

Conflict Weekly

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A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Zawahiri's killing, Pope's apology to the indigenous people in Canada, Iraq's political crisis, and Senegal's disputed elections

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Al Qaeda leader and Osama bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in a US drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan. (Image Source: Reuters/BBC)

COVER STORY

Myanmar Military: Annihilation as a Domination Strategy

Afghanistan: Al Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri killed in US airstrike

In the news

On 1 August, president Joe Biden announced that Al Qaeda Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in a counterterrorism operation by the CIA in Kabul's Sherpur area. He said: "Now justice has been delivered, and this terrorist leader is no more. No matter how long it takes, no matter where you hide, if you are a threat to our people, the United States will find you and take you out." Further, he claimed that intelligence had located Zawahiri's family in Kabul earlier in 2022 and that the airstrike was carried out over the weekend after he approved the "carefully planned" operation a week ago "...after being advised conditions were optimal."

According to officials, the operation to kill Zawahiri had been planned for months. After receiving intelligence from several sources on Zawahiri, the CIA tracked his movements until they received authorization for the strike, and targeted him on a balcony with two Hellfire missiles on 30 July. The drone strike is the first known US intervention inside Afghanistan since its withdrawal in August 2021.

Following the announcement, Taliban chief spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the attack in Kabul and condemned it as a "violation of international principles." He said: "Such actions are a repetition of the failed experiences of the past 20 years and are against the interests of the US, Afghanistan, and the region." However, the statement did not name Zawahiri.

Issues at large

First, Zawahiri's killing and Al Qaeda. Zawahiri, Al Qaeda's second leader was an Egyptian doctor who merged his militant group with Al Qaeda in the 1990s. Since then, he was considered Al Qaeda's intellectual pillar. After Osama Bin Laden was killed, he took over as the leader. Although Al Qaeda is a highly splintered group with branches and affiliates operating from Africa to Asia, Zawahiri's killing is another blow to the group as it would need to adjust to the loss of another leader. Additionally, the group is likely to see a leadership crisis as senior leader Saif al-Adel who is the next in line is based in Iran, causing affiliates to question his credibility.

Second, the nexus between the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The presence of Zawahiri in one of Kabul's busiest areas highlights the nexus between the group and the Taliban. A UNSC report published in July 2022 cites that the Al Qaeda leadership remains close to the Taliban. The report adds that the group enjoys greater freedom in Afghanistan under Taliban rule but confined itself to advising and supporting the de facto authorities. Additionally, the report states that Al Qaeda's senior leadership enjoyed a more settled period in early 2022, with leaders like Zawahiri being able to communicate freely since the Taliban's takeover.

Third, the US-Taliban deal. Under the Doha Agreement, the Taliban promised to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a haven for Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups. However, the US has been wary of the Taliban's commitment despite its several claims that it is adhering to the deal. Zawahiri's killing questions the Taliban's commitment to the deal but also highlights the US commitment to continue counterterrorism operations despite not having a military presence in Afghanistan.

In perspective

First, the threat posed by Al Qaeda. It is unlikely that there will be any immediate consolation for Al Qaeda following the killing of Zawahiri. This development would push the group to further splinter and divide over who would lead the group next.

Second, Al Qaeda and the Taliban relationship. The nexus between Al-Qaeda and the Taliban would change depending on how the details of this incident unfold. As of now, the Taliban has treaded strategically to keep away criticism from the US and kept Al Qaeda at bay by not making any claims on the development. However, the group would likely continue to remain in Afghanistan as long as the Taliban is in power.

Third, the US's counterterrorism operations. The killing of Zawahiri highlights the US ability to still successfully carry out counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. However, the issues become sensitive as indiscriminatory airstrikes could result in retaliation from the Taliban.

Canada: Pope's visit signifies a growing awareness of the violation of indigenous communities

In the news

On 29 July, Pope Francis ended the "Pilgrimage of penance" in Canada after making multiple stops in cities across the country, meeting indigenous communities, and apologizing for the atrocities committed by the Roman Catholic church in former residential schools.

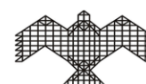
On 25 July, the Pope arrived at the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage site outside Edmonton after a member of the Kehewin Cree Nation delivered a speech about the violence on indigenous communities in Canada. The Pope then apologised to the indigenous people for the horrifying abuses committed toward as many as 1,50,000 children from the community.

The Pope said: "I am sorry. I ask forgiveness, in particular, for the ways in which many members of the Church and of religious communities cooperated, not least through their indifference, in projects of cultural destruction and forced assimilation promoted by the governments of that time, which culminated in the system of residential schools."

The Pope acknowledged that his apology would not mean closure to the issue and must be perceived as the beginning to repairing the past. He called for a serious investigation into the school's actions and assisted the survivors in healing from the trauma.

Issues at large

First, the problem. In Canada, the Catholic Church was in charge of over 70 per cent of the residential schools between the 1880s and 1990s. The actions of the Church have prolonged impacts even in the present times and can be identified through impoverishment, systemic racism and inequality. The indigenous female population of Canada amounts to four per cent but makes up for a quarter of the female suicides in the country. The women from these communities are 4.5 times more likely to be a victim of violent crimes than women from other communities. The most defining impact of the residential schools and the Church's policies is the loss of languages, culture, customs, and traditions caused by the separation of the children from their families and the inhuman conditions in the schools.



Second, the Pope's visit. Pope Francis' visit to Canada comes seven years after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission demanded an apology from the Church for operating a network of residential schools that marginalized and suppressed indigenous communities. In April 2022, the Pope apologized to the people of the First Nations in the Vatican City and promised to visit Canada and apologize to the people in person. The current visit draws from the first apology to the Canadian First Nations people and also acknowledges the crimes committed by the discriminating institution more than 100 years ago.

Third, a series of apologies. The Church's apology to the indigenous people in Canada comes at a time of increased recognition and acceptance of past errors and wrongful policies by the entities in power. In August 2021, New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern formally apologized to the Pacific communities for the "Dawn Raids." In September 2021, French president Emmanuel Macron apologized for France's destructive role in Algeria and atrocities against the people of the country. In May 2021, Macron sought forgiveness from Rwanda for its role in the 1994 Genocide. The apologies are being made as reports of abuse become public and cannot be ignored. In March 2021, the UN reported on the Nordic country's history of racism against the Sámi people.

