

IPRI Conflict Weekly

Research | Review | Forecast

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Trump impeached by the US House, Hazara miners buried in Pakistan, Farm laws stayed in India, and the Crisis escalation in CAR

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Is there a light at the end of the Trump presidency? The House has impeached President Trump for the second time; security is getting strengthened with more troops being sent to secure the Capitol Hill (Image Source: WSJ)

The US: Trump impeached by the House, as a disorderly transition looms large

In the news

On 13 January 2021, the US House impeached President Donald Trump for the second time. The vote was passed with a majority with 232-197; ten Republicans joined the Democrats in passing the vote. Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, was quoted stating: "We know that the

president of the United States incited this insurrection, this armed rebellion, against our country...He must go. He is a clear and present danger to the nation that we all love." A section amongst the Republicans, who have criticized Trump, consider the House's latest move would not be the best way to go. Kevin McCarthy, the House Minority Leader, was quoted to have stated: "A vote to impeach would further divide this nation, a vote to impeach will further fan the flames, the partisan division."

On 13 January, according to a New York Times report, the National Counterterrorism Center and the Justice and Homeland Security Departments have warned of instability. Quoting a bulletin, the report says, "The 'boogaloo,' a movement that seeks to start a second civil war, and extremists aiming to trigger a race war 'may exploit the aftermath of the Capitol breach by conducting attacks to destabilize and force a climactic conflict in the United States'."

On 12 January, the House formally asked Vice President Mike Pence to make use of the 25th Amendment that provides a provision to remove President Trump on the ground that he is "incapable of executing the duties of his office." However, the Vice President refused to follow that option; according to Pence, such a course would neither be in the US's best interest nor consistent with the American Constitution.

On 12 January, the Army Secretary finalised to strengthen Washington's security with National Guards, which would be armed to secure the Capitol Hill against the Trump supporters. This is being done to prevent the latter from disrupting Joe Biden while he takes over as the next American President on 20 January 2021.

On 12 January, the YouTube, "in light of concerns about the ongoing potential for violence," suspended President Trump's social media account. In a statement, it also said that it had removed new content uploaded in Trump's channel. Earlier Twitter and Facebook had also suspended the accounts of Trump.

Issues at large

First, the political fallout of the violence in Capitol Hill. The violence inside the Capitol Hill led by Trump supporters' has brought many Republicans to condemn the act and the entire Democrats – both in the House and in the Senate. One of the reasons for the Democrats to push the resolution despite being a minority in the Senate emanates from this recent development. Though the House led by the Democrats would have preferred the Vice President to remove Trump from office, using the 25th amendment, they got ready to initiate the impeachment process. Outside the Capitol Hill, there is larger support for the move. Many Americans consider the violence on 7 January led by Trump's supporters as sedition and an attack on the US democratic values and institutions.

Second, setting an accountability process against Trump, even if the impeachment process does not get a necessary vote in the Senate trial. To impeach Trump, the resolution also needs two-thirds majority support in the Senate. The Democrats do not have that number; even if the Republicans favour the resolution, it can be done only on 19 January, when the Senate

reconvenes. 19 January would be the last day for Trump as the President. So, what would the impeachment achieve? The House is aware of this fact but wants to hold Trump accountable, for inciting the mob to target the Congress.

Third, the emergence of right-wing groups in the US, including the "Proud Boys." Though this was obvious during the last one year vis-à-vis the Black Lives Matter movement, this is a pre-BLM phenomenon, highlighting the changes taking place within the American society. Racial relations and democracy within the US, cannot be taken for granted anymore. Whether Trump was the product of the above phenomenon or aggravated the existing fault lines would need a larger discussion.

In perspective

First, the threat to democracy and internal harmony should be the clear and present danger for Joe Biden, as he takes over as the new President on 20 January. The fact that there are fears over violence on that day says so much about what should be Biden's immediate priority.

Second, American democracy and internal stability as a role model for the liberal societies elsewhere. The US has a duty to address both; democracies worldwide are under distress, with authoritarian rulers and protest movements. The US has to be a source of stability.

Pakistan: Hazaras finally bury the dead

In the news

On 9 January, 10 coal miners from the Hazara community were laid to rest at the Hazara Town, Quetta, after being brutally killed in an attack earlier this month. The decision to bury the slain coal workers came after relatives and protesters from the community who had earlier refused to bury the deceased unless Prime Minister Imran Khan visited them and addressed their concerns reached an agreement with a government team. Following this, Prime Minister Imran Khan arrived in Quetta and met with the families of the slain coal miners and members of the Hazara community.

