

Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

14 October 2021, Vol.2, No.28

ISIS violence in Afghanistan, and Targeted killings in J&K

Abigail Miriam Fernandez and Akriti Sharma



A series of targeted killings in J&K, attacking members of the minority communities. (Image Source: AP-TheHindu)

Afghanistan: Over 50 people killed in ISIS-K suicide bomber attack

In the news

On 8 October, a suicide bomber attacked a Shiite mosque in the northern Afghan city of Kunduz, killing over 50 people and wounding more than 150 others. The Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement carried by the IS-linked Aamaq news agency, the group said that the attacker was an ethnic Uyghur and that the attack targeted both Shiites and the Taliban for their supposed willingness to expel Uyghurs to meet demands from China. Following the attack, the Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah

Mujahid, condemned the attack and vowed retribution. Additionally, the incident also drew in reactions at both national and international levels.

On 12 October, G20 leaders during an extraordinary summit on Afghanistan called for a "laser focus" on counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan, including threats from the ISIS-K. According to the White House: "The leaders discussed the critical need to maintain a laser focus on our enduring counterterrorism efforts, including against threats from ISIS-K (another name for IS-K), and ensuring safe passage for those foreign nationals and Afghan partners with documentation seeking to depart Afghanistan."

Issues at large

First, the increasing attacks by the ISIS-K. Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the ISIS-K has increased their attacks across the country, with most ISIS-K prisoners either released or able to flee from various Afghan prisons. Previously, the group claimed responsibility for a suicide bomber that targeted American evacuation efforts at Kabul's international airport, which left 169 Afghans and 13 US service members dead. Since then, the Taliban has conducted several raids targeting the group's hideouts; however, the recent attacks show that the group is expanding its footprint beyond its stronghold in the east of Afghanistan and is moving closer toward Kabul.

Second, the ISIS consolidation in Afghanistan over the years. In 2013, the US military forces began to recognize the existence of Islamic State-affiliated fighters along the Afghanistan Pakistan border. Initially, the ISIS-K in Afghanistan was comprised of rebel Afghan Taliban commanders, former members of the Tehrik-e-Taliban, and adherents of Central Asian extremist groups. Later in 2015, Islamic State proclaimed the creation of the "Khorasan Province" of its caliphate in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Until recently, its groups capacity was constrained by pressure applied by U. forces, the previous Afghan forces, and, in some areas, the Taliban itself.

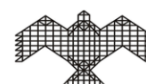
Third, the threat of terrorism and counterterrorism measures. According to the UN's Twelfth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, since the withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan, some 8,000 to 10,000 jihadist fighters from Central Asia, the North Caucasus region of Russia, Pakistan and the Xinjiang region in western China poured into Afghanistan, most were said to be associated with the Taliban or Al Qaeda, which are closely linked, but others were allied with the Islamic State. Given this development, the foreign forces that were engaged in direct counterterrorism measures in Afghanistan, now have to resort to over the horizon counterterrorism measures that is not as effective.

Fourth, the Taliban's struggle. Unlike the previous Afghan government, the Taliban has yet to address the issues of terrorism. As the Taliban government shifts from leading an insurgency to forming a functioning state, deadly attacks such as those carried out by the ISIS-K has become an obstacle for the Taliban in keeping its promises. Additionally, the Taliban claims that "are able to tackle Daesh independently," ruled out the option of cooperation with the United States to contain extremist groups in Afghanistan.

In perspective

First, the obvious threat of ISIS-K. The recent attacks by the ISIK-K do not come as a surprise because there was enough evidence to prove that the group was not defeated. It was no question that the ISIS-K was defeated in Afghanistan, thus the recent attacks carried out by the group do not come by surprise. The resurgence of ISIS-K in Afghanistan proves that the group is consolidating itself as a more militant and unrelenting jihadi group. Thus, attacks by the group are likely to increase.

Second, Taliban's capability to protect Afghanistan from the threat of terrorism. Given the precarious counterterrorism situation in Afghanistan, the Taliban is almost left on its own to address the threats of terrorism and extremism. It is unlikely that the Taliban would also get any substantial external assistance for the same.



