

Conflict Weekly

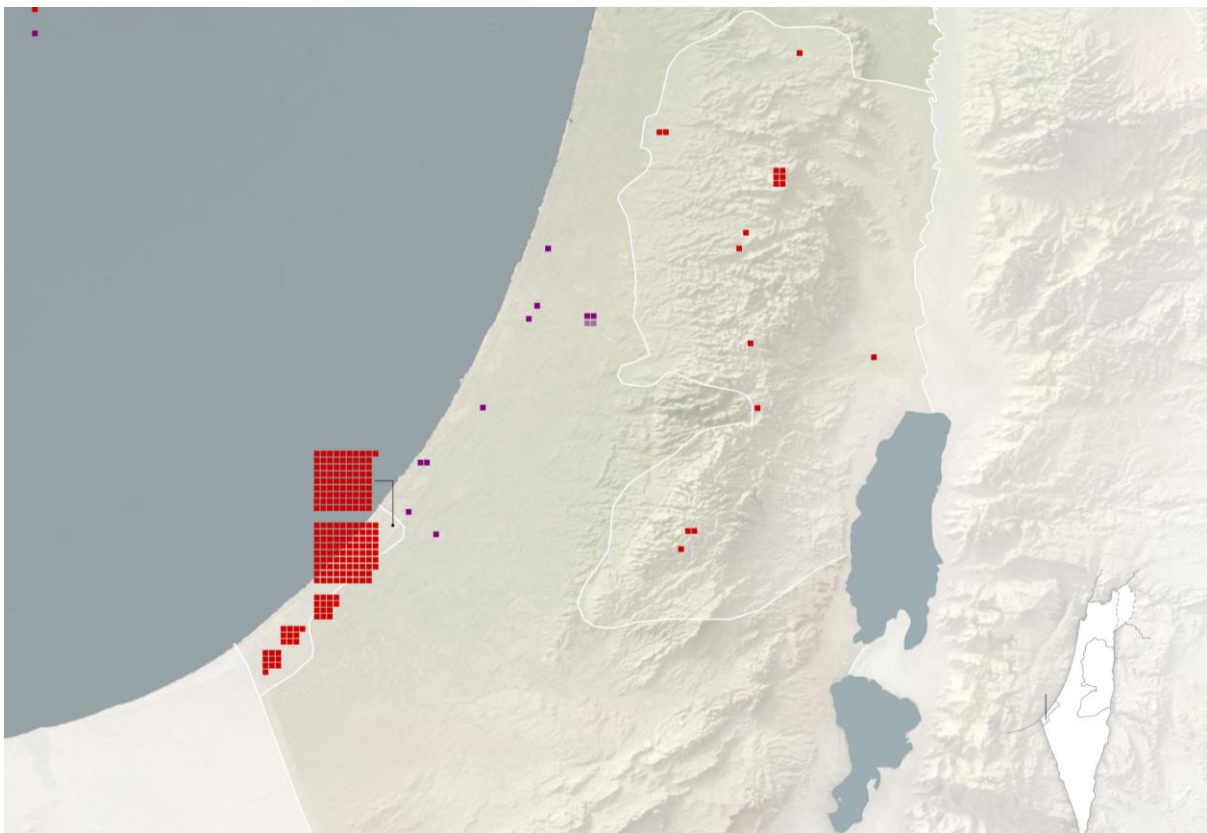
An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

19 May 2021, Vol.2, No.07

Elusive ceasefire in Israel-Palestine conflict, a migration crisis in Spain, three weeks of protests in Colombia, and the rise of Ransomware reign

Udbhav Krishna P, Mohammad Aseel Ummer, Vishnu Prasad, and Jeshil Samuel J



The clashes between Hamas and Israel continue into the second week, as there is no end to the rocket attacks. Casualties are increasing across Israel, as could be seen from the above image by the New York Times. (Image Source: The New York Times)

Israel-Palestine: Who wants what?

In the news

On 18 May, a White House statement stated that President Joe Biden had extended his support for a ceasefire in the Israel- Palestine conflict during the phone call with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. As of 18 May, Gaza health officials reported that at least 212 Palestinians had been killed, including 61 children and 36 women, in more than a week of fighting. Meanwhile, ten people have been killed in Israel, including two children. Around 3,350 rockets

have been fired by militants from Gaza, and retaliatory air and artillery strikes by Israel have killed 130 Palestinian combatants.

