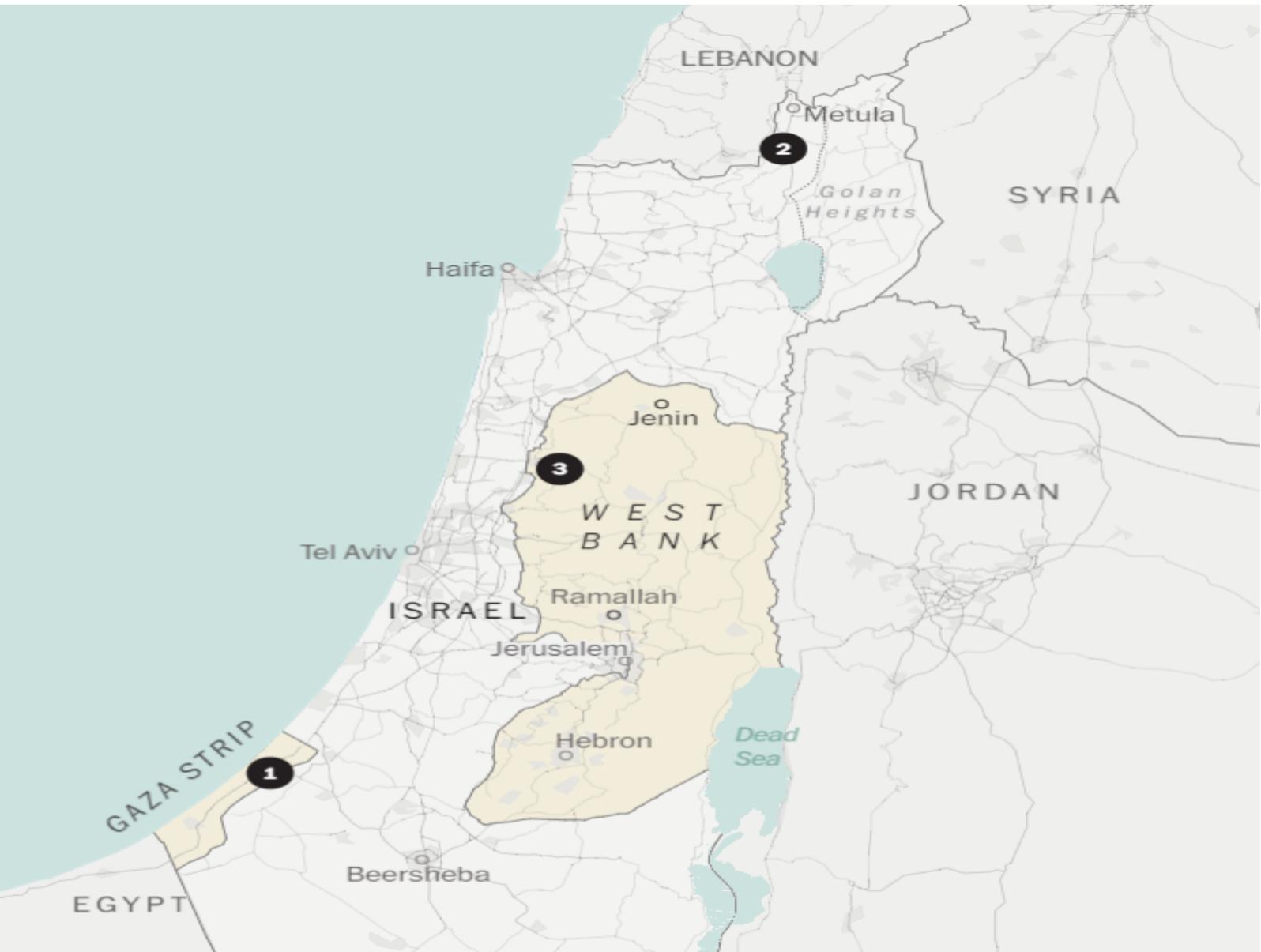


Conflict Weekly

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

Conflict Weekly #198 | Vol. 04 | Issue No.42 | 19 October 2023



Israel-Hamas fighting continues in the Gaza Strip; the casualties have risen to more than 1000 on both sides. (Image Source: [AP Photo](#))

Israel-Palestine Conflict Earthquake in Afghanistan

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

Gender | Environment | Ethnic Violence

External Interventions | Armed Conflicts | Peace Processes



Into the Second Week: Expanding Gaza Conflict, Increasing Violence, and Impending Humanitarian Disaster

D Suba Chandran

In the news

On 20 October, the Executive Director of the UN World Food Programme (WFP), Cindy H. McCain, who called for “full and complete unimpeded access” said that in Gaza “less than a week of food left...People are going to die unless we can gain access.”

