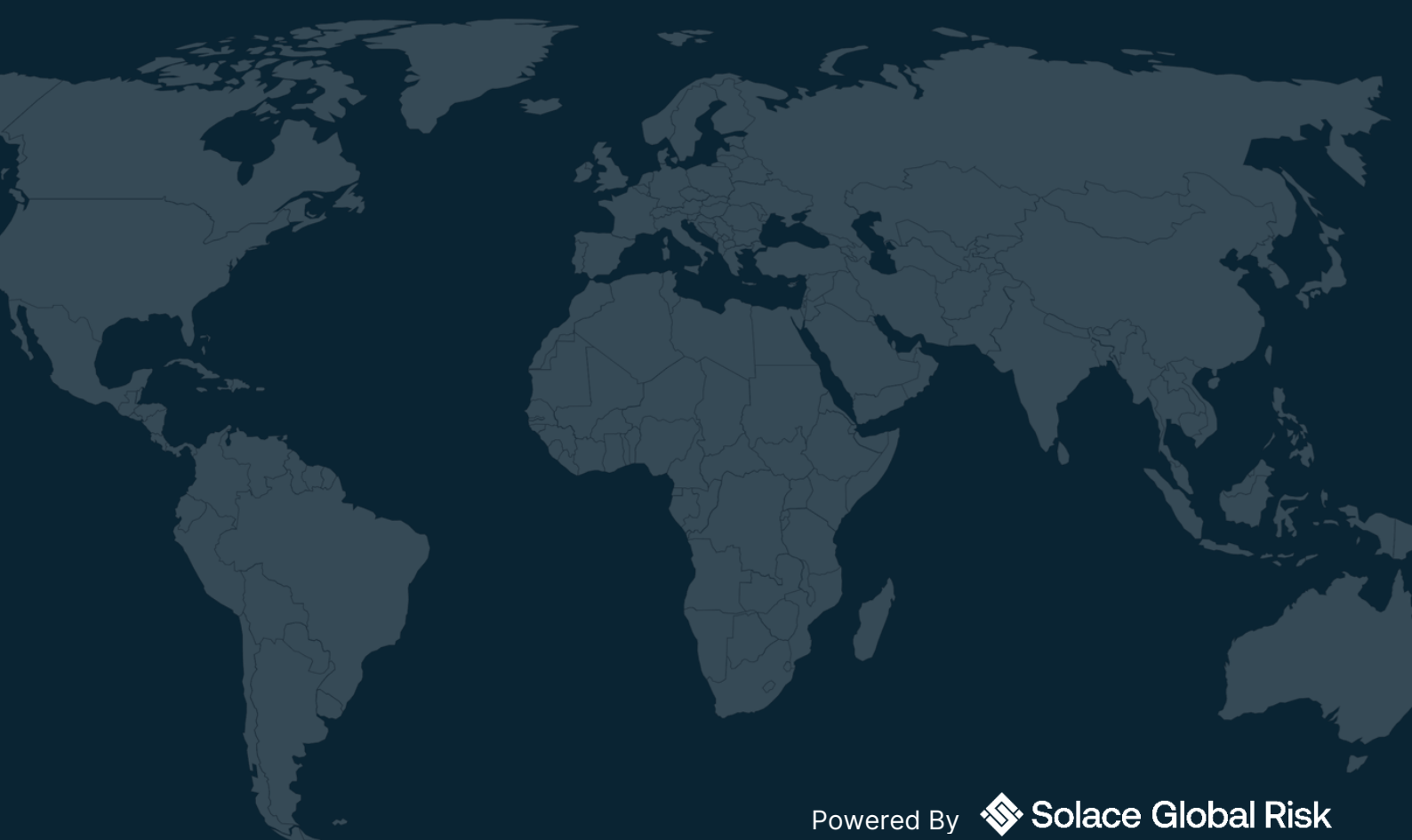




Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 3 MAY – 10 MAY





Global Intelligence Summary

Week 18: 3 May – 10 May

Executive Summary

- The arrest of three **Indian** citizens for the assassination of a Sikh activist in **Canada** will **likely** further strain diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- **Israeli** forces' entry into **Rafah** will **highly likely** ignite further international protests. The operation will **almost certainly** worsen humanitarian conditions in the southern **Gaza Strip**.
- **Russia's** potential switching of allegiance in the **Sudanese** Civil War will **almost certainly** change the trajectory of the war and enable Moscow to secure a strategic port on the **Red Sea**.
- **China's** naval deployments to **Cambodia** and **East Timor** are likely indications of its efforts to establish more foreign bases that will improve its access to the **South China Sea** and beyond.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

