

The World This Week #227, Vol. 5, No. 31

Trump indictment, Moscow Conference and the Iran-US Prisoner Exchange deal

Ankit Singh, Rishika Yadav and Rohini Reenum



(Image Source: Reuters)

Trump is indicted yet again: What next for politics in the US?

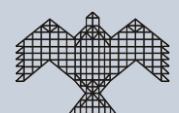
Ankit Singh

What happened?

On 14 August, Donald Trump with 18 of his associates in the then government was indicted on state racketeering and conspiracy charges in efforts to reverse election results in Georgia by grand jury of the Georgia state. The indictment mentioned that Trump and his co-defendants knowingly and wilfully joined a conspiracy to unlawfully change the outcome of the election in favour of Trump.

Trump's legal team pointing to the expansive racketeering law of Georgia said: "A proposed indictment should only be in the hands of the district attorney's office. Yet it somehow made its way to the clerk's office and was assigned a case number and a judge before the grand jury even deliberated. This is emblematic of the pervasive and glaring constitutional violations."

Kevin McCarthy, the speaker of the US House, said: "Now a radical [district attorney] in Georgia is following Biden's lead by attacking President Trump and using it to fundraise her political career. Americans see through this desperate sham."



What is the background?

First, multiple cases against Trump. This indictment is the fourth indictment in order, the other being, Classified documents case in Florida in which Trump pleaded not guilty; the trial is scheduled for May 2024, the Hush-money case in New York in which Trump pleaded not guilty; the trial is scheduled for March 2024, 6 January case in Washington in which Trump pleaded not guilty, next hearing on 28 August. One defamation lawsuit by E Jean Carroll in New York is expected to be tried in January 2024, while Jean Carroll has been awarded USD 5 million in a separate defamation lawsuit.

Second, Trump's responses to the juridical indictments and counter-responses. Trump has shown his intent to contest for the presidency again and mentioned that such indictments are efforts to damage his chances of being elected for a second term. He has maintained that Justice Department is being weaponised, he is seen as the greatest threat by the Democrats and he has rallied support from other Republicans. After he got indicted in a classified documents case, he said: "I promise you this: If you put me back in the White House, their reign will be over and America will be a free nation once again." His Republican opponents have chosen to say nothing publicly while former runner for President, Hillary Clinton commented that it was a terrible moment for democracy in America.

Third, the undermining of institutions by Trump. Trump has alleged that there was voter fraud in Georgia, and he has been quoted in media in asking the secretary of Georgia to find enough votes for him. It is not just the federal government but state government institutions that are exercising their writ to bring Trump to accountability as he used his influence to undermine migration rights, abortion rights and gender-inclusive policies. He has been using his popularity and mass support to question US Judicial system. He has other-ised not just Republicans but the entire administration to legitimize himself.

What does it mean?

First, Trump is cornered, republicans maybe not. Trump has four indictments against him now and he is likely to be arrested. He may even face disqualification from contesting for presidential elections again. However, this can open up capturing of voters by other Republican front runners. Media reports have indicated that with every indictment, the Republican elite has poured more money into electoral campaigns like De Santis, Mike Pence and Nikki Hailey. The cornering of the former president will leave a bitterly politically divided US.

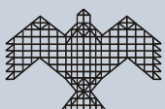
Second, Biden and his administration will continue looking for a different narrative. The silence from democrats signals that they are betting on Bidenomics, which is based on targeting inflation, transition to renewables and more affordable healthcare. The Republicans have relied on campaigning on political issues while Democrats would continue to vouch for economic recovery and increased employment for Americans.

Moscow conference on international security

Rishika Yadav

What happened?

On 15 August, Russia's President Vladimir Putin addressed the 11th Moscow Conference on International Security, attributing global security challenges to Western geopolitical recklessness and neocolonialism. It was held at Patriot Military Park in the Kubinka suburb of Moscow from 12 August to 16 August. Putin highlighted the simmering tensions



worldwide and emphasized that these issues primarily arise from the west's selfish actions and geopolitical decisions. According to Putin: "Hotbeds of tensions are simmering" in various parts of the globe. "And although each has its own unique security challenges, all of them effectively originate from the west's geopolitical recklessness and selfish, neocolonial actions."

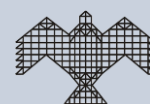
This significant event, themed "Realities of Global Security in a Multipolar World," witnessed a dynamic platform for 800 delegates across 76 countries and representatives of eight international organizations, to engage in comprehensive discussions. With a focus on critical regions and defence collaboration, the conference's plenary sessions delved into themes ranging from the Middle East and the African Continent to the Asia-Pacific region. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation quoted Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, "The very possibility of the dominance of one country or even a group of states is disappearing into oblivion. When EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell tries to present Europe as a blooming "garden," with nothing but a wild "jungle" around it that needs to be improved to become "civilized," this only shows once again that this mentality, which allowed the West to rule the world for centuries, has led to a dead end."