On 20 October, the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, was in the region meeting the leaders of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. He was quoted by the BBC about the UK's vision of a “future where Palestinian people can live with dignity, with freedom and security” and also that the opening of Rafah crossing into Gaza is imminent.

On 20 October, the UN Secretary-General stated: “The situation in Gaza has reached a dangerous new low” and wanted to “prevent further dangerous escalation in the West Bank or elsewhere in the region, especially in southern Lebanon...Even wars have rules...Civilians must be protected and also never used as shields.”

On 19 October, the US President Joe Biden, in a special address, stated: “The terrorist group Hamas unleashed pure unadulterated evil in the world... Hamas and Putin represent different threats, but they share this in common. They both want to completely annihilate a neighbouring democracy — annihilate it. Hamas’ stated purpose for existing is the destruction of the state of Israel and the murder of Jewish people. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people. Hamas uses Palestinian civilians as human shields and innocent Palestinian families are suffering greatly because of them.”

On 17 October, a rocket attack on a hospital in Gaza caused a huge uproar. According to local sources, more than 500 were killed in the attack. While Hamas blamed Israel, the latter denied it. Independent sources from the US and the UK claim that it could be the result of a failed launch by another militant group - the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). The attack has led to spontaneous protests across the Arab region against Israel.

On 16 October, according to the BBC, the Israel Defense Forces announced an evacuation of civilians living two kilometres close to the Lebanon border to “reduce harm to civilians and enable the IDF freedom of action if it is required.”

On 12 October, the Washington Post quoted a spokesperson for the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on the objective of the new operation against the Hamas. According to him: “Unlike other operations, we are collapsing the governance and sovereignty of the Hamas organisation.” The report also mentioned Israel mobilising 360,000 reservists and armoured divisions.

On 12 October, on the evolving humanitarian situation in Gaza, the Washington Post quoted the Head of Doctors Without Borders in Gaza, Matthias Kennes, saying: “We know what it was like in 2014 and 2021, thousands died. Each time, our medical colleagues go to work, not knowing if they will see their homes or their families again.” The report also referred to a threat by Israel’s Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Karine Elharrar: “Humanitarian aid to

Gaza? No electrical switch will be lifted, no hydrant will be opened and no fuel truck will enter until the Israeli hostages are returned home. Humanitarian for humanitarian. And nobody should preach us morals.”

Issues at large

First, Israel’s plan for a ground offensive. The government of Israel is planning for a punitive strike aimed at a radical objective – wiping off the Hamas from Gaza. However, the plan risks a huge collateral in terms of civilian casualties. Hence, Israel has asked the civilians in the region to vacate; given the narrow geographic territory, the options for an exodus are limited. In the south of Gaza, Egypt has closed its border. While the US and other Western countries are pressuring Egypt to open the border, the countries in the Middle East are apprehensive of another round of Palestinian refugees. These countries are pressuring the US to ask Israel to stop any ground offensive. Israel wants to finish off the Hamas; this would involve door-to-door operations in Gaza and a high level of violence.

Second, the likelihood of geographic expansion of the conflict. Although the current round of conflict has started between the Hamas based in Gaza and the state of Israel, the likelihood of its geographic expansion into the north with Hezbollah in Lebanon remains high. Iran is believed to be supporting Hezbollah and wants the latter to act as its proxy. Israel has already issued a warning to its people in the north bordering Lebanon to evacuate.

Third, the anti-Israel sentiment in the Middle East. The immediate reaction in the streets of the Middle East from the east of Israel to Egypt and Tunisia in the west highlights the anti-Israel sentiments in the region. Despite the diplomatic efforts, the signing of the Abraham Accords and the normalisation of relations with the state of Israel during recent months, the public mood on the ground remains the same: anti-Israel. The state in the Middle East seems to be sympathetic to the public mood as could be seen from the refusal of the leaders to meet with the US President who dashed to the region this week.

Fourth, the support from the West. Following an extensive round of meetings and trips in the various capitals by the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken came the visit of the US President Joe Biden and the UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Repeated statements from Biden indicate the support for Israel and its right to defend itself.

Fifth, the release of hostages taken by the Hamas. After their surprise attack on 7 October, it is believed more than 200 people of different nationalities, but mostly from Israel, were held as hostages by the Hamas. Israel and other Western countries want their immediate release. Qatar is believed to be playing a major role in getting the hostages released. The air raids and ground offensive by Israel will complicate the negotiations, which is what the Hamas would want.

In perspective

First, Israel’s endgame. The government’s immediate aim is to get the Israeli hostages released by Hamas. However, if the long-term objective is to eliminate Hamas and remain on the ground in Gaza, it would be a long haul for Israel and even be disastrous. Even if Israel succeeds in eliminating the Hamas, how it would want to govern Gaza and who would do it will remain a bigger challenge.



