

# IPRI Conflict Weekly

Research | Review | Forecast

*A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world*

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## From Myanmar and Hong Kong in Asia to Nigeria in Africa: Seven conflicts this week

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This week witnessed violence in Myanmar, as the security forces retaliated with force; more than 50 were killed during the last seven days. (Image Source: DW/Reuters)

### Myanmar: Deadliest week since the Coup

#### [In the news](#)

On 28 February, according to the United Nations, Myanmar's security force killed 18 and injured 30 in their attempt to clampdown the protest.

On 27 February, the government removed Myanmar's ambassador to the United Nations for his speech in the General Assembly where he had sought international assistance to restore democracy.

On 2 March, in a video conference court hearing, there were two more new charges against Aung San Suu Kyi. These charges will extend Suu Kyi's prison term to a total of nine years.



Also, the former President and former mayor of Nay Pyi Taw were charged with breaching Article 505 (b) of the Penal Code.

On 3 March, the ASEAN foreign ministers concluded a virtual meeting on Myanmar. Brunei, the ASEAN chair, officially stated: “We express ASEAN’s readiness to assist Myanmar in a positive, peaceful and constructive manner.”

On 3 March, the United Nations stated more than 38 people were killed by Myanmar's security force. These attacks have been vehemently condemned by the UN, Japan, Canada and the EU.

### Issues at large

First, the increase in violence as a new strategy by the military. The pro-democracy protests did not witness an immediate retaliation; there was no use of force during the first week. Since the second week, reprisal by the security forces in the form of firing live bullets, attacks on the protestors by pro-regime monks, and goon attacks on civilians, started. The larger purpose of these attacks is to create fear and suppress any kind of antagonism against the new government.

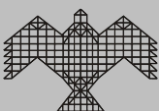
Second, the growing anger across the country against the regime. The killings and the attack by the military have failed to suppress the protest. On the contrary, the repression has fuelled public anger. The protests are not limited to a few cities; it has spread across Myanmar including the areas controlled by the ethnic armed groups. The pro-democracy protests are demographically and ethnically diverse and also includes minority religious communities.

Third, the new legal cases aimed at silencing democratic leadership and dissent. Since the detention of the Suu Kyi and the former President, there have been three to four charges against them. The lack of fair trial and the nature of the charges are aimed at extending their imprisonment. Apart from Suu Kyi and the President, several other higher rank NLD leaders also face similar absurd charges. Journalists, students, activists and artists amounting to more than thousands have been detained.

### In perspective

First, the increasing charges against the NLD leaders seem to be a part of the larger preparation for the promised election next year. The election promised by General Hlaing will ensure the return of USDP. Hence it is essential to curtail any opposition that would challenge that strategy.

Second, the protests seem to continue and also inspiring the pro-democracy protests in Thailand. The pro-democracy movement started in Thailand in 2020 got subdued due to the COVID-19. However, on 28 February the protests seem to have resurged, inspired by developments in Myanmar.



## Nigeria: The fear and uncertainties of child abduction, despite the latest release of 279 schoolgirls

### In the news

On 26 February, as many as 317 girls were reported to have been abducted from the school by 100-odd gunmen who stormed the school in the wee hours of the day. However, the Governor clarified that some of the girls escaped and hid in the bushes. Therefore, the total number of girls abducted was 279, all of whom the government managed to release after negotiations with the “repentant bandits.” He denied paying any ransom to the bandits but termed the whole incident politically motivated. He said, “While the state was in negotiation with (the) abductors for the release of the schoolgirls, other persons offered money to the armed bandits to keep the girls in captivity.”

On 27 February, 42 people, including 27 students, who had been previously abducted on 17 February, were released.

On 2 March, the Governor of Zamfara State announced the release of all 279 girls. President Muhammadu Buhari tweeted that he was happy “that their ordeal has come to a happy end without any incident.”

On 3 March, three people were shot by security forces. The security forces opened fire when parents started attacking government officials with stones during the handover ceremony of the abducted children.

### Issues at large

First, the recurring mass abductions. In 2014, Boko Haram abducted 276 girls from a school in Chibok and this generated international outrage. However, numerous other instances of the abduction of school children have taken place. For example, in 2018, as many as 110 girls were abducted by the group. Similarly, in December 2020, more than 300 schoolboys were abducted allegedly by Boko Haram, who were later released after negotiations. From December 2020 to February 2021, three mass abductions took place in schools.