On 16 May, Israel destroyed a 12-storey tower block in Gaza, that housed the US-based Associated Press and other news media, saying the building was also used by the Islamist militant group Hamas.

On 13 May, Israel carried out airstrikes on the Gaza strip, increased their deployment of troops and tanks along the Gaza border despite international calls for calm. Later in a statement, the Israeli army denied that any such ground offensive had started.

Issues at large

First, what does Israel want? In the immediate future, Israel would want the militants in Gaza to stop their rocket attacks and also disarm. Israel would also prefer the Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood to vacate their homes after the court ruling that Jewish families held historical claims to the land. In the long run, Israel would want the whole of Jerusalem as their capital. Israel would not let Palestinians claim more land for themselves as this could threaten the overall demography of the region, threatening the survival of the Jewish state.

Second, what does Palestine want? Immediately, Palestine would want an end to the police violence in East Jerusalem and West Bank and the air and artillery strikes on Gaza. They demand the non-eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. In the long run, Palestinians would want East Jerusalem to be the capital of the State of Palestine. However, the Palestinians are highly divided. The Palestinian Authority believes in a two-state solution and diplomatic negotiations with Israel; it does not want more Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In contrast, Hamas, which governs Gaza, believes in an armed struggle against Israel for Palestinian statehood. Hamas wants to gain more support in the West Bank as they feel Fatah is weak and they are the only strong resistance of Palestinians against Israel.

Third, what does the Arab world want? The Arab world has uniformly condemned the Israeli airstrikes in Gaza and Israeli police invasion into Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Mosque. The UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, which had recently recognized Israel, also openly criticized Israel's policies and called for the support of Palestinians and defence of Jerusalem. Egypt, Qatar and Jordan are trying to negotiate a solution to the crisis. In the long term, they too agree with a two-state solution.

Fourth, what does the US want? The US wants a ceasefire and violence to end in the region. They have sent an envoy Hady Amr to diffuse tension between Israel and Palestine. In the long run, the US would want Israel to find an acceptable solution and accommodate the interests of the Palestinians.

In perspective

First, the international failure. The UN and other big and regional powers have failed to reach an understanding. They could not end the violence, pressurize the actors and broker a ceasefire. The United States, an ally of Israel, has blocked any statement from the UN. Second, countries like Egypt could not force Hamas to stop firing rockets and reach a ceasefire. Countries like Turkey are trying to garner support for the Palestinians and establish themselves as their messiah and improve their regional standing in the Middle East.

Spain: A migrant crisis, as more than 5000 from Morocco enter the Spanish enclave

In the news

On 18 May, the Spanish government deployed troops in the North African enclave of Ceuta as over 5000 migrants have managed to cross into the Spanish territory by either climbing over the fences in the border between Ceuta and Morocco or to swim into the enclave's shores, one person was reported to have died during the attempt. The Spanish Prime Minister visited Ceuta and said: "We will restore order in the city and along our borders as quickly as possible." The Deputy Prime Minister was quoted to have stated: "What has taken place is an attack on our borders." The migrants include around 1,500 minors; nearly 2,700 of the migrants have already been deported back to Morocco.

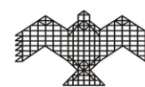
On the same day, Home Affairs Commissioner of the European Parliament said: "The most important thing now is that Morocco continues to commit to preventing irregular departures and that those who do not have the right to stay are orderly and effectively returned." Her statement - "Spanish borders are European borders. The European Union wants to build a relationship with Morocco-based on trust and shared commitments. Migration is a key element in this regard," also underline the more considerable concern of the EU.

On 19 May, the BBC reported, "Morocco withdrew its ambassador for consultations after Spain's foreign minister told the envoy of her 'disgust' at what had happened."

Issues at large

First, the case of migration into Spain. Ceuta has become a hotspot for migrants from Africa attempting to flee to Europe for better living conditions. The enclave is the easiest and probably the cheapest gateway into Europe for African Migrants. The Tarajal and Fenediq are a few of the most used entry points for migrants from Morocco and other African Countries. Melilla and Ceuta are two North African Enclaves that migrants frequent from Africa in large numbers. The conditions in both regions have worsened in recent months primarily due to the COVID pandemic, putting authorities in a tight position.

Second, the case of migration into Europe outside Spain. The migrants make perilous voyages in rickety makeshift boats, resulting in drowning and killing the onboard migrants, and most incidents go undocumented. Outside Spain, Italy and Greece have also been the first destination



for the migrants from Africa. Also, Asian migrants try to enter Europe through the north African countries.