Second, the threat of escalation. The second week of the current crisis has witnessed the threat of geographic and political escalation. If the Israeli troops move into Gaza, they will be moving into the Hamas' territory. The way that Hamas has triggered the current round of conflict with the firing of thousands of rockets should highlight how well-armed they are now. Any ground offensive will end up being violent and messy in Gaza. In the north of Israel, there is another likely escalation with the Hezbollah based in Lebanon.

Third, Iran at the centre. Recent developments in the region – the Abraham Accords, normalisation of Arab-Israel relations and the internal situation within Israel have taken Tehran out of the Middle East equation. With one swift attack by the Hamas, Iran seems to have occupied the centre again. It has pushed those regimes looking for normalisation with Israel on their back foot and has raised the regional public anger against Israel and their respective governments.

Fourth, the impending humanitarian disaster. The international organisations have already been highlighting the availability of food and water if Israel insists on its embargo and the border points are not opened. The situation on the ground is likely to get worse.

Australia's Failed Referendum on Indigenous Voice: Navigating recognition and reconciliation

Dhriti Mukherjee

In the news

On 14 October, Australia's voice referendum on indigenous recognition failed with 40 per cent voting in favour and 60 per cent against. The referendum sought to recognise Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders as the first people of Australia by introducing Section 129. It would provide the indigenous community the "Voice to Parliament" giving them political representation and influence. It also aimed at providing them "executive" powers "with respect to matters relating to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice."

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese advocated for the "Voice to Parliament" stating: "The Voice vote could be a unifying force for Australia, offering Indigenous communities the political representation they deserve."

An indigenous community leader stated: "This referendum's outcome reinforces the enduring challenge of achieving reconciliation and recognising Indigenous rights in Australia."

Another indigenous community leader, Rachel Williams, asserted: "The mere fact that this referendum took place shows that Australia is willing to acknowledge and address the issues that have long plagued Indigenous communities."

However, opposition to the referendum was vocal with former President of the Australian Labour Party, Nyunggai Warren Mundine, explaining: "The Yes23 campaign did not effectively communicate how the Voice would work and improve lives. It's essential that all Australians are treated as equals." The multi-million-dollar Yes23 campaign was initiated to mobilise people to vote for the passing of the referendum.

The Washington Post deemed the failure to be a "crushing blow" for the Indigenous peoples; the Associated Press (AP) declared it a "major setback to the country's efforts for reconciliation with its First Peoples."

Issues at large

First, a brief note on the referendum. The Australian Indigenous Voice referendum was introduced by the Australian government, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. This was in response to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, a document released in 2017 by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. The Voice to Parliament was meant to be a formal body for indigenous people to advise the parliament on laws and policies related to their communities. The government believed that it would improve their lives by giving them a greater say in the decision-making.

Second, the history of Australia's indigenous peoples. The Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders lived in Australia for over 65,000 years. The first Aboriginal Australians are from Southeast Asia; the Torres Strait Islanders are from Papua New Guinea. In 1788, the British began to colonise the continent resulting in the suppression of these communities and dispossession of land. Colonialism left disparities within Indigenous communities in areas including health, education and incarceration. They continue to experience racism, high rates



of poverty, disease and social disadvantages. They currently live all over Australia, but most reside in the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia.

Third, the political differences between the Labour and Conservative parties. There was a political division on the stance taken by Australia's major political parties. The Labour Party supported the referendum as a necessary step towards reconciliation. However, the National Party and Liberal Party opposed arguing that the referendum would create a special status for indigenous peoples. National Party leader, David Littleproud, argued that the referendum was "not the right way to go" and that it would "divide the country."

Fourth, the failure of the Yes23 campaign. A member of the campaign, Marcus Stewart, shed light on the "bullying and misinformation" on social media that characterised their efforts. He stated that they "struggled" with getting their message across. Former Labor strategist, Kos Samar, stated that the campaign relied "on techniques that were suited to people who are super engaged with regards to this referendum." This meant that "people voted no because they have not engaged with the referendum and [didn't] have enough information." Therefore, the 'No' campaign "capitalised" on the "communication problem."

In perspective

First, a positive development, despite the negative vote. Although the referendum did not secure approval, it marked a positive development in Australia's efforts to address the challenges faced by its indigenous communities. However, the referendum's rejection implies the challenges in achieving reconciliation and recognising the rights of indigenous Australians.

Second, a divided public response. The public response to the referendum reveals a stark division within the Australian society with support for 'Yes'- strong in inner suburbs and low in outer suburban areas. Those who were part of the Yes23 campaign have gone into a collective week of silence after the "tragic" results. Those who voted 'No' viewed the Voice proposal as "niche and bespoke," which would cause a "land grab." Cumberland City Councillor Steve Christou hailed the failure as a win for "equality and common sense." There were also worries of division as opposers felt that the indigenous community would get "special" rights and treatment.