Second, expansion in kidnapping groups. Mass abductions from school were a strategy adopted by Boko Haram which opposed any form of western education. However, over time, local armed groups, generally known as bandits, have also adopted a similar strategy. In the case of bandits, the abducted people were released after what the government calls “peaceful negotiations.” Further, casualties in many cases involving bandits have been minimal as kidnappers also aim for money in the form of ransoms.

Third, failure of the state and lack of transparency from the government. The recurrence of mass abductions reflects a state failure as it has not been able to deploy the necessary forces and technology to trace the kidnappers. However, it could also be the state’s lack of willingness to act on the issue. Further, the government reaches out to the kidnappers for negotiations citing that military actions might result in casualties. However, the said negotiations have never been



made public. Though the government has in all cases denied paying ransoms to the kidnappers, doubts have arisen over the same.

### In perspective

The curious case of kidnappings raises more questions than answers. First, if one goes by the government's words that it does not pay ransoms to the kidnappers, then the larger question at play is: What is the endgame of the kidnappers? If the kidnappings are politically motivated, as the Governor says, then who is trying to send a message to the government and what is the message they are aiming to convey?

Second, repeated instances of abductions from schools create a sense of insecurity not just among students, but also parents. This could result in parents preventing their children, especially girls, from going to schools thereby impacting the social-economic conditions of different sections of Nigerian society.

## **Saudi Arabia: Crown Prince MBS named in the US intelligence report on the killing of Jamal Khashoggi**

### In the news

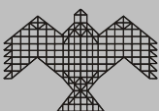
On 26 February, an intelligence report by the office of the US Director of National Intelligence revealed that the Crown Prince of Saudi, Mohammed bin Salman played a role in directing the Saudi hit squad to either "capture or kill" Khashoggi. The report says, "We assess that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman approved an operation in Istanbul to capture or kill Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi." The direct involvement of one of his advisers as well as members of his protective detail in the operation is some of the reasons for the conclusion. The four-page report names 21 individuals who participated in the killing.

On, 2 March, the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have filed a criminal complaint with a German prosecutor alleging that Saudi Arabian officials are responsible for "widespread and systematic" persecution of journalists in the kingdom, citing what it characterizes as the arbitrary detention of more than 30.

### Issues at large

First, the return of the Khashoggi case. The Khashoggi killing had been dying-out from popular memory. The renewed interest in the case came with the Biden election campaign and the subsequent release of the report. The RSF case filed in Germany also draws attention to the case of Jamal Khashoggi again.

Second, the change in US strategy to the Middle East under Biden. Throughout his election campaign, Biden vowed to take a harder stance with a pretext of having Saudi Arabia act responsibly or pay a price. Taking from it, the release of the report comes in the early months of Biden taking office. In an attempt to indicate that nothing would change in the relations, Biden made a call to Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud the day before the release.



There are also changes in the US strategy towards Yemen and statements hinting the same on Iran.

Third, international investigations, reports and the pressure on MBS. An investigation by the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, concluded that “Since 2017, the Crown Prince has had absolute control of the Kingdom’s security and intelligence organizations, making it highly unlikely that Saudi officials would have carried out an operation of this nature without the Crown Prince’s authorization.” The current US intelligence report prepared in 2019, takes a similar path and correlates the actions of the people accused to link the role of MBS in the decision to kill Khashoggi. It appears the international pressure on MBS is back with developments in the US and Germany.

### In perspective

First, though the US officials have portrayed it as an attempt to re-calibrate the relations and not rupture them, actions taken by Biden have drawn a lot of attention. However, there has been no MBS specific sanctions in the US yet.

Second, the recent measures would have an impact on US-Saudi Arabia relations. Especially with MBS. Hours after the release of the report, the Saudi foreign ministry has called it unacceptable, and false. Though the decision to release the report can be seen in good light, it seems like President Biden got the timing wrong and angered many parties including the human rights defenders.

## Hong Kong: 47 pro-democracy activists charged with security crime

### In the news

On 28 February, Hong Kong police confirmed that 39 men and eight women pro-democracy campaigners were being charged on account of a “conspiracy to commit subversion”. The group of pro-democracy activists include former lawmakers, academicians, social workers, and youth activists. Jimmy Sham, one of the 2019 protest organizers said, “Democracy is never a gift from heaven. It must be earned by many with a strong will.”