AMER

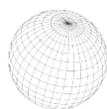
- 1 Canada:** Sikh activist assassination suspects arrested
- 2 Haiti:** Progress on Kenyan mission is welcomed in Washington
- 3 Panama:** Disqualified president's party wins general elections

EMEA

- 4 Israel and Gaza:** Israeli operations in Rafah begin
- 5 Sudan:** Russia changing allegiance in civil war
- 6 South Africa:** Election campaign enters final stage

APAC

- 7 Afghanistan and Pakistan:** Tensions and attacks continue
- 8 Myanmar:** Junta increasingly isolated abroad and weak at home
- 9 Cambodia and East Timor:** China seeks stronger military cooperation
- 10 South China Sea:** Manila seeks to expel Chinese diplomats



Global Dates and Events

University campuses worldwide are continuing to see increasing shutdowns and clashes with authorities following large **pro-Palestine protests**. Amsterdam, Berlin, and Paris have emerged as the main hotspots for demonstrations, but other European countries, including Switzerland, Austria, and the United Kingdom, have also seen gatherings and disruptions. In the meantime, United States colleges and universities remained plagued by tensions, following hundreds of arrests at protest camps erected in New York and California. There is a high likelihood that, with Israeli troops taking control of the Rafah crossing, further disruptions will occur.

This 15 May will be the **76th anniversary of the Nakba** (“catastrophe”), or the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. It is almost certain that the date will be met with large-scale protests and demonstrations in the Middle East (and especially in the Arab states outside of the Arabian Peninsula), in the United States, and in European countries with large Arab diasporas and pro-Palestine movements. There is, likewise, a high likelihood of attacks and clashes in Israel and the West Bank, with particularly high risks in Jerusalem. There is a realistic possibility of lone-actor terrorism, especially targeting large protests, or Muslim and Jewish places of worship in the West.

Anglo-Swedish company **AstraZeneca** announced that it started the global withdrawal of its **Covid-19 vaccine**, citing a surplus of newer alternatives. The announcement comes in the aftermath of a European Medicines Agency notice that the vaccine would no longer be authorised for use, following the finding that the drug could cause a rare side effect known as thrombosis with thrombocytopenia (TTS) (in three out of 100,000 people). The announcement may have a series of adverse effects. It is very likely that conspiracy theories will return to online prominence in the following days, and that may impact rates of vaccine avoidance in at risk countries.



Americas (AMER)

Canada:

Suspected killers of Sikh activist arrested.

On 3 May, Canadian police detained three Indian nationals on suspicions of having carried out the assassination of Sikh activist Singh Nijjar in Vancouver, in June 2024. The three, who entered the country between three and five years ago, some using student visas, are currently being investigated for possible ties to India's intelligence services and government. In September, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's announcement of "credible allegations" that the assassination had been sanctioned by New Delhi caused a diplomatic crisis between the two countries.