Third, alternative pathways to change. A reconsideration could be expected with alternative pathways to address indigenous issues. These alternatives include legislative reforms and treaties to recognise indigenous rights and address disparities. There is a popular narrative that those who voted 'No' believe in a better pathway than constitutional enshrinement.

Fourth, global response. Criticism against the rejection was not limited to the West. The Japanese media, Nikkei Asia, commented: "Australia is the only developed nation with a colonial history that doesn't recognise the existence of its Indigenous people in the constitution." The coverage of the referendum by global media can impact Australia's diplomatic position within the Asia-Pacific region. Steps towards granting indigenous rights and representation are gaining traction. The Arctic Council approved the Arctic Indigenous Peoples Policy (AIPP) in June 2023 recognising the role of Indigenous people. Australia's referendum could thus spark more dialogue in the Asia-Pacific region.

Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Rishika Yadav, Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, Padmashree Anandhan, Dhriti Mukherjee, Shamini Velayutham, Nuha Aamina and Vetriselvi Baskaran

East and Southeast Asia

China: Xi Jinping warns against “decoupling” from Chinese economy

On 18 October, Chinese President Xi Jinping addressed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) forum in Beijing. Xi apprised the Western countries of “decoupling” against the Chinese economy and suggested that China’s economy is rather an asset to the global economy amidst dwindling foreign investments. Additionally, he accused the West of hampering Beijing’s growth stating: “We stand against unilateral sanctions, economic coercion, decoupling, and supply chain disruption.” He also elaborated that hampering one country’s development won’t speed up their own, adding that “China can only do well when the world is doing well... When China does well, the world will get even better.” Xi announced that China will open access to foreign investment in the manufacturing sector and will remove investment restrictions to facilitate better trade ties.

China: Pentagon releases footage of 180 incidents of Chinese interception towards US warplanes

On 18 October, the Associated Press (AP) reported on a released Pentagon document claiming that more than 180 times China had intercepted US warplanes in the past two years. The report noted that there has been an exponential rise which is double the amount compared to the previous decade. The Head of US Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral John Aquilino, stated: “We have been taking several steps to strengthen our commitment to the region, strengthen our deterrence in the region and we will continue to do that.” Assistant Secretary to Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, Ely Ratner, stated: “All of these examples we’ve released today underscore the coercive intent of (China) by engaging in behaviours, particularly in international airspace.”

China: New AI provision bans export of sophisticated AI chips to China

On 17 October, the US Department of Commerce announced that they plan to block the sale of advanced Artificial Intelligence (AI) chips from China. The department plans to avert all loopholes on AI chip exports that dodged the restrictions imposed in 2022. Nvidia, the AI chip platform, announced that owing to the new US export restrictions it will also halt the sales of its latest AI chips A800 and H800. A retaliation is expected by the Chinese government against US firms in China. US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo stated: “The updates are specifically designed to control access to computing power which will significantly slow the PRC’s development of the next-generation frontier model, and could be leveraged in ways that threaten the US and our allies, especially because they could be used for military uses and modernization.”



Taiwan: 13 Chinese aeroplanes violate air zones

On 19 October, the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence reported that they detected 13 Chinese aircraft violating their air defence zone. They accused Chinese aircraft including fighter jets and drones of performing combat drills and patrols. This comes in light of consistent infringement and increasing Chinese intimidation tactics over Taiwan. Taiwan's Ministry of Defence has repeatedly expressed its worry over the rising Chinese military activities.

North Korea: Defends nuclear program against US "nuclear supremacy"

On 17 October, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) described its nuclear program as a self-defence strategy against the US' "nuclear supremacy." A researcher at the Foreign Ministry's Institute for Disarmament and Peace, Kim Kwang Myong, accused the US of escalating regional tensions and destabilising world peace with its nuclear program. Kim stated: "The US, the world's biggest nuclear weapons state and the world's first nuclear user which adopted the preemptive nuclear attack on other countries as its national policy, is talking about 'nuclear threat' from someone."

South Korea: US nuclear-capable bomber arrives, aiming to reassure allies

On 16 October, US Forces Korea (USFK) reported that a US Air Force B-52 Stratofortress, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, would arrive in South Korea this week. It will land for the 2023 Seoul International Aerospace and Defence Exhibition (ADEX). The move is seen as a gesture by the US to reassure South Korea of the strong deterrence capabilities of their alliance with the US amid concerns related to the North Korean aggression in the Korean Peninsula. South Korean and US aircraft are participating in the event involving over 500 exhibitors from 34 countries. USFK stated that the participation of the B-52 Stratofortress is to promote "peace, stability and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula."