Fourth, the exclusion of sexual abuse. One of the primary criticisms of the apologies made by the Pope in the previous week is the failure to address the sexual abuse of the residential schools. According to some estimates, over 10 to 50,000 children died at these schools because of harsh physical labour, violence, and abuse by priests, nuns, and staff members. There were reports of children as young as six years killing themselves after being assaulted by the staff. The grave violation of their human rights was not a secret and was known to the government in 1907 when the Indian Affairs Chief visited the schools and found that on average 25 per cent of the student died in the schools. The Church has also been accused of forced sterilization and abortion.

Fifth, Canada's response. The Canadian government issued a formal apology to the communities in 2008 and described the incident as a sad chapter in the history of the country. The government was historically supportive of the Church's policies. The First Prime Minister of Canada John A Macdonald supported the idea of removing the children from their parents. In 1920, the former Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs said that he wishes to get rid of the "Indian problem." The government has now come a long way in accepting its errors, apologizing, and providing reparations. The government also referred to the Pope's apology and said that it wasn't enough and was just a start to the reconciliation process.

In perspective

The issue of abuse against indigenous people is gaining importance in the 21st century because of the intergenerational trauma inflicted on the community and the vehement suppression of the mishandling in the past. Pope Francis' apology to the indigenous community is a start for countries and governments across the world to acknowledge the crimes against the indigenous population and initiate reconciliation. The apology stands in line with Pope Francis' image of a liberal and modern head of the Catholic Church who himself advocated and took the responsibility for the abuses of the institution. The apology is late to the communities who lost thousands of children to cultural assimilation tactics but is better than the crimes being left unreported and unchecked forever.

Iraq: The escalating political crisis

In the news

On 30 July, protestors rallying in support of Shia leader Muqtada al- Sadr, breached the heavily fortified Green Zone and stormed Iraq's Parliament for the second time in a week. The protestors opposed the candidacy of Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, the pro-Iran Shia Coordination Framework's candidate for the prime minister's post.

The incident resulted in clashes, stone pelting, tear gas firing, and more than 125 people, including protestors and the police are reportedly injured. The UN Mission in Iraq called for de-escalation and said that the "voices of reason and wisdom are critical to prevent further violence."

On 1 August, al-Sadr's supporters were countered by Coordination Framework's and al-Sudani's supporters who held demonstrations in the latter's favour. On the same day, Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi called on the protestors to evacuate the Parliament and participate in a "national dialogue" involving all the parties and "draw a road map for a solution."

Issues at large

First, the failure to form a government. Al-Sadr's Sadrist Movement won 74 seats in the October 2021 elections, emerging as the largest faction in the 329-seat Parliament. He failed to secure a 2/3rds majority and was unable to form the government, paving the way for a political deadlock. After nearly eight months of failing to form the government, al-Sadr made his 74 legislators resign but warned of political pressure through possible mass demonstrations in support of his candidature. The protests now have prevented the Parliament from convening and choosing the Prime Minister and President.

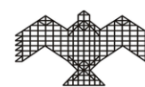
Second, Iran's role. Tehran has taken advantage of the Shia centrism in Iraq and aims to further its interest by uniting the Shiite parties and backing the Popular Mobilization Front. In other words, Iran has positioned itself to be an influential external power in post-war Iraq, using the relationship it shares with the Shia political outfits.

Third, nationalist sentiment in Iraq. The Sadrist Movement gains its popularity by seeking to detangle Iraq from the American influence, Iran's strong influence in political matters, separating itself from the pro-Iran Shia factions, and representing different sects such as Sunnis and the Kurds. The support for al-Sadr emerges from the poorer sections of the population, southern Iraq's Shia heartland, and working-class people in Baghdad.

In perspective

First, the political situation in Iraq since the war. Post2003, the political landscape of Iraq has been dominated by sectarian competition and rivalry between the Shias and Sunnis, with an increasing Shia-centric rebuilding. The protestors have now called for a change in the existing political system which distributes power based on sect and party and is believed to be the root cause of corruption and lack of tangible progress in the post-war years.

Second, a political crisis in the region. Political deadlocks, inability to form stable governments and demand for reforms are plaguing the Middle East. Israel is headed towards the fifth election in four years after the Parliament was dissolved following the collapse of the coalition government headed by Prime Minister Neftali Bennett. Currently, Yair Lapid is the caretaker prime minister until the elections are scheduled in October. Lebanon is in the midst of a serious political and economic crisis, with the government formation process still being a point of



disagreement between prime minister Najib Mikati and president Michael Aoun. A section of the population in Palestine is rallying, demanding political reforms, and a formation of a functioning cabinet, ending the one-man presidential rule by Mahmoud Abbas. With Iraq's crisis escalating, the region suffers from another backslide.

Third, the snowballing into a bigger crisis. Political issues, coupled with economic woes have led to a crisis in countries like Sri Lanka, Chile, Lebanon, and now Iraq. While a direct comparison of the situation in these countries would be unfair, given that the background and trigger points were different, and the direction of Iraqi protests is yet to be known completely, the base of the crisis lies in policy misappropriation. It is yet to be seen if Iraq sees this as a starting point of a snowballing movement demanding structural changes in the system.

Senegal: Ruling coalition and opposition claim victory in parliamentary elections

In the news

On 1 August, Senegal's president Macky Sall's ruling party coalition claimed victory in the parliamentary elections. Aminata Toure, head of the presidential coalition said that the coalition had an "unquestionable majority," winning 30 out of 46 administrative departments. President Macky Sall said: "We have given a majority in the National Assembly." However, of the 165 parliamentary seats, the number of seats won by the coalition is yet to be announced.

On the same day, an opposition coalition Wallu Senegal said it had defeated the ruling party in the majority departments with an allied coalition Yewwi Askane Wi. The Wallu Senegal's statement said: "The provisional results from the legislative elections show that President Macky Sall lost the elections ... and that he will not have a majority in the National Assembly."

Meanwhile, the opposition coalition, Yewwi Askane Wi rejected the ruling party's claimed victory as a "prefabricated majority." The opposition leader, Barthelemy Dias disputed the claims of winning elections and warned the ruling coalition of having no right to announce the election results. He said: "The people will respond, and the people will come out into the streets tomorrow, and you will tell us where you got your majority," He added: "You lost this election at the national level. We will not accept it. This abuse will not pass."

