

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

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

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## **Drone attacks in Russia**

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(A satellite imagery of the Engels Air Base in Southern Russia. Image Source: Maxar Technologies, The New York Times)

## Russia: Drone attacks escalate the Ukraine war

### In the news

On 5 December, the Russian Defence Ministry reported an alleged Ukrainian drone strike on the Russian airbases in Ryazan and Saratov. The drones were identified as “Soviet-made jet drones,” targeting the Dyagilevo airfield in the Ryazan Region and the Engels airfield in the Saratov Region located 300 miles from the Ukrainian border. According to the Ministry, the strike did not affect its aviation as the drones were shot down by the air defences and reported only slight damage to two aircraft, the death of three service members, and the injury of four other members.

In response to the drone strike, Russia carried out missile attacks on “energy objects” using strategic bombers across Ukraine resulting in power outages in Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Sumy, and Odessa regions. Ukraine has made no claims about the drone attacks. However, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal confirmed the functioning of the power grid despite the missile attack target on Ukraine’s energy infrastructure.

On 6 December, the Russian Governor of Kursk city claimed another drone attack on an airfield in Kursk which set ablaze oil storage near the airfield. Remaining cautious of the recent escalation, the UK Ministry of Defence said, “if Russia assesses the incidents were deliberate attacks, it will probably consider them as some of the most strategically significant failures of force protection since its invasion of Ukraine.” On the other hand, US Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said that the US would not stop Ukraine from building its own long-range strike capabilities, while the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken remained ambivalent: “We have neither encouraged nor enabled the Ukrainians to strike inside of Russia.

### Issues at large

First, the geography of the Ukraine war. On 24 February, the war began with the Russian military breaching Ukraine's territory in the DPR and LPR regions. In March, after the Donbas region came under Russian occupation, the war was concentrated to port city of Mariupol, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Mykolaiv extending to Odessa in the southern Ukraine and a simultaneous exchange in the northeast axis from Kharkiv, Sumy, and Chernihiv, and extending further to Kyiv. This advancement began to slow down in April when Ukraine's forces put up a strong defence in the northeast region of Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy. This first turning point in the war weakened the Russian posture in the northeast axis with a heavy concentration of Russian forces only in Kharkiv and the southern axis and seriously challenged Russia’s goal to capture Kyiv in western Ukraine. Since then, regular exchange of attacks between Ukrainian and Russian forces continued in the region until the end of August when Ukraine’s strong counteroffensive in early September resulted in the successful recapture of 8,000 sq km in Kharkiv and Kherson. The next turning point happened in November when Russia withdrew from Kherson into the eastern bank Dnipro River, providing a strategic opportunity for Ukraine to launch attacks into the Donbas and recapture Zaporizhzhia where Russia maintains a stronghold. The latest drone attacks into Russia’s farthest regions have raised serious concerns about the scope of the war.

Second, the strained Russian offensive. The nature of the Russian offensive seems to be fluctuating since September. During April and May, there was a steady movement of the troops away from Chernihiv into Kharkiv and Russia began to face challenges from August onwards in terms of logistics, restocking of the military, and positioning of the personnel. This forced Russia to concentrate its forces on the eastern bank of the Dnipro River in November. Since the

withdrawal, Russia has diversified its offensive targeting energy grids, infrastructures, and the cyber domain; on the ground too, the attacks have been more sporadic or reactive in nature.

Third, military aid from the West. The west has held a very defensive posture when it comes to sending military equipment and arms to Ukraine. During the course of the war, the type of military support has transformed from medium to high-range weapons systems such as the Howitzers, HIMARS, air defence systems, battle tanks, and drone technologies. In addition, the west continues to augment Ukraine's offensive capacity through regular intelligence support, satellite imagery, and military training, all of which have boosted Ukraine's military strength.