What is the background?

First, background to the conference. Initiated by the Russian Ministry of Defence, this annual conference offers a platform for open exchanges on critical global and regional security matters. In May 2012, the inaugural event convened, centering on security dynamics in Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Additionally, it scrutinized the roles of NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in upholding stability. The 1943 Moscow Conference, wherein the USA, UK, USSR, and China deliberated the post-war global arrangement and the formation of the UN, served as a source of inspiration for the conference's inception. The conference has evolved into a vital forum that nurtures collaborative approaches to multifaceted security challenges. Over time, its scope expanded to encompass diverse subjects like cyber threats, terrorism, arms control, and military diplomacy.

Second, Putin's strategic security discourse. Organizing the conference in the middle of the Ukraine war, reflects Putin's strategic timing to amplify Russia's perspective on global security. Amid tensions and conflicts, Putin claims to assert a multipolar world order, counter Western influence, and garner support for his stance on Ukraine. The conference tacitly showcased the West's perceived geopolitical recklessness, neocolonialism, and interference, aligning with Putin's goal to challenge Western dominance. Notably, by highlighting Ukraine's conflict and emphasizing China's Non-Western partnership, Putin subtly reinforced a narrative of global power diversification. The conference highlighted Russia's broader objective of reshaping international security narratives, fostering cooperation on its terms, and asserting its role in crafting a global security paradigm.

Third, endorsing Russia China's non-aligned security collaboration. China's engagement at the conference underscores its commitment to non-aligned, non-confrontational cooperation with Russia. Chinese State Councilor Li Shangfu's speech emphasized their military partnership as a model that doesn't target any third party. Li said: "The comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era has maintained steady development, as the two countries' military relations have set a model in non-alignment, non-confrontational cooperation that does not target any third party." Amid western media scrutiny, China-Russia



cooperation challenges the western led world order perception. In the context of Ukraine, China-Russia exchanges promote peace talks, showcasing China's measured stance.

What does it mean?

First, the strategic security discourse of Russia is not reducing anytime soon. The forum became a platform for Russia to assert its viewpoint on the Ukraine conflict. China's involvement in the conference adds further significance by reinforcing the narrative of non-Western perspectives on global conflicts. The conference shares objectives with forums like the recent Shangri-La Dialogue, from 02 June to 04 June. While the Shangri-La Dialogue gathers various stakeholders, including Western powers, to address security concerns, the Moscow Conference distinctively emphasized non-western perspectives and it aims to provide a counter-narrative to Western-dominated security discourse.

Second, rising collaboration among non-western countries. The participation of high-level delegates from countries like India, China, and Turkey underscores the rising relevance of the conference, particularly in Central Asia, Eurasia, Africa, and the Global South. Their engagement signifies the conference's growing importance as a platform for non-western countries to address global security concerns and advocate for a multipolar world order. With discussions encompassing regions crucial to their interests, these powerful countries recognize the conference's potential to shape security dynamics beyond traditional western-centric narratives, strengthening collaboration among diverse countries and emphasizing the significance of their perspectives in shaping the evolving global security landscape.

Explainer: The Iran-US Prisoner Exchange Deal

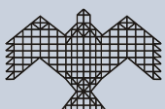
Rohini Reenum

Background

Details of a deal between US and Iran emerged last week about a US-Iran prisoner swap arrangement when the New York Times and several other media outlets started reporting on it. It started debates and discussions once again one of the most openly hostile rivalries in the international relations and its dynamics. The historically turbulent relationship has worsened since the former US President, Donald Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal in 2018. Suspicions about the Iranian nuclear program has further complicated the relationship. It comes as no surprise then that the deal was brokered over a period of two years of quiet negotiations which were mediated by Oman, Qatar and Switzerland with the governments of UAE and Iraq playing supporting roles as intermediaries in the discussions.

What is the Deal?

On 10 August, the New York Times newspaper reported that the US and Iran have reached an agreement to secure the release of five American detained in Iran in exchange for release of several jailed Iranians and an eventual access to USD 6 billion meant for Iranian oil payments stuck in South Korea after U.S sanctions blocked the money. However, as part of the deal, this money will not directly be released to Iran but transferred into an account in the Central bank of Qatar. Iran can only use this fund to pay for humanitarian purchases of food and medicine where the payment will be made on its behalf by the bank. Further the US Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, also stated that the funds would be in “restricted accounts” that can be accessed only for “humanitarian purposes.”