Issues at large

First, Senegal's electoral process and challenges. Senegal, a Muslim majority country has a model of stability in Africa. The country had consecutive peaceful power transfers in 2000 and 2012 and has never experienced any coups. Under Senegal's hybrid electoral system, 97 candidates winning a majority are elected to various administrative departments, 53 are elected using proportional representation and 15 are elected by Senegalese living outside the country. Though Senegal has a 16 million strong population, only 6.7 million were registered to vote. The election processes are often hindered by contentious campaigns, corruption charges, mismanagement, disinformation, and violence.

Second, the political backdrop. The political tension in the country is triggered by the years-long pattern of political opposition being obstructed on multiple grounds. In March 2021, violent street protests took place, resulting in several fatalities and extensive damage to government buildings and businesses. The protests broke out after president Macky Sall's main opponent Ousmane Sonko, who came third in the 2019 presidential election, was arrested on rape charges. In 2015 and 2018, two other major opposition leaders were jailed on corruption

charges. On 22 June, another wave of protests broke out after the main opposition coalition Yewwi Askan Wi's national list for the legislative polls was disqualified on technical grounds.

Third, Macky Sall's third-term ambition. Sall came to power in 2012 with popular support after removing Abdoulaye Wade. He was re-elected in 2019 for a second term. In 2016, the constitutional amendment reduced the presidential term from seven to five years, renewable only once. According to the constitutional council, the law is not retroactive and therefore the first term of President Sall is beyond the law. Having favourable circumstances, many accuse Sall of trying to eliminate his opponents, seeking a third term in 2024.

Four, Senegal's economic challenges. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the country is struggling with economic crises worsened by unemployment and the global rise in fuel and food prices. The trade and tourism sectors widely suffered from the sanctions imposed on neighbouring West African countries after a series of coups. Besides, in 2022, the International Monetary Fund estimated that inflation in the country is expected to reach 5.5 per cent.

In perspective

First, the lack of transparency around Senegal's electoral process has put the country's stability image at risk. The political actors attempt to hold onto power harms the Senegalese democracy. If president Sall runs for a third term in 2024, it would add to the footsteps of Ivory Coast president Alassane Ouattara and former Guinea president Alpha Conde, adding to the emerging trend of democratic backsliding and entrenchment of authoritarianism in Africa.

Second, the political backdrop in the country has caused public dissent with the ruling governments. Increasing violent protests and demonstrations are worsened by the authoritarian approach of Sall's government.

Third, beyond political issues, raging youth unemployment, growing inequalities, corruption scandals, weak handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and inflation are at the root of growing public anger.

Four, though rhetorically Senegal had successful elections, multiple issues put the country at higher risk of instability, presenting a worrying future for Senegal.

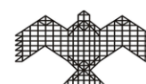
Also, from around the world

By Avishka Ashok, Sruthi Sadhasivam, Vijay Anand Panigrahi, Akriti Sharma, Abigail Miriam Fernandez, Joel Jacob, Rashmi BR, Apoorva Sudhakar, Rishma Banerjee, Padmashree Anandhan, Lavanya Ravi, and Sejal Sharma

East and Southeast Asia

China: Open letter urges UN Human Rights High Commissioner to refrain from fabricating assessment on Xinjiang

On 27 July, Xinhua Net publicized an open letter to the UN high commissioner for human rights Michelle Bachelet. The letter expressed concerns regarding the pressure created on the international organization on releasing the assessment on Xinjiang. The letter hoped that the high commissioner's report would reflect the truth and facts of what she witnessed and experienced during her visit to Xinjiang in May 2022. It claimed that the report falsely accused the Chinese government of suppressing the Muslim minority in the Xinjiang autonomous region and will be used as a tool to interfere in the country's internal affairs. Xinhua Net reported: "The assessment, once released, will be definitely used by certain countries as a



political tool to interfere in China's internal affairs and to contain China's development under the pretext of human rights. It will badly damage the credibility of Madame High Commissioner yourself and the OHCHR, and seriously undermine the developing countries' confidence in constructive cooperation with the OHCHR." The letter was signed by 923 state institutions and other government bodies.

Taiwan: Chinese vessels spotted near the Taiwan Strait ahead of Nancy Pelosi's visit

On 2 August, the Strait Times reported that as unrest rose over the visit of the US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi in Taipei, several Chinese warplanes crossed by the median line that divides the Taiwan Strait. The US declared on 1 August that it will not be frightened by Chinese "sabre rattling" over Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, which China has consistently warned against since it views Taiwan as a wayward province that needs to be reunited. Numerous Chinese vessels had remained close to the dividing line since 1 August in addition to Chinese aircraft flying close by.

Myanmar: Junta extends emergency rule till 2023

On 31 July, the senior general of Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing declared that the "emergency rule" will be extended as the state stands ruptured by internal turmoil since the coup. Previously, the government promised to conduct elections but now it claimed "instability" as the chief reason for failing to keep up its promise and that emergency rule allowed the government to arrest people. In the aftermath of the coup, Aung Hlaing became the prime minister and expressed his desire to reform the electoral system by accommodating the "first past the post system" and "proportional representation system." However, the civilians are weary of whether the military would conduct elections and restore normalcy.

Myanmar: Advocacy group reports Junta's usage of Russian aircraft for targeting civilians

On 30 July, Myanmar Witness, an advocacy group reported that the Myanmar government has been using "Yak-130 aircraft," an aircraft imported from Russia to launch attacks against its people. In a report, Myanmar Witness said: "During this investigation, credible reports and geolocation have revealed the use of the Yak-130 within populated, civilian areas." Most of the attacks have been targeting Myawaddy town, a region that houses ethnic armed groups. The organization was able to geolocate attacks occurring in the Thailand-Myanmar border region. Russia has been the major exporter of arms to Myanmar. While the US, Canada, and the UK have sanctioned those who extend arms to Myanmar's airforce, the advocacy groups have demanded the imposition of an embargo on aviation fuel.

Cambodia: Rural populace gets access to clean water and sanitation

On 1 August, Xinhua reported that there is a rise in accessibility of clean water and sanitation by the rural people from 70 per cent to 80 per cent in five years. The ministry of rural development's secretary of state, claimed that since 2018, the country had established 2,440 rainwater tanks, 1,271 community ponds, 200 water distribution systems, and 11,741 wells and also provided about 145,865 water jars to people. For sanitation facilities for rural people, the government constructed about 433,014 toilets for villagers and 11,198 handwashing facilities for public schools. The minister said: "We have set our goal to reach 100 percent access to clean water supply and sanitation in rural areas by 2025."

