

IPRI Conflict Weekly

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A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Coup in Myanmar and Protests in Russia

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The military in Myanmar staged a coup to prevent the new Parliament from assembling on 1 February 2021. (Image Source: Vox)

Myanmar: A coup d'état; Military returns takes over power, detains Suu Kyi

[In the news](#)

On 1 February, in a military coup, the Myanmar army retook control. It has declared an emergency and has formed a new government headed by the Senior General Aung Myin Hlaing and former Vice President U Myint Swe. An 11-member cabinet of retired army personnel and USDP (Tatmadaw's proxy) members has been formed.

On 2 February, it released most of the leaders who were detained earlier; however, Aung San Suu Kyi and Myint Win are still in detention. On 3 February, Suu Kyi was also charged with breaching import-export law.

On 3 February, the UNSC met on the subject; however, a joint statement could not be made, as China blocked the move calling the coup as an internal matter of Myanmar.

Issues at large

First, the military's de facto control. It has been in power since the 1962 coup under the leadership of Ne Win. The period was marked by complete closure from the world and nominal economic growth. However, by 2010 under mounting economic slowdown, sanctions, public unrest and international pressure, the army merely heeded to the idea of democracy with a power-sharing arrangement of its own. The 2008 Constitution enabled 25 per cent reservation for the military in both the Houses. And in 2011, the USDP formed a government winning an election boycotted by opposition such as NLD, to convince the world about its democratic bid. In 2015, when NLD won through landslide votes, Tatmadaw still retained vital positions. The democratic government completed its five-year tenure due to Suu Kyi's appeasement policy, which garnered her worldwide criticism. But the November 2020 election had threatened this control, and the Tatmadaw took over the de facto power in the coup.

Second, the larger intention of the military. Although the army retained the 25 per cent of the seats in both the Houses, the USDP requires a minimum of 167 in the total 621 seats to retain control. However, it could secure only 39 seats. This would give the NLD adequate control to make legislative changes; starting from 2019, the NLD has been pushing constitutional amendments to reduce the military's footprint in the Parliament. Tatmadaw is against any amendment that would reduce its role. General Hlaing was to retire in 2021; perhaps, one of the coup's objectives is to prolong his control.

Third, the overt and covert support to the coup. It has received a lukewarm response from the region and its neighbours. There has been no condemnation from China - Myanmar's largest investor and trading partner. At the UNSC, China has a history of being the closest ally to the Junta.

In perspective

First, the current Junta government promised to end the emergency within a year and call for a new democracy. But it is juvenile to believe in this promises and democracy seems to be a far-flung idea for the country.

Second, there is a growing expectation of public protests starting with the medical staff going into a civil disobedience movement as announced on 2 February. But given the history, the protests are not enough to remove the power monger Tatmadaw from power.

Russia: Alexey Navalny sentenced to jail; protests intensify against his arrest

In the news

On 2 February, a Moscow City Court declared Alexey Navalny guilty of breaking the terms of an earlier case from 2014. He was initially sentenced to three-and-a-half years; since, he had failed to regularly report to the Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN), the Court has stated that his excuse for non-appearance as insufficient, converting his suspended judgement into a real one.

On 2 February, public protests followed the arrest; an additional 1,400 people have been detained.

Issues at large

First, Russia's approach to Navalny. He is considered Putin's harshest critic and is in a personal battle with Russia's leadership. During the court session, he has called President Vladimir Putin a "poisoner", blaming the latter for the attack against him in August 2020. With the arrest now and the detention of the majority of Navalny's colleagues from the anti-corruption party, Russia has taken a firm stance to suppress the movement against him.

Second, domestic and international support for the release of Navalny. On 23 January, 3,900 people were detained after thousands of demonstrators turned up in over 100 cities demanding his release. Last Sunday (31 January), the protests continued. Protests erupted on the day of his arrest where videos of the police beating the protesters emerged on social media and the protesters were heavily outnumbered by the security forces who were seen in helmets and body armours. Navalny has millions of fans across Russia for his criticism of Putin and the United Russia Party. Internationally, Australia, Germany and the UK have raised concerns over the rationale behind his arrests. Boris Johnson called the court ruling "pure cowardice," on Twitter. The Council of Europe stated that the judgement "defied all credibility." However, Russia upholds its 'foreign interference' argument towards the protests.