Third, the migration challenge and reluctance in Europe. Legal and illegal migrations from Africa to Europe has become a matter of concern in recent years. Mainly because of the massive numbers of migrants, this raises various red flags causing these countries to remain reluctant in admitting the migrants. Spain, Italy, and Greece being the southern European countries, undergo tremendous pressure. The lack of adequate infrastructure to cater to the needs such as housing and education of migrants, weak financial conditions now coupled with the threat of COVID poses serious questions. There is an evident rise in hostility towards these migrants, as they are often pictured as violent and involved in crime, so some raise the question of security. Ultra-nationalist groups attack the idea of allowing migrants to put authorities in a further dilemma.

In perspective

The current influx has come in a heightened tension between Rabat and Madrid on Brahim Ghali, part of the rebel outfit of Polisario front, fighting for the independence of the West Saharan region from Moroccan authorities. Brahim was provided medical treatment in Spain for COVID, which exacerbated the relations between both countries.

The Spanish authorities are deeply disturbed because the Moroccan forces allowed illegal migrants into Ceuta; this might tighten the ongoing tensions between both countries. The number of migrants has been steadily rising; nevertheless, the troops are engaged in continuous repatriation of the migrants. The Ceuta and Melilla region can expect to have large-scale security deployment in the future. Finally, migration as a crisis to the European community can pose challenges of unfamiliar character in the future.

Colombia: Three weeks of protests

In the news

On 17 May, the Colombian government said that it would consider a list of demands put forward by demonstrators as country-wide protests moved into the third week. Deutsche Welle quoted a presidential advisor as saying that they had received a 'document' and that it was yet to be analyzed by the government.

As of 17 May, at least 50 people had died since the protests began, according to a report in Deutsche Welle, while 524 had disappeared.

Issues at large

First, controversial tax reforms as the initial trigger. The reforms, put forward by right-wing president Ivan Duque Marquez and aimed at pulling Colombia out of a pandemic-induced financial crisis, had imposed service tax on essential goods, widened the tax bracket and eliminated tax benefits. Duque's decisions caused uproar in the country where the poverty rate had crept up to 50 per cent while the unemployment rate had risen to 15 per cent. The new tax regimen had prompted trade unions to call for a strike on 28 April. On 2 May, Duque had

withdrawn the tax regimen, while a day later, his finance minister had announced his resignation. However, these developments did not pacify protesters.

Second, the violent response by the government. The police have been accused of resorting to extreme violence to quell the protests, with deaths and injuries mounting by the day. On 16 May, Reuters quoted Colombia's national police director general Jorge Luis Vargas who said that 122 disciplinary proceedings had been initiated against policemen since the protests began. The extreme violence led to the nationwide expansion of the protests, which were initially confined to Bogota and Cali's capital in the southwest.

Third, a multi-dimensional expansion of the protests. The demands of the protesters had evolved from rolling back the tax reforms to a long list that includes universal basic income, free university tuition and dismantling of the riot police force. The protests also saw a geographical expansion with separate incidents triggering escalations in different cities. In Popayan, it was the suicide of a young woman after alleged police harassment, while in Jamundi, it was the fatal shooting of a student protester. After initially being led by trade unions, the protesters now belong to a wide array of socio-economic classes, with students, religious groups, LGBTQ+ activists and indigenous communities now taking to the streets.

In perspective

First, the protests are a big headache to the Colombian government, which is already struggling to deal with the coronavirus pandemic in the country. With Colombia fast running out of hospital beds, it is feared that the protests will lead to the virus spreading even faster. The government is also facing challenges in ensuring the distribution of food, fuel and other essential supplies, with transportation routes blocked by protesters.

Second, the protests are also an ominous sign for the rest of Latin America, with many countries sharing the same societal fault lines that have been laid bare in Colombia. In 2019, similar protests in Ecuador had quickly spread to Chile, Paraguay, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela and Colombia. It remains to be seen if these protests too will lead to instability across the continent.

Colonial Pipeline incident: The Reign of Ransomware

In the news

On 14 May, the cybercrime group, DarkSide (infamous for the recent Colonial Pipeline hack) announced that they would be closing down operations due to increasing pressure from the US and several law enforcement agencies. Cybersecurity firms FireEye and Intel 471 noted that the hacker group had informed their associates that they had lost access to their operations infrastructure and funds collected through recent attacks (Colonial & Brenntag).

