

# 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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## Violence in Israel and 25 Years of the Good Friday Agreement

Mohaimeen Khan and Sourina Bej



(Israeli police detaining Palestinian worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Image Source: AP, Mahmoud Illean)

## Israel: Escalating violence and regional tensions

Mohaimeen Khan

### In the News

On 7 April, two people were killed after gunmen attacked a vehicle in the West Bank. The incident happened hours after Israel launched air raids on Lebanon and Gaza Strip. According to the Israeli military, the airstrikes targeted the Palestinian militant group Hamas in retaliation for a "barrage of rockets" fired at Israel on 6 April. Alongside, it launched airstrikes against the Hamas-run Gaza Strip.

Qatar condemned the Israeli raids on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the attack on Palestinian worshippers. A spokesperson from Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "In the context of its role as a mediator, the State of Qatar is working to de-escalate the situation on all sides."

On 9 April, the Israeli military attacked the Syrian missile launchers with artillery and a drone. It accused Syria of firing multiple missiles towards northern Israel, one of which landed in a field on the Golan Heights, which is administered by Israel.

The same day, armed groups in Lebanon and the Gaza Strip launched rockets at Israel in response to the violent Israeli strikes that infuriated Palestinians observing the holy month of Ramadan. Hezbollah's leader stated that they remain "vigilant" following the air strikes.

On 10 April, violence escalated in the West Bank after a Palestinian child was killed by Israeli forces in the Aqabet Jaber refugee camp in Jericho. Meanwhile, Israeli settlers marched to an outpost close to the city of Nablus.

On 12 April, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that non-Muslim visitors would not be allowed in the al-Aqsa Mosque until the end of Ramadan. Israel's Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben Gvir, criticised the ban as a "serious mistake that will not bring peace, rather risks escalating the security situation further." He added: "When terrorism strikes us, we must strike back with great force, not surrender to its whims."

### Issues at Large

Firstly, the escalating violence on multiple fronts. After Israel's far-right government assumed power in December 2022, tensions increased, followed by raids on Palestinian settlements in the West Bank were carried out. Israeli aggression has increased on multiple fronts, including Gaza, Lebanon, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank. In the Israeli administered territories, the operations have sparked outrage among Palestinians. The army incursions were intended to stop individual attacks on Israelis by the Palestinians; However, they increased instead. The raids took place at the time of the spiritually important mid-Ramadan and Passover.

Secondly, differing positions. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas blamed Israel for the increase in violence. He commissioned his senior negotiator to meet Israeli counterparts in Aqaba, Jordan, in February and Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, just before Ramadan in March. The Hamas criticised the Palestinian Authority for taking part in the talks and negotiations. A representative claimed the meeting was "worthless" and would not bring any changes. Netanyahu refuted any agreement to halt settlement expansion. He stated: "Whatever happened in Jordan (if it happened) stays in Jordan." Ben Gvir reiterated that by making such declarations, Israel had left its intentions unclear, while house demolitions and raids have

proceeded unabated.

Thirdly, the role of the new government. The violence broke out less than four months after the conservative government under Netanyahu came to power. This coalition, which includes ultra-nationalist parties, supports the Israeli settlers and publicly encourages such raids. Far-right politician Bezalel Smotrich even demanded the Palestinian villages to be "erased." A two-state solution is not supported by any members of the far-right nationalist coalition. Ben Gvir, the head of the Jewish Power Party, supports an extreme Zionist nationalism and religious Jewish fundamentalism that threatens all prospects of peace.

Fourthly, increasing regional tensions. Israel has been attacking ports and airports in Syria and a key conduit facility in Aleppo that assisted shipments for hundreds of attacks which Israel claims to be carried out by Iran-linked forces. Thereby, Israel infringed on Syria's sovereignty and provoked Iran. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials responded that Israel should be wary of its regional influence and strategic depth. A further escalation between Israel and Hezbollah could have severe ramifications for both parties.

### In Perspective

According to Palestinian health officials, there has been an alarming number of attacks in recent months, the worst for Palestinians. Tensions might further escalate in the areas where the situation is volatile. It is an ongoing conflict with no end in sight. The hostility has the potential to destabilise the region even more. It is likely that the regional conflict might turn into a wider conflict. If the West Asian countries and the non-state actors attempt to engage further militarily.