India: Targeted killings in Kashmir valley

In the news

On 7 October, a principal belonging to the Sikh community and a Hindu teacher was shot dead in Government Boys' Higher Secondary School in Srinagar.

On 5 October, a Kashmiri pandit businessman was shot dead by the terrorists in Srinagar. The Resistance Front (TRF), believed to be a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has claimed responsibility for the killing. On the same day, a migrant worker was shot dead near Lalbazar in the city, marking the second civilian killing of the day. In the night, a transporter was killed in the Bandipora district. On 2 October, two civilians were shot dead by the terrorists in separate incidents.

On 7 October, former CM Mehbooba Mufti and PDP Chief said: "Disturbing to see the deteriorating situation in Kashmir where a minuscule minority is the latest target." Also, on the same day, the National Conference leader and former CM Omar Abdullah tweeted: "Words of condemnation are not enough for this inhuman act of terror but I pray for the souls of the deceased to rest in peace,"

On 10 October, a militant was killed by the security forces who was behind the civilian killings in two separate incidents.

On 11 October, the National Human Rights Commission, issued notices to the Chief Secretary and the DGP of the Union Territory to respond within four days regarding the killings.

Issues at large

First, the recent trend in killings. In 2021, 28 civilians and 22 security personnels were killed so far, according to a police data quoted by The Hindu. The civilian killings have surpassed that of the security personnel. In the last six years, the killing of the security personnel was more than the civilians. This year shows, so far, there is a reversal to that trend.

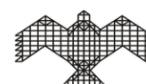
Second, the recent hike in violence. After the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019, there was a temporary pause on the violence in the valley due to a large number of security forces. The recent hike in violence should hint at a new trend.

Third, the rise in targeted killings. In 2020, in Bandipora, a local government leader was killed, in an attempt to instill fear amongst the local leaders who were trying to bring back political activity in the valley. The terrorists have continued to attack the symbols of the government. Panchayat leaders, teachers and civilians have been targeted since then. Any attempt to revive political activity at the grassroot level often results in outrageous bloodshed.

In perspective

First, the inability of the security forces and civil administration to prevent the violence. The targeted killings have been increasing, and the security forces and the government have not been able to prevent them.

Second, the need to engage with the stakeholders. To address terrorism in the valley, the government needs to engage with civil society, local representatives and political leaders to ensure political and communal harmony. The government has been following a state-centric approach which needs to be reworked.



Also, from around the world

By Apoorva Sudhakar and Abigail Miriam Fernandez

Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

China: India has unreasonable and unrealistic demands to resolve LAC issue, says Beijing

On 10 October, China and India held the 13th round of the Corps Commander level meeting to discuss the tensions on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in East Ladakh. On 11 October, the spokesperson for the Western Theater Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) said that India "should cherish the hard-won situation in China-India border areas" and not "misjudge" the situation. Similarly, the Foreign Ministry spokesperson said India had complicated the negotiations by putting forward "unreasonable and unrealistic demands."

Indonesia: Rights group calls for end to death penalty

On 12 October, The Jakarta Post reported on a rights group's demand to end death penalty from Indonesia's legal system, maintaining that there is no evidence that such punishment would prevent people from committing a crime. Data compiled by the rights group, Imparsial, between March 2020 and September 2021 shows that 129 convicts faced capital punishment; the group believed that there could also be a high chance of wrongful conviction and said it could jeopardize the due process of law.

Singapore: Rights organisations demand withdrawal of Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Bill

On 13 October, eleven international organizations, including the Human Rights Watch, called on the Singapore government to withdraw the Foreign Interference (Countermeasures) Bill (FICA). The organizations maintained that FICA was a "rights-abusing law, which threatens those not frightened into self-censoring with having their content blocked and being labelled foreign agents." Outlining that the law will enable the Minister for Home Affairs to "prevent, detect, and disrupt foreign interference in... domestic politics," the organizations said it will let the "executive overreach into what it deems permissible as civic discussion and public debate." The FICA was passed by the Parliament on 4 October.