What has Iran agreed to?

Iran has agreed to release five US detainees, namely Siamak Namazi, Emad Sharghi and Morad Tahbaz and two others whose names have been withheld by their families. They had all been jailed on unsubstantiated charges of spying, the News York Times reported. In order to facilitate the same, three named prisoners and one other were transferred from the Evin Prison to a hotel in Tehran where they will be held for several weeks before being allowed to board a plane. A fifth unnamed woman had been released into house arrest earlier.

What has the US agreed to?

According to New York Times, Biden administration officials declined to comment or to confirm details about what Iran will get in return. However, Iran's deputy foreign minister and chief nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani stated that the United States and Iran had reached a deal for a prisoner exchange and the release of Iran's billions of dollars of assets. He has also stated that Iran had received the "commitments necessary" from the United States that it would honor the deal. Iran's state news agency, IRNA, reported that five Iranians would be released from American prisons in exchange for the five Americans released by Iran.

The Response so far:

In Iran:

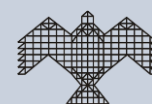
The Aljazeera reported that the characterization of the deal in Iran is substantially different. It quoted Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs that said: "Process of releasing several billion dollars of Iranian assets which had been illegally frozen by the United States in South Korea has begun", as reported by the IRNA news agency. The statement further stated that: "Iran will determine how to use these assets, and they will be consumed to meet different needs of the country as determined by the related authorities."

In the U.S:

While the Democrats have argued that the concessions are a necessary step to rescue Americans unjustly detained, the Republicans have criticized the deal on two fronts: the first criticism relates to the deal incentivizing hostage taking for ransom and the second relates to fears of the funds released being diverted for use in the nuclear program or other defence purposes not in the interest of the United States. For example, Senator Tom Cotton accused Biden of a "craven act of appeasement" that would "embolden" Iranian leaders, the Aljazeera reported.

In Qatar:

The Gulf Times quoted Dr Majed bin Mohammed al-Ansari, advisor to the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Official Spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who stated that Qatar, as a reliable international mediator, has played a major and effective role in achieving consensus between the two sides, and continues its efforts in various files, hoping that this deal will lead to greater understandings related to the Iranian nuclear file, which Qatar asserts as necessary for the security of the region in general.



Also in the news...

Regional Round-ups

East and Southeast Asia This Week

China: Evergrande files for Bankruptcy in the US

On 17 August, Chinese property conglomerate Evergrande filed for Bankruptcy in the US. The law shields non-US companies that are undergoing restructurings from creditors that hope to sue them or tie up assets in the United States. Evergrande has USD 330 billion of liabilities and another company Country Garden is also considering employing some debt management measures. Filing for bankruptcy will protect Evergrande's assets within US which in turn would help them to negotiate a deal with its creditors. The company last month announced that it lost USD 80 billion over the two years and the flailing Chinese economy have furthered contributed to the issue. The housing bubble crisis have left several ghost properties with unfinished work and has left several individual investors hanging, who took loan to invest in these houses.

China: National Bureau of Statistics suspends release of unemployment data

On 15 August, Chinese National Bureau of Statistics announced that they are suspending the further release of unemployment data. This comes in after there has been a steep decline in youth employment with the unemployment rate between 16-24 years old hitting a record low of 21 per cent. The spokesperson for National Bureau of Statistics Fu Linghui expressed that their data required to be "further improved and optimized." The NBS stated that it aims to conduct "in-depth research" to restructure their methodology. The unemployment crisis has further exasperated after Covid and the economic slump where NBS reported of a slow down in consumer spending, production and investment.

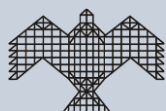
Vietnam: Vietnam and Israel strengthen economic ties for business growth

On 17 August, according to Viet Nam News, the Vietnam-Israel business forum highlighted potential for increased economic collaboration. Despite global challenges, the two countries have maintained steady trade growth, with Israel being Vietnam's fifth-largest trade partner and a significant importer. Mutual interests in technology, agriculture, and investment were discussed, with both nations having signed the Vietnam-Israel Free Trade Agreement (VIFTA) in July. The forum emphasized Vietnam's support for Israeli investment, aiming to boost bilateral trade to USD three billion. Analysts believe this strengthened relationship will drive economic advancement and technological exchange. The deepening economic ties between Vietnam and Israel underscore their commitment to mutual growth and technological exchange, creating opportunities in various sectors.