On the same day, Toshiba announced in a public statement that its European subsidiaries had also become victims of a ransomware attack by DarkSide. Toshiba's spokesperson later informed media outlets that it was attacked on 4 May and the company had not paid any ransom.

On 13 May, Bloomberg reported that within hours of being attacked by ransomware on 7 May, Colonial Pipeline had paid nearly USD 5 million in Bitcoin to DarkSide, contradicting earlier statements made by the company.



Issues at large

First, the rise of ransomware attacks. Ransomware is a type of malware that encrypts data in a victim's system and requires a private key (which the hacker has) to decrypt the data. In order to get the private key, victims are forced to pay a ransom. In 2016 alone, the number of ransomware created increased by 752 per cent compared to the previous year; 2016 also marked the advent of ransomware-as-a-service as Advanced Persistent Threats began selling ransomware via affiliate programmes. This new business model incentivized and increased ransomware attacks, making them even more lucrative and successful. The ongoing pandemic has witnessed a 150 per cent increase in ransomware attacks since many businesses had to operate remotely. Cryptocurrency tracker Chain analysis reported that the ransoms paid to cybercriminals in 2020 alone amounted to USD 370 million.

Second, the growing influence of Advanced Persistent Threats (APTs). APTs are highly sophisticated groups of cybercriminals who engage in cyberterrorism, cyberespionage, cybercrimes and hacktivism. These groups are usually state-sponsored due to their scale of operations and precise targets. Each APT has its own agenda. DarkSide, for instance, was outspoken about its apolitical nature, the goal of gaining more money, and habit of giving a portion to charity. The rise in APT activity could also be directly tied to the pandemic. The cybersecurity measures of numerous companies could not guarantee safe and secure remote working conditions for employees. The recent trend amongst APTs is their ability to form cartels or disperse into newer groups. DarkSide, for example, is considered to be an offshoot of another prominent, persistent threat actor called REvil. This is one reason why cybersecurity experts find it hard to believe that groups like DarkSide would just shut down their operations. In reality, when APTs feel pressure from law enforcement agencies, they usually stay dormant for a while or disband the group to form another.

Third, the influence of cryptocurrency in abetting ransomware attacks. Cryptocurrencies have been used as the go-to form of ransomware demands and payments since 2015. Cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin were created to form a decentralized financial system that would not require any singular entity to control the transactions. The opaque transaction processes embedded within cryptocurrencies like Monero have made it a favourite of ransomware operators. Popular currencies such as Bitcoin, on the other hand, make it easier for hackers to legitimize and circulate the illegal ransom. This has been one of the main reasons why governments are critical of cryptocurrencies. Once the ransom is paid, it becomes very hard for law enforcement agencies to trace and retrieve it.

In perspective

The reign of ransomware and APTs such as DarkSide will continue as long as victims such as Colonial Pipeline are ready to pay a ransom. Law enforcement agencies have strongly advised individuals and businesses not to pay ransom to cybercriminals. But, the fear of personal or confidential data being leaked or deleted pushes most of the victims to pay. Businesses should follow good cybersecurity practices such as proper maintenance of system logs and multiple data backups to minimize the impact of ransomware attacks.

Also, from around the world

By Apoorva Sudhakar and Abigail Miriam Fernandez

Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

Hong Kong: Jimmy Lai, nine others plead guilty for unauthorized assembly in October 2019

On 17 May, media tycoon Jimmy Lai and nine others pleaded guilty for organizing and participating in an unauthorized assembly marking the National Day on 1 October 2019. The nine others include former lawmakers and activists. Previously, on 14 May, Lai's bank assets worth USD 36.8 million and all shares of Next Digital media company were frozen under the national security law. Following the trial, the Hong Kong Stock Exchange suspended the trading of Next Digital shares.

South Korea: Fishermen associations demand compensation from Japan for release of Fukushima waters

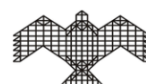
On 13 May, Reuters referred to Yonhap news agency and reported that fisheries associations in South Korea had filed a lawsuit seeking compensation from the Japanese government for the release of contaminated water from the Fukushima plant. The National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives of Jeju Island and a shipowners association demanded that Japan and the Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings pay them 10 million won per day. South Korean fishermen reportedly believe that the release of the water will undo the efforts taken to convince people that "Fukushima's seafood is safe."