South Korea: Plans to impose record fines on Hong Kong investment banks for naked short-selling

On 16 October, South Korea's Financial Supervisory Service (FSS) uncovered two Hong Kong-based investment banks involved in illegal naked short-selling. Naked short-selling is when an investor sells shares before borrowing them. Two unnamed investment banks conducted transactions of KRW 40 billion and KRW 16 billion violating South Korea's Capital Markets Act 2009. The FSS expressed the need to prevent such violations and stated that it would investigate similar practices at other investment banks to create a favourable environment for foreign investors.

The Philippines: Navy vessel nearly collides with a Chinese ship

On 16 October, the South China Morning Post (SCMP) reported that a Philippine ship was made to steer clear of a Chinese vessel. A Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessel came as close as 320 metres to the Philippine Navy's BRP Benguet as it was on its regular resupply mission to a military station. Thitu Island is Manila's biggest outpost in the South China Sea. The Philippines raised concerns over China's violation of collision regulations, however, China cited the nine-dash line. The spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mao Ning, asserted that the Philippines violated China's sovereignty by illegally occupying the Thitu Islands.

Indonesia: Seven civilians killed by an insurgent group in Papua

On 17 October, Indonesian police claimed that assailants opened fire at mining workers on a Monday afternoon, according to the South China Morning Post. The Papua region has observed similar events. A special group has been formed to handle the insurgents; Faizal Ramdhani, head of the Taskforce, reported that the gunfire lasted for one and a half hours and the personnel were attacked. Seven bodies were found dead, most migrants from the Sulawesi region and eleven were rescued. The rebels stated that the reason behind the attacks was to warn the migrants to leave the region of Papua.

Singapore: Scrutiny on money laundering scandal by Credit Suisse and others

On 18 October, around two billion USD worth of assets and jewellery were seized from a group of alleged money launderers in Singapore. The Monetary Authority of Singapore plans to conduct an on-site inspection at banks to determine if wealthy clients were handled properly. Credit Suisse is one of these banks that holds relations with the accused or their companies.

Singapore: Prime Minister warns of China's growing influence

On 13 October, Prime Minister of Singapore, Lawrence Wong, stated that China would have to grow by “adjusting” and “moderating” itself and not “pressure” and “coerce” countries in the process in a dialogue session at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. In the backdrop, there are growing tensions between China and other Southeast Asian countries over claims in the South China Sea and its development initiatives in unoccupied land features. Singapore stands non-aligned in the rivalry between China and the US. According to him, while Singapore values the US friendship, even China is “good” friends with all Southeast Asian countries and Singapore aims at maintaining ties with both.

South Asia

India: Supreme Court rejects legalising same-sex marriages

On 17 October, the Indian Supreme Court opted not to legalise same-sex marriages. The court stated that the legislature is the appropriate body to decide on this contentious matter. Following numerous petitions filed since last year, the case was brought up. The court asked the panel of five judges to look at homosexual relationships. The bench, led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud, stated: “The panel needed to consider the degree of agreement and disagreement on this issue, and the panel needed to incorporate the experts on dealing with the social, emotional, and psychological needs of the people.” Chandrachud then declared that the court “should only interpret what has already been written; it cannot make law.”

Pakistan: Former US officials ask not to deport Afghans seeking relocation

On 18 October, a request was made to Pakistan in an open letter by the former US diplomats and leaders of resettlement groups to hold back from deporting thousands of Afghans awaiting US visas as part of the US initiative to relocate Afghan refugees who are at risk. The officials commented in their letter that arresting Afghans seeking relocation in the US is unnecessary. They also urged Pakistan to work with the US in the visa process. The letter was signed by 80 former US officials and representatives of resettlement organisations. This request came weeks after Pakistan declared it would be taking action against the illegal immigrants including 1.7 million Afghans and asked them to leave the country by 31 October to prevent widespread detention and removal.



Bangladesh: The IMF approved the initial assessment of the USD 4.7 billion bailout

On 19 October, Bangladesh and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reached a staff-level agreement on the first review of the USD 4.7 billion bailout. Out of the three economically challenged South Asian countries who requested the loan including Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the IMF approved the USD 4.7 billion loan in January to Bangladesh with an immediate delivery of USD 476 million, making it the first country to secure a loan.

Nepal: The Indian government allows non-basmati rice exports

On 18 October, India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade notified the Indian government allowing the export of non-basmati white rice of about 95,000 tons to Nepal by reducing the export bans to a limited extent, which was enforced in July. According to the reports, rice smuggling in Nepal has surged since India banned exports. Nepal largely depends on India for imported foods.

Afghanistan: UN officials on frequent earthquakes

On 17 October, UN officials reported that more than 90 per cent of those who lost their lives in the recent earthquakes were women and children. The quakes killed more than 2000 people, Taliban officials reported. Between 7 and 15 October, the country saw a devastating series of earthquakes. Following the earthquake, the aftermath, food shortages, loss of infrastructure and the dust storms worsened the situation. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that more than 20,000 families were affected by last week's disaster.

Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa

Iran: Warns "preemptive" measures against Israel

On 17 October, Iran warned of a potential "preemptive" response against Israel "in the coming hours" while Israel plans a ground offensive on the Gaza Strip. Since 13 October, Israel and the Iran-backed group, Hezbollah, have been exchanging fire along the Israeli-Lebanese border. This has escalated tensions as Israel bombards the Gaza Strip in response to the offensive by the Palestinian armed group, Hamas, since 7 October. On 16 October, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-abdollahian, stated: "All possible options and scenarios are there for Hezbollah ... Naturally, resistance leaders will not allow the Zionist regime to take any action in Gaza, and when it feels reassured about Gaza, move on to other resistance areas in the region." Hours later, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated: "We're in a battle for our lives. A battle for our home, this is not an exaggeration, this is the war. It's do or die - they need to die."

Iran: Urges Muslim countries to boycott Israel over the alleged hospital attack in Gaza

On 18 October, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir-abdollahian stated that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) members should impose an oil embargo, economic sanctions and the expulsion of all Israeli diplomats over the alleged strike on the al-Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza that killed more than 500 people. Amir-abdollahian's remarks were made during an urgent OIC conference in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss the worsening Israeli-Palestinian crisis. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it "calls for an immediate and total embargo on Israel by Islamic countries, including oil sanctions, as well as expelling Israeli ambassadors if relations with the Zionist regime have been established." It also demanded the creation of a group of Muslim attorneys to investigate any possible war crimes Israel may have perpetrated in Gaza.

Iraq: Three drones hit US bases in Iraq; soldiers injured

On 18 October, AP reported on a wave of drone assaults at the US bases in Iraq that caused minor injuries to several soldiers. AP quoted a US official that two drones targeted the al-Asad airbase in western Iraq and one drone targeted a base in northern Iraq. According to a statement by the US Central Command, US forces thwarted all three. The US Central Command stated: "In this moment of heightened alert, we are vigilantly monitoring the situation in Iraq and the region. US forces will defend US and coalition forces against any threat." Following the US support to Israel against Palestine, militias backed by Iran have vowed to attack US bases in Iraq. The Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a federation of Iranian-backed militias, claimed responsibility for the two drone attacks and announced additional operations against the "American occupation."

Ethiopia: Eritrea against Prime Minister Abiy's remark on the Red Sea

On 16 October, the Eritrean government commented that they would not be "drawn into" discussions on Ethiopia's access to the Red Sea. The tensions come after Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated that access to the Red Sea is "a matter of existence" for his country. He stated: "The Red Sea and the Nile River define Ethiopia. They are the foundations for Ethiopia's development or its demise." Ethiopia is a landlocked country that depends on Djibouti for 85 per cent of its exports and imports as Djibouti port is proximate to the country

Mozambique: Opposition protests against election irregularities

On 17 October, BBC Africa reported on protests in Mozambique's capital Maputo. The protests were carried out by the opposition party, Renamo, against the elections held on 13 October which they claimed were rigged and favoured the ruling party, Frelimo. Meanwhile, the police fired tear gas against the protesters injuring several. An unnamed protester stated: "They didn't need to do this, after all, isn't this democracy? We are marching peacefully and we don't want problems with anyone." Renamo failed to secure any seats this term although it governed seven municipalities previously. Leader of Renamo, Ossufo Momade, asserted that they will continue the protests until the "election truth" is uncovered.

South Africa: Four children killed in heavy rains

On 18 October, BBC Africa reported on heavy rains in the provinces of Manicaland and Midlands in Zimbabwe. Five children were killed in the heavy rains and lightning. Meanwhile, heavy rains were also reported in the neighbouring country, South Africa, in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape. In September, at least 11 people were killed in heavy rains in the province of Western Cape in South Africa.

Nigeria: Gunmen abduct 50 people

On 17 October, BBC Africa reported that at least 50 people including women and children were abducted by gunmen in the state of Zamfara in Nigeria. The incident happened after armed men stormed the village of Bagega on motorcycles. At least three people were killed and several others were injured after the gunmen used weapons indiscriminately and set houses on fire. Kidnappings for ransom are common in northwestern Nigeria. It is carried out by armed men, also known as bandits, who target villages and schools. There has been a relative lull in ransom kidnapping for the past few months. However, the latest development is concerning considering the worsening security situation in West Africa followed by the coup in Niger and the withdrawal of the UN and French troops.



Europe and the Americas

Sweden: Thunberg arrested in protest held in London

On 17 October, Sweden's young climate activist, Greta Thunberg, was arrested by the UK police for breaching a section of the Public Order Act 2023 during a gathering of protestors outside an oil and gas conference. During the protest, Thunberg along with hundreds of people from Fossil Free London and Greenpeace groups were seen chanting "Oily Money Out." She stated: "Behind these closed doors, spineless politicians are making deals and compromises with lobbyists from [the] destructive fossil fuel industry." They protested the fossil fuel companies which they claim delayed the energy transition and shifted towards renewables to make profits. According to Thunberg, the consequence of using fossil fuels is clear and despite the awareness, the industries continue to do "nothing."

