

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

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

20 April 2023, Vol.4, No.16

## Violence in Sudan and the Battle for Bakhmut

Trisha Roy and Padmashree Anandan



(Smoke rising from Khartoum city after fighting erupted between two rival military factions..  
Image Source: Ömer Erdem, Anadolu Agency)

## Sudan: Intensifying political rivalry and expanding violence

Trisha Roy

### In the news

On 15 April, intense fighting erupted in the capital of Sudan, Khartoum, between two rival military factions, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) under the military leader General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, popularly known as Hemedti.

On 17 April, BBC reported that more than 200 people were killed and thousands injured in the fighting across Sudan. The same day, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres called the situation "catastrophic" and highlighted that further escalation could be devastating for the country and the region.

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), an East African trade bloc, has asked Kenyan President Willan Ruto, South Sudanese President Salva Kiir, and Djibouti President Omar Guelleh to travel to Khartoum in an attempt to broker an immediate ceasefire.

On 18 April, UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to discuss the situation in Sudan after a reported assault on the European Union ambassador to Sudan and an attack on a US embassy convoy. Blinken stated: "Indiscriminate military operations have resulted in significant civilian deaths and injuries, and are recklessly endangering the Sudanese people and diplomats."

### Issues at large

First, tensions between the two rival factions. The SAF and RSF, together, toppled Omar al-Bashir's government in 2019, agreeing to a civilian transition. The RSF, an offshoot of Janjaweed (Arab militias), was formed by al-Bashir to take down the Darfur rebellion in 2003. Both the army and the RSF fought against the Darfur rebels. However, tensions between the two had been escalating for the past few months after both sides clashed over the military leadership upon merging RSF with the army as part of the agreed civilian transition. The roots of the current crisis trace back to al-Bashir's deliberately pitting both security forces against each other.

Second, the role of regional actors and their differences. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, also a part of the "Quad" alongside the US and the UK, view this conflict as an opportunity to push back the Muslim Brotherhood, which they believe retains a strong influence over the Sudanese army. However, Abu Dhabi backs Hamdan Dagalo. Egypt, which has the closest ties with Sudan, sees less of a threat in the Muslim Brotherhood than in a democratic transition in an adjacent country.

Third, the concerns of international actors. The US aims for a more stable and secure Sudan which is no longer subjected to economic sanctions. Russia, which has recently begun to establish a relationship with Hemedti, is set to finalize an agreement with Sudan to set up a military base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea. In exchange, Russia agreed to support Sudan with military equipment.

### In perspective

First, the threat of a possible spillover. Sudan's neighbours, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Chad, have been facing political upheavals themselves. A possible spillover of this conflict to its neighbouring countries can have a devastating impact on the region. Sudan's instability raises the potential risk of the spread of terrorism and civil war. Sudan is strategically positioned next to the Red Sea, a significant route for maritime commerce. A disturbance in the region will therefore likely impact trade routes.

Second, an unstable Sudan would bring issues including terrorism, civil war, economic woes and disruption of maritime. While international involvement by a neutral actor seems generally feasible, it will require the conflicting parties to be open to negotiation in the first place.

---



## Ukraine: Russia claims control of two additional areas in Bakhmut

Padmashree Anandan

### In the news

On 17 April, the Deputy Defence Minister of Ukraine, Hanna Malier, said in view of current developments: "The enemy's offensive in the east continues. Bakhmut and Maryinka remain at the epicentre of hostilities." Heavy artillery shelling in Bakhmut is damaging several buildings in the city.

On 16 April, as part of the "Great Easter Exchange," close to 130 prisoners were sent back to Ukraine from Russia. This was confirmed by the Ukrainian presidential advisor Andriy Yermak. He commented through a Telegram post: "The lives of our people are the highest value for us." Meanwhile, the founder of Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, released a video informing the detainees that they will be returned to Ukrainian forces.

On 15 April, the UK Defence Intelligence observed that Ukraine was forced to partly withdraw from Bakhmut after a "renewed assault" by Russia. Meanwhile, Russia accuses Ukraine of purposefully destroying the infrastructure during its withdrawal to slow down the movement of the Russian forces. Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces denied claims that the Wagner Group captured 80 per cent of the city.