Japan: Myanmar drops charges against journalist Kitazumi, deports him to Tokyo

On 14 May, Japanese journalist Yuki Kitazumi who was arrested while covering the developments in Myanmar following the coup, arrived in Tokyo after charges against him were dropped in a diplomatic gesture. Kitazumi had been in a Myanmar prison since April along with other journalists. Upon arrival in Tokyo, he said he was "extremely frustrated" at the deportation and added: "I am a journalist and I wanted to convey what was happening in Yangon."

South Korea: World's third Climate Clock unveiled in Seoul

On 13 May, South Korea unveiled the third Climate Clock in the world which warns against Earth's race towards a catastrophe and a point of no-return in the climate crisis. The Climate Clock, located in Seoul, displayed that the Earth has "six years, 235 days, six hours, four minutes and 55 seconds" to prevent global warming from reaching an irreversible level, given the current emission rates remain the same. The first Climate Clock was installed in 2019 in Berlin and the second in 2020 in New York.



Myanmar: US sanctions military leaders and State Administration Council

On 17 May, the US imposed sanctions on 16 military leaders and the State Administration Council of Myanmar. Of the 16, 13 are senior military leaders and the remaining "three are adult children of three senior military officials who were previously designated for US sanctions." The 13 senior leaders have been sanctioned for their role in the deadly assault on civilians. Similarly, the State Administration Council has been sanctioned because the armed forces established it "to support the unlawful overthrow of the democratically elected civilian government." Meanwhile, the UK and Canada have also announced additional sanctions on Myanmar's military. The UK announced new sanctions against Myanmar Gems Enterprise, which is under the control of the military, and Canada imposed additional sanctions on military-linked individuals and entities. Internally, Myanmar is witnessing various uprisings by ethnic groups and militias against the military in Kachin state, Yangon and other cities.

Peace and Conflict from South Asia

Sri Lanka: Tamils' war memorial found vandalized

On 13 May, the Mullivaikkal memorial monument, a new memorial plaque for the Tamils killed in Sri Lanka's civil war, along with monuments erected earlier, was vandalized allegedly by the army. However, the army has denied involvement in the incident. The Mullivaikkal war remembrance committee raised concerns over the "continuing attack" on Tamils' right to memorialization. Further, condemning the incident, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) termed it as "the height of indecency," adding, "The act did not merely destroy a plaque made of stone, but has demolished the hearts of lakhs of Tamil people."

India: Cyclone Tauktae makes landfall, several deaths reported

On 17 May, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that Cyclone Tauktae, which has intensified into an "extremely severe cyclonic storm", made landfall near the Gujarat coast with wind speeds of up to 160km/h (100mph). Several deaths have been reported, while around 200,000 people have been evacuated across several states. Further, the cyclone is considered to be the most severe storm to hit Gujarat in over two decades.

India: Three NLFT members surrender to the police

On 13 May, three members of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) laid down their arms before the Tripura police. After the preliminary investigation, they were reported to have joined NLFT in 2018 and had undergone training in Myanmar and Bangladesh. The three said that they wanted to return to the mainstream as they were fed up with the "ill behaviour" of their leaders. Previously, on 16 April, two members of the group had surrendered before state police.

Afghanistan: Girls are fleeing Taliban-controlled areas for education, says NYT

On 17 May, the New York Times reported on the several Afghan girls and their families who fled Taliban-controlled areas over the years to attend school in two districts in the country's northwest. Further, it reports how education officials have described the environment of the Taliban-controlled areas as that of repression in which residents, parents and teachers have no opportunity to weigh in on the Taliban's rigid and harsh policies.

Pakistan: Foreign Office calls Ghani's remarks on Pakistan irresponsible and baseless

On 17 May, the Foreign Office rejected the recent allegations by President Ashraf Ghani as "irresponsible and baseless," warning that such statements could undermine mutual trust. Further, the FO said: "Pakistan has emphasized that groundless accusations erode trust and vitiate the environment between the two brotherly countries and disregard constructive role being played by Pakistan in facilitating the Afghan peace process." Previously, Ghani alleged that Pakistan operates an organized system of support for the Taliban insurgents, who receive logistics and financial support from them.

Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan: Officials agree to joint security control along border

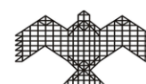
On 18 May, officials from Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan agreed to jointly control law and order along the disputed border in efforts to ease the tensions after the clashes in April 2021. The joint checkpoint has been established between the Kyrgyz village of Ak-Sai and Tajikistan's Vorukh district for authorities from both sides. Meanwhile, several Kyrgyz and Tajik nationals were detained for a brief period along the border.