France: Government bans pro-Palestinian protests

On 12 October, cities in France including Paris, Lille and Bordeaux witnessed protests in support of Palestine. In response, French Minister of Interior, Gerald Darmanin, announced a ban on demonstrations and stated that those who resisted were to be arrested. French President Emmanuel Macron asked the public to not cause division stating: "The shield of unity will protect us from hatred and excesses." The ban on protests comes after concerns among Europeans following the antisemitism triggered by the conflict in Israel. Pro-Palestinian groups have asserted that the ban endangers their "freedom of expression" and stressed the importance of continuing the protests.

Ukraine: Zelenskyy reports on strike using ATACMS missile system

On 17 October, Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, reported on destroying nine Russian helicopters using the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). This comes after the US delivered "a small number of missiles" to Ukraine. Ukrainian forces utilised long-range ATACMS missiles for strikes on two air bases in the occupied cities of Berdiansk and Luhansk. According to a BBC report, the attack caused a "serious blow." The ATACMS is a surface-to-surface artillery weapon system which can strike long-range targets beyond army cannons and rockets. In response, Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed Russian Aerospace Forces to patrol permanently in the neutral zone over the Black Sea.

The UK: Ministry of Defence reports a new Russian offensive in eastern Ukraine

On 17 October, the UK's Ministry of Defence gave its intelligence update on Ukraine. According to the update, Russian forces have initiated a highly probable coordinated offensive in eastern Ukraine. It is focused on the heavily defended town of Bakhmut, a major obstacle to Russia's objective of controlling Donetsk Oblast. Ukrainian forces have managed to repel the advance resulting in substantial losses for Russia. These challenges have likely led to Russia's shift from an offensive to an "active-defence" stance.

Colombia: Diplomatic tensions with Israel over controversial statements on Hamas attacks

On 15 October, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it has suspended security exports to Colombia after Colombian President Gustavo Petro compared Israel's siege of Gaza to the actions of Nazi Germany. The diplomatic tensions rose after Petro stated that "terrorism is killing innocent children in Palestine," accusing Israel of transforming Gaza into a "concentration camp." The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that these comments "inflame antisemitism" and suggested that Israel's ambassador should leave Colombia. Despite being Israel's closest Latin American partner, having used Israeli weaponry to combat gang violence in 2020, the alliance has dwindled since the beginning of Petro's term.

Tensions flared further when Petro wrote on X that Hamas was “invented” by Israel’s intelligence service as an “excuse” to “punish” Palestinians. Petro commented that he was ready to “suspend diplomatic relations with Israel.”

Colombia: Three-month ceasefire with FARC

On 16 October, the Colombian government and the rebel branch of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), FARC-EMC, signed a three-month ceasefire in the Tibu township. The government’s lead negotiator, Camilo González, stated: “Peace today seems to have been eclipsed when sirens, bombs, shouts of pain and desperation can be heard in places like the Middle East, Europe or sub-Saharan Africa.” González described the talks as a “bet on life and freedom” as 12,000 rebels have surrendered their guns. This development is part of Colombian President Gustav Petro’s total peace plan while regional elections are scheduled to take place on 29 October 2023. Although the group has agreed to not interfere with the electoral process, Colombian security analyst Jorge Restrepo shed light on the “disputes between the different groups that make up the EMC,” meaning that the ceasefire would not be implemented immediately.

Mexico: Leader of civilian “self-defence” group Bruno Plácido shot dead

On 17 October, Bruno Plácido, one of Mexico’s last chiefs of armed vigilante movements, was shot dead in Chilpancingo in South Mexico. Plácido gained fame in 2013 after turning over 50 gang members to civilian prosecutors by keeping them in improvised jails. Plácido stated that the frequent killings by drug gangs created a “psychosis of fear” and thus armed hundreds of villagers with old hunting rifles and pistols to effectively defend themselves. These villagers claimed that government authorities had previously been unsuccessful in providing safety. Plácido’s death follows that of Hipólito Mora, another main leader of a vigilante movement. This highlights the infiltration of these movements by cartels and the worsening gang violence in Mexico.

Guatemala: Interior Minister Napoleón Barrientos resigns after three weeks of pro-democracy protests

On 16 October, Guatemala’s Minister of Interior, Napoleón Barrientos, resigned following a shooting that killed one person and injured two people during the three weeks of pro-democracy protests. These protests were against the suspension of President-elect Bernardo Arévalo’s Movimiento Semilla party after his election victory. Barrientos announced after his resignation that he preferred to hold talks with those demanding the resignation of Attorney General Consuelo Porras whose office was responsible for the investigation into Arévalo.