Assessment: India has the largest diaspora in the world, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has repeatedly stated that it sees it as a strategic asset to be leveraged out of national interest. In countries like Canada, where approximately 2 million diaspora members are settled, there is an increasing trend of seeing a projection of domestic Indian political developments. Nijjar, who was an activist for the creation of "Khalistan", a Sikh-majority state in Punjab and other parts of northern India, maintained close ties to the movement in his home country and was accused by Indian officials of orchestrating terrorist actions on Indian soil. On the other hand, BJP, and other Hindutva groups – who espouse a Hindu-supremacist view of India's future – have increasingly sought to extend their control over foreign political groups, with efforts often targeting anglosphere countries, such as the UK and Canada, which have large Indian diasporas. Since the beginning of BJP rule in 2014, the leading far-right organisation in India, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has become especially active in carrying out efforts to recruit activists and sympathisers abroad, also setting up cultural and political institutes that seek to advance Hindu-friendly sentiments among the general population – lobbying local governments to take formal measures to combat "Hinduphobia" –, and spread Hindutva ideology among resident Indians. Canada's relatively open immigration laws, and especially its generous programme of student visas, are likely being exploited by activists and intelligence agents to enter the country to spread Hindutva views and carry out actions furthering the interests of the current administration. The intelligence gathered by US and Canadian agencies included alleged communications between Indian diplomats that seemed to indicate New Delhi's knowledge and involvement in the plot, as well as other material showing its planning of further operations on American soil. It is almost certain that India regularly conducts information operations targeting diaspora communities in the West, as well as the general public, and it is very likely that further Indian operations aimed at strengthening Hindutva sentiment abroad and reducing the prevalence of alternative ideological and religious movements have been carried out under BJP leadership. While definitive proof of the killing's alleged state sanctioning is yet to emerge, its dynamics, as well as the impact of the Khalistan movement within the Indian diaspora in Canada (which is roughly half Sikh) make New Delhi's involvement a definite possibility. The arrest and trial of the three alleged perpetrators is likely to increase India-Canada tensions. In Canada, it may result in further tensions, and possible clashes, between Hindu and Sikh communities, especially in cities with large diaspora groups such as Vancouver and Toronto. Finally, the ongoing Indian elections are likely to bolster information operations carried out by Hindutva groups in Canada and other countries with large Indian diaspora communities. The BJP's rhetoric has been primarily directed against Muslims. However, there is a likelihood that the spread of nationalistic and Hindu-supremacist material will result in anti-minority sentiment at home translating into harassment abroad.

Haiti:

Progress on Kenyan mission is welcomed in Washington.

On 9 May, civilian contractors arrived in Haiti to build living quarters for the 1000-personnel-strong Kenyan policing mission that was approved by the UN last October – which was recently bolstered by troop pledges made by Benin and Jamaica among other countries. While the mission had been delayed multiple times, last week Kenyan President William Ruto stated that the nomination and swearing-in of a transitional council, including the appointment of a president and prime minister, had resolved the last administrative hurdle preventing the mission's deployment.

Assessment: The civilian contractors were deployed to the country via US Southern Command aircraft and dozens of US Army flights are expected to land at Port-au-Prince in the coming days, carrying further personnel and materials. The Kenya-led mission, which may reach a total strength of 3,000 personnel and a cost of USD 600 million, is likely to face extreme difficulties following its deployment. First, the scale of the humanitarian disaster is massive: more than 350,000 people have been displaced over the past year, being forced to leave urban centres - already lacking in infrastructure – to makeshift camps and settlements, many of which sit on the border with the Dominican Republic. In addition, there are few stable administrative structures still present on the island. The Haitian National Police has engaged in clashes with the criminal gangs that continue to dominate much of the country. However, it continues to be outgunned and plagued with inexperience and corruption. The gangs, who realise that foreign intervention will necessarily represent a serious challenge to their activities, have likely adopted a strategy aimed at deliberately damaging the country's remaining institutions, including even healthcare facilities and churches, in order to put pressure on the transitional council. Likewise, they have increasingly torched private residences, likely in an effort to worsen the displacement of the civilian population. These developments mean that the force deployed to Haiti will have to, in addition to facing low-intensity combat with the gangs, essentially work to rebuild much of the Haitian state apparatus from scratch. Kenyan President Ruto is set to visit the US in May - the first visit by an African state leader in fifteen years. The achievement likely shows what Kenya hopes to get out of the mission: under Ruto, the country has increasingly sought to portray itself as a beacon of stability in its region, and as a pro-Western leader in a continent that, for the most part, seems to be shifting towards Russia, China, and Iran. Still, with non-negligible programs at home, there is a realistic possibility that the Haitian mission may backfire on the Ruto administration, leading to protests and disruptions at home. For this reason, the visit to Washington will likely be aimed at securing a protracted US commitment. For its part, the White House almost certainly wants to avoid a deployment of US personnel on the island at all costs and may therefore find Kenya's ambitions particularly favourable to its interests. The risks that a protracted Haitian crisis poses to its national security, and to the overall stability of Central America, may encourage Washington to "overlook" Kenya's structural problems, including its widespread corruption, and seek to deepen ties. In the backdrop of the Haitian crisis, it is therefore likely that US-Kenya meetings will focus on economic matters, with the renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) being particularly prominent.