Myanmar: European Parliament supports NUG; ousted President testifies against military takeover; Naypyitaw sees three explosions in a week

On 7 October, the European Parliament passed a resolution to support the National Unity Government (NUG) and the parliamentary Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CPRH), being the first international body to do so. The resolution garnered 647 votes in favour and 31 abstentions. In another development, on 12 October, ousted President U Win Myint testified that he was threatened by two military generals on 1 February - the day of the coup - to resign. This comes amid the military leader General Min Aung Hlaing's efforts to convince the international community that there was no "coup" and that the military takeover was constitutional. In yet another development, the country's capital, Naypyitaw, witnessed three explosions within a week, including one targeting the Myanmar Police Force's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on 12 October; five policemen were hurt in the blast. The other

blasts targeted the Directorate of Procurement of the Commander-in-Chief of Defense Services (Army) and the Immigration Department on 7 October.

Peace and Conflict from South Asia

India: Supreme Court asks UP government to file a status report regarding FIR on Lakhimpur Kheri violence

On 8 October, the Supreme Court directed the Uttar Pradesh government to file a status report in 24 hours identifying the accused in the First Information Report (FIR) registered on the Lakhimpur Kheri violence and whether they have been arrested or not. Later, on 9 October, the Supreme Court said the Uttar Pradesh government's resolve to fairly investigate the Lakhimpur Kheri violence and deaths, including allegations of murder against a Union Minister's son, seemed just all talk and no action. Chief Justice of India (CJI) N V Ramana said: "Your seriousness is only in words and not in your actions."

India-China: 13th round of Corps Commander-level concludes with a stalemate

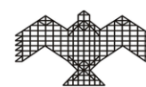
On 10 October, India and China failed to make any headway in resolving the issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh at the 13th round of Corps Commander-level held at the Chushul-Moldo border. Following the meeting, the Indian Army said, "During the meeting, the Indian side, therefore, made constructive suggestions for resolving the remaining areas but the Chinese side was not agreeable and also could not provide any forward-looking proposals. The meeting thus did not result in resolution of the remaining areas."

Bangladesh: Government and UN sign deal to aid Rohingya relocated to island

On 9 October, Bangladesh and the United Nations (UN) signed an agreement to work together to help Rohingya refugees in Bhasan Char, where thousands have been relocated from camps near the Myanmar border. The agreement provides for close cooperation between the government and the UN on services and activities to benefit the island's residents. Following the agreement, authorities stated that 81,000 refugees would be relocated to the island in the next three months. In a statement, the UN high commissioner for refugees said the agreement was a further expression of Bangladesh's "generosity and support toward the Rohingya population until they can return safely and sustainably to Myanmar."

Pakistan: Earthquake of magnitude 5.9 kills 21 in Balochistan

On 7 October, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) reported that an earthquake of magnitude 5.9 struck parts of Balochistan killing around 21 people and injuring over 300 others. According to the National Seismic Monitoring Centre, the earthquake was centred near the province's Harnai district and had a depth of 15 kilometres, with tremors, felt in Quetta, Sibbi, Pishin, Muslim Bagh, Ziarat, Qila Abdullah, Sanjavi, Zhob and Chaman. On 8 October, a massive relief operation was launched by the army and Frontier Corps (FC) troops with Provincial Disaster Management Authority and local administration officials completed rescue operations in the earthquake-hit areas of Harnai district.



Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Armenia-Azerbaijan: Minsk Group Co-chairs ready to facilitate meeting between Pashinian and Aliyev

On 8 October, co-chairs of the Minsk Group, from the United States, France and Russia, released a statement observing the willingness of Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders to seek a settlement to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The statement read: "The co-chairs look forward to engaging the sides on modalities and details of such a meeting and reiterate their willingness to visit the region in the near future to discuss next steps in the process." The development comes after Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev earlier said he was willing to meet Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian.

Syria-Turkey: Ankara determined to "do what is necessary for its security"

On 13 October, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu cited a rise in cross-border attacks by the Syrian Kurdish YPG, and said Turkey will "do what is necessary for its security." Cavusoglu accused the United States and Russia for the presence of the YPG, claiming that the two countries failed to ensure the militia's withdrawal from the border area. The development comes after Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, on 11 October, said a YPG attack resulting in the death of two Turkish police was the "final straw" for Turkey to take action against the threat.