On 1 March, hundreds of protestors gathered to show their support outside the West Kowloon court complex. Protestors held banners and raised slogans saying, “Liberate Hong Kong, a revolution of our times.”

### Issues at large

First, China’s continuing arrests of pro-democracy activists. In June 2020, China imposed the National Security Law which criminalises acts deemed to subversion, secession, terrorism, and collusion with foreign forces. Those charged could also face life imprisonment. China has described it as an attempt to restore stability in the city. Young protestors like Joshua Wong, Ivan Lam and Agnes Chow Ting were convicted for unlawful assembly, in December 2020.





Over the last few months, many political leaders have been arrested on charges of "contempt" and "interfering" with the city's Legislative Council. Jimmy Lai, the founder of Apple Daily was recently denied bail for the third time by the Hong Kong High Court. He was arrested last year in August, on suspicion of colluding with foreign powers and was arrested under the new security law.

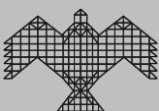
Second, the extensive use of National Security Law. On 6 January, 50 pro-democracy protestors were arrested. The protestors were accused of organizing and participating in the unofficial "primary election" of 2020. The polls aimed at selecting the strongest candidates for the legislative council election. Hong Kong officials described the primary as "the strategy to violate the security laws, ban and attempt to derail government functioning and pose a threat to national security." Since 2020, police have arrested more than 10,000 people, out of which more than 2,400 have faced charges and 100 have been arrested under the national security law.

Third, the changing nature of the protests - from the streets to court halls. After the outbreak of COVID-19, the protestors on the street dwindled. For the first since January 2020, the supporters gathered outside the court hall. More than 100 police officers were deployed. Hong Kong Judiciary called the situation "very crowded."

Fourth, increasing international response. The international community showed solidarity and condemned China's action in Hong Kong. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken tweeted, "We condemn the detention of, and charges filed against pan-democratic candidates in Hong Kong's elections and call for their immediate release. Political participation and freedom of expression should not be crimes. The US stands with the people of Hong Kong." Nanaia Mahuta New Zealand's Foreign Minister also tweeted saying, "the charges marked an escalation in the application of the national security law and New Zealand is concerned and would be monitoring the situation."

### In perspective

The extensive clampdown of the pro-democracy protests under the National Security Law indicates that the space for dissent or democracy is narrowing in Hongkong and China's hold on Hong Kong is tightening, effectively eroding the one country's two systems.



## Armenia: Demonstrations increase as Armenia PM slams ‘coup attempt’

### In the news

On 1 March, protesters stormed a government building in the Armenian capital, Yerevan, demanding PM Nikol Pashinyan’s resignation, escalating a months-long political crisis over his handling of the recent war with Azerbaijan. On the same day, Pashinyan said he would be ready to hold snap parliamentary elections if the opposition agreed to certain conditions.

On 25 February, the General Staff of Armenia’s armed forces joined the opposition called for Pashinyan’s resignation with the Defence Ministry spokesman Samvel Asatryan stating, “Due to the current situation, the armed forces of the Republic of Armenia demand the resignation of the prime minister and government of the Republic of Armenia, at the same time warning against the use of force against the people who died defending the homeland and Artsakh.” Pashinyan responded calling the statement a “coup attempt.”

On 27 February, President Armen Sarkisian refused to sign off on the dismissal of the head of the country’s general staff whose firing by Pashinyan prompted the political crisis. Sarkisian said the move was unconstitutional and that the army should be kept out of politics.

### Issues at large

First, Pashinyan’s struggle to maintain his position since the war in 2020. Protests broke out in Armenia in November 2020 after Pashinyan signed a Russian-brokered cease-fire that brought an end to the six-week war with Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The forces aligning against Pashinyan are growing by the day, and those publicly demanding his resignation now include the country’s president, the two opposition parties in parliament, all three former post-Soviet leaders of Armenia, the leaders of the two major Armenian churches, the academic council of Yerevan State University, and several provincial governors and mayors. Despite the pressure, Pashinyan has refused to step down and defended the peace deal as a painful but necessary move that prevented Azerbaijan from overrunning the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Second, the looming constitutional/ institutional crisis. The current political crisis has pitted the Prime Minister and President against each other, this is the first such decree Sarkisian has refused to sign in during his tenure with Pashinyan. Similarly, there has been a deepening rift between the Prime Minister and the military who have criticised Pashinyan for allegedly being too soft on certain issues.