On 15 April, Russia's Ministry of Defence reported on the Wagner Group's progress in capturing two more areas in Bakhmut. It stated: "Wagner assault units have successfully advanced, capturing two districts on the northern and southern outskirts of the city."

On 14 April, the Ukrainian forces reported on intense artillery attacks during the past "48 hours" in Bakhmut. The UK Ministry of Defence confirmed the same and disclosed the possibility of fresh attacks in Bakhmut as a result of "improved cooperation" between Russia's Ministry of Defence and the Wagner Group. According to the ministry, Russia's airborne forces (VDV) had replaced Wagner Group units in northern and southern zones.

### Issues at large

First, Ukraine's reality check in Bakhmut. The Ukrainian forces have been able to withstand the long war against Russia in Bakhmut at the cost of a high death toll of nearly 20,000. According to NATO, for each Ukrainian, five Russian soldiers had been killed during the fight for Bakhmut. For Ukraine, preventing Russia from expanding its frontlines has been the key concern while preparing for subsequent fights in Kramatorsk and Sloviansk. Largely due to a lag in military support from the West, the fight for Bakhmut does not appear to be in Ukraine's favour.

Although it secured the Western Bakhmut during early 2023, since March, the combined attacks by the Wagner Group and the Russian special forces have forced it to pull out from Bakhmut.

Second, the Wagner Group's strategy. The Wagner Group focussed on the circling, and attacking along the northern and southern directions of Bakhmut with the support of the Russian forces. It had a disagreement with the Russian Ministry of Defence in March over the

transfer of military equipment. However, it was later resolved, owing to the group's tactical and flexible approach, which included recruiting prisoners and using the available weaponry. It helped Russia in creating a buffer to mobilize and train additional recruits, resulting in engaging its special forces during the fight in Avdiivka and Sloviansk, pressurizing Ukraine and sealing Bakhmut.

Third, the failure of a political process. Currently, more than 2,000 prisoners have been exchanged between Ukraine and Russia. The nature of these exchanges was at a bilateral level; however, other EU and non-EU countries, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have assisted only in a few exchanges. Besides, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other UN bodies were active only in transferring people within Ukraine to safer places. The US, EU member states and multiple international organizations have condemned Russia's forced deportation.

#### In perspective

First, the long war has cost both Ukraine and Russia. Winning Bakhmut does not pose a direct threat to Ukraine. However, it provides an on-ground advantage for Russia to get access to Sloviansk and Kramatorsk. The success of this battle depends on two factors: How long Ukraine or Russia will take to recover from the losses to go forward for the next battle and which support both countries will receive.

Second, the focus of international organizations is yet to shift away from accusations against Russia and towards the prisoners and deported civilians. Mediation is yet to take place, especially over prisoner exchange. On the other hand, the US and the EU countries have been steel headed in providing military, economic, and humanitarian aid. This may have led to the failure to establish a process or dialogue to carry out the prisoner exchange. The missed focus has slowed the exchange, adding pressure on Ukraine to gather more human resources.

---



## 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

##### **South Korea: President Yoon Suk Yeol hints on expanding support to Ukraine beyond humanitarian assistance**

On 19 April, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol hinted on expanding its support to Ukraine beyond humanitarian assistance if there is a large-scale civilian attack. In an interview with Reuters ahead of his visit to the US, he discussed possible ways to help defend Ukraine similar to how they received assistance during the 1950-53 Korean War. He stated: "If there is a situation the international community cannot condone, such as any large-scale attack on civilians, massacre or serious violation of the laws of war, it might be difficult for us to insist only on humanitarian or financial support." Russia's spokesperson Dmitry Peskov expressed dissatisfaction over the announcement stating: "Unfortunately, Seoul has taken a rather unfriendly position in this whole story."

