

Conflict Weekly

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Israel-Palestine Conflict Earthquake in Afghanistan



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Gender | Environment | Ethnic Violence
External Interventions | Armed Conflicts | Peace Processes



Israel-Palestine Conflict: The return of violence in Gaza

Rosemary Kurian, Rishita Verma and Shakthi Vigneshwaran

In the news

On 7 October, the Hamas launched a massive attack on Israel. Al Jazeera reported that 100 people were killed and dozens taken hostage in an assault combining gunmen crossing into Israel and a barrage of rockets fired from Gaza.

On 8 October, Israel responded with air strikes, hitting multiple targets in Gaza. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, 370 died in Israel's retaliatory strikes.

On 10 October, Israel said that it recaptured Gaza border areas from Hamas militants as the war's death toll passed 3000. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, warned Israel's military campaign was only the start of a sustained war to destroy Hamas.

On 11 October, a wartime unity government was formed in Israel to oversee the fight. The US President, Joe Biden, condemned the Palestinian militant group's attack as "sheer evil" and stated that "there is no justification for terrorism."

Issues at large

First, a brief note on the Hamas, its support base and opposition. Hamas is one of the two main groups governing the West Bank, the other being Fatah. Since 2006, the Hamas has ruled over two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Hamas believes in violent armed resistance against Israel, while the Fatah-dominated Palestine Authority (PA) prefers a political approach. The majority of the countries in the West consider Hamas as a terrorist organization given its violent approach against Israel. Within Gaza, more than half the population supports Hamas' leadership over Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the PA, according to a survey by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR). Iran is considered as one of the strong supporters of the Hamas due to shared anti-Israeli sentiments and as a means to extend its regional influence through supporting Palestinian resistance groups.

Second, the strategic significance of Gaza. A small enclave wedged between Egypt, Israel and the Mediterranean Sea, the Gaza Strip is 365 square kilometres with 40 kilometres of coastline. Roughly 60 times smaller than Israel, Gaza is inhabited by a majority Sunni Muslim population with a minority Christian group. With the dismantlement of Jewish settlements in 2005, it is fully inhabited by Palestinians. Gaza's population is about two million people, making it one of the world's most densely populated areas. It was governed by Britain under the Palestinian mandate between 1918 and 1948 and by Egypt from 1948 to 1967. Later, Israel captured both Gaza and the West Bank (from Jordan). Post the Oslo Accords in 1994, the Palestinians took over governance. In 2005, Israel withdrew from Gaza under international pressure. In 2006, the Hamas took over after their election victory and has been controlling it ever since. Gaza is extremely dependent on Israel (and Egypt) for basic resources like food and electricity.

Third, a brief note on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Palestine wants a state of its own and so does Israel, making the 'Two-State Solution' as an option supported by the former and negated by the latter. Tensions persist as Israel continues to build settlements in designated Palestinian regions while the latter fights for its state, making it extremely difficult to settle.

Externally, the differences between the Israelis and Palestinians led to Israel attacking the Arab countries - Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon at various points. Over the years, through multiple wars, Israel has captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria.

Fourth, agreements and intifadas. In 1978, the US mediation under the then President Jimmy Carter resulted in the signing of the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt. The President of Egypt Anwar Sadat and the Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin received the Nobel Prize for Peace for agreeing to work together. Later in 1993, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed an agreement in Oslo, that focussed on a two-state solution. The Oslo Accord of 1993 also resulted in establishing the PA and limited self-governance in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In 1995, both signed more agreements referred to as Oslo-II. During the 1980s and 1990s, the Palestinians also waged what was referred to as the Intifada-I and Intifada-II. Both uprisings were violent in terms of protests and state responses. They were aimed at self-determination, withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlements.

Fifth, regional and global responses. Since the independence of Israel, the Arab world has witnessed numerous wars. Egypt normalised the relations with Camp David Accords, following which Jordan resumed its diplomatic relations. The Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995 between Israel and Palestine were aimed at reaching an understanding between the two actors within. The recent Abraham Accords in 2020 signed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, Bahrain and Israel were aimed at regional normalisation. Iran has backed Palestine and the Hamas.