Third, the rising opposition in Armenia. Although the opposition parties failed to gather a quorum of lawmakers to vote Pashinyan out, a coalition of opposition groups, including the former ruling Republican Party, have staged opposition protests in the capital with tents lining the streets causing tensions to surge.



### In perspective

With winter receding, the protests are likely to move from being dormant to active. However, an attempt to take power away from Pashinyan and his elected government would be unprecedented for the republic of Armenia.

While a wide swath of Armenian society now believes Pashinyan should resign, the more difficult question is that who should replace him? Although the opposition has risen to prominence in recent months, its weak position has continued to enable Pashinyan to stay in power. Conversely, snap elections could provide a path out of the deadlock, yet Pashinyan's chances of winning are slim. His approval ratings have fallen from over 80 per cent after the country's peaceful revolution in 2018, to just about 30 per cent.

## Syria: UN report calls for a complete ceasefire

### In the news

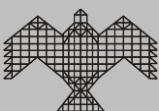
On 1 March, the United Nations released a report by the Commission of Enquiry for Syria. The report explicitly holds the Government of Syria and armed groups in the region responsible for the detainment and mistreatment of tens of thousands of innocent civilians. The report highlights the government's role in suppressing dissent by arresting and detaining civilians in detainment camps for more than a decade. It also gives insights into the war crimes committed by ISIL, HTS, the FSA, the SNA and the SDF.

On 2 March, three human rights groups filed a complaint in France against the war crimes committed in Syria. The groups have urged the French government to investigate the use of chemical weapons in the conflict, based on first-hand testimonies collected from numerous witnesses and victims. The three groups had previously filed a complaint regarding the same issue in Germany last year.

On 25 February, the United States conducted an airstrike on Iran-backed militias operating in Syria. The airstrike was conducted on the Syrian-side of the Syrian-Iraq border and killed around 22 militants. The strike also destroyed multiple militant facilities in Al Bukamal along with three trucks carrying munitions from Iraq.

### Issues at large

First, the ongoing civil war in Syria. The war began during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011 when the Syrian populace began protesting for the removal of their despotic leader, President Bashar al-Assad. Unable to control the uprising, President Assad invoked a complete military crackdown on protestors, resulting in a bloodbath. In retaliation, rebel groups began opposing the government in armed conflict. Not long after, the civil war in Syria turned into a proxy war in which Iran and Russia backed Assad's government, and The Gulf States, Turkey, Jordan and the US supported the rebels. The war also gave rise to religious extremist groups like Hezbollah and ISIS, creating further unrest in the region.





Second, the civilian population caught in the crossfire. The UN report mentions that none of the warring factions respects civilian rights in line with international legal obligations. From the use of chemical weapons to numerous detention camps around the country, the civilian population has been repeatedly targeted and abused. The pandemic has also made certain that the crowded detention camps are deathtraps for innocent civilians.

Third, the international community and their response. The involvement of various armed groups in the conflict has made the decisions of the international community divided and unproductive thus far. With the US and Russia taking opposing sides, the international community has had a restricted approach toward the conflict. When countries like the US try to promote a peaceful resolution, militias in the region disrupt it blatantly.

### In perspective

The war in Syria is nowhere close to a finish. From the UN report, it is evident that innocent civilians have had to endure the brunt of the war. The parties involved are not ready for a compromise or cooperative initiative despite the plight of the civilians. Similar to the conflict in Yemen, the role of external powers has increased the intensity of the war and divided the country significantly. All this unnecessary carnage can only end if all parties involved respond to the UN's call for a complete ceasefire.

## **Yemen: The donor conference raises only USD 1.7 billion, as humanitarian aid**

### In the news

On 1 March, a “Virtual High-Level Pledging Event for the Humanitarian Situation in Yemen” was held by the UN. It was co-hosted by Sweden and Switzerland. More than 100 governments and donors participated in the conference but the amount pledged was highly short of requirements and even less than that raised in 2020. In the three sessions of the conference, discussions took place around the major objectives of the conference. These included raising awareness and mobilising resources for severe and deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Yemen and the imminent risk of large-scale famine, and the past success and present challenges of humanitarian partners.