##### **North Korea: Kim Jong Un announces first spy satellite**

On 19 April, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un announced the launch of their first spy satellite as they face impending threats from both the US and South Korea. North Korea aims to advance its surveillance and reconnaissance technology to strike targets. The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), the state news agency of North Korea, reported that Kim has ordered the timely launching of the satellites and an increase of reconnaissance satellites production.

##### **Taiwan: Contract with the US for 400 Harpoon anti-ship missiles**

On 17 April, Bloomberg reported that Taiwan will buy 400 US-sourced land-launched Harpoon missiles as they face rising Chinese aggression in the Taiwan Strait. In April, the Pentagon announced a USD 1.17 billion contract for 400 anti-ship missiles without mentioning the recipient. US Army Lieutenant Colonel Martin Meiners, a Pentagon spokesperson said: "The United States makes available to Taiwan defence articles and services necessary to enable it to maintain a sufficient self-defence capability." Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence spokesperson Sun Li Fang expressed their confidence in concluding the contract.

#### South Asia

##### **China: Chinese national in Pakistan objects to blasphemy charges and claims false accusation**

On 18 April, a Chinese national detained allegedly for committing blasphemy said that he never made any comments and that he was being arrested over false accusations. He was accused after commenting that precious time was being wasted on prayers. He said to the Joint Investigation team: "I can't even contemplate offending sentiments of Pakistanis and Muslims but whatever I have been facing here is nothing but a lie." The mob of protestors stormed the place after information spread. Chinese foreign ministry stated that they are verifying the situation and added: "The Chinese government has always required overseas Chinese citizens to abide by the laws and regulations of the host country and respect local customs, and that if this issue does involve a Chinese citizen, the embassy will provide



consular protection and assistance within the scope of its duties."

### **Pakistan: World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook April 2023 reports on country's economic stress**

On 15 April, Business Recorder reported on the "Macro Poverty Outlook for Pakistan: April 2023" by the World Bank. They estimated a decline in GDP per capita income to USD 1,399.1 in 2022-2023 from USD 1,613.8 in 2021-2022. The per capita growth is expected to be -1.5 per cent in 2022-2023, a fall from 4.2 per cent in 2021-2022. This year, the unemployment rate could reach 10.2 per cent compared to 10.1 per cent in 2021-2022. The lower middle income might see a rise of 37.2 per cent while the gross investment in the country is set to decline to 106 per cent.

### **India: Sri Lankan economic crisis refugees now at 227**

On 19 April, five Sri Lankans arrived in Rameshwaram. The family had boarded a boat in Thalaimannar and arrived in Arichalmunai and were rescued by the Rameshwaram marine police. So far, 227 Sri Lankans have arrived illegally in India after the economic crisis hit the country. They have been lodged in the Sri Lankan Rehabilitation Centre in Tamil Nadu.

### **Nepal: Air pollution due to wildfires**

On 16 April, the Air Quality Index of Kathmandu reached 216, making the city one of the most polluted globally. Air pollution is a result of the forest fires that have been reported across the country. More than half of the Nepalese forests are ablaze due to dry and hot weather conditions. Citizens have reported health issues due to air pollution.

### **Bangladesh: Heatwave across the country, Dhaka records second highest-ever temperature**

On 14 April, Dhaka recorded its second-highest-ever temperature of 40.2 degree Celsius. The heatwave has persisted for the past two weeks. The Bangladesh Meteorological Organisation (BMO) said that there will be an increase in temperature in the coming days. The dry and hot weather has resulted in increasing load on the power supply of the country affecting its citizens during the festival season.

### **Central Asia, The Middle East, and Africa**

#### **Syria: US strikes kill IS leader**

On 17 April, US Central Command (US-CENTCOM) carried out a helicopter raid and killed Abd-al-Hadi Mahmud al-Haji Ali, a senior leader of the Islamic State in Syria. CENTCOM said that it carried out a "unilateral raid" and described the target as a "leader and operational planner responsible for planning terror attacks in the Middle East and Europe." The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said that the operation was carried out in al-Suwaydah, near Syria's border with Turkey.