South Asia This Week

India: Nineteenth round of Corps Commander-level talks with China

On 14 August, India and China held the 19th round of Corps Commander-level talks at LAC. The talks took place at Chushulon the Indian side to discuss the disengagement of the ongoing stand-off in eastern Ladakh. The Indian MEA in a press release said: "The two sides had a positive, constructive and in-depth discussion on the resolution of the remaining issues along the LAC in the Western Sector. In line with the guidance provided by the leadership, they exchanged views in an open and forward-looking manner." The talks were started in 2020 and were successful in disengagement from five friction points- Galwan, north, and south of Pangong Tso, and the two patrolling points at the Gogra-Hot Springs area.



Sri Lanka: Prime Minister's Visits China

On 16 August, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena met with the Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi on the sidelines of the China-South Asia Exhibition in Kunming. Sri Lanka's Prime Minister said that Mr Wang "vowed that China will help Sri Lanka improve its capacity for independent development, get rid of the poverty trap and the trap of non-development, accelerate its industrialisation process and agricultural modernisation." The meeting was unclear on whether China and Sri Lanka have officially agreed on debt treatment as Sri Lanka will have its first review meeting next month for the Extended Fund Facility by IMF.

Middle East and Africa This Week

South Africa: Alliance to defeat African National Congress (ANC)

On 18 August, an alliance of seven South African political parties reached an agreement in an attempt to defeat the ruling African National Congress (ANC) in the 2024 presidential election. According to the Multi-Party Charter for South Africa, if they were elected, they would work together to assign ministry and parliamentary seats. They are also attempting to prevent Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) from gaining power. The accord, brokered by the country's main opposition Democratic Alliance (DA), comes as the country faces a struggling economy, corruption, unemployment and an energy crisis. The Inkatha Freedom Party, Freedom Front Plus, ActionSA, United Independent Movement, Independent SA National Civic Organisation (Isanco) and Spectrum National Party joined the pact.

Europe and the Americas This Week

Latvia: Prime Minister Karins resigns

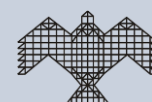
On 14 August, following the split in the coalition government, Latvia's Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš announced to resign. Kariņš New Unity (JV) party which formed a coalition with National Alliance and United List in the 2022 elections will be dissolved due to persisting differences and a new prime minister will be chosen. The clash of interest is due to objections from the National Alliance (NA) and Combined List (AS) on the proposal against Karins to include the Progressive Party (PRO), the Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS). Apart from this, differences also exist in approving policies relating to welfare schemes and economic growth. Karins said: "For any country, there are difficulties when someone tries to hold on to their office."

The US: Trade representative takes dispute on corn imports with Mexico under US-Mexico-Canada Agreement panel

On 17 August, US Trade Representative (USTR) office announced on taking trade dispute between the two countries to a dispute settlement panel under USMCA. The decision came after formal talks failed to resolve the issue. USTR Katherine Tai said: "It is critical that Mexico eliminate its USMCA-inconsistent biotechnology measures so that American farmers can continue to access the Mexican market and use innovative tools to respond to climate and food security challenges." Mexico buys corn worth USD 5 billion on an annual basis. In February 2023, Mexico issued a decree banning GM crops for human health as well as preserving its biodiversity.

About the authors

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About Global Politics:

The course provides an introduction to contemporary world affairs. The primary objective of the course is two – first, to enhance the understanding of contemporary global developments, with an attempt to comprehend the larger picture. Second, to identify trends leading forecasts on contemporary world affairs.

The Course will also invite senior scholars within and outside NIAS – also from within and outside India to provide lectures on contemporary world affairs.

The World This Week



6 February 2021

Biden's new US foreign policy priorities, Russia-EU tensions over Navalny, and China's redline on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan



30 January 2021

The Daniel Pearl case in Pakistan and the new vaccine complications in Europe



23 January 2021

The US returns to the Paris Agreement, and India reengages the region through a Vaccine diplomacy



16 January 2021

North Korea's Party Congress, Houthis as terrorists, and Elections in Uganda



9 January 2021

Disorderly transition in the US, Breakthrough over Qatar, Enrichment in Iran and Arrests in Hong Kong



27 December 2020

The Year of COVID, Protests and Elections



20 December 2020

India-Bangladesh reset and China's Chang'e-5 success



13 December 2020

Morocco recognizes Israel, Maduro consolidates in Venezuela and No-deal Brexit gets real

About TWTW

The World This Week is an academic initiative of the Global Politics course at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), Bangalore. The alert, published every Saturday aims to provide its readers with a ready reckoner of major developments during the week under three heads - what happened, what is the background and what does it mean. The Alert also provides an opportunity for the young scholars at NIAS and its partner institutions to follow and comment on contemporary global developments.

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