#### In perspective

First, a tipping point or a deviation. There has been slow but a steady improvement in Ukraine's military strike capacity and range between April and October. The first turning point for Ukraine was its counteroffensive starting from April onwards until November and its ability to launch precision strikes on Russian military bases and supply routes providing a strategic advantage to its troops in eastern Ukraine. Although the drone attacks into Russian territory remain to be claimed by Ukraine, it can be a tipping point that can change the course of the war. For the escalations and turning points in the war, the west's support has been crucial. The recent drone attacks on its territory may not be a deviation but could serve as a strong warning for Russia.

Second, probable future scenarios for Russia. Russia's last resort to secure its position in the northeast axis of Ukraine through mobilisation and martial law did not materialize and has ended up being a failure. The increasing support from the west to Ukraine and Russia's continued challenges in replenishing its weapon and material supply and troops are set to strain Russia's hold in eastern Ukraine. In the months ahead, Russia can be expected to adopt more off-ground or non-military tactics while it stocks up its military supplies.

Third, the future of western military support. The military support from the west to Ukraine has ranged from ground, maritime, and air defences supplies to intelligence support with the principal goal of bridging the asymmetry. It remains to be seen if the west will continue to provide the intelligence support, land and air defences to Ukraine.

Regardless, the west can be expected to continue preventing escalations and reigning in the possibility of direct military engagement between both parties while securing energy and cyber infrastructures and waiting for the sanctions to take effect.

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## Also, from around the world

Avishka Ashok, and Sai Pranav, Joel Jacob, Sethuraman N, Akriti Sharma, Abigail Fernandez, Rashmi Ramesh, Apoorva Sudhakar, Anu Maria Joseph, Padmashree Anandan, Harini Madhusudan and Madhura Mahesh

### East and Southeast Asia

#### **China: CPC withdraws the zero-COVID policy and introduces new norms for pandemic control**

On 7 December, China's National Health Commission released a 10-point announcement withdrawing the zero-COVID policy and presented a new set of lenient norms to control the pandemic. The development came after numerous protests broke out in cities across China and resulted in an emergency meeting where the authorities agreed to ease the COVID-19 restrictions. The World Health Organization (WHO) Emergencies Director Dr Michael Ryan appreciated China's decision to loosen its policy.

#### **China: Foreign Ministry expresses concerns over Japan's increased defence budget**

On 6 December, China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning commented on Japan's defence budget and called it a dangerous development that causes serious concerns for Japan's neighbours. Ning accused Japan of hyping regional tensions to seek military breakthroughs while consecutively increasing its spending in the past decade. This comes after Japan announced its decision to increase its military spending from USD 295 billion to USD 318 billion over a period of five years.

#### **Japan: House of Councillors adopts resolution on human rights violation in China**

On 5 December, Japan's House of Councillors adopted a resolution on human rights in China and expressed concerns over the violation of rights in Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Hong Kong. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning reprimanded the resolution for ignoring the basic facts, being based on disinformation and interfering in China's internal affairs. Further, Mao pointed fingers at Japan's aggression during the world wars and said: "Pointing fingers at other countries will not cover up Japan's past. Politicizing and instrumentalizing human rights issues to hurt China's image and stall China's development will not succeed.

#### **Japan: Tokyo increases defence expenditure for five years to JPY 43 trillion**

On 6 December, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that the government would boost its defence budget by 56 per cent over five years to JPY 43 trillion. The government plans to increase the defence expenditure to two per cent of Tokyo's GDP by 2027. Defence Minister Yasukazu Hamada stated that the increase in defence expenditure was to ensure Japan's safety and security from Chinese and North Korean threats. He said that both countries threaten regional peace and Japan wanted to prepare defensive measures to counter it.

#### **Indonesia: Parliament criminalizes sex outside marriage**

On 6 December, the parliament passed the new criminal code banning citizens and foreigners visiting the country from having sex outside marriage. The legislation also curtails public demonstrations and cohabitation of unmarried couples in Indonesia. On the same day, small rallies against the legislation were held in Jakarta. The Guardian quoted rights groups that said the development indicates a move towards fundamentalism in Indonesia, which had been appreciated for its religious tolerance and secularism.