#### **Yemen: Prisoner exchange between Houthis and government**

On 16 April, Houthis and the internationally recognized government completed the three-day prisoner exchange exercise, releasing 869 detainees. The International Red Cross said that the exchange was based on an agreement achieved in Switzerland the previous month. Among the detainees was one woman who was arrested by government forces five years ago for allegedly planning and executing blasts targeting officials. She was freed in exchange for the four journalists who were sentenced to death by the Houthis.



### **Burkina Faso: At least 42 people including ten soldiers killed in two jihadist attacks**

On 17 April, Africanews reported that at least ten soldiers and 32 civilian auxiliaries were killed in two jihadist attacks in the northern region of Aorema. The attacks happened after the government declared a "general mobilization" against the escalating jihadist violence on 13 April. Apart from the declaration, the military government announced to "give the state all the necessary means" to deal with the jihadist attacks in the country. It stated that those measures will provide in particular "the right to request people, goods and services and the right to call for defence employment, individually or collectively."

### **Democratic Republic of Congo: Rebels refuses to disarm and demobilize**

On 14 April, M23 rebels in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo said that they will not disarm or demobilize until a direct political dialogue with the government is initiated. A spokesperson from the rebel group, Lawrence Kanyuka, stated that the Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi refused to hold negotiations with the rebels. Previously, Tshisekedi said that under an agreement negotiated by regional states, the M23 rebels are expected to demobilize.

### **Nigeria: At least 33 people killed in gunmen attack**

On 17 April, Africanews reported that at least 33 people were killed following a gunmen attack in the village of Runji in the northwest of Nigeria. The State Commissioner of Security, Samuel Aruwan, said: "Troops had a fierce encounter with the attackers and are still in the general area." No group has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, bandits who are accused of recurring attacks and kidnappings are suspected to be behind the attack.

## Europe and the Americas

### **The UK: Oil spills in North Sea waters pose a threat to marine life**

On 14 April, according to exclusive data obtained by BBC News, regular oil spills in UK waters over the past five years have resulted in thousands of tons of pollution, endangering marine life. Activists claim that the data reveals that some spills have impacted areas designated to safeguard wildlife, such as porpoises and orcas, and that 40 per cent of monitored releases were in breach of permits. The analysis of the data shows that from 2017 to 2022, approximately 22,000 metric tons of oil were discharged into UK waters, equivalent to 164,000 barrels. Uplift, an energy campaigning group that aims to transition from oil and gas to green energy, revealed that Dana, Repsol Sinopec, CNR, Shell, and Apache were the companies that spilled the most oil. The findings also revealed that 58 per cent of releases were allowed under government permits, threatening UK's international leadership on marine conservation, as the UK has made major international commitments to protect UK and global oceans.

### **The UK: Rishi Sunak to be investigated on declaration of interest**

On 17 April, BBC reported on the upcoming investigation on the UK Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. According to the report, the investigation will be carried out under paragraph six of the MPs code of conduct. It is aimed to find if his "declaration of interest was open and frank." Regarding the childcare business issue over the shares held by his wife in the child care agency, the shares are owned by Rishi Sunak's wife. The investigation body will analyze if any rule has been breached after the enquiry. If found breached, it may lead to the suspension from the "House of Commons." Sunak stated that his wife's interest was already declared and will ensure to take steps to prevent "any potential conflict of interest."



### **Czech Republic: Protestors gather for second time demanding for the resignation of the government**

On 16 April, Associated Press reported on a rally in Prague by thousands of people protesting against inflation. They demanded the resignation of the Together coalition government under Prime Minister Petr Fiala. Earlier a similar rally took place on 11 March organized by a newly established political party that uses a "against the poverty" slogan. The protestors blamed the EU and the Czech government for the inflation and called for its resignation.

### **Europe: Sweden to hold joint military exercise with NATO allies ahead for a possible attack in future**

On 17 April, Sweden's Armed Forces announced its launch of the largest military exercise in its history called "Aurora 23." The exercise will include soldiers from the US, the UK, France, Germany and Nordic countries. It is aimed to train for a possible armed attack on Sweden. According to the Armed Forces: "Together with military units from our partner countries we build security and, concurrently, reinforce the Swedish operational capability." During the exercise, uniformed soldiers and land vehicles will conduct training around the base and airports.