Brazil: Bolsonaro describes congressional panel’s charges as “an absurdity”

On 18 October, a Brazilian congressional panel accused former President Jair Bolsonaro of attempting to stage a coup by instigating the 8 January riots. The riots took place a week after Brazil’s current President Lula de Silva came to office when thousands of Bolsonaro’s supporters stormed the Congress, Supreme Court and Presidential Palace. The panel’s 1,300-page report recommended that Bolsonaro should be charged on four counts including an attempt to overthrow democratic rule. It further stated that he “not only instrumentalized public bodies, institutions and agents but also exploited the vulnerability and hope of thousands of people.” Bolsonaro has described the panel’s findings to be “completely biased.”



The US: Jim Jordan fails to secure enough votes in the second round of voting on speaker

On 18 October, after a second round of voting, right-congressman Jim Jordan failed to secure a position as the speaker; 199 Republicans supported Jordan; while 212 Democrats decided to vote for their leader Hakeem Jeffries. Questions are now being raised over whether Jordan is a suitable candidate owing to the number of people who had initially supported him having decreased. Jordan is currently hoping to win in a potential third round of voting on 19 October. He commented on X that Republicans “must stop attacking each other and come together” as there is “too much at stake” given the Israel-Gaza conflict.

The US: Senator Bob Menendez accused of acting as “an agent of foreign principal” to Egypt

On 12 October, US Senator Bob Menendez was charged with serving as an unregistered agent for Egypt. Prosecutors allege that he entered a “corrupt agreement” to “approve or remove holds on foreign military financing and sales of military equipment to Egypt” in return for bribes. Additionally, he is being accused of revealing sensitive and confidential information about the US embassy in Cairo to his co-defendants. Menendez and his wife were indicted on the allegation that they accepted bribes (in the form of gold bars, home mortgage payments, a Mercedes-Benz and money) in exchange for using his position to help the Egyptian government. The charge came back to light following the bribery indictment on 22 September. Menendez has responded: I “firmly believe when all the facts are presented, not only will I be exonerated but I will still be the New Jersey senior senator.”

The US: Congressional report states the US is “on the cusp of” simultaneous wars with China and Russia

On 12 October, the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States released a report recommending the US to step up its military modernisation in preparation for potential simultaneous wars with China and Russia. The commission stated that the current global situation is “fundamentally different” to what was experienced “even in the darkest days of the Cold War.” As the “risk of military conflict with Russia and China” has “grown,” the commission feels that the US is “not prepared.” There were several recommendations in the report including “fully and urgently” executing the 2019 nuclear weapons modernisation programme, expanding all warheads and nuclear delivery systems and deploying tactical nuclear weapons in Asia and Europe.

The US: Six-year-old Muslim boy stabbed to death by landlord claiming “you Muslims must die”

On 14 October, a six-year-old Muslim boy, Wadea al-Fayoume, was stabbed to death in the state of Chicago by the family’s landlord Joseph Czuba. Authorities have linked the crime to the “on-going Middle Eastern conflict involving Hamas and the Israelis.” His mother, Hanaan Shahin, was also stabbed multiple times and is currently recovering in a hospital. The attack followed an argument between Shahin and Czuba over the Israel-Hamas conflict. Shahin stated that she was “shocked” but not “surprised” and expressed concern over the safety of the “powerless kids around the world that are in Palestine now.” Wadea’s uncle, Yousef Hannon, highlighted that “there was no signs of anything wrong” between Czuba and the family, adding that he treated Wadea “like a grandson.” The Department of Justice stated that it would “use every legal authority” to bring justice to the family. The White House released a statement citing that “there is no place in America for hate against anyone.”

(The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of any institutions or organisations.)

About the authors

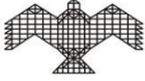
D Suba Chandran is the Professor and Dean of the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS. Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis and Rishika Yadav are Research Assistants at NIAS. Dhriti Mukherjee and Shamini Velayutham are Research Assistants at NIAS. Padmashree Anandhan is a Research Associate at NIAS. Nuha Aamina is an Undergraduate Scholar at St Joseph's University, Bengaluru. Vetriselvi Baskaran is a Postgraduate Scholar at the University of Madras, Chennai.





About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

National Institute of
Advanced Studies



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 researches 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. 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 manner.

KAS has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas: Foreign and Security Policy; Economic, Climate, and Energy Policy; Rule of Law; Political Dialogue focused on Social and Political Change; and Media and Youth. The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions that implement jointly curated projects and programmes.

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.

Editor: D. Suba Chandran

Assistant Editor: Anu Maria Joseph and Dhriti Mukherjee

Editorial Team: Femy Francis, Rishika Yadav, Rohini Reenum, Shamini Velayutham and Padmashree Anandan