### South Asia

#### **India: Interstate border clashes reported between Karnataka and Maharashtra**

On 6 December, Karnataka Rakshana Vedike members pelted stones on Maharashtra state vehicles. The violence was due to the unresolved interstate border dispute related to the Belagavi district. On 30 November, the Supreme Court was scheduled to conduct a hearing on the plea filed by Maharashtra claiming parts of the district. Thereafter, the visit of two Maharashtra ministers to Karnataka was cancelled.

#### **Sri Lanka: OCHA ROAP says nearly three in ten households face food scarcity**

On 6 December, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) released a report revealing that three out of ten households in Sri Lanka consume insufficient levels of food. The report outlines that the ongoing multidimensional crisis in the country is one of the worst since its independence in 1948. According to the World Bank, Sri Lanka faces 85.6 per cent of food inflation and ranks the sixth highest food price inflation in the world. The harvest for the last two seasons were reduced by 40-50 per cent. The OCHA ROAP report stated that several food security and nutrition assessments are underway or planned. The data collected from the field is currently analysed to fulfil future needs for humanitarian aid.

#### **Pakistan: UNICEF regional director assures polio eradication by 2023**

On 4 December, UNICEF's Regional Director for South Asia George Laryea-Adjei expressed hope of eradicating polio from Pakistan by 2023. Adjei stated that the polio programme in the country is "back on track" and that Pakistan was in a better position to eradicate polio than a year ago. He said, "We are using all available resources and services at our disposal to reach every girl and boy in Pakistan with life-saving vaccines and protect them against the entirely preventable disease." He lauded the efforts of the health workers struggling to administer vaccines throughout the country. This comes as Pakistan reported 20 cases of polio in 2022 when compared to one case reported in 2021.

#### **Afghanistan: US Special envoy visits Japan, India and UAE**

On 1 December, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Thomas West began his official visit to Japan, India, and the United Arab Emirates to discuss the humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan. During his visits, he met with the political representatives of the countries and discussed the humanitarian and economic crises in Afghanistan, the protection of Afghans' rights, and shared security concerns. West also met with the Afghan diaspora in UAE and discussed matters related to challenges regarding human rights, business, politics, and media.

### Central Asia, Middle East, and Africa

#### **Iran: Crackdown against protesters continue**

On 5 December, the BBC reported that a 27-year-old man Noormohammadzadeh, one of the six protesters sentenced to death, was subjected to three rounds of mock executions. Mock execution is a form of psychological torture, where a person is made to feel that his execution is taking place, but is not carried out in reality. On 6 December, five people were sentenced to death for allegedly killing a member of Basij, a paramilitary force affiliated with the IRGC. Prosecutors said that Ajamian was stripped naked, chased with knives and killed by a group of protestors paying tribute to another slain protester Hadis Najafi in Karaj, Tehran. On 6 December, Arab News reported that a group of 1200 university students in Iran have been struck by a food poisoning outbreak. Students at Kharazmi and Arak Universities blamed the authorities for deliberate food poisoning and protested by discarding the food provided to them.



### **Chad: Hundreds sentenced to jail for anti-government protests**

On 5 December, 262 people were sentenced to two or three years in jail for the anti-government protests in October which witnessed over 50 casualties. The developments come after a mass trial held in the Koro Toro prison held on 2 December. Al Jazeera reported that the defendants were sentenced on charges of "unauthorised gathering, destroying belongings, arson and disturbing public order." The public prosecutor said that apart from the 262 people, 80 were given suspended terms and 59 were cleared of all charges; 83 minors will be tried later in a special juvenile court. Meanwhile, several lawyers criticised the mass trial with the defence lawyers terming it "illegal" and others boycotted the proceedings. The Chad Bar Association labelled the trial a "parody of justice."