On 3 January, 11 coal miners were kidnapped and killed, when armed assailants entered their residential compound in the Mach coalfield area of Balochistan. The militant Islamic State (IS) group claimed responsibility for the attack.

Issues at large

First, the relentless targeting killing of the Hazara community. According to a National Commission for Human Rights report, religious extremists have killed more than 2,000 Hazaras between 2004 and 2018. The Hazaras have been the victims of ethnic and sectarian cleansing through target killings, suicide attacks and bomb blasts inflicting harm to their daily lives, education and business activities of roughly half a million Hazaras living in Quetta. Hazaras have been the target of multiple terrorist attacks over the recent years, with Quetta's Hazara community at the front line of Pakistan's battle with violent extremism. This is owing to their small population, distinct facial appearance and limited territory making them soft targets for militants. The most concerning aspect of this issue is the Hazara community's

isolation. They have been forced into ghettos in two Hazara neighbourhoods in Quetta's Marriabad and Hazara Town, restricting their movement.

Second, the inadequate response and ineffective strategy of the State. The repeated targeting of the Hazaras irradiates the failure of the State. Despite the initiation of the National Action Plan, sectarian militant groups continue to operate in Balochistan. Moreover, the state has failed to bring perpetrators of sectarian violence to justice. Repeated attacks on the Hazaras have gone unpunished. Further, legal pursuit of these cases has been a challenge with the judiciary unable to deliver justice due to the gap in the FIR reports that fail to identify perpetrators.

Third, the increasing presence of militant groups. The Islamic State's reach, which has joined hands with Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and other sectarian groups, has increased in Balochistan, with the former declaring war on minority Shiites. Apart from the IS, other groups like the outlawed Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and the Taliban have also targeted the Hazaras over the years in Balochistan. The LeJ has carried out various attacks against the community because of its anti-Shia and anti-Iran ideology. Further, the strengthened nexus between the sectarian group in Balochistan with militants gives them better leverage.

Fourth, the larger systemic issues inside Balochistan. The Hazara community's issue is a manifestation of the larger systemic issues inside Balochistan, which is Pakistan's largest and poorest region, rife with ethnic, sectarian and separatist insurgencies.

In perspective

The repeated persecution of the Hazara community in Pakistan highlights two larger issues.

First, sectarianism exists unabated throughout Pakistan as the country continues to foster sectarian groups resulting in the loss of countless lives. The Hazara community's persecution is an apt case for they have been solely targeted because they are Shia; thus, the motive is sectarian and sectarian groups have historically carried out the killings. As long as such groups can exist freely, they will continue to threaten minorities across the country.

Second, the lack of attention to Balochistan. As a province, Balochistan has much to offer. However, when it comes to giving back to the locals, especially the minorities in the region, there seems to be a gap. Much of the issues in Balochistan stem from the flawed political and economic development policies and strategies from within the province and the federal government.

India: Supreme Court stays farm bills amid continuing protests

In the news

On 12 January, the Supreme Court in India stayed the implementation of the farm laws as impasse continued between the protesting farmers and the government. The three-judge bench of the Supreme Court responded to the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of all the three farm laws. The court also ordered a four-member expert committee to examine the farm laws and submit a report within two months. The bench urged the farmers' unions to go before the committee and resolve the dispute. It also asked the Attorney-General to confirm by filing an affidavit before the court along with Investigation Bureau's records, in response to the application alleging help and support being extended by banned organisations to the protesters.

Issues at large

While reflecting on the conundrum, the Chief Justice of India, Justice SA Bobde, highlighted the following four aspects: the farm laws cannot be kept in abeyance for nothing; there must be some progress towards resolving the impending issues over the farm laws; women, children and old were exposed to cold and COVID-19, and many have lost lives due to illness and suicide; and, the court does not want to stifle a peaceful protest, rather want to save lives and want protestors to return to their livelihood. These observations are of great significance, given the claims of farmers' unions and government.

First, as reported, farmers' unions said that they would not go to any apex court-appointed panel to resolve disputes. They are firm on the repeal of farm laws, sans any amendment to it.

Second, all the committee members have been pro-farm laws in their opinion expressed in media and elsewhere. Hence, their neutrality has been challenged at the inception itself.

Third, the government has been adamant throughout that they may accommodate amendment to protect the interests of farmers being jeopardized, if any, without repealing the laws.

Fourth, the apex court also seems to be quite pressurising when the bench reiterated that they are forming a committee to have a clear picture. That they do not want to hear arguments that the farmers will not go to the committee.

Fifth, the laws have been stayed by the Court to calm protestors and convince them to discuss the legislation with the government. On the one hand, the stay has angered the government, and on the other farmers are unsatisfied as they are demanding repeal, hence critical of the committee formed without consulting them.