### Issues at large

First, the looming famine in the country. The danger of the longest famine in many decades has been materializing in Yemen. The president of UNSC had stated in August 2017, warning the world of the emerging food crisis in Yemen. In March 2018, the Council, yet again recognized that the coming famine would not be very deadly. The numbers indicated that 3.4 million people were pushed to dependency on humanitarian aid within a year. On 12th February 2021, four agencies of the UN (FAO, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO) indicated that nearly 2.3 million children under the age of five in Yemen are projected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2021. 4,00,000 of these could die if they do not receive urgent treatment. According to the



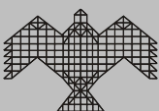
latest UN data, more than 16 million Yemenis (about half the population of the country) will face hunger this year, and nearly 50,000 are already starving to death in famine-like conditions.

Second, the failure of internal actors in resolving the humanitarian aid issue. The Houthi rebels have been posing obstructions in aid. Approval delays, violence against the staff, interference with an assessment of need, and usage of aid access to extort concessions and money are common practices utilized by the Houthis. Since May-June 2020, the Houthis have blocked 262 containers at Hodeida Port hindering the delivery of PPE kits and transport of commercial vessels carrying fuel for revenue. All this makes food, hospital operations, and water supply obscure for the Yemenis, and leaving them highly vulnerable to COVID-19. Even the Coalition-backed Yemeni government has recently issued numerous bureaucratic restrictions on aid agencies creating unnecessary obstacles and delaying aid deliverance.

Third, the lack of international attention to Yemen. The UN has called the situation in Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis and yet the international community has failed to provide Yemen with the deserved attention and help. The focus on Yemen comes only in the context of a proxy war between Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia and Shia-majority Iran. The few Yemeni journalists identify two major reasons for the ignorance by global media. These are that Yemen does not pose a direct threat to the western countries and there are no “waves” of Yemeni refugees crossing the Mediterranean. International media and members of the community have pushed Yemen on the side-lines.

#### In perspective

External solutions to the issue will fail unless the Houthis and the Yemeni government lift unnecessary restrictions on humanitarian aid. Yet, efforts from the UNSC to identify senior Houthi and government officials involved in obstruction of aid, and taking appropriate actions on them might help the situation. However, no permanent solution can be expected until the conflict itself is resolved. The international community needs to act tactfully and move towards a political solution.



## Also, from around the world

By Apoorva Sudhakar and Abigail Miriam Fernandez

### Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

#### Thailand: Musician-activist becomes the latest target of lese majeste law

On 3 March, an anti-government activist and musician, Chaiamorn "Ammy" Kaewwiboonpan was arrested and charged under the lese majeste law for allegedly burning the portrait of the King. The law provides for imprisonment of up to 15 years if found guilty of insulting the monarchy. According to the Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, at least 61 have been charged under the law.

#### Thailand: At least 16 injured during pro-democracy protests

On 28 February, as many as 16 people were injured during the pro-democracy protests when police used rubber bullets and water cannons to disperse the protesters. The protesters had clashed with the police outside the military barracks surrounding the Prime Minister's residence in Bangkok. They also demonstrated their support to the anti-coup protesters in Myanmar. Referring to Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-o-cha's meeting with Myanmar's new foreign minister, one of the protest leaders said, "Prayuth welcoming a Myanmar official from their military government to Thailand earlier this week also show that he is supporting the dictator there."

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### Peace and Conflict from South Asia

#### Sri Lanka: OHCHR releases a report on Sri Lanka

On 24 February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said "Despite commitments made in 2015, the current government, like its predecessor, has failed to pursue genuine truth-seeking or accountability process." While submitting the report on Sri Lanka to the UN Human Rights Council, Bachelet stated "The impact on thousands of survivors, from all communities, is devastating. Moreover, the systems, structures, policies and personnel that gave rise to such grave violations in the past remain – and have recently been reinforced." Further, she said there remain structural and systemic issues in Sri Lanka and warned there were "clear warning signs that past patterns of violations could be repeated."

#### Sri Lanka: Easter bombings investigation calls for former President to be prosecuted

On 3 March, the final report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry (PCoI) probing into the 2019 Easter Sunday Terror Attack has called for the country's former President as well as senior police and intelligence officials to be prosecuted. The commission of inquiry says that "criminal proceedings" should be brought against former President Maithripala Sirisena, who left office in November 2019, for "criminal liability on his part" over the attacks. Further, the report has been also handed over to the Archbishop of Colombo, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith.