Myanmar: UN reports displacement of 1.2 million people

On 1 August, the UN spokesperson claimed that about 1.2 million civilians are displaced across the region out of which about 866,000 people got displaced due to internal conflict since the 2021 Junta takeover. Out of the remaining displaced populace of 346,000 people, many of them are situated in the Rakhine state. Dujarric said: "We have reached around half of our target with

at least one form of humanitarian assistance at mid-year, despite access constraints and funding shortfalls. To reach the remaining vulnerable communities, we need better access and additional funding, especially in light of inflation." Only 13 per cent of the UN's 2022 humanitarian response plan for Myanmar is funded, falling short of USD 719 million.

Laos: Joint medical exercise with China ends

On 29 July, the "Peace Train-2022" joint humanitarian medical rescue exercise and medical service activities initiative of Laos and China ended. As part of the "bilateral annual plan for exchanges and cooperation," the joint exercise was held from 19 July to 29 July. The two sides have been collaborating on the four joints including "joint command and control, joint treatment of the wounded, joint epidemic prevention and control, and joint evacuation of the wounded, during the medical rescue exercise." Further, the Chinese side extended nucleic acid testing equipment and other materials to the Lao People's Army. During the closing ceremony of the 10-day drill, Laos's deputy defense minister, Vongkham Phommakone honoured "friendship medals" to ten of the Chinese military medical team's representatives. Both sides perceived the joint exercise as a means to enhance cooperation and collaboration in the future.

Laos: Hungry River phenomenon causes Mekong River bank erosion

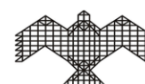
On 31 July, the director of the Southeast Asia program and the energy, water, and sustainability program at the Stimson Center, Brian Eyler claimed that upstream damming caused the "Hungry River phenomenon" that gradually resulted in erosion of the river. Further, Eyler said: "Upstream dams in China have removed more than half of the sediment from the Mekong mainstream and now that Laos has built about 100 dams, the effects are being felt even more severely." Director of the Center for Southeast Asia Studies at the University, Ian Baird claimed that along with the hungry river phenomenon, sand dredging and deforestation can be potential causes of erosion. Some perceive sailing ships weighing 100 tonnes to cause huge waves that adversely affect the riverbank. The erosion greatly affects Laos's economic security and the livelihood of the coastal communities.

Cambodia: IUCN reports extinction of tigers in three Southeast Asian countries

On 29 July, as a result of "loss of habitat" and "poaching," the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) declared that tigers are extinct in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. development can be attributed to hunting, corruption, and agribusiness development. A postdoctoral researcher with the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit of the University of Oxford said: "Evidence suggests that tigers have been extirpated from Nam Et-Phou Louey National Protected Area (NEPL), which is Laos' largest protected area and previously had the country's only source population of tigers." Previously, the Cambodian prime minister, Hun Sen pledged to enhance the tiger count by acquiring assistance from the World Wide Fund for Nature. Ash called for addressing the root cause of extinction before adopting measures for enhancing the tiger populace. The IUCN report suggests a plan to introduce a 12 year strategy for preserving the flora and fauna in the region.

Vietnam: Conducts joint military drill with India

On 1 August, the India-Vietnam military drill, "Exercise VINBAX 2022," was initiated at the Chandimandir Military Station. The agenda for this year is "employment and deployment of an engineers' company and a medical team" as part of the United Nations contingent for peace-keeping operations. The joint exercise intends to solidify confidence, and interoperability and allow for exchanging vital experiences of both the Indian Army and the Vietnam People's Army. The collective engagement is expected to provide ample space for both "contingents" to get enlightened about each other's national heritage.



South Asia

Bangladesh: Power cuts haunt the country amid global fuel shortage

On 1 August, Bangladesh's minister for power stated that it was failing to secure long-term natural gas supplies, leading to extending power cuts for another three years. Amidst the soaring fuel prices due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the cost of spot LNG in Asia has increased two-fold. Hence, Bangladesh is trying to secure more long-term supplies and seeking financial support from the creditors like the IMF to control its expenditures owing to the increased fuel prices. Bangladesh and Pakistan have been the worst hit by a price increase, and with only a few alternatives to resolve the issue, their economic growth is under the threat of rolling power cuts.

Bhutan: Indian chief of army staff meets the king

On 31 July, the chief of army staff of India General Manoj Pande visited Bhutan to meet with King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck to bolster strategic relations between the two countries. Pande's visit came owing to the recent concerns over satellite images showing China's attempt to build a village East of the Doklam plateau on the Bhutanese side, a strategically important area for all three countries. Pande was received with an impeccable Guard of Honour. During his visit, he also engaged with the Bhutanese army chief lieutenant general Batoo Tshering and some Indian officials.

Nepal: Global commitment to double Tiger population achieved

On 29 July, Nepal declared that it successfully fulfilled its global commitment to double its tiger population by 2022. The International Tiger Summit took place in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2010, where 13 countries set the target to double their tiger population by 2022. In 2009, the tiger count in Nepal was 121, which has now increased to 355. The other 12 tiger range countries participating in the summit were Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Sri Lanka: Navy arrests 47 people trying to illegally leave the country

On 1 August, the Sri Lankan Navy arrested 47 people illegally trying to migrate to a foreign country by sea. The navy conducted a special operation in Wennapuwa town and arrested the suspects who belonged to Jaffna, Trincomalee, Mundalama, Kalmunai, and other parts of the country.

Sri Lanka: Violence against protestors weakens the movement

On 1 August, Al Jazeera reported that many protestors on the GoGotaGama protest sites have left the camps following the violence inflicted on the protestors in the last few days. On 1 August, President Ranil Wickremesinghe responding to the protestors said: "I am appealing to you not to do that as I have no home to go to." The protestors, quoted by Al Jazeera said: "We believe the role of GotaGoGama as the center of the protest is now over. The next phase of the protest should focus on introducing political, social, and economic reforms."

Pakistan: Talks with TTP end without results

On 1 August, the talks between Pakistan and TTP were reported to have reached a deadlock as the militant group refused to budge from its demand for the reversal of the merger of erstwhile FATA with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Later, Pakistan sent a second delegation after a week to break the stalemate following the visit of the delegation of ulemas on 30 July but since the prospects were not clear, it remains a deadlock.

Afghanistan: ISIL-K seeks to recruit members from other terrorist groups, says UN report

On 29 July, the UNSC report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat claimed that during the first half of 2022, the threat posed by Da'esh and its affiliates to international peace and security continued to rise, with no deviation from the trend observed in the past two years. Further, the report added that the Da'esh views Afghanistan as a base for expansion in the wider region for the realization of its "great caliphate" project, stating that ISIL-K seeks to strengthen its capabilities by recruiting members from other terrorist groups, as well as to attract disaffected Taliban fighters and dissatisfied local ethnic minorities.

Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Azerbaijan-Armenia: Nagorno-Karabakh military accuses Baku of attacks

On 1 August, Nagorno-Karabakh's military accused Azerbaijani forces of attacks on several sections of the northern and north-western border of the unrecognized republic. Further, Karabakh's Ministry of Defense stated that its ministry had suppressed the attempts of Azerbaijani soldiers to cross the contact line. However, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defense categorically denied any ceasefire violations in or around Karabakh. The situation along the Karabakh line of contact has been relatively calm since March, however, there has been recent tension along the border with frequent firing from both sides.

Yemen: Ends four-month truce

On 2 August, the four-month ceasefire to the war in Yemen expired, amidst looming fears of a new cycle of conflict. The UN-sponsored truce had been the longest respite in seven years, with parties to the conflict adhering to a large extent, despite incidents of violations in some areas. The ceasefire resulted in a relative reduction in the humanitarian crisis, civilian deaths, and fuel prices. The UN and US envoys to Yemen are increasing their diplomatic efforts, visiting Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Oman, to find ways to extend the ceasefire and negotiate with the parties.

Lebanon: The US mediates a meeting with Israel to resolve the maritime dispute

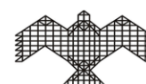
On 1 August, US special envoy and coordinator for international energy affairs visited Beirut, met President Michael Aoun, and discussed the issue of the maritime dispute between Israel and Lebanon over the competing claims on offshore gas fields. The envoy was carrying an Israeli proposal that was issued by Tel Aviv in response to Lebanon's demarcation offer.. Following the meeting, the envoy said that he is positive about making "continuous progress" and looks forward to "coming back to the region and being able to make the final arrangements."

Israel-Palestine: Israeli raid in West Bank

On 1 August, the Israeli army raided the Jenin refugee camp on the West Bank. The Palestinian health ministry said that al-Kafrini, a 17-year-old teenager was shot dead by the Israeli army during the shooting that broke between the army and pro-Palestine fighters in the camp. The Israeli forces were also successful in arresting a senior leader from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement (PIJ).

Mali: 15 soldiers and three civilians killed in two attacks

On 27 July, 15 soldiers and three civilians were killed in two separate attacks on military camps. The army said six soldiers were killed and 25 wounded in an attack on a military camp in Sonkolo. Nine soldiers were killed in an attack on a military camp near Kalumba town. An attack on the military base near Mopti was unsuccessful. The army said 48 militants had been



killed in Sonkolo when the army retaliated. The attacks come a week after a major attack on Mali's main military base near the capital city Bamako.

Mali-France: Abandon neocolonial attitude, Bamako tells Macron

On 31 July, Mali's military government reacted to France's President Emmanuel Macron's remarks during his visit to West Africa. The government spokesperson said: "The transitional government demands President Macron permanently abandon his neocolonial, paternalistic and patronizing posture to understand that no one can love Mali better than Malians." During his visit, Macron said it was the responsibility of West African countries to ensure that Malians "express the sovereignty of the people."

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Two killed as UN peacekeepers open fire

On 31 July, two people were killed when UN peacekeepers opened fire while trying to enter DRC from Uganda. Deutsche Welle quoted a statement and reported that UN secretary general Antonio Guterres was "outraged" by the incident and demanded accountability. The incident took place after at least three UN peacekeepers and 12 civilians were killed in protests against the UN which began on 25 July in the eastern DRC. The protesters said the UN has failed to protect civilians from armed militia groups.

Europe and the Americas

NATO: Germany, Hungary, and Italy take over policing of Baltic airspace

On 1 August, NATO members Germany, Hungary, and Italy took over the policing of the airspace over the Baltic region, as a part of NATO's air policing mission. The mission will be led by four JAS-39 fighter aircraft and around 80 personnel from Hungary, out of Šiauliai air base in Lithuania. Four German Eurofighter aircraft, flying out of Amari, Estonia, and Italian Eurofighters based in Malbork, Poland will join them. The new force will replace the Belgian, French, and Spanish units that have been patrolling the Baltic airspace since April. NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu said: "At a time when European security has been fundamentally altered by Russia's war against Ukraine, NATO fighter jets remain ready around the clock to protect Allied airspace. We are always vigilant."

Europe: New gas reduction plan introduced to prepare for potential discontinuation of Russian gas

On 27 July, EU member states agreed to introduce a new plan to reduce their gas usage, to prepare for the winter, if Russia cuts its gas supply. They have set the goal to cut consumption by 15 per cent by March 2023. So far, Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus have been entirely exempted from the plan as they are physically disconnected from the EU and cannot contribute to the gas stored by the bloc. Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania too secured an exemption as they are still heavily dependent on Russian gas, and will have to adhere to the plan only if Russia retaliates. Another clause by which countries will be exempt from the plan is if they overshoot the EU-wide gas storage target of 80 per cent by 1 November.

Poland: UN special rapporteur accuses of discrimination against non-European migrants

On 29 July, UN Special Rapporteur on migrants' rights, Felipe Gonzalez Morales criticized Poland for its discriminatory treatment of migrants. He urged Poland to stop detaining non-Ukrainian migrants near the Belarus border. While he praised Poland's government for their protection and assistance to over two million refugees from Ukraine, he also noted that migrants from the middle east and Afghanistan were not been treated the same way. According to Morales, the non-European refugees have not only been illegally detained which violates international humanitarian law, but also face trouble getting residence permits, proper shelter, and legal protection.

Latin America: Monkeypox deaths on the rise

On 31 July, Brazil and Spain reported their first monkeypox deaths. Three people died of the morbidity, with 1066 and 3750 confirmed cases in the two countries respectively. Subsequently, Peru and Mexico also reported rising fatalities due to this viral disease as the WHO declared it a global health emergency. However, the government response has been insufficient across the region with little efforts made towards educating the masses and setting up testing facilities. 10 countries in the region have shown interest in acquiring a vaccine, although the infection can be substantially contained with proper control measures. According to the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, there are 21,148 cases worldwide, with most cases centered in Africa.