Sixth, the constitutional validity of all three laws has been challenged in the Court, which it is yet to hear. Hence, how the Court would handle those petitions is ambiguous. The court's endeavour to locate a mid-way through Committee smacks of politics more than the justice.

Last, a stay means a delay in the final decision. Delay would lead to rotting of crops and produce. Farmers once again would be at receiving end.

In perspective

The stay incapacitates the Centre with any executive action to implement the same. The farmers' protest that began on 26 November 2020 on different national capital borders witnessed several rounds of fruitless negotiations between the farmers' unions and government. A continued stalemate prompted the Supreme Court to intervene to bring farmers to the negotiating table.

However, negotiations have been happening, but the will to resolve has been missing on both sides. Farmers and government are stuck on two extremes; hence reaching a middle ground will be too challenging.

The adequacy of the 'decision' remains questionable. It may have given a reprieve to the government, but the fate of laws still hangs. Farmers are also divided within, which government is aiming to capitalize upon.

How far the committee, thus constituted, would create a congenial atmosphere and improve the trust and confidence of the farmers, is difficult to predict.

Central African Republic: France intervenes as thousands flee election-related violence in the country

In the news

On 9 January, French fighter jets flew over the Central African Republic (CAR). According to the office of the French President, the flights were flown in at the request of the CAR President and with the permission of the UN as tensions escalated amid the elections in 2020.

On 8 January, the UNHCR spokesperson said more than 30,000 people from CAR had fled to its neighbouring countries amid the election-related violence. The Democratic Republic of the Congo accounted for the highest number of people fleeing as 24,196 people had crossed over into the country, followed by Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of Congo.

Further, the spokesperson said that within CAR, 1,85,000 people retreated to the forests since 15 December 2020 to escape the violence; of this, 62,000 remain "newly displaced" while the rest returned home.

Issues at large

First, a brief background on the conflict in CAR. The current instability in CAR has its roots in 2013 when Seleka forces, formed majorly by Muslim groups, staged a coup and removed the then-President François Bozizé from power in 2013. Following this, Christian forces under the banner of "anti-balaka" forces, retaliated leading to a protracted conflict. Though a peace

agreement was signed between the government and rebel groups, violence has persisted, and armed groups control two-thirds of CAR.

Second, the disputed elections of 2020. In December 2020, CAR held its presidential elections; Faustin-Archange Touadera, who was elected president in 2016, won his second term. Before the elections, Bozizé formed a rebel coalition with other presidential candidates after the Constitutional Court rejected his candidacy. After Touadera was re-elected, the opposition coalition has been citing irregularities in the elections and demanded the annulment of the results.

Third, the deteriorating security conditions. According to the Election Commission, 800 of the 5,408 polling stations did not operate on the election day due to security threats. Prior to the elections, and after the polling, rebels captured several towns fuelling the CAR's already tense atmosphere. According to the UN, one-fifth of the CAR population is displaced due to the protracted conflict and half of the population is dependent on humanitarian assistance.

Fourth, the external intervention in CAR. Russia and Rwanda had deployed their troops to support the UN mission in monitoring the election process in CAR. Similarly, the Touadera's latest request for French intervention adds to increased external powers in the region.

In perspective

First, mere intervention by external powers will not stem the conflict in CAR. The scale of humanitarian loss over the years reflects the failure of the state in addressing the conflict. Further, troops' deployment by different countries did not keep the rebels from seizing towns and reigniting civilian displacement and its spillover to neighbouring countries, which have their own conflicts to address.

Second, France's latest intervention in CAR comes amid its security operations in other African countries like Mali and Libya. Further, France has had a series of interventions in CAR since the 2013 coup. However, French operations have not yielded the results necessary to root out the violence - neither in CAR, nor in Mali or other countries.

Also, from around the world...

Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

China: WHO to visit Beijing to study origins of COVID-19

On 11 January, the Chinese authorities said a team of experts from the World Health Organization (WHO) would arrive on 13 January to study the origins of COVID-19. The WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said last week that he was "very disappointed" as China had not permitted the trip. The statement was a rare occasion when the organization was seen criticizing Beijing. Later the China's National Health Commission said the team's trip had been finalized. They will arrive "to conduct joint research with Chinese scientists on the origin-tracing of the novel coronavirus".

China: Beijing warns Australia of 'politicizing' trade relations

On 13 January, China criticized Australia's decision to block a Chinese company's 300 million dollar bid for the Australian construction firm Probuild, accusing Canberra of further undermining trust between them. Earlier this week, Probuild announced that the state-owned China State Construction Engineering Corporation had withdrawn its offer after being told that the Treasurer Josh Frydenberg would block the sale on national security grounds. China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian called the decision a mistake and warned against politicizing normal commercial cooperation. The federal government in Australia, however, has not confirmed that it had blocked the sale.