### **Sudan: Military signs agreement for a civilian transition**

On 5 December, Sudan's pro-democracy coalition Forces of Freedom and Change and the military signed an agreement to restore civilian rule in two years that would lead to an election. However, protesters in capital city Khartoum challenged the agreement and called the military to be accountable for the coup as well as the death of anti-coup protesters. The deal doesn't cover security reforms leaving public concern that it would leave the military powerful and disrupt the democratic transition. A Forces of Freedom and Change spokesperson said: "The goals of the agreement are establishing a fully civilian authority, creating a free climate for politics, and reaching a final agreement with the widest political participation." The African Union, Arab and western countries have been pressuring both sides for negotiations. Meanwhile, the UN and the US welcomed the agreement.

### **Europe and the Americas**

#### **Russia: President signs law criminalising distribution of 'LGBTQ Propaganda'**

On 5 December, Vladimir Putin signed a law completely banning distribution of the materials that promote non-traditional sexual relations, transgenderism, and pedophilia. The law, which has been approved by the upper and lower chambers of Russian Parliament during the last week of November, allows foreign offenders to be expelled from Russia. This applies to cinema, media, literature, and the internet, and advertisers. Previously, a law in 2013, had banned the distribution of LGBTQ materials to minors, and the new law applies to all ages, and broadens the content that is regulated. A breach would result in a fine of RUB 400,000 for individuals and up to RUB four million for corporate entities.

#### **Russia-Japan: Mobile Coastal Defence Missile System deployed on northern Kuril Islands**

On 5 December, the Russian defence ministry announced the deployment of a mobile coastal defence missile system as part of its strategically located chain of islands stretching between Russian Kamchatka Peninsula. The Russian Bastion systems with a flight range of up to 500 km (310 miles) were deployed on the island of Paramushir, revealing that "a military camp was set up on Paramushir with facilities allowing for year-round service, accommodation, recreation and food for personnel." The territorial dispute in the region dates back to the end of World War II, when the Soviet troops seized the Southern Kuril Islands which Japan calls its Northern Territories.

#### **Colombia: Landslide caused by heavy rains in Pueblo Rico kills around 34**

On 6 December, Colombia's national agency for managing risks and disasters (UNGRD) reported that around 34 people died in a landslide caused by heavy rains near Pueblo Rico. The landslide hit a bus travelling from Cali to Condoto burying the passengers on board.

### Colombia: Dissidents attack in Cauca leaves six soldiers dead

On 6 December, the government reported that six soldiers were killed in an attack by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Cauca. Colombian President Gustavo Petro said that the military will continue its operations against “illegal armed groups” and added that such operations will not stop until the dissident groups show a “will to negotiate for peace.” This comes as the government started peace talks with the National Liberation Army.

### Canada: Government to freeze assets of Haitian businessmen

On 5 December, the Canadian government announced that it will freeze the assets of three Haitian businessmen, suspected of aiding the criminal groups in Haiti. The local assets of Chairman of GB Group Gilbert Bigio, Reynold Deeb and Sherif Abdallah will be frozen by the government for enabling “illegal activities of armed criminal gangs.” Neither of the businessmen nor the government have issued any statement regarding the sanctions.

### Mexico: Three separate gang violence incidents claim nine lives in two days

On 4 December, the Zacatecas government reported that a judge was shot dead by a criminal gang. On 6 December, the prosecutors reported that eight people were killed in two separate incidents of gang violence in Acapulco. The prosecutors reported that five men were fatally shot in a resort bar in Acapulco where three died on spot and two died outside and at a hospital. The prosecutors reported the death of three other people who were fatally shot in Acapulco.

### Honduras and Jamaica: Partial state of emergency announced to curb gang violence

On 6 December, a partial state of emergency was announced in Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula to curb gang violence and promote economic development. The Honduran police chief Gustavo Sanchez said that 1000 police officers will be deployed in both cities. Sanchez added that the officers will arrest identified members of criminal groups and those who appear suspicious. A similar measure was introduced by the Jamaican Prime Minister Andrew Holness who announced a partial state of emergency in Kingston and six other parishes. Holness said that this measure was introduced to reduce murder rates in the region and to curb gang violence. Jamaican authorities said that it will arrest people and search buildings without warrants.

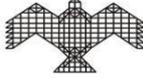
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### About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

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 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. 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.

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