Latin America: Frequent natural disasters raise an alarm

On 30 July, the World Meteorological Organisation in its report on the Latin American and Caribbean region discovered the rise in natural disasters between 2020 and 2022. Statistics say that there were 175 disasters, out of which 88 per cent were weather, climate, or water-related. The regions have been facing intense periods of heatwaves, wildfires, and droughts following a significant rise in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. In addition, Andean glaciers have experienced a 30 per cent loss in their area since 1990, and have triggered rising sea levels in the region. Climate disasters and extreme weather events have been taking place more frequently calling for urgent attention and the development of an early-warning system.

Latin America: Synthetic drugs adding to the substance abuse crisis

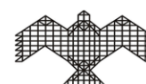
On 1 August, the Latin American region reported an influx of a fatal synthetic drug carfentanil, in the substance market. Carfentanil is a derivative of the powerful opioid fentanyl, responsible for the rise in drug-related deaths in the region. The chemical has been taking over the drug export market in Mexico simultaneously establishing a consumer market in the region. Earlier, the market was centered around marijuana and cocaine. In February, Argentina reported 24 deaths due to the consumption of cocaine laced with this chemical. The market for carfentanil has become a lucrative business for drug cartels in the region due to the cheap cost of production and huge profit margins associated with it.

The US: Nancy Pelosi begins her tour to Asian countries

On 1 August, Nancy Pelosi's office stated that she will begin a trip to four Asian nations on 31 July, despite widespread rumours that she would visit Taiwan. The office said: "Speaker Nancy Pelosi is leading a Congressional delegation to the Indo-Pacific region, including visits to Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Japan... The trip will focus on mutual security, economic partnership, and democratic governance in the Indo-Pacific region." It added that those nations would be included in the visit but did not indicate whether Pelosi, who is third in line to become president, may make more stops.

The US: The military deploys ships and plans near Taiwan

On 1 August, the US military started deploying US planes and ships near Taiwan, creating a buffer zone in anticipation of Nancy Pelosi's visit. Pelosi, on her Asia tour, landed in Singapore on 1 August. A local news network reporter stated Pelosi will arrive in Taiwan by 2 August night. The visit has sparked tensions between China and the US, with Beijing considering the visit provocative and issuing multiple warnings. China's foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian warned against Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, claiming that it would lead to "very serious" developments. Lijian said: "The China's People's Liberation Army will never sit idly by." The staff of Pelosi's tour is ensuring a safe visit with the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan returning to the South China Sea and multiple assault ships positioned in Japan.



The US: Joint statement with Japan focuses on strengthening economic security and research

On 29 July, the inaugural ministerial meeting of the US-Japan Economic Policy Consultative Committee (EPCC) was held in the US. The secretary of state Antony Blinken and Japanese foreign minister Yoshimasa Hayashi discussed recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, disruption caused by the Ukraine war, pushing back against China, and energy and food security. The dialogue also aimed at establishing a new joint research center for next-generation semi-conductors which would provide research and development resources and will be open for other "like-minded" countries to collaborate. Japan plans to research next generation semiconductor chips and hopes to establish its supply chain to reduce dependence on Taiwan.

The US: New sanctions proposed against Iran's oil companies

On 1 August, Wall Street Journal reported that the US government is working on a new set of sanctions against companies that smuggle Iran's oil. Many companies from Iran which have lost market due to strict sanctions by the US try to sell Iran's oil as Iran crude blend by forging documents. This is the third time the US is issuing new sanctions against Iran in 2022 since the nuclear deal talks have been stalled. Even though Iran's oil is one of the cheapest, priced at USD 10 below the global benchmark, multiple sanctions by the US have made it difficult for Iran's oil industry to make a profit.

The US: Kentucky floods leading to 37 casualties

On 2 August, flash floods hit Kentucky killing at least 37 people. The Kentucky governor stated that the death toll would continue to rise as hundreds remain missing. Loss of power has affected more than 12,000 houses and businesses. Houses were reportedly swept away in hard-hit areas. Overnight curfews have been declared in two counties but it led to theft and looting. Beshear stated it was the "deadliest flood" of his life as Kentucky faces its worst flood in decades.

The US: Wildfire in California leaves two dead

On 2 August, the BBC reported wildfire in northern California had been raging for 48 hours and has grown to more than 50,000 acres in size. Two people were found dead inside a car in the driveway of a property that was on fire. The wildfire forced two thousand people to flee their homes. Named the McKinney Fire, it is California's largest fire in 2022 which started on 29 July. A combination of strong winds, lightning, and dry fuel has led to a rapid explosion in size. Around 650 firefighters are battling to contain the fire and light rains have helped the fire from spreading more. California's governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency over the fire.

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COVER STORY

Myanmar Military: Annihilation as a Domination Strategy

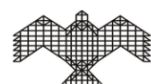
Bibhu Prasad Routray



(Image Source: AP/The Independent)

Myanmar Military: Annihilation as a Domination Strategy

The Military Junta (*Tatmadaw*), which set up the State Administrative Council (SAC) governing entity in Myanmar after orchestrating a coup in February 2021, has proved time and again that it will not shy away from drawing red lines. These include how much democracy will it allow flourishing, how much curtailment of its own power will it tolerate, and how much expression of dissent can it condone. Its every action, ever since it reluctantly started loosening its control over the country's political process in the early 2000s, has been guided by considerations of survivability. While nearly a decade of experiment with democracy raised hopes for further progress, it was evident that the growth of liberal democracy in the country would not only be constrained, but could be reversed the moment the *Tatmadaw* perceives a danger to its paramountcy. Hence, the coup that upended the results in the 2020 parliamentary elections and the ruthless stabilisation project undertaken since then by the junta are parts of its strategy to remain relevant, powerful, and the ultimate arbitrator of Myanmar's body polity. On 25 July, the *Tatmadaw* went a step further, and executed four democracy activists, after they were sentenced to death in a closed-door trial. All four, including activist Ko Jimmy and former member of parliament Phyo Zeya Thaw, had been convicted of 'terrorism', a phrase the junta has conveniently used to describe activities centered on restoring democracy in the country. While these executions, the first in at least three decades in Myanmar, can be considered a new low in the *Tatmadaw*'s war on pro-democracy activists and have evoked shock and anger across Myanmar, and have been condemned by the UNSC, ASEAN, and several countries, such sanctioned annihilation of dissenters need to be contextualized within the *Tatmadaw*'s strategy of quelling the opposition demanding restoration of democracy.