North Korea: Party Congress meeting ends with hailing the nuclear capabilities

On 13 January, the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un called for all-out efforts to strengthen military capabilities, including further modernization of its nuclear deterrent. He addressed the final session of the party congress. The state media Korean Central News Agency quoted Kim, "to further strengthen our nuclear war deterrent, we need to do everything to build the strong capabilities." North Korea started its eight-day Workers' Party Congress on 5 January to lay out North Korea's military goals and long-term policy direction. In his first official reaction to the incoming Joe Biden administration in the US, Kim also unveiled a long list of weapons plans, including a nuclear-powered submarine, in his opening remarks.

South Korea: Seoul mounts pressure on Iran to release seized oil tanker

On 7 January, South Korea initiated a diplomatic effort to free an oil tanker seized by Iran amid a dispute over frozen bank funds. It is the latest flare-up of tensions between Tehran and Seoul. A South Korean delegation arrived in Tehran after the 9,797-ton oil tanker Hankuk Chemi and its 20 crew members were detained. According to the South Korean Foreign Ministry, the delegation is expected to lay the groundwork for a visit to Iran by the country's vice foreign minister.

Myanmar: China promises support in peace talks with ethnic minority groups

On 12 January, China promised to continue to support Myanmar in its peace talks with the ethnic minority groups. During his six-day tour of Southeast Asia, Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister, said that China would boost its coronavirus aid. During a meeting with President Win Myint and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, Wang Yi urged Myanmar to speed up construction work on the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, a key element in China's BRI. Wang said, "China supports Myanmar government's commitment to national reconciliation in the country and will continue to assist within its capabilities, as well as upholding justice in the international arena." In response, Win Myint told that Myanmar would continue to support Beijing's positions on Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang, according to Xinhua.

Malaysia: Emergency imposed to curb virus spread, opposition calls it a foul play

On 12 January, Malaysia declared an emergency following the increase in the COVID-19 cases. During the emergency, the Parliament will remain suspended until August and halt any bids to seek a general election. This has led critics to view the emergency as a political move

by Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to consolidate power. The sultanate, King Sultan Abdullah Sultan Ahmad Shah, stated support of Muhyiddin's proposal for an emergency until 1 August. In a televised speech, Muhyiddin assured its citizens that the emergency was "not a military coup and a curfew will not be enforced."

Peace and Conflict from South Asia

Sri Lanka: Jaffna University war memorial removed

On 10 January, Jaffna University's Vice-Chancellor (VC) promised to "rebuild" a war victims memorial on campus after bulldozed by the university administration thereby setting off students protests. Urging students to end their hunger strike, the VC laid a "foundation stone" for the new structure. "The development caused a lot of concern within the country and outside. People in the UK are talking about it. Tamil Nadu is boiling. Authorities felt the situation had to be diffused," said the VC in an interview to the Indian newspaper, the Hindu. Earlier, the VC had instructed the administration to remove the memorial built to commemorate the 2009 Mullivaikkal war victims.

India: Election campaign kick-starts in Assam

On 10 January, the BJP national president JP Nadda launched the party's Assam poll campaign from Silchar in Barak Valley. He addressed the people at 'Vijay Sankalpa Samabesh' in the southern Assam city. Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the 2019 Lok Sabha election campaign in Assam from Silchar. The BJP said it would remain grateful to the city's residents.

Afghanistan: Key negotiators give a skip to peace talks in Doha

On 11 January, a week has passed since negotiators from both sides of the Afghan peace negotiations announced the resumption of the second round of intra-Afghan talks in Doha; however, some members of their teams have not returned to Doha. On Tuesday, the Afghan lawmakers said that members of the negotiating teams should not put their personal interests ahead of national interests.

Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Russia: Putin hosts Armenian and Azerbaijani counterparts

On 11 January, President Vladimir Putin hosted Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev. This was the first meeting between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leader after a Russia-brokered peace agreement was signed in November 2020 to cease fighting in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. After the meeting, the leaders released a four-point agreement focussed on unblocking the region's borders. Further, the three countries will form a working group which will meet on 30 January.

Kyrgyzstan: Japarov wins controversial presidential elections

On 10 January, populist leader Sadyr Japarov won the snap elections which were held after an uprising by the Kyrgyz population led to the collapse of the previous regime. Japarov, who was previously convicted for kidnapping a provincial governor, won nearly 80 per cent of the vote. His prison term was shortened after protests in October 2020 led to the quashing of his verdict. Further, his victory is perceived to be controversial because previously, more than 80 per cent

of voters supported "a proposal to reform the constitution to give the president greater powers at parliament's expense."