### **Sri Lanka: Government allots an island as a burial site for victims of COVID-19, but the locals are upset**

On 3 March, Iranaitivu, a remote island has been chosen by Sri Lanka's government for the burial of COVID-19 victims from the minority Muslim and Christian communities. The decision has been criticised and termed as a cruel ploy by the government to induce tensions against the Tamils and Muslim communities regarding the forced cremation issue. The government's decision comes after burials for COVID-19 victims was banned in April 2020, forced minorities to cremate their dead in line with the practice of the majority Buddhists.

### **India: India urged to provide refuge to 81 Rohingya adrift at sea**

On 1 March, the director of Rohingya Human Rights Initiative (RHRI) in India, Sabber Kyaw Min said, "We are begging Indian authorities to bring our people to the land. How can all countries refuse to accept 81 lives stranded in international waters?" This statement came after India's coastguard repaired the vessel that has been drifting in the Andaman Sea for over two weeks. They have been denied permission to enter Indian waters as India wants Bangladesh to take them back, however, Bangladesh has refused these demands.

### **Pakistan-India: DGMOs meet, recommit to 2003 ceasefire arrangement on LoC**

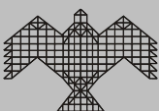
On 25 February, Pakistan and India recommitted themselves to the 2003 ceasefire arrangement at the Line of Control and agreed to address 'core issues' that could undermine peace and stability. The agreement came after the militaries of the two countries spoke about a 'hotline contact' between their directors-general military operations (DGMOs) who met earlier. Further, the conversation between the two DGMOs was described as "free" and "frank" and held in a "cordial atmosphere." Additionally, they also committed to addressing core issues disturbing the ties.

### **Pakistan: FATF to keep Pakistan on 'grey list' till June**

On 25 February, the FATF decided to keep Pakistan on the 'grey list' until June 2021 for not fulfilling three of the 27 action items. The FATF, however, appreciated Pakistan for having made progress on the remaining 24 items, especially the Anti-Money Laundering and Combating the Financing of Terrorism. The FATF President urged Pakistan to fulfil the remaining conditions and clarified that Pakistan would not be categorised under the blacklist if it fails to comply with the conditions by June 2021.

### **Afghanistan: SIGAR report claims that the US wasted 2.4 billion on buildings and other assets**

On 24 February, The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that the US government spent more than USD 2.4 billion "in assets that were unused or abandoned had not been used for their intended purposes, had deteriorated, or were destroyed." Further, the report claimed that more than USD 1.2 billion out of the USD 7.8 billion in U.S.-funded assets were being used as intended, and, only USD 343.2 million worth of assets were "maintained in good condition."



## Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

### **Kazakhstan: Dozens detained during protests calling for release for political prisoners**

On 28 February, the police detained nearly 50 protesters who were calling for the release of political prisoners, including ex-President Nursultan Nazarbayev. The protesters were citing a resolution passed by the European Parliament which demanded the EU to “to prioritise rights in its relations with Kazakhstan.” The resolution believed that the rights conditions in Kazakhstan were deteriorating. However, the Foreign Ministry dismissed the claims and said the resolution had been “initiated by unfriendly politicians, fuelled by inaccurate information from destructive circles.”

### **Yemen: the US sanctions two Houthi leaders**

On 2 March, the US imposed sanctions on two Houthi leaders accusing them of procuring weapons from Iran to use against Saudi Arabia during cross-border attacks. The two persons are the commander of the Houthi air force and the commander of Yemen’s naval and coastal defence force. The statement from the State Department read, “The United States has made clear our commitment to promoting accountability for Ansarallah’s malign and aggressive actions, which include exacerbating conflict in Yemen.” Ansarallah is the name of the Houthi movement.

### **Iraq: Volley of rockets hit the military base, number casualties stand disputed**

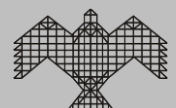
On 3 March, the US Defense Department said a contractor died of a heart attack during a rocket attack in western Iraq. At least 10 rockets were launched from an unidentified location targeting the Ayn Al Asad airbase which houses the US forces and other coalition troops. However, an Iran-backed militia’s news outlet says three US soldiers were killed in the attack. No group has taken responsibility for the attack.

### **Syria: Israeli missiles intercepted over Damascus**

On 28 February, state news agency SANA reported that the Syrian air defences had intercepted Israeli missiles over Damascus. According to SANA’s military source, the attack was launched from the Golan Heights. The Army said it had managed to take down most of the missiles. Previously, on 26 February, the Israeli Defence Minister said Israel was carrying out measures every week to “prevent Iranian entrenchment in Syria.”

### **Algeria: Macron admits to murder of Algerian nationalist in 1957**

On 2 March, French President Emmanuel Macron admitted that France had tortured and killed Ali Boumendjel, a prominent figure during the Algerian War of Independence in 1957. At the time, his death was covered up as a suicide. However, when Macron met with Boumendjel’s grandchildren, he admitted to France’s crime and said the admission was made “in the name of France.” He also offered the family a chance “to find out the truth about this chapter of history.”





### **Ethiopia: Amnesty International accuses Eritrean troops of crimes against humanity in Tigray**

On 26 February, Amnesty International released a report stating that Eritrean troops had carried out a massacre in the conflict-hit Tigray region of Ethiopia; this amounts to crimes against humanity. According to the report, the Eritrean troops killed hundreds in the ancient city of Axum on 28 and 29 November 2020. It says the Eritrean troops were engaged in “widespread looting of civilian property and extrajudicial executions” in Axum since 19 November 2020. However, Ethiopia and Eritrea have denied the presence of Eritrean troops. Further, the Information Minister dismissed the claims calling them fabricated.

### **Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas**

#### **Russia: EU and US impose sanctions over the poisoning of Alexey Navalny**

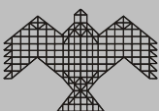
On 2 March, The United States and European Union imposed sanctions on senior Russian officials Tuesday over the poisoning of Alexey Navalny. The US has imposed sanctions on seven senior Russian officials and 14 entities involved in chemical and biological production, while the EU has targeted four Russian government officials. In response, Russia stated that the sanctions were “absolutely unacceptable,” dismissing claims of being behind the poisoning. Further, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman said, “We will continue to systematically and resolutely defend our national interests and rebuff aggression,” adding “We urge our colleagues not to play with fire.”

#### **US-Mexico: Biden speaks with President Lopez, issue a joint declaration**

On 1 March, the White House issued a statement saying that President Joe Biden spoke with Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador in an online meeting. The two sides reviewed their cooperation on migration and to advance joint efforts to promote development in Southern Mexico and the Northern Triangle of Central America. Further, the two leaders committed to working together to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, to reinvigorate economic cooperation, and to explore areas of cooperation on climate change. They also reaffirmed the importance of combating corruption and security cooperation.

#### **Canada: Fear increases after the mysterious disappearance of a Saudi dissident in Canada**

On 27 February, The Washington Post reported that the mysterious disappearance of a Saudi dissident living in Montreal after visiting Saudi Arabia’s embassy in Ottawa has sent fear rippling across Canada’s community of Saudi exiles. Further, it states that these fears are most severe among Saudi activists who have tried to keep a low profile and avoid attracting unwanted attention from the Saudi government. This comes after Ahmed Abdullah al-Harbi who went missing in January reappeared recently in Saudi Arabia causing his fellow activists who are afraid he is providing Saudi authorities with information that jeopardizes them and their families.



### Canada: Fear increases after the mysterious disappearance of a Saudi dissident in Canada

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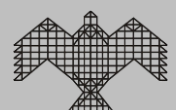
### The US: House cancels session over threat of 'possible' attack on Congress

On 3 March, the Capitol Police said it had "obtained intelligence that shows a possible plot to breach the Capitol by an identified militia group on Thursday, March 4." Further, the Capitol Police said that it was "aware of and prepared for" threats towards members of Congress and the building, adding, "We have already made significant security upgrades to include establishing a physical structure and increasing manpower to ensure the protection of Congress, the public and our police officers." Following the warning, leaders in the House of Representatives cancelled plans for Thursday's session.

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### About the authors

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The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI) is part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS).




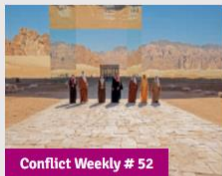




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