Panama:

Disqualified former president's party wins general elections.

On 5 May, general elections were held in Panama to elect a new president, members of the National Assembly and members of local government. With an estimated voter turnout of almost 78 per cent, the relatively new and right-wing party, Realizing Goals, won the election with over 34 per cent of the popular vote. The incumbent party and the largest party in Panama by party membership, the left-wing Democratic Revolutionary Party, suffered its worst electoral defeat since its creation, only securing just under six per cent of the popular vote. Realizing Goals' stand-in candidate, Jose Raul Mulino, will become the country's new president on 1 July after being appointed as party leader following the disqualification of former president, Ricardo Martinelli,

who was sentenced to ten years in prison in 2024 for charges related to embezzlement of public funds and money laundering.

Assessment: Before to his disqualification, Martinelli had garnered favourable polling numbers. His subsequent disqualification and decision to seek refuge in the Nicaraguan Embassy in Panama City likely have had a positive impact on his party. As president, Martinelli had overseen a booming economy from 2009 to 2014 and is widely expected to run the country from behind the scenes- a favourable concept for many who feel Martinelli had been politically targeted and at a time when the country's economy is faltering. However, almost two-thirds of Panamanians voted for alternative parties, and it is likely that Martinelli's influence will be hugely controversial. Moreover, recent polling indicates that 57 per cent of Panamanians believe corruption is the most important issue in the country. Martinelli's involvement in politics is likely to cause political volatility and a decline in public trust in the government. Furthermore, President Mulino will now have the power to pardon Martinelli and if he chooses to pursue this course it may trigger civil unrest in the country. Outside of corruption, Panama's new government have a host of other issues to contend with and how they approach these have yet to be fully determined. One of Mulino's promises is to close down the Darién Gap, the dangerous stretch of jungle on Panama's border with Colombia. Hundreds of thousands of migrants cross every year on their journey north to the United States with widespread reports of abuse and exploitation. Whilst this tactic may improve relations with Washington, it falls under Mulino's wider law and order proposals to quash crime. This may result in Panama emulating the strategies of El Salvador and Ecuador, leading to a militarisation of the police and endemic human rights abuses. Mulino's greatest challenge will be how to reverse the recent economic decline of Panama. This has partly been the result of drought caused by the El Niño phenomenon. This led to low water levels in the Panama Canal and restricted traffic but will likely reverse with the end of El Niño. However, this is unlikely to counter the economic damage caused by the closing of the Cobre Panama mine run by the Canadian mining giant, First Quantum, which accounted for five per cent of the country's GDP. The mine's environmental impact caused widespread civil unrest in the country and resulted in the current government suspending all mining concessions. First Quantum has started expensive international arbitration against Panama and the country was downgraded by Fitch from BBB- to BB+, otherwise known as "junk" or "non-investment grade," a major concern for a country with a major financial sector attempting to improve the economy. Any government decision to reverse the decision to end the mining will almost certainly lead to major demonstrations and demonstrations. Conversely, the decision to back the suspension will severely jeopardise Mulino's efforts to improve the economy.

AMER Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

A US District Judge in the state of **Florida** indefinitely postponed the start date of the trial of former President Donald Trump over his alleged mishandling of classified documents during his tenure in office. The announcement, a victory for the Trump camp, is likely to decrease the risk of political unrest and domestic terrorism, as the Florida case is perhaps the most dangerous for Trump. Nevertheless, the looming threat of prosecution will continue to embolden pro-Trump extremist groups to carry out protests and demonstrations.