Israel: Airstrikes in eastern Syria leave 16 dead

On 13 January, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that Israeli airstrikes in eastern Syria the previous night killed 16 people including five soldiers. According to the Observatory, at least 18 airstrikes targeting bases and storehouses of pro-Iranian groups were carried out by Israel in the Albu Kamal and Deir Ezzo areas.

Iraq: One policeman killed in a clash with anti-government protesters

On 10 January, clashes between security forces and anti-government protesters in Haboubi Square left one policeman dead and 33 protesters injured. Further, the Iraqi military said at least 40 security personnel were also injured during the clash. The protesters had been gathering at the Haboubi Square since Friday demanding the release of the arrest of activists in the Dhi Qar province.

Yemen: The US to designate Houthis as terrorists

On 10 January, the US Secretary of State announced that the US would designate the Houthi rebels in Yemen as a terrorist organization. Mike Pompeo said, "The designations are intended to hold Ansar Allah (Houthis) accountable for its terrorist acts, including cross-border attacks threatening civilian populations, infrastructure and commercial shipping." The announcement, which came 10 days before Joe Biden takes office, might complicate Biden's "efforts to restart diplomacy with Iran," and reassess the US-Saudi Arabia relations. It has also sparked fears that it will escalate the violence in the country.

Ethiopia: Border clashes with Sudan continue

On 12 January, the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry spokesman alleged that Sudan has been violating territorial boundaries and accused Sudanese forces of "pushing further into a contested border region." The border region between the two countries has been witnessing deadly clashes in recent weeks. Further, the allegation from the Ethiopian side comes after it accused Sudan of stalling the process to reach an agreement on the Nile Dam issue. Meanwhile, Sudan's Information Minister said the country does not want to engage in war with Ethiopia but "but its forces would respond to any aggression."

Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

Russia: Prison authorities seek jail term for Alexei Navalny

On 12 January, Alexei Navalny stated that Russian prison authorities were seeking his imprisonment for violating the terms of a suspended sentence he received as part of a 2014 embezzlement case. Taking to Twitter, he said, "Putin is so enraged that I survived his poisoning that he ordered FSIN [Federal Prison Service] to go to court and demand that my suspended sentence is changed to a real one." The announcement was made from Germany, where Navalny has spent the past four months recovering from an August poison attack while travelling in Siberia.

Venezuela: The EU withdraws recognizing Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president

On 6 January, the European Union announced that it could no longer recognize Juan Guaidó as Venezuela's interim president after losing his position as head of its parliament. The European Commission stated that the decision was taken collectively by EU governments. Further, a statement by the bloc threatened to impose sanctions against the Maduro government, on the already existing an arms embargo and sanctions on Venezuelan officials, in an attempt to criticize what it views as rights violations and the destruction of democracy.

Honduras: President accused by the US of taking bribes from drug traffickers

On 8 January, United States federal prosecutors filed a motion with the southern district of New York stating that the President of Honduras, Juan Orlando Hernández, took bribes from drug traffickers and forced the military to protect a cocaine laboratory and shipments to the US. The documents cited Hernández as "shove the drugs right up the noses of the gringos by flooding the United States with cocaine." Hernández has repeatedly denied any connection to traffickers despite the 2019 conviction of one of his brothers. Further, several senior military, police, political officials and businessmen have also been accused of accepting bribery and laundering money in illegal operations.

The US: Cuba redesignated to list of state sponsors of terrorism

On 11 January, the Trump administration redesignated Cuba to the US list of state sponsors of terrorism, which could jeopardize President-elect Biden administration's efforts to revive Obama-era detente with Havana. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the designation stating Cuba's continued harbouring of US fugitives, its refusal to extradite Colombian rebels and its support for Nicolas Maduro. The redesignation will reimpose restriction on Cuba, including the ban on travel and transfer of money between the two countries.

The US: FBI arrests dozens as part of the investigation into the violence at Capitol Hill

On 8 January, federal law enforcement officials announced that dozens had been arrested, including 13 who face federal charges after the assault on Capitol Hill. Among those arrests is a lawmaker from West Virginia, a 70-year-old Alabamian armed with gasoline jars and a man who broke into Speaker Nancy Pelosi's office. Several FBI agents and prosecutors have been assigned to investigate the 160 plus case files that have been opened thus far.

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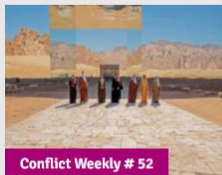
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