Israel-Lebanon: Israel retaliates to Lebanese shelling

On 17 May, the Israeli military said that six shells fired from Lebanon towards northern Israel, but they could not cross the border. Responding to this, Israel fired artillery at the source of the launches. Reuters referred to a Lebanese security source who said that efforts were being made to identify the location from where the shells were fired from Lebanon. On the other hand, he claimed that Israeli forces had fired 22 shells. On the same day, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon said the rocket fire was detected in southern Lebanon and that it is coordinating with the Lebanese army to improve the country's security control.

Yemen: UN envoy highlights military escalation in Marib

On 12 May, the UN envoy to Yemen delivered a briefing to the UNSC wherein he highlighted the "relentless military escalation by Ansar Allah in Marib," restrictions on imports in Hudaydah port thereby leading to fuel shortage and soaring prices, restrictions of freedom of movement in the country, and closure of the Sana airport. All of the above, along with the "absence of a political process," is "depriving Yemenis of some hope that an end to the conflict is near." He said that the threats to Yemen's stability increase as the Ansar Allah continues its offensive. He reiterated the need for three things: "commitment to a nationwide ceasefire," reopening of the Sana airport, and "a commitment to resume that political process" to find a long-lasting solution.



Ethiopia: WHO head terms situation in Tigray "horrific"

On 17 May, the WHO Director-General said the people in Tigray are undergoing a horrific situation observing that hundreds are dying due to the destruction of the healthcare system. He said: "The situation in Tigray, Ethiopia, is, if I use one word, horrific. Very horrific." He also said at least five million people in Tigray require humanitarian aid, particularly food aid. Further, condemning indiscriminate killings and sexual violence, he said: "Rape is rampant. I don't think there was that scale anywhere else in the world, actually." Meanwhile, on 15 May, Ethiopia delayed its national election indefinitely, citing logistical difficulties; previously, elections were postponed from 2020, citing the pandemic.

The Horn of Africa: Special envoy completes visit to the region

On 14 May, a press release from the US State Department conveyed that the Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa had completed his visit to the region between 4 May and 13 May. He visited Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan and Eritrea. His visit outlined the US concerns over increasing political and ethnic polarisation in Ethiopia and the US support to the political transition in Sudan. Further, he discussed the need for negotiations between the four countries on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam under the African Union's leadership. He reiterated the US commitment to political and technical support for the same.

Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

Turkey: Turkish forces kill top PKK commander in Operation Claw Lightning

On 17 May, the President said that Turkish forces had eliminated a key commander of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) during the ongoing operation Claw Lightning in northern Iraq. He called the deceased commander, Sofi Nurettin, a Syrian-born "terrorist." Operation Claw Lightning started in late April following another similar operation in February.

Belarus: Authorities raid largest independent news portal

On 17 May, the authorities in Belarus raided the offices of Tut.by, the country's largest independent news portal and took down its website. This development highlights the widening crackdown after opposition protests in 2020. The Editor-in-chief of the organization said: "Representatives of security agencies also came to the newsroom," adding that their homes were also searched. Meanwhile, the state-controlled committee's financial investigations department said that it was investigating Tut.by for tax evasion.

Venezuela: Eight soldiers captured by Colombian armed group

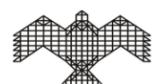
On 15 May, the Defence Minister stated that eight Venezuelan soldiers were captured during combat with "irregular Colombian armed groups" in the border state of Apure. The minister said: "We have established the necessary contacts for their prompt liberation, and the Republic's Foreign Ministry is coordinating with the International Committee of the Red Cross to act as a link for the release of our brothers in arms." This comes as several Venezuelan soldiers died in Apure after battles against unidentified Colombian armed groups began earlier this year.

Brazil: Severe drought leaves farmers worried for the dry season

On 18 May, a Bloomberg report stated that the severe drought condition in Brazil's Center-South region, a powerhouse of agricultural output, has left farmers worried about running out of the water reserves that help keep crops alive over several months of the dry season. Further, it stated that as these areas cannot get enough water, Brazil's coffee and orange output may decline for the second year in a row.

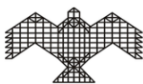
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About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI)

The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI research are published as briefs, reports and commentary.



About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education”, in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible

About Conflict Weekly

The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.



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