### **The US: Shooting in Alabama kills four, several injured**

On 15 April, four people were killed and 28 were severely injured during a teenager's birthday party in Alabama. Following the incident, President Joe Biden stated: "What has our nation come to when children cannot attend a birthday party without fear?" The Alabama police detained three suspects and reassured that there was no threat to the community. So far, the US has witnessed 160 reported mass gun shootings in 2023.

### **Ukraine: Kyiv wants more than a billion dollars from the sale of Shell's assets in Russia**

On 18 April, Politico reported that Oleg Ustenko, an economic adviser to Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky, has asked oil giant Shell to donate the proceeds from the sale of its Russian assets to Ukraine in a letter to Shell CEO, Wael Sawan. He demanded the firm to donate the proceeds from a supposedly upcoming sale of its stake in a Siberian oil and gas project to Kiev's coffers. Ustenko added that there is an "overwhelming" moral case for handing the cash over to his government. In February 2022, Shell pulled out of the Russian market in retaliation to the Ukraine War, announcing that it would write off up to USD five billion of its assets in the country. It remains unclear, however, if Shell will get the proceedings of this transaction.

### **The US: Minneapolis becomes the first US state to let mosques broadcast Islamic call five times a day**

On 13 April, the Minneapolis City Council unanimously agreed to amend the city's noise ordinance, which will let Mosques broadcast the call for 'adhan' five times a day. Executive director of the Minnesota chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations expressed faith in the constitution and extended his confidence that the US, a nation founded on the freedom of religion, now makes good on its promise. Minneapolis has had a flourishing population of East African immigrants since at least the 1990s, and there are a significant number of mosques in the city.



### **The US: Supreme Court temporarily halts ban on abortion pills**

On 14 April, the US Supreme Court ordered a temporary block on the restrictions on access to the popular abortion pill, Mifepristone, after a court in Texas restricted its distribution due to safety and side effects as claimed by anti-abortion groups in their appeals. The abortion pill is still accessible in 17 states of the USA while a judgement by a Texas court had put the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) in a fix to reconsider doing the approval for the pill. The ban is temporary and the FDA will have to struggle with judicial oversight in approval of abortion pills and various other drugs.

### **Mexico: Top court strikes down congressional reform for stronger military oversight**

On 18 April, Mexico's Supreme Court ruled a presidential reform aiming to transfer control from the civilian-led National Guard towards the army to be unconstitutional. The reform gave the army operational, financial and administrative control of the National Guard which is currently under control of the security ministry. Since assuming office as president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been close to the military. During his term, the military has become increasingly influential, delivering major infrastructure projects and being put in charge of monitoring ports and airports.

---

### **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.

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

13 April 2023, Vol.4, No.15

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

Mohaimen Khan and Sourina Bej



(Israeli police detaining Palestinian worshippers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Image Source: AP Mahmood Han)

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

16 March 2023, Vol.4, No.11

## Protests in Senegal, Imran Khan's arrest attempt and Bank distress across the US and Europe

Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, and Ankit Singh



(Senegal opposition supporters protesting against the government in capital Dakar. Image Source: AFP)

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

23 March 2023, Vol.4, No.12

## Sri Lanka's IMF deal and Violence in Haiti

Chirshari de Alwis Gunasekare and Apoorva Sudhakar



(The aid package arrives as the island nation faces its greatest economic crisis in 70 years. Image Source: Jhara S Kodikara, AFP)

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

6 April 2023, Vol.4, No.13 & 14

## Protests in Israel, Elections in Finland, and Kidnapping in Nigeria

Rashmi Ramesh, Padmashree Anandan and Anu Maria Joseph

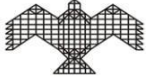


(Israelis protesting against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing government's plan for judicial overhaul in Tel Aviv. Image Source: Ronen Zvulun, Reuters)



### 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.