Yemen: Six killed in bomb attack in Aden; Arab coalition launches series of airstrikes in Marib

On 10 October, six people were killed and at least seven injured in a bomb attack targeting the Governor's convoy in Aden; according to a state media report, the governor and the agriculture minister survived what it called a "terrorist assassination attempt." The deceased include the Governor's press secretary, photographer, and the head of his security detail and others. In another development, the Arab coalition has launched airstrikes to end a 20-day siege of Marib's Al-Abedia district by the Houthis; on 11 October, the coalition reportedly claimed that 400 Houthis had been killed in the airstrikes.

Palestine: Gaza Strip faces drinking water crisis

On 12 October, Al Jazeera reported on the deteriorating drinking water situation in the Gaza Strip, outlining an increasing risk of water-borne diseases. The residents mostly resort to buying water from private vendors charging an equivalent to USD 7 for 1,000 litres of water, as the water from municipal taps is often salty. The article cites WHO guidelines for safe drinking water and says that the salinity and nitrate levels of groundwater available in the Gaza Strip is "well above" the norm; over 50 per cent of children here experience water-borne infections, thereby making the situation that of a "slow poisoning." The article quotes experts who believe that the problem has been exacerbated by Israeli blockades, military attacks, and a cut in humanitarian assistance.

Libya: UN raises concerns over security forces' treatment of migrants

On 12 October, the UN human rights spokesperson informed a UN briefing that the heavy-handed operations by Libyan security forces, including "detention in appalling conditions" and expulsions to other countries, had "resulted in killings and serious injuries." The spokesperson called the actions of the security forces "unnecessary and disproportionate." The development comes after more than 5,000 migrants were arrested and allegedly suffered physical and sexual violence at the hands of Libyan forces in early October. The spokesperson traced the beginning of these detentions to 1 October, saying the officials from the Interior Ministry first raided an informal settlement of migrants and asylum seekers on the day. On 6 October, four among the 500-odd who managed to escape were killed after forces used live ammunition.

Eswatini: Army deployed in schools to quell pro-democracy protests

On 11 October, the spokesman for the Swaziland Solidarity Network, consisting of pro-democracy groups, said that the government had deployed the army and police to schools as students protest against the monarchy. The protesters are demanding the release of two lawmakers and better and free education, and political reforms. The spokesperson said that 17 students had been arrested on the day, including a seven-year-old. Meanwhile, the Army spokeswoman confirmed the deployment, however maintaining that soldiers were not people's enemies, "but just an assistance to the other forces to maintain order."

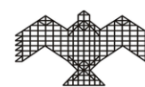
Nigeria: Gunmen kill 20 in Sokoto; over 100 abducted people released in Zamfara

On 9 October, at least 20 people were killed when gunmen attacked a market in Sokoto state in Nigeria's northwest. The Special Adviser to the Sokoto Police Affairs Minister said the gunmen killed the people sporadically; several parts of Nigeria are currently under a telecommunications blockade as the government is attempting to disrupt the operations of such gangs. In a separate development on 7 October police said that 187 kidnapped people, including children, were rescued in Zamfara state; they were previously kidnapped in various attacks, including those on schools.

Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

Brexit: Northern Ireland border checks on British goods to be reduced

On 13 October, the European Union proposed to remove most checks on goods crossing from Great Britain to Northern Ireland in an attempt to ensure smoother trade within the UK and end a protracted post-Brexit dispute with London. European Commission Vice-President Maros Sefcovic said: "Today's proposals are a direct, genuine response to their concerns," adding, "We have put a lot of hard work into them to make a tangible change on the ground." Meanwhile, Lord David Frost, UK Brexit minister, insisted that any agreement must remove the European Court of Justice from its role in policing the Brexit deal in Northern Ireland, but did not call it a "red line."



Spain: Right-wing politicians criticize Biden over the statement on Columbus and conquests

On 12 October, right-wing politicians in Spain criticized US President Joe Biden for calling on Spain to apologize for dark chapters in its colonial while acknowledging the atrocities suffered by indigenous peoples. The leader of the conservative Popular Party (PP), Pablo Casado, described Spain's colonial expansion to the Americas as "the most important event in history after the Roman empire," adding, "Does the kingdom of Spain have to apologize because five centuries ago it discovered the New World, respected those who were there, created universities, created prosperity, built entire cities? I don't think so."