Third, the Yves Rocher case. In 2014, Navalny was found guilty for embezzling 30 million roubles from two companies, including the cosmetic company Yves Rocher, and was sentenced for three and a half years. He is said to have already served up to 10 months in house arrest. For years he led nationwide protests against the ruling party, but in 2018 he was barred from challenging Mr Putin at the ballot box, because of the court conviction for embezzlement.

In perspective

The leadership in Russia would want to keep Alexey Navalny in jail for as long as possible to suppress the movement against President Putin. The immediate priority would be to ensure Navalny can no longer organize/ call for unauthorized street protests against his arrest or the corruption. The enthusiasm of the demonstrations has already seen a downfall and can be expected to fizzle out in the following weeks. The Russian government is seen determined to crack down on the situation before it expands further.

Also, from around the world...

By Apoorva Sudhakar and Abigail Miriam Fernandez

Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

China: Foreign Ministry derecognizes BNO passports

On 29 January, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson announced the country would not recognize the British National Overseas (BNO) passport as a valid travel document or a proof of identity. The announcement was made hours after the United Kingdom offered to issue BNO visas from 31 January; this would enable Hong Kong residents to live and work in the UK. The Chinese spokesperson termed this as a violation of international law and accused the UK of grossly interfering into Hong Kong affairs and China's internal matters.

China: BBC uncovers systematic abuses against Uighur women in Xinjiang

On 3 February, the BBC published a series of interviews with women who were once captive in China's "re-education" camps for Uighurs. The interviewees recalled their experiences at the internment camps; they spoke of "an organized system of mass rape, sexual abuse and torture" by Chinese men. The detainees who managed to escape alleged that they were forced to watch

propaganda films, sing patriotic Chinese songs and watch patriotic TV programmes about Chinese President Xi Jinping. However, a Chinese spokeswoman said the government is committed to the protection of women's rights and claimed the camps were "vocational education and training centres."

Taiwan: Chinese, US fighter aircrafts enter defence zone

On 31 January, Taiwan's Defence Ministry said seven Chinese fighter aircraft and a US reconnaissance aircraft had entered its air defence identification zone (ADIZ). While Taiwan usually announces Chinese entry into its ADIZ, this is the first time the Defence Ministry mentioned the US presence. On 28 January, China responded to US President's Joe Biden's support of the island country by saying "Taiwan independence means war."

Singapore: Amendment introduced to COVID-19 bill to address privacy concerns

On 1 February, Singapore's Smart Nation and Digital Government Office said it is proposing an amendment to its COVID-19 bill to address concerns about privacy of the users of the country's coronavirus contact-tracing app. With the amendment, the police would be allowed to use data collected from the app only for investigations under seven types of crime. Further, the government instructed all public agencies to erase all the data collected by the app once the pandemic is over.

South Korea: Iran to release crew members of tanker seized in January

On 2 February, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said the government has agreed to let the 19 crew members of the South Korean tanker ship in January leave the country on humanitarian grounds. However, the Ministry did not mention details about sailors from Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam who were also on board. Further, Iran also reiterated that the case against the ship allegedly captured for environmental pollution would continue.

South Korea: Japan no longer described as "partner"

On 2 February, South Korea's Defence Ministry dropped its description of Japan as a "partner" in its latest white papers thereby reflecting the worsening ties between the two countries. Now, South Korea describes its relations with Japan as "close neighbours that should cooperate not only for the two countries' relationships but also for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the world." Previous white papers referred to the two countries as "geographically and culturally close neighbours as well as partners cooperating for global peace and prosperity." The move comes after Japan implemented stronger export controls against South Korea in 2019.

Peace and Conflict from South Asia

India: Twitter restores blocked accounts over 'provocative' posts

On 2 February, Twitter had restored dozens of Indian accounts that were earlier blocked after the government said users were posting content inciting violence. On 1 February, the Ministry of Home Affairs demanded the suspension of more than 250 accounts for tweeting and retweeting, the hashtag #ModiPlanningFarmerGenocide and posting "fake, intimidatory and provocative" tweets in context to the farmers' protest. The blocked accounts included farmers' leaders, activists and a news magazine.