### CONFLICT WEEKLY SPECIAL COMMENTARY

## **25 years of Good Friday Agreement** ***New 'Troubles', Peace in Question***

Sourina Bej

On 11 April, US President Joe Biden visited Northern Ireland to participate in the 25th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement. This deal brought peace to Northern Ireland with the help of the US, thereby ending decades of sectarian violence. Biden tweeted: "25 years ago, Northern Ireland's leaders chose peace. The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement ended decades of violence and brought stability." During the past 25 years, a post-conflict Northern Ireland shaped its democratic institutions so as to preserve peace while at the same time being challenged by new political crises. After 25 years, is the Good Friday agreement in dire straits?

### **Nobel Peace Deal Unpacks with Brexit**

Firstly, peace deal is to be examined. The Good Friday Agreement ended 30 years of violence, a time period known as 'The Troubles.' The agreement has put into practice a liberal peace framework to end ethno-religious conflicts and was awarded with a joint Nobel peace prize. Through democratic authorisation, the agreement resolved seemingly intractable problems such as constitutional changes, self-government and the denouncement of violence by the IRA. By 1979, the IRA had killed Lord Mountbatten and tried to assassinate former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, and, according to the BBC, conflict during 'The



Troubles' had claimed the lives of at least 3,500 people. Thus, the agreement established a politically accepted construct: a mandatory coalition. As an outcome, Northern Ireland remained part of the UK but could join Ireland if, in a referendum, a majority in both areas voted for it. People born in Northern Ireland were granted Irish nationality, British nationality, or both. Since then, Northern Ireland has formed governments where nationalists and unionists were in a mandatory coalition with the goal of inclusive representation.

Secondly, now comes the BREXIT! Barely into the second decade of power-sharing governance in Northern Ireland, the UK voted to leave the EU, leaving in question the land border arrangement between Northern Ireland and Ireland, which remains in the EU. Brexit has brought with it border controls before goods could move from Northern Ireland to Ireland. The decision to alter the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in Northern Ireland rested with Great Britain, according to the peace agreement. Since checkpoints at the land border, with its history of violence, risked flaring the conflict. It was decided that border checks would be conducted instead between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This has gone on to upset the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the largest pro-Union party in Northern Ireland, which continues to boycott Stormont, the Parliament of Northern Ireland. Without the DUP, the mandatory coalition cannot function. In an attempt to avert the crisis, the UK and the EU in February 2023 agreed on the Windsor Framework, which should sooth the tensions.

Thirdly, the recurring political crisis in Northern Ireland. The Brexit deal has resulted in Northern Ireland being without a functioning government for over a year. Riots have broken out because of a lack of political representation of half of the population in a post-conflict society. For instance, on 11 April, masked young adults in paramilitary gear threw petrol bombs at the police. However, Brexit was not only the reason for the collapse of the coalition.. In 2017, the Stormont was suspended for three years before it was reluctantly restored over renewable energy payments and scandal.

In addition, deep social divides continue. While the deal may have brought in a new political framework, it did not entirely help to relax sectarian tensions. Less than 10 per cent of students in Northern Ireland attend religiously integrated schools. So called peace walls still demarcate Protestants from Catholic neighbourhoods. Parades and marches with sectarian undertones, flags, and emblems display divided memories of the past. Importantly, leaders in Northern Ireland could never develop a common understanding of the past violence that could unify or bring in a moment of truth for those affected.

Challenges within could be done without

Firstly, the Good Friday Agreement needs to be revisited . After 25 years, the peace deal is facing a challenge: not just by Brexit, but also by a lack of trust in the deal itself. It must be recalled that the involved parties agreed on the 'mandatory coalition' in response to the conflicts at the time. With new conflicts emerging, it could be said that the "mandatory coalition" is rapidly approaching its limits. Since Northern Ireland has been without a political government, could a voluntary coalition and increased political representation be an answer to a divided society?

Secondly, addressing the trust deficit with Westminster. The deal was achieved when the people and politicians of Northern Ireland and the UK were confronted with much deeper wounds. The UK government in 1998 and 2007 acted in consensus with the US and the EU to

iron out the deal. However, affirmations to the international treaties have eroded once the Tories committed to Brexit. Until UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak concluded the Windsor framework, the Tories have time and again risked their commitments to treaties such as the Northern Ireland Protocol under former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. They have also formed electoral alliances with political parties in Northern Ireland that have deterred power sharing for both Westminster and Stormont. Questions around borders, identity, citizenship and self-determination, which had faded into the background, have become more prominent with the hard Brexit stances of the Tory leaders. The trust deficit towards Westminster could further increase with regard to international law issues. For instance, the UK government is now considering circumventing the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to proceed with the 'Stop the Boats Bill'. On similar lines, the Good Friday agreement is an international treaty, and the ECHR is directly referenced in its text. Therefore, this also calls for the need to re-evaluate the deal.

How can the current political crisis and the looming social conflict be met against the background of the Good Friday Agreement? The answer lies in neo-institutionalism. The web of institutions established to govern Northern Ireland by bringing together leaders in Northern Ireland with those in Ireland and from all over UK ensured a well-negotiated peace process. In the face of Brexit, however, new institutions for peacebuilding could well be in sight.

## Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Akriti Sharma, Ankit Singh, Rashmi Ramesh, Apoorva Sudhakar, Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, Harini Madhusudan and Padmashree Anandhan

### East and Southeast Asia

#### **Taiwan Strait: China concludes its military drills**

On 10 April, China ended its three-day military drills around Taiwan; however, several aircraft and navy vessels are still stationed around. The drills are a direct response to Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen's US visit, where she met US House of Representatives speaker Kevin McCarthy. Taiwan's defence ministry has reported at least nine Chinese warships and 26 aircraft performing combat exercises near Taiwan. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said: "Taiwan independence and Taiwan Strait peace and stability are mutually exclusive things. If we want to protect peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, we must firmly oppose any form of Taiwan independence separatism." Additionally, Wenbin said: "Taiwan is an inseparable part of Chinese territory. There is no so-called Taiwanese defence ministry."

#### **North Korea: South Korea and Japan concerned over the missile test**

On 13 April, North Korea launched a long-range ballistic missile that covered a distance of over 1,000 km and landed between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. The launch prompted evacuation orders in South Korea and Japan. The South Korean military kept a close watch on the missile test which included the use of new weapons displayed in North Korea's recent military parade. South Korea and the US condemned the test. The South Korean Foreign Ministry stated that North Korea is consistently disturbing regional peace with "unprecedented levels of provocation."



### Myanmar: Airstrike by junta kills 110 people in an airstrike

On 11 April, at least 110 people were killed in an airstrike by the military junta in the Sagaing region. The “aerial massacre,” as reported by the Irrawaddy Times, hit many civilians, including children and families. Right after the attack, a Mi-35 combat helicopter opened fire on those who were collecting the dead. The volunteers estimated that 50 victims were children, all aged below 14. Major General Zaw Min Tun, spokesperson for the junta, confirmed that the attacks targeted a ceremony of the anti-junta National Unity Government and the People's Defense Force. He also stated that the civilian casualties are to be attributed to the "terrorists" who forced civilians to attend the event.

### South Asia

#### Pakistan: Congressman Sherman urges Blinken to look into the human rights and democracy crisis

On 12 April, Congressman Brad Sherman urged US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to look into the human rights and democracy crisis in Pakistan. Sherman asked Blinken to reaffirm their support to the cause and encourage Islamabad to respect the right to speak and engage politically. Additionally, he stated: "I respect its constitution and its democratic process — but we must not shy away from raising our voice when the human rights of the Pakistani people are at stake." He also expressed concerns over prosecutions against PTI leaders and protesters. Furthermore, he described the officials delaying regional elections as another instance of "skirting" democratic rights. He said: "Most importantly, I urge the authorities to make sure that going forward, political figures or citizens who simply want to demonstrate are not subjected to anti-democratic consequences."

### Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa

#### Uzbekistan: Referendum set to allow President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to stay in power for two more decades

On 12 April, Eurasianet drew parallels between Uzbekistan's constitutional referendum scheduled on 30 April and its preceding referendum of January 2002. In January 2002, as it is now, voters were asked to endorse an extension of presidential term limits from five to seven years. Almost a year ago, the government began preparations for the 2023 referendum and has attempted to portray the campaign as a people-led one. In March 2023, Uzbekistan's Parliament, Oliy Majlis, voted to approve the amendments. The Constitutional Reform Commission and the Oliy Majlis released a joint statement which claimed that more than 220,000 public proposals were considered during the drafting process. However, in close resemblance to the 2002 referendum, the legality of the referendum seems questionable from a constitutional perspective.

#### Iraq: Turkish strikes in northern Iraq

On 8 April, Iraq condemned Turkish attacks in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, particularly targeting the Sulaymaniyah airport. Baghdad claims that the attacks were carried out on 7 April; however, Ankara denied any Turkish involvement in recent attacks targeting the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Iraqi government stated that Turkey has no "legal justification to continue intimidating civilians under the pretext that forces hostile to it are present on Iraqi soil" and demanded an official apology.

### **Sudan: Anti-government protests turn violent, injuring dozens**

On 7 April, BBC reported that many people were injured after security forces used tear gas to disperse mass protests against military rule. The protests were against the delay in signing a final agreement to re-establish civilian rule in the country. It also marked the fourth anniversary of the Sudanese uprising in 2019 that overthrew former dictator Omar al-Bashir. Hundreds of protesters set up roadblocks in the capital, Khartoum; they carried banners and shouted slogans denouncing the army's involvement in politics.

### **Nigeria: At least 51 people killed in gunmen attack**

On 7 April, BBC reported that at least 51 people were killed in a gunmen attack in the village of Umogidi in the state of Benue. The attack is speculated to be related to clashes between nomadic herders and settled farmers, which are common in the region. Farmers accuse herders of destroying their fields, while herders accuse farmers of attacking their cattle.

### Europe and the Americas

#### **France: Protests continue for 11th day over proposed pension reform**

On 6 April, protestors gathered in cities across France for the 11th consecutive day in response to the pension reform bill. According to the Ministry of Interior, nearly 570,000 people participated in the protests, blocking roads, access points to the airport, and universities. France's Constitutional Council is scheduled to give its verdict on the constitutionality of the proposed bill on 14 April. Meanwhile, in Nantes, clashes occurred between police and protesters which led to the police using tear gas to disperse the crowd.

#### **Ireland: Riots erupt in Northern Ireland ahead of Biden's visit**

On 10 April, ahead of US President Joe Biden's visit, riots broke out in Northern Ireland, with masked individuals throwing Molotov cocktails and other objects at a police vehicle during an assembly in the city of Londonderry. The parade opposed the Good Friday peace accord on the occasion of the 25th anniversary, which marked the end of a 30-year-long ethno-nationalist conflict that claimed the lives of around 3,700 people. Biden is scheduled to arrive in Northern Ireland on 11 April.

#### **Italy: Coastguard rescues over 1,200 migrants off Sicily coast**

On 11 April, the BBC reported on two extensive operations by the Italian coastguard to save approximately 1,200 migrants from overcrowded boats at the coast of Sicily. The authorities observed that one of the fishing boats was carrying about 800 people while the other was transporting around 400 individuals. In total, they have saved almost 2,000 migrants since 7 April. Despite the right-wing coalition government's efforts to reduce irregular migration, migrant arrivals in Italy rose substantially compared to the same period last year.

### About the authors

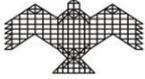
Harini Madhusudan, Rashmi Ramesh, Ankit Singh and Akriti Sharma are Doctoral Scholars at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS. Padmashree Anandan is a Project Associate at NIAS. Anu Maria Joseph and Femy Francis are Research Assistants at NIAS. Mohaimen Khan is a postgraduate scholar at the Manipal Academy of Higher Studies. Sourina Bej is a doctoral candidate at the University of Bonn.





### 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

**Editorial Team:** Harini Madhusudan, Ankit Singh, Rashmi Ramesh, Femy Francis, Akriti Sharma and Padmashree Anandan.