Afghanistan: An Unprecedented Tragedy After Earthquake

Shamini Velayutham

In the news

On 11 October, the German Research Centre for Geoscience (GFZ) reported a 6.3 magnitude earthquake in northwest Afghanistan near Herat. According to the research institute, the tremors were felt at a depth of ten kilometres (6.21 miles) from Herat.

On 7 October, the Taliban authority stated: “We ask our wealthy compatriots to give any possible cooperation and help to our afflicted brothers.” According to Afghanistan's de facto Taliban authority, more than 2,400 people had died and several others had been injured.

The same day, UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed solidarity with the Afghan people and shared condolences to the families of the deceased. He added: “The United Nations and our partners in Afghanistan are coordinating with the de facto authorities to swiftly assess needs and provide emergency assistance. As winter approaches, the Secretary-General calls on the international community to come together and support people impacted by the earthquake, many of whom were already in need before this crisis.”

On 8 October, Amnesty International stated: “Our deepest condolences to the families who have lost loved ones in the devastating earthquake.” The organisation called on the de facto Taliban authorities for an effective response to the basic needs of the affected people and fair and adequate rescue and relief operations according to international human rights norms.

Issues at large

First, Afghanistan's earthquake zone. Afghanistan is positioned on the Eurasian plate that is bordered by the Arabian plate and the Indian plate. The country is prone to earthquakes as it is located at the point the plates converge. According to Al Jazeera, in June 2022, a 6.2 magnitude earthquake in southeast Afghanistan killed at least 1000. In 2015, more than 200 in Afghanistan and Pakistan were killed in another earthquake. The earthquake in June 2022 was the deadliest since 2002 killing nearly 1,200 people.

Second, the incompetence of the Taliban administration. Earthquakes are common in Afghanistan, particularly in the HinduKush mountain region. However, the Taliban, who took over power in August 2021, have no expertise in managing natural disasters. Providing temporary housing and aid to earthquake survivors is a difficult task for the Taliban. Amidst the ongoing internal crisis, natural disasters are a burden to the volatile system. Ever since the takeover, the Taliban has pledged effective governance and a better economy; however, the broken promises elucidate the inefficiency of the government in doing so. Besides, the 2023 annual budget by the UN agencies in Afghanistan was reduced from USD 4.6 billion to USD 3.2 billion after the Taliban banned female workers in these organisations.

Third, limited global response. The international response to the earthquake has been delayed partially because several international actors are wary of engaging directly with the Taliban-led administration. Despite calls for international aid, only China and Pakistan have openly pledged financial and humanitarian support respectively. The international response to the earthquake in June 2022 was prompt and prudent. According to the UN, in 2022, the US provided Afghanistan with humanitarian aid of USD 1.2 billion.

In perspective

The rescue efforts following the earthquake in June 2022 were successful due to foreign aid. However, the efforts are limited for the current one owing to the increasingly coercive Taliban administration. For the Taliban, the earthquake in Herat is likely to be taken as an opportunity to gain international support and facilitate bilateral relations.



PROFILE

Narges Mohammadi: The Winner of Nobel Peace Prize 2023

Rajika Kanungo

On 6 October, the Norwegian Nobel committee announced that activist Narges Mohammadi would receive the 2023 Nobel Peace Prize. Mohammadi is considered the voice of Iranian women battling against their subordination and advancing human rights. She is imprisoned in Iran serving a 10-year life sentence. Iran has arrested her 13 times, convicted her five times and sentenced her to a total of 31 years in prison and 154 lashes. The hundreds of thousands of individuals who protested against Iran's policies of discrimination and persecution against women in the year prior are also recognised with this year's Peace Prize. The committee stated that the demonstrators' chosen motto "Woman - Life - Freedom" appropriately captures the commitment and labour of Narges Mohammadi.

Mohammadi was born in Zanjan, Tehran, in 1972, under the Shah's authoritarian administration, which permitted little criticism and pushed for very limited freedom for women. His regime was toppled by the Iranian Revolution of 1979.

She attended Qazvin International University, graduated with a physics degree, and became a professional engineer. During her university days, she began discussing women's issues and co-founded the Tashakkol Daneshjooie Roshangaraan (Illuminating Students Group).