Sri Lanka: Government revokes 2019 agreement on ECT port project

On 1 February, the Government of Sri Lanka decided to renege on a 2019 agreement with India and Japan to develop the strategic East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port amid pressure from the trade unions across the country. Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stated

that the operation of the east terminal would be done by Sri Lanka Ports Authority, however, offering the West Container Terminal to India for possible investments. The PM's decision took India by shock as there was no prior communication from Colombo that ongoing negotiations.

Afghanistan: Series of blast across Kabul leaving several dead

On 2 February, three people dead and six more wounded in a series of blast across Kabul. On the same day, at least ten security forces were killed, and 11 others were injured in separate attacks in Sar-e-Pul and Uruzgan provinces after the Taliban attacked a security outpost. These attacks come after several western countries called on the Taliban to end a wave of violence that the group denies responsibility for. As violence continues to surge across the country, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) report, Resolute Support, the NATO-led mission in Afghanistan, reported 2,586 civilian casualties from 1 October to 31 December last year, including 810 killed and 1,776 wounded.

Afghanistan: Taliban calls for 'Islamic Govt to Replace Current Govt in Afghanistan'

On 1 February, the Taliban stated that an Islamic government will replace the current government in Afghanistan, citing the US-Taliban peace agreement, which called for an Islamic government to replace the Ghani government due to the intra-Afghan peace negotiations. However, the Office of National Security Council (ONSC) stated that it was still premature to talk about the political system in Afghanistan, suggesting that the Taliban should stop shedding blood instead of talking about their government.

Afghanistan: Foreign troops to stay in Afghanistan beyond May deadline

On 31 January, Reuters report citing senior NATO officials stated that international troops plan to stay in Afghanistan beyond the May deadline as signed in the US-Taliban deal. The officials said the decision was made as "Conditions have not been met," adding, "And with the new US administration, there will be tweaks in the policy, the sense of hasty withdrawal which was prevalent will be addressed and we could see a much more calculated exit strategy." Responding to the statement, the Taliban said that they will continue "defending the country" if foreign forces remain beyond the May deadline.

Pakistan: Supreme Court orders Omar Sheikh to be moved out of death cell to 'rest house'

On 2 February, the Supreme Court ordered Omar Sheikh the key accused in the Daniel Pearl murder case to be moved out of his death cell to a rest house while remaining in state custody, stating, "Though the detainee (Omar Sheikh) is entitled to be freed, he should be moved to a comfortable residential environment out of the Karachi prison to something like a rest house." Further, the apex court is to issue a written order allowing Sheikh's family to meet him between 8 am and 5 pm. This came after the Court, on 28 January acquitted Omar Sheikh of Daniel Pearl's murder.

Pakistan: PDM's deadline ends, with PTI ignoring it

On 31 January, as the Pakistan Democratic Movement's deadline for the government to resign passes, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) chairman Bilawal Bhutto called upon the alliance to "force the removal of puppets" adding, that the opposition alliance has given "this illegitimate regime the opportunity to step aside respectfully and allow for a transition to democracy with free, fair and transparent elections." Previously, the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government rejected the PDM's deadline and termed the opposition's demands "undemocratic, immoral and unconstitutional."

Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Azerbaijan: Russia, Turkey launch a joint military centre

On 30 January, Russia and Turkey jointly opened a military centre in Azerbaijan's Aghdam region to monitor the ceasefire with Armenia. The centre marks the first formal military presence of Turkey in the Caucasus and Russia in Azerbaijan; both the countries have deployed 60 personnel each with their own respective commanders. The move raised speculations about larger cooperation between Russia and Turkey; however, on 1 February, Russian Deputy Chairman of the National Security Council said "This is a stabilizing factor, but I wouldn't call it an element of a long-term policy or create any conspiracy theories here."