The future of democracy in Myanmar, therefore, remains linked with the *Tatmadaw*'s capacity to orchestrate violence as well as its perceived sense of impunity. While the *Tatmadaw*'s history is replete with waging unending wars against its own people, past months have demonstrated that such capacity to target the opposition can falter and needs reinforcements by external sources. This analysis attempts to bring to focus the multiple sources behind such strength which fuels the *Tatmadaw*'s annihilation strategy. It also underlines the strengths and vulnerabilities of the opposition. The analysis argues that as long as the SAC continues to be empowered by external sources, it will fancy its chances of getting away with mass-scale human rights violations and crushing democracy in Myanmar permanently.

I. Junta-sponsored Violence

Since orchestrating the coup on 1 February 2021, the *Tatmadaw* has implemented a two-prong strategy against pro-democracy politicians and civilian activists. One of them is political as well as seemingly legal. Over 13,000 people, including politicians and activists remain in detention for opposing the military's seizure of power, according to the rights group Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP); 117 people, including two children, have been sentenced to death including 41 sentenced in absentia. A large number of legal cases have been filed by the *Tatmadaw* in courts against former state counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi, in which she gets periodically convicted with her sentences stretched. Under a carefully scripted strategy, Suu Kyi, former ministers and office bearers of the deposed civilian government, and her several colleagues from the National League for Democracy (NLD) are being driven to a point of political redundancy.

The macabre and grotesque, however, continue to take place on the second level. The wrath of the military has been unleashed on hundreds of the civilian resistance People's Defence Forces (PDFs), which have sprung up across the country and the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) in the periphery. Initially, the *Tatmadaw*'s soldiers were in charge of the campaign against the PDFs and the EAOs. Subsequently, however, replicating the PDFs and also to fill in the vacancies by deserting soldiers and police personnel, a large number of militia groups were created by the *Tatmadaw*. As a result, *Pyusawhtis* (paramilitary militias) and the shadowy *Thway Thauk Apwe* pro-military groups have become an integral part of the official scorched earth policy. The military also recruited a large number of *Anghar-Sit-Thar* (hired soldiers), paying them a monthly salary of approximately USD 100. These groups, consisting of disposable and largely untrained fighters, have not only economized the war, but with a mandate to burn villages, loot, kill and torture civilians and rape women, have wreaked havoc in the EAO-dominated areas, which shelter many of the PDFs.

In a conflict-ridden country, where ground-level reporting is either difficult or largely unverifiable, Planet Labs and Google Earth images bear testimony to vacated and burnt villages. On rare occasions, deserter soldiers have narrated how they were ordered to round up and kill innocent people by their commanders. The military has supplanted its ground-level weakness by using attack helicopters to open aerial fire. Such unceasing hostility has resulted in the internal displacement of 700,000 and the killing of scores. A group of open-source researchers tracking human rights abuses, Myanmar Witness, has verified more than 200 reports of villages being burnt between September 2021 and May 2022 in the north-west Sagaing and Magway region, allegedly in retaliation for their support to PDFs and the National Unity Government (NUG), the shadow government of the ousted civilian administration. The increasing intensity of attacks is clear from the fact that 146 of these incidents have taken place

between January and May 2022.¹ In December 2021, nearly 35 people, including a child, were killed after army troops deliberately set the people in the trucks on fire in Kayah state, suspecting them to be sympathizers of the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF), an insurgent group that pledged support to the NUG. In July 2022, at least 10 villagers were killed during a military raid on a village in Sagaing region.² Scores have been killed in unreported night raids, secret assassinations and targeted annihilations. According to the United Nations human rights chief Michelle Bachelet, “over 30 percent of over 2,100 people killed since February 2021 have died in military custody – most as a result of ill-treatment.”³ The junta’s intention of silencing even an iota of protest in the most deprived manner is no longer a matter of speculation.

II. Junta’s Strength

The *Tatmadaw* legitimizes its violent campaign as aimed at the ‘terrorism’ perpetrated by the PDFs and the EAOs, and has vowed to annihilate them.⁴ It has declared its intention of bringing peace and stability to the country before holding another round of elections to elect a new government. And yet, there is little reason to believe such false claims and assurances, as it continues to extend the state of emergency. The junta’s manpower strength is unknown, with estimates varying from 250,000 to 350,000. The actual number of combat soldiers is far lower—between 80,000 and 120,000. The National Police force is around 80,000 strong.⁵ As mentioned earlier, the junta has added more manpower by enlisting militia members, pro-military groups as well as hired mercenaries. This gives it a tactical advantage vis-a-vis the PDFs and the EAOs. However, the real power behind its campaign comes from two sources: indifference shown by the regional as well as global powers to the rampant human rights violations by the junta and the latter’s continuing ties with military hardware-providing countries such as China and Russia.

Barring repeated statements condemning the Myanmar military, unveiling sanctions against key military figures and demanding that the democratic process be restored in the country major powers such as the United States and United Kingdom have done little to pressure the *Tatmadaw*. The United Nations, time and again, has condemned the junta for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. It has retained Kyaw Moe Tun, appointed by the deposed civilian government, as the Permanent Representative of Myanmar. And yet, preoccupation with the Ukraine war has pushed Myanmar out of the priority list of most major powers. The ASEAN is peeved with the junta’s refusal to implement the April 2021 five-point consensus agreement for restoration of stability and has refused to include the country in its summits. And yet, Myanmar’s defence minister General Mya Tun Oo has not been stopped from participating in the annual ASEAN Defence Ministers’ meeting in June 2022. In July, Russia and Myanmar

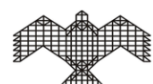
¹ *Burning Myanmar*, *Myanmar Witness*, 22 July 2022, <https://www.myanmarwitness.org/reports/burning-myanmar>.

² “Myanmar villagers accuse junta troops of massacre”, *The Straits Times*, 22 July 2022, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/myanmar-villagers-accuse-junta-troops-of-massacre>.

³ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, “Myanmar: Bachelet condemns executions, calls for release of all political prisoners”, 25 July 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/07/myanmar-bachelet-condemns-executions-calls-release-all-political-prisoners>.

⁴ “Myanmar junta chief vows to annihilate opposition forces”, *CNN*, 28 March 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/03/28/asia/myanmar-min-aung-hlaing-annihilate-opposition-intl-hnk/index.html>.