Colombian riot police have deployed water cannons and tear gas to disperse protestors outside the National University in Bogota. Tens of thousands of Colombians have been protesting President Petro's reform agenda and plans to rewrite the Colombian constitution; however, it remains unknown if these protests are related.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

At least ten members of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel/Cartel de Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) have been killed in Tocumbo, **Mexico** after an exchange of gunfire with Mexican security

services. The shootout may have been linked to the recent extradition of a prominent CJNG associate to the US who had spent ten years on the run. In a separate development relating to Mexico, former President Donald Trump is considering establishing a special operations task force that will kill the heads of drug cartels if he retakes the White House and reportedly told his allies that he wants to create a “kill list” of major drug lords.

In the **Nariño** province of **Colombia**, a dissident front of the National Liberation Army (ELN) has declared its split with the central command and announced that it would resume carrying out kidnappings. The government, in return, announced that it would maintain talks with the ELN and treat the breakaway branch – known as the Southern Community Front – as an independent entity. Depending on the Front’s capacity to exploit its independence, the development may further derail the Colombian government’s softer, negotiation-based approach to resolving the decades-long conflict.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

The National Weather Service in **Puerto Rico** has warned of life-threatening flash floods and mudslides with heavy rains expected on 10 May. Low-lying areas are likely to be most affected and landslides will likely lead to widespread transport disruptions.

Mexico’s National Energy Control Centre has declared a state of emergency due to a lack of available power for the country’s national grid. There is also a major shortage of natural gas in the country, which Mexico relies on for electricity production. The lack of power will likely lead to planned blackouts or load shedding.

Officials in **Ecuador** and **Colombia** have declared national emergencies in response to the drought which has been caused by months of the El Niño effect. Ecuador’s reservoirs have been depleted leading to a huge reduction in hydroelectric power output which will only further increase electricity blackouts in the country. Ecuadorian authorities have demanded that people reduce their power usage and have published schedules for planned blackouts in major cities. In Colombia, hydroelectric power is responsible for 70 per cent of the country’s electricity supply and the drought has forced the government into water rationing and suspending electricity exports to Ecuador, further compounding Quito’s problems. Declining water reserves could lead to an increase in health emergencies caused by dehydration, poor nutrition, and a lack of sanitation.

Venezuela may be the first country in modern history to lose all of its glaciers after the Humboldt/La Coruna Glacier melted faster than expected likely due to the combined effects of El Niño and climate change. The loss of glaciers will almost certainly reduce access to freshwater resources and could lead to a host of economic, health and environmental issues related to water shortages.

The flooding in **Brazil’s Rio Grande do Sul** province has worsened. At the time of writing, at least 85 fatalities have been reported, and at least 150,000 displaced. Disruptions in telecommunications and electricity lines are worsening the crisis, but rescue operations are still ongoing, albeit they are encountering difficulties in accessing more isolated settlements. On 9 May, Starlink CEO Elon Musk announced that he would make the service’s terminals in the region free to use during the crisis. Musk, who is involved in a spat with Brazil’s supreme court over his defiance of court orders, has increasingly been directly involved in international relations. The announcement is likely an indirect effort to undermine popular support for the Lula government, favouring more business-friendly alternatives.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Israel and Gaza:

Rafah offensive imminent, mass exodus of civilian population.

Units of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) entered eastern Rafah, arriving at the southern Rafah crossing and conducting clearing operations that reportedly destroyed a dozen of tunnel shafts and killed approximately 50 Hamas operatives. Washington, despite earlier reports of its “understanding” of the necessity of a Rafah offensive, has threatened to cut off arms supplies to Israel if the operation goes ahead. At least 150,000 Palestinians have evacuated the city at the time of writing, but this number is possibly obsolete due to the rapid pace at which new developments occur.