The Gulf: The US moves carrier out of Middle East

On 2 February, the Pentagon spokesman said the USS Nimitz Carrier Strike Group which had been stationed in the US military's Central Command in the Middle East sailed to the Indo-Pacific Command region. The move comes after the Pentagon, in January, reversed its decision to bring the USS Nimitz back to the US citing "threats" from Iran. According to Aljazeera, the spokesman indicated that President Joe Biden did not feel the need to station the USS Nimitz in the Gulf since Donald Trump had increased the US military presence in the region.

Syria: UN pushes for repatriation of 27,000 children

On 30 January, the United Nations counterterrorism chief, in an informal meeting of the UN Security Council, urged countries to repatriate 27,000 Syrian children stranded in the al-Hol camp in north-eastern Syria; many of them are children of ISIS fighters. He said these children are vulnerable to the threat of radicalization in the camps. He said the camp houses children from 60 countries and emphasized that they are not the responsibility of Syria or groups controlling the camp. He believed they should be repatriated as victims and should not be detained or prosecuted.

South Sudan: AU, UN welcome establishment of Hybrid Court

On 31 January, the African Union and UN welcomed South Sudan's announcement to establish the AU Hybrid Court and the Commission on Truth, Reconciliation and Healing to try war crimes in the country. On 29 January, the government of South Sudan had approved the establishment of the Court after a delay of two years; the Hybrid Court was a part of the country's 2018 peace deal. The South Sudan UNHCR Chair hoped that the move would translate into tangible results and will not remain a political rhetoric.

Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

Turkey: Erdogan lashed out at LGBT movement amid student protests

On 30 January, four students were arrested in Istanbul over a piece of artwork that showed the LGBT rainbow flag during a rally at Bogazici University. On 1 February, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan denounced the student protesters as "terrorists," adding, "We will carry our young people to the future, not as the LGBT youth, but as the youth that existed in our nation's glorious past. He also vowed to crack down on demonstrations who have been protests for weeks opposing the appointment of a government loyalist to head Istanbul's most prestigious university. Following his statement, Erdogan was accused of inciting homophobic sentiment in Turkey as protest intensified with a total of 159 people detained on the same day.

EU: AstraZeneca to supply nine million more vaccine doses

On 31 January, President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen stated that AstraZeneca has agreed to supply nine million additional doses of its coronavirus vaccine to the European Union during the first quarter. The new target of 40 million doses by the end of

March is still only half what AstraZeneca originally aimed for before it announced a shortfall due to production problems. Further, the pharmaceutical company also plans to expand its manufacturing capacity in Europe.

Russia: Study published in The Lancet finds Russia's vaccine is effective and safe

On 2 February, a peer-reviewed analysis published in The Lancet stated that the Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine developed by Russia showed 91.6 per cent efficacy rate, appeared safe and did not cause serious side effects. Previously, Russia faced scepticism about approving its vaccine without the release of clinical trial data, however, the result now gives Russia the leverage to deliver a cheap vaccine at home and abroad.

Colombia: Special tribunal accuses eight former rebel commanders for war atrocities

On 28 January, a special tribunal to process war atrocities in Colombia accused eight former rebel commanders of war crimes and crimes against humanity for the guerrillas' practice of kidnapping people during the civil war. The Special Jurisdiction for Peace, a system of judges and investigators who have been mandated to determine responsibility for war-related crimes decided against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

The US: Trump's 77 days between election and inauguration

On 1 February, The New York Times brought in an analysis on former President Donald J. Trump's 77 days between the election and the inauguration says that he attempted to subvert American democracy with a lie about election fraud that he had been grooming for years. The 77 days witnessed allegations after allegation coupled with conspiracy theories to misplaced belief and more lies. Further, The Times says that the violence at the Capitol and Joe Biden's victory may have put an end of Trump's post-election campaign, however, it says that the same cannot be said about the political staying power, the grip on the Republican faithful, of the lie he set in motion.

UNSC-Myanmar: China and Russia block efforts to reach a consensus on the coup in Myanmar

On 2 February, China along with Russia blocked efforts by the United Nations Security Council at its consultative meeting to issue a strong statement condemning the coup in Myanmar. Later, on 3 February, China stated that it opposed any strong resolution by the UNSC condemning the coup and insisted that any action by the international community should not escalate the tensions and complicate matters.

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