⁵ Andrew Selth, “Myanmar’s military numbers”, *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 17 February 2022, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/myanmar-s-military-numbers>.



co-chaired the ASEAN defense working group on counterterrorism in Kubinka, near Moscow, which was boycotted by the US, Australia and New Zealand, but attended by all ASEAN members. Japan, a member of the Quad along with the US, Australia and India, has continued training the Myanmarese defence forces in its National Defense Academy and the Air Self-Defense Force Officer Candidate School. Australian embassy in Yangon, has been accused of spending over USD 525,473 with the junta-linked Lotte Hotel and Lotte serviced apartments in Yangon since the February 2021 coup. India was among a handful of countries to participate in the *Tatmadaw's* Armed Forces Day celebrations in March 2021 but has also ordered the deportation⁶ of Myanmarese refugees who had crossed over into Indian territory.

While preventing a full-scale civil war situation and pursuing their own national interests may have determined actions of individual countries that have indirectly added to the strength and survival of the *Tatmadaw*, two countries— China and Russia— have been instrumental in not only protecting Myanmar from censorship in the UN but also continue to provide military hardware, which ostensibly used against the PDFs and EAOs. China's links with the *Tatmadaw* have a long history. In the past years, however, the *Tatmadaw* has attempted to diversify its military hardware procurement sources and has reached out to Russia. This explains multiple trips undertaken by SAC Chairman Min Aung Hlaing to Moscow. In the latest week-long trip in July 2022, Aung Hlaing met the director general of Russian state energy company Rosatom and signed an MoU to cooperate on skills development in nuclear energy in Myanmar.⁷ Russian support to the Myanmar Air Force (MAF)—by providing it with two Su-30 Fighter Jets and a Mi-24P attack and transport helicopter, and by stationing a technical assistance team in Myanmar to train and assist the MAF —is believed to be a key enabler in the latter's air raids on the EAOs and PDFs.

III. Vulnerabilities of the Opposition

In early 2022, the *Tatmadaw* chief indicated that he could have underestimated the power of the opposition. Over 200 PDFs operate in Myanmar's urban centres like Yangon, and in the Sagaing and Magwe regions. The NUG, to which the PDFs pledge support, claims that it controls over 15 per cent of the country's territory. Combined with another 30 to 35 per cent over which the EAOs have dominance over, half of Myanmar's territory is effectively out of the *Tatmadaw's* purview. Attacks, with growing sophistication, are regularly carried out by PDF fighters against the military's regime and its benefactors. The armed resistance has been hailed as a stupendous example of unity among the Bamars and the ethnic groups by analysts. Since the February 2021 coup, over 2,500 army and police forces have deserted the junta and are now reportedly with the opposition. Such assessments and number crunching, while holding a beacon of hope for the pro-democracy-movement, do little to hide its vulnerabilities, mostly at the operational as well as logistical levels.

The NUG is seeking USD 1 billion to sustain its operations including supporting the PDFs. However, with no external financial support, it falls back on innovative methods to raise finances internally as well as from expat Myanmar nationals and other concerned persons/entities. Funds collected outside of Myanmar are channeled unofficially into the

⁶ "Home Ministry Asks Border States In Northeast To Deport Myanmar Refugees", *NDTV*, 12 March 2021, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/home-ministry-asks-border-states-in-northeast-to-deport-myanmar-refugees-2389684>.

⁷ "Myanmar seeks Russian assistance in push for nuclear energy", *Nikkei Asia*, 19 July 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Myanmar-Crisis/Myanmar-seeks-Russian-assistance-in-push-for-nuclear-energy>.

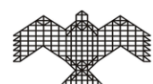
country or through cryptocurrencies, to avoid the junta-controlled banking system.⁸ However, as the war continues, the NUG is bound to discover that private donations alone would not sustain its operations.

The European parliament and the French Senate have adopted resolutions recognizing the NUG as Myanmar's only legitimate government, while US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has tweeted support. However, the NUG and the PDFs would require material support in addition to such pledges. The use of Russian and Soviet-era choppers by the *Tatmadaw* not only for attacks but also for maintaining supply lines, troop deployment, and evacuations have been huge challenges for the PDFs and EAOs, who neither have access to any choppers of their own nor have any advance missile systems to tackle these flying machines. Unless the PDFs receive significant external assistance, in terms of funds, arms, and expertise, their ability to threaten *Tatmadaw*'s position would always remain limited. To force the *Tatmadaw* into accepting their demands, the EAOs and PDFs will have to widen the areas of operations beyond the Sagaing and Mangwe regions. Unless the theatre of conflict is expanded, the *Tatmadaw* will not only have the advantage of carrying out focused area operations, but it will also absorb the recurrent, and yet middling damages inflicted by the opposition. So far, the Karen National Union (KNU) and the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), are working with the NUG and fighting alongside resistance forces against *Tatmadaw*'s troops. Some other EAOs have either unofficially supported the NUG or have remained uncommitted. Extracting active support from a majority of the 20 EAOs operating in the country would be a challenge for the NUG in the coming months. So far, the PDFs have done exceedingly well against the troops. Due to the recurrent attacks on official installations and police stations, Yangon has been labelled the most dangerous city in Myanmar. However, sustaining such attacks in the long run may be a challenge. Paradoxically, too much violence unleashed by the PDFs may also make them unworthy of receiving any assistance from external sources.

IV. The Future

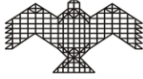
Insurgency movements or armed uprisings against a conventional military force have rarely succeeded without significant external support. Belief in principles and conviction in a cause can prolong the life of such uprisings, but do not add to their winning probability against an adversary pursuing a strategy of annihilation. Insurgency movements of Myanmar have a prolonged history of confrontation with the *Tatmadaw*, stretching several decades. They have mostly remained undefeated, carving out and ruling over near-autonomous homelands. But for the PDFs, the goal is much larger. Toppling a shadow government of the military or coercing it to send its soldiers back to barracks and restore power to the NLD is a far more difficult task. Currently, neither *Tatmadaw* nor the armed opposition is willing to accept defeat. The international and regional powers, apprehensive of a full-blown civil war situation at the heart of Asia, are averse to materially assisting the NUG and the PDFs. The stalemate, therefore, is a recipe for continued conflict, tilted in favour of the military. In the coming months, the *Tatmadaw* may continue pursuing a two-prong strategy of increasing the scale and sweep of its operations and trying to avenge its battlefield losses by punishing the softer targets, i.e. the imprisoned politicians and the activists. International condemnation of the July 2022 executions of the four activists may prevent further prison executions but will do little to deter the *Tatmadaw* from further pursuing its annihilation strategy.

⁸ "Inside the global drive to fund a revolution in Myanmar", *Japan Times*, 23 February 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/02/23/asia-pacific/myanmar-funding-revolution/>.





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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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