Assessment: The Rafah offensive has been discussed since March. It has become central to the strategic planning of the Netanyahu administration, which sees it as a fundamental step towards the destruction of Hamas as a capable military force. The rejection of Hamas officials’ acceptance of a ceasefire plan, claiming that it fell short of Israeli demands, most likely reflects Tel Aviv’s belief that the only acceptable future for the Gaza Strip is one where Hamas ceases to exercise any authority and to have any power. The beginning of operations in the east likely reflects Israeli preferences for the direction of the displacement of Palestinian civilians in the city. By quickly arriving at the Egypt-Gaza Rafah crossing, IDF forces are likely trying to funnel civilians towards the Mediterranean coast, where the Al-Mawasi humanitarian zone, and other makeshift refugee settlements, are located. Avoiding a massing of Palestinian civilians on the border is desirable to both Israel and Egypt, the latter being particularly worried about the chance of domestic unrest following the emergence of more images of Palestinians being turned away from its heavily fortified frontier with Gaza. President Biden’s threats, which are unlikely to materialise due to strong Congressional opposition, are unlikely to deter Israel, which possesses the necessary assets to carry out an operation in Rafah. Nevertheless, combat in Rafah proper is likely to be particularly costly for the IDF. Over the past two months, the estimated four Hamas battalions still surviving in the city would have almost certainly created heavily fortified positions involving ammunition depots and tunnels, and planted large quantities of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in preparation for the arrival of the IDF. Moreover, the IDF’s inability to effectively clear areas in the north of the Gaza Strip and prevent the re-infiltration of Hamas fighters is likely to pose a threat to the IDF in its rear areas during a Rafah offensive. The IDF’s main operational objectives in Rafah will likely be to significantly degrade Hamas’ strength there while seeking out the main leaders, most notably Yaya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, who are likely still in the city. Hamas will likely try to exploit a Rafah offensive and the civilian death toll to apply pressure on Israel’s Western allies to stop supporting Tel Aviv. Hamas will also attempt to persuade Iran to leverage its regional proxy forces to conduct offset action throughout the Middle East to persuade Israel’s allies to demand a ceasefire. After the combined effort to thwart Iran’s 19 April attack on Israel, it is unlikely Tehran will recommit to another strike on Israel itself but may leverage its proxy forces in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon to attack Israel or even Western interests in the region. The series of policy “turns” made by the Biden administration has likely been caused by the volume of protests, as well as the dissent within the Democratic Party’s base regarding Washington’s pro-Israel stance. Pro-Palestinian elements will almost certainly seek to exacerbate public protests and dissent in the immediate future due to the effectiveness of these actions in determining government policy.

Sudan:

Indications Moscow may be switching allegiances.

Reporting indicates that the Kremlin is switching its allegiances in Sudan from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group to the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). The reports follow an official visit to Sudan on 28-29 April from Mikhail Bogdanov, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister and Special Representative for the Russian President in Africa and the Middle East. At the conclusion of Bogdanov's visit, he expressed support for "the existing legitimacy in the country represented by the (SAF-backed) Sovereign Council" and indicated that his visit could lead to increased cooperation between the SAF and Russia. Uncorroborated reporting also suggests that the Kremlin may be willing to offer the SAF unrestricted qualitative military aid and enquired about its long-established agreement with the former Sudanese government led by Omar al-Bashir regarding the creation of a naval base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