Russia: Putin says that Europe was to blame for the current energy

On 13 October, President Vladimir Putin claimed that Europe was to blame for the current energy crisis. This came after soaring gas prices incited accusations that Russia was withholding supplies to pressure the West. In a meeting with Russian energy officials, Putin said: "They've made mistakes," adding that one of the factors influencing the prices was the termination of "long-term contracts" in favour of the spot market. He added, "It turned out, and today this is absolutely obvious, that this policy is wrong." Further, rejecting the accusations Russian spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "First and foremost — we don't just think — we insist that Russia does not and cannot have any role in what is going on in the European gas market," adding, "Russia has fulfilled, is fulfilling and will continue to responsibly fulfil all of its obligations under existing contracts."

Chile: State of emergency declared over Mapuche conflict

On 12 October, President Sebastian Pinera announced a state of emergency and deployed troops to two southern regions after clashes broke out between Mapuche Indigenous people and security forces. Pinera said: "We have decided to call a state of exception" in four provinces of the southern regions of Biobio and Araucania and the deployment of troops to help control "the serious disturbance of public order." This comes as the Mapuche, the largest indigenous group in Chile are demanding the restoration of their ancestral lands and self-determination.

Bolivia: Opposition blocks hold protest over government 'persecution'

On 11 October, the opposition in Bolivia blocked streets in protest against the government of President Luis Arce, accusing him of "political persecution." The opposition are demanding the release of the former head of state Jeanine Anez, jailed on charges of leading a coup in 2019 to oust then-president Evo Morales and also called for the liberation of the mayors of La Paz, Cochabamba and the governor of Santa Cruz, along with former presidents Carlos Mesa and Jorge Quiroga.

Peru: President Castillo swears in new prime minister amid concerns about political instability

On 13 October, President Pedro Castillo swore in Mirtha Vasquez, a left-wing former head of Congress, as his new prime minister. President Castillo while announcing the resignation of his previous prime minister, Guido Bellido, cited "instability" in the country. Under Peruvian law, the prime minister's resignation automatically triggers that of the entire cabinet. However, the change in his cabinet comes amid accusations some ministers sympathized with the Maoist rebel group, Shining Path.

Cuba: Opposition denied permission for a march in Havana

On 12 October, The Guardian reported that the Government of Cuba denied the opposition permission to stage a march for civil liberties in the capital Havana and a few other provinces on grounds it was part of efforts to overthrow the government. In a letter to the organizer, the government said: "The protesters ... as well as their links with some subversive organizations... have the open intention of changing the political system in Cuba," adding, "The protests are a provocation and part of a regime change strategy for Cuba tested in other countries." According to a protest leader, "This response shows the most conservative and hardline have power in Cuba."

Brazil: Bolsonaro accused of crimes against humanity

On 12 October, Austrian environmental group AllRise announced that has filed an official complaint with the International Criminal Court (ICC) accusing President Jair Bolsonaro of "crimes against humanity" for "facilitating and accelerating" the destruction of Brazil's Amazon rainforest. The group's founder said: "Jair Bolsonaro is fuelling the mass destruction of the Amazon with his eyes wide open and in full knowledge of the consequences," arguing that Bolsonaro "systematically remove[d], neuter[ed], and eviscerate[d] law agencies and individuals that serve to protect the Amazon."

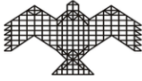
About the authors

Akriti Sharma is a PhD Scholar at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS. Apoorva Sudhakar and Abigail Miriam Fernandez are Research Associates at the School of Conflict and Security Studies, NIAS.





National Institute of
Advanced Studies



About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI)

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 research 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. With 16 regional offices in Germany and over 120 offices abroad, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is committed to achieving and maintaining peace, freedom and justice through political education. KAS promotes and preserves free democracy, social market economy, and the development and consolidation of the value consensus. KAS also focus on consolidating democracy, the unification of Europe and the strengthening of transatlantic relations, as well as on development cooperation.

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

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 Editors: Abigail Miriam Fernandez & Apoorva Sudhakar