Mohammadi began her career as a journalist writing for the women's magazine Payaam-e-Haajar. Additionally, she released a broad collection of articles, *The Reforms, The Strategies and The Tactics*. While in prison, she was a vocal critic of the government concerning the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a young Iranian who died in 2022 while in custody for "improper attire." In 2022, she authored a book titled "White Torture, elaborating on the inhuman prison conditions."

The Peace Prize has received several responses. Many Iranian artists, actresses, directors, activists and political prisoners congratulated Narges Mohammadi and said her prize was a much-needed boost for Iranians' aspiration for democratic change. UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that the Nobel Foundation's recognition of Narges Mohammadi is "an important reminder that the rights of women and girls are facing a strong pushback, including through the persecution of women human rights defenders, in Iran and elsewhere."

However, Iran's state media covered Narges Mohammadi's award by trying to diminish her and the objective of the Peace Prize. According to the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), the country's state news agency: "Over the time, the Nobel Peace Prize deviated from its main path and became a means to satisfy the political desires of the Western countries and to put pressure on the countries with which the Westerners have a long-standing enmity."

Narges's victory is a positive development considering the status of women's movements. She joins Nadia Murad, Shirin Ebadi, Malala Yousafzai and Tawakkul Karman who have been previous recipients of the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts to help women and children across Pakistan, Yemen, Liberia and Iran.

Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Rishika Yadav, Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, Padmashree Anandhan, Dhriti Mukherjee and Shamini Velayutham

East and Southeast Asia

China: Zhanjiang holds the second Blue Sword joint navy exercise with Saudi Arabia

On 9 October, the Blue Sword-2023 joint naval exercises between Saudi Arabia's Royal Saudi Navy and the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) navy began aiming to boost military cooperation. The opening ceremony was held in Zhanjiang in the province of Guangdong. The PLA stated that the exercises aim to create mutual trust and cordial relations between the two countries. It added that the exercise aims to develop and enhance their naval capabilities by comprehensive joint operations. This is the second edition of the Blue Sword exercise; the first was held in 2019 at the King Faisal Naval Base in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

China: The Philippines condemned for resupplying ships in the contested South China Sea

On 5 October, the Strait Times reported on China condemning the Philippines' mission by two Coast Guard ships resupplying the Philippine troops in the contested South China Sea near the Spratly Islands. The Philippines Coast Guard reported that they sent supplies to its troops stationed at a World War II-era transport ship-turned-military outpost. The Philippines National Security Council (NSC) stated that "these missions are a legitimate exercise of the administrative functions of the Philippine government" regardless of the attempts by the Chinese navy to disrupt their efforts to resupply.

South Korea: US aircraft carrier to dock amid heightened tensions

On 10 October, the South Korean Ministry of National Defence announced that the US' nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, Ronald Reagan, is set to arrive at the South Korean naval base in Busan on 12 October. It is a part of Carrier Strike Group 5 which includes the aircraft carrier, the Aegis-equipped US Shoup destroyer and other warships that aims to display strength against North Korea's threats in the Korean Peninsula. The visit comes following the worsening tensions in the Korean Peninsula after North Korea unveiled a new "tactical nuclear attack" submarine in September. The visit is part of the US commitment to enhance the presence of strategic assets in the region. South Korea's Fleet Commander Vice Admiral Kim Myung-soo stated: "(The visit) is a key demonstration of the US' extended deterrence in action, and will become an opportunity to strengthen the combined defence posture for an immediate, overwhelming and decisive response against North Korea's continued provocations." Meanwhile, on 9 and 10 October, according to the South Korean Ministry of National Defence, South Korea, Japan and the US conducted naval exercises. The trilateral exercise included South Korea's Yulgok Yi I destroyer, the Aegis-equipped US's Shoup destroyer and Japan's JS Hyuga helicopter destroyer.



Myanmar: Attack on IDP camp

On 10 October, Myanmar Now reported that at least 30 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) were killed in a suspected Myanmar junta strike on the village of Munglai Hkyet in the state of Kachin. The village is near the headquarters of the ethnic armed organisation, Kachin Independence Army (KIA). The attack targeted a camp in the village that shelters around 500 IDPs. The village has been under the control of the KIA. Its spokesperson Colonel Naw Bu stated: "We found 29 dead bodies including children and older people ... 56 people were wounded." The shadow National Unity Government (NUG) condemned the attack calling it a vicious attack on civilians. NUG spokesperson Kyaw Zaw stated: "This act of military council is a war crime and crime against humanity." The UN office in Myanmar expressed concerns over the reports of civilian deaths at the IDP camp stating: "IDP camps are places of refuge, and civilians, no matter where they are, should never be a target."

South Asia

Pakistan: Five terrorists and two soldiers killed in Balochistan

On 9 October, the Dawn reported that five terrorists belonging to Tehreek-e-Taliban-e-Pakistan (TTP) and two soldiers were killed during an operation in the Sambaza region in the province of Balochistan. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) stated that the clashes occurred during an operation conducted by the security forces on 8 October. Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar stated: "Their dedication reinforces our resolve to eliminate terrorism from Pakistan." Pakistan has been facing frequent terror attacks in recent months, mainly in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan after the TTP halted its ceasefire with the government in November 2022. According to the Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS), the number of terrorist attacks in August has been the highest in the past nine years. At least 99 occurrences of militant attacks were reported during the month.

Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa

Niger: France begins to withdraw its troops

On 10 October, BBC Africa reported that France has begun withdrawing its troops from Niger after increased tensions between the countries following the coup in July. The French chief of staff spokesperson stated: "The first troops have left." Nearly 1,500 French troops have been fighting insurgency in the region since 2015. Meanwhile, the US announced the suspension of USD 500 million aid to Niger over the military coup. The US Department of State stated that aid to Niger would only be resumed if a democratic government is reestablished. US Department of State spokesperson Matthew Miller stated: "Any resumption of US assistance will require action to usher in democratic governance in a quick and credible timeframe."

Burkina Faso: Security forces kill a commander linked to failed coup attempt

On 9 October, BBC Africa reported that the security forces in Burkina Faso executed commander Ismael Tohobougou suspected of taking part in a coup attempt on 27 September. Tohobougou had been on the run since the military prosecutor had called him in for interrogation. Tohobougou was charged with taking part in an attempted coup against Burkina Faso's military leader Captain Ibrahim Traore among other military officers. Additionally, the suspension of several army personnel connected to the coup attempt was disclosed by the country's Ministry of Defence on 6 October.

Kenya: Court halts the deployment of police officers to Haiti

On 9 October, BBC Africa reported that the deployment of Kenyan police officers to Haiti had been halted by a Kenyan court awaiting the verdict of an appeal. The judge emphasised the appeal's grounds on public and national importance. According to former presidential candidate Ekuru Aukot's petition, the intended deployment is unconstitutional as he claims that normal police officers could not be assigned to international missions. Additionally, Aukot criticised that the country cannot afford to lose 1,000 police officers as it already deals with insecurity and ethnic clashes internally. The development comes after on 2 October, the UN Security Council approved a Multinational Security Support (MSS) mission led by Kenya to assist Haiti in its fight against gang violence.

Europe and the Americas

Finland: Leak in Balticconnector gas pipeline under investigation

On 10 October, an external cause was suspected in the leak of the Balticconnector gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia. Finland's President Sauli Niinistö indicated that it could be due to "external activity." The National Bureau of Investigation (KPR) is leading the inquiry. Both Finland and Estonia have alternative gas supplies and the incident is not expected to affect energy security. The pipeline is Finland's only direct connection to the EU's gas network. Meanwhile, Finland's gas system operator, Gasgrid and its Estonian partner, Elering stated on 9 October that the repair of the Balticconnector subsea gas pipeline is time-consuming. Gasgrid has closed the pipeline valves to prevent further gas loss. The damage has pushed up European gas prices. UK price increased by 13.5 per cent on 9 October to 124 pence per therm from 88 pence per therm on 7 October.

The UK: Supreme Court reviews asylum deportation

On 9 October, the Supreme Court of the UK reviewed the government's appeal to overturn a law deeming the deportation of asylum seekers to Rwanda unlawful. A policy proposed by UK's Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to curb asylum-seeking numbers is under review as the UK prepares for upcoming elections. The June ruling in London's Court of Appeal stated that Rwanda was not a safe third country for migrant deportation. It highlighted the deficiencies in its asylum system and the risk of deportees facing inhumane treatment upon return to their home countries. Sunak's administration seeks to block asylum applications from those arriving in the UK through small boats. Over 100,000 migrants have crossed the English Channel since 2018, becoming a concern for the administration.

Venezuela: Announcement of expansion of border wall by Biden administration

On 5 October, US President Joe Biden's administration announced that it would continue deporting Venezuelan migrants while announcing the expansion of the southern border wall. This development is a major shift from Biden's earlier approval to grant legal status to 4,70,000 Venezuelan migrants in the US, maintaining that "the conditions in their home country prevent their safe return." Currently facing political pressure to stem the flow of these migrants, Biden's decision shifts towards former President Donald Trump's border policy. As Biden had pledged that "no more American taxpayer dollars" would be used to "construct a border wall," the administration will use money allocated during Trump's term. This decision is likely to face criticism from left-leaning supporters. Migration-based policies are likely to be a major part of the next elections.



Ecuador: Six Colombian inmates killed in Ecuadorian prison

On 6 October, six Colombian inmates who were convicted in the murder of Ecuador's Presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio were killed in an Ecuadorian prison. Ecuador's President Guillermo Lasso condemned the killings stating that there would be "neither complicity nor cover-up" in the investigation. Lasso "ordered an immediate meeting of the Security Cabinet" to investigate the murder of the inmates and the suspected organised crime group responsible for Villavicencio's death. The Colombian and Mexican drug cartels operating in and through Ecuador have led to a rise in gang violence and related deaths, which according to Al Jazeera have killed over 430 inmates since 2021.

Mexico: Hurricane Lidia brings "dangerous storm surge" to Mexico's coast

On 10 October, hurricane 'Lidia' hit Mexico's Pacific coast bringing heavy rain and winds up to 220 kilometres per hour. Mexican President Andres Obrador ordered citizens to "take refuge in safe places" and deployed 6,000 security forces to assist those affected. With the rainwater reaching inland, schools and offices have been shut and the airport is to remain closed until 11 October. The US National Hurricane Centre (NHC) warned that the "rains will likely produce flash and urban flooding, along with possible mudslides."

Guatemala: Second week of protests in favour of President-elect Arévalo

On 11 October, the BBC reported that protests staged by supporters of President-elect Bernardo Arévalo have extended to a second week, leading to increased tensions. The protests follow the suspension of Arévalo's Movimiento Semilla party by Attorney-General Consuelo Porras, after his landslide victory in the presidential election alleging that his party was not properly registered. The protestors are demanding the resignation of Porras who has been accused of multiple corrupt practices. The peaceful protests turned violent on 9 October after the protesters threw stones, broke windows and clashed with the police. Arévalo has described his party's suspension as a "coup d'état" and has been requested by outgoing President Alejandro Giammattei to call on protestors to lift the "illegal" blockades that are putting "Guatemalans' lives at risk."

The US: Secretary of US Army urges Congress to increase funding to aid Israel and Ukraine

On 9 October, the Secretary of the US Army, Christine E Wormuth, underscored the importance of Congress to approve additional funding for the Pentagon's munitions production to meet the requirements of the conflict in Israel and the war in Ukraine. Amid Hamas' attacks and Ukraine's ongoing war with Russia, Wormuth stated that "additional funding from Congress" to increase the "capacity to expand production and then to also pay for the munitions themselves" is a priority. While the army is still in the "early stages" of weighing out extending support to Israel similar to the support given to Ukraine, she remains "confident" that assistance will be provided to Israel.

The US: Delays in finalising speaker for House of Representatives

On 11 October, Republicans nominated Steve Scalise to be the next speaker of the House of Representatives following the removal of Kevin McCarthy on 3 October through a vote of no-confidence. However, the decision faced objections making it unclear when the public floor vote would take place. Scalise won by a vote of 113 to 99 against Congressman Jim Jordan, however, fell short of the 217-vote threshold needed to become the elected speaker. Scalise stated that they “still have work to do” to unify the members and win over Jordan’s supporters. Republicans are hoping to choose a speaker by the end of the week. Republican congressman Patrick McHenry is serving as speaker until a new speaker is elected.

About the authors

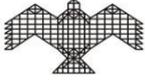
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About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

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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.

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