Assessment: During the height of the Cold War the Soviet Union was capable of challenging the hegemony of the USA and its allies partly by establishing a network of foreign military bases. The Soviet Union could sustain worldwide naval operations through its bases in countries like Cuba, Egypt, Vietnam, and Yemen but today Russia only has permanent access to its only foreign naval port at Tartus, Syria. Moscow has long coveted a military presence on the Red Sea, a strategic location that will enable the Russian Federation Navy to cut off the major shipping chokepoints of the Suez Canal and Bab al-Mandeb. Under the presidency of al-Bashir, the Kremlin had agreed to a naval base in Port Sudan. However, this deal was largely quashed by the ousting of al-Bashir in 2019. During the Sudanese Civil War, the Kremlin has supported the RSF with military training and arms in exchange for gold, with most gold mines controlled by the RSF. Some estimates suggest that Russia was able to extract almost USD 2 billion in gold from Sudan to help fund the first year of its invasion of Ukraine. This was largely facilitated by the Wagner Group, and it is likely that this revenue stream has declined after the death of Yevgeny Prigozhin and the relative decline of the Wagner Group. It is highly likely that Moscow is now preparing to switch allegiances for its long-coveted port, especially if it has calculated that Russian support for the SAF will guarantee the SAF's victory and ultimately enable future access to Sudan's mineral wealth. A permanent presence in Port Sudan will also afford Russia greater economic access and diplomatic influence in Africa, a key component of its future strategy as it continues to capitalise on the withdrawal of Western forces and influence in the region. For the Sudanese government, a Russian port will only be sanctioned if Moscow promises to help in the civil war and to ensure the survival of the regime. Russia's economy is on a war footing, and while it may struggle to produce adequate numbers of sophisticated weapons for the War in Ukraine, such as ballistic or cruise missiles, it is likely capable of producing sufficient quantities of less sophisticated systems such as small arms rounds or artillery shells. These weapon systems could be put to good use in a war that lacks the same technological sophistication as the War in Ukraine, especially with the RSF controlling almost half of Sudan. Moreover, if Russia achieves its aims in Ukraine or the intensity of the conflict dies down, it could provide the SAF with more advanced weapon systems like drones that could help turn the tide of the war. Long-term, this may enable the SAF to recapture territory from the RSF and decrease the chances of genocide at the hands of the paramilitary group which has been repeatedly accused of ethnic cleansing in the Darfur region.

South Africa:

Electoral campaign enters its final stages as coalition question remains unresolved.

South Africa is scheduled to hold its general elections on 29 May amidst a political climate marked by uncertainty and instability. After exactly 30 years in power, the African National Congress (ANC) is projected by most polls to lose its majority. The ANC is challenged by the main opposition party, the centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA), as well as newer parties, which have been growing steadily in the polls. The most recent of these, and most threatening, is the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), which has taken a substantial share of ANC voters after it received the

endorsement of former President Jacob Zuma. Finally, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) – a Marxist-populist party - threaten the ANC from the left, especially among poorer parts of the electorate.

Assessment: South Africa continues to suffer from a series of fundamental structural difficulties, including extremely high unemployment rates (which hit 32 per cent last year), inflation and widespread infrastructural breakdowns, which continue to regularly cause almost country-wide power cuts. Much of the electorate perceives many of these issues to be self-inflicted and caused by an incompetent and corrupt ANC administration. Moreover, South Africa has increasingly been plagued by skyrocketing levels of violent crime: in the last quarter of 2023, the country averaged 130 rapes and 80 murders daily, which have furthered calls for fundamental reforms. The ANC, which continues to campaign on its historic achievements, has likely failed to reassure electors outside of its core constituency of older South Africans. Consequently, while likely to remain the largest party in the country's parliament following the elections, there is a high likelihood that it will be forced to enter a coalition government with one of its competitors. Among them, the most likely candidate is Zuma's MK. With no particularly clear policies besides its support of Zuma's leadership, MK offers an opportunity for the ANC to negotiate a power share without having to compromise on its manifesto. However, observers have noted that Zuma has the advantage of likely being the "kingmaker" following the vote and will be in a position to extract significant demands from the ANC in case negotiations for a joint government are started. Moreover, Zuma is 82 years old, and the party lacks appeal independently of the president's support. These two factors, combined, make a long-term alliance unlikely to be viable. A much more challenging prospect is posed by the EFF, which advances a radical programme including sweeping nationalisations and wealth redistribution schemes. If the EFF were to be included in government, it would almost certainly lead to a leftward shift of the coalition's policies. Moreover, it may leave the ANC in a difficult position in the likely scenario of a medium-term continuation of the structural difficulties faced by the country, as the majority coalition party will be at risk of hemorrhaging votes to a radical EFF claiming that government measures are not going as far as necessary, and constantly threatening to collapse the legislature. The DA, which has warned of a "doomsday coalition" comprising the ANC, MK, and EFF parties, has been inconsistent with its messaging, alternating frequent statements of its opposition to a deal with the ANC, with occasional and much more tentative openings. An ANC-DA coalition is a realistic possibility and represents the result most likely to reassure foreign investors and large multinational companies operating in South Africa. Regardless of the election results, any coalition government is likely to cause widespread social unrest across the country.

EMEA Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest

The final night of the Eurovision Song Contest is scheduled to be held in **Malmö, Sweden**, on 11 May. Due to the ongoing conflict in Rafah – and the fact that the Israeli contestant is one of the favourites to win the competition – there is a high likelihood of localised protests in the city, with a realistic possibility of clashes.

On 8 May, the Olympic Games flame arrived in **Marseilles, France**, amid high security. There is a high likelihood, also following cases from the UK and Brazil, that protesters will seek to disrupt the approximately 400 stops that the flame will make before arriving in Paris in July. Such disruptions will likely mostly be nonviolent. However, a realistic possibility of terrorist attacks, especially lone actor attacks, remains. Indeed, the arrival of the flame likely showcased the level of tension in France regarding the possibility of terrorism. In the evening, a baseless rumour of a terrorist attack caused hundreds of attendees, who had filled the quay and the streets of the city centre, to escape in a panic, with videos showing people running in fear. The incident raises the realistic possibility of similar episodes happening in Paris, which would pose significant risks to residents and visitors.

On 12 May, regional elections will take place in the autonomous community of **Catalonia in Spain**. Independence advocates like the former President of Catalonia, Charles Puigdemont, will hope to unite the pro-independence factions and reignite the movement. Polls indicate that the Socialist Party is projected to win which may destabilise Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's national coalition which relies heavily on the backing of Catalan separatist groups which were recently granted amnesty. With Catalanian independence proving a habitually contentious issue, the results and potentially new alliances formed by the elections have the capacity to increase political instability or provoke civil unrest in both Catalonia and mainland Spain.

On 8 May, the **Croatian** ruling Democratic Union (HDZ) announced that it would form a government with the far-right Homeland Movement (DP), after an inconclusive election that left it in need of finding coalition partners. It is likely that DP's inclusion, which involved a deal to exclude representatives of the ethnic Serbian minority in the country, will reignite ethnic tensions in Croatia, possibly leading to strains with Brussels.

Officials from **Hungary** and **China** signed a reported 18 economic agreements during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to the European country. The meeting saw Prime Minister Viktor Orban praise Chinese statecraft and reiterate his agreement with the Chinese peace plan for Ukraine, a stance that Hungary's NATO allies are vehemently opposed to. The visit follows Xi's trip to Serbia, another regional power that Beijing sees as particularly friendly.

The Eurasian Economic Union's (EAEU) tenth-anniversary summit is underway in **Moscow, Russia**. The summit is being chaired by the Armenian Prime Minister, Nikol Pashinyan and will include attendees from Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia with observers from Cuba, Moldova, and Uzbekistan. President Putin will likely try to use the summit to pull ex-Soviet and communist countries back into Moscow's sphere of influence and champion the idea of a multi-polar world that can challenge or counter the hegemony of the US and the rising influence of China. The Kremlin may also explore ways to use the attending states to circumvent sanctions and help overcome Russia's relative isolation caused by the War in Ukraine and will likely make strong overtures to Yerevan after its inability to support the Armenian side in its conflicts and disputes with Azerbaijan.

Top officials in **Malta**, most notably former Prime Minister Joseph Muscat, have been charged with corruption regarding a hospital privatisation scheme dating to 2015. The deal had been investigated by journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, who was killed by a car bomb in 2017, the assassination being suspected by many to be linked to her criticisms of Muscat. There is a high likelihood of protests on the island in the aftermath of the announcement, with most disruptions being focused in Valletta.

On 2 May, **Turkey** announced that it would suspend all Israeli exports and imports. The move is likely meant to appease the public, which is overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian. The ruling AKP party suffered a significant defeat at the last local elections and is likely looking to rebuild consensus through more populist and nationalistic measures.

On 3 May, the announcement of the results of last month's legislative elections saw the ruling party of **Togo** win a sweeping majority. The vote also certified the country's transition to a parliamentary system. It is likely that the results will solidify the power of the Gnassingbe dynasty in the country, and lead to a further centralisation of power. There is a high likelihood of opposition-sponsored protests following the announcement.

Mozambique's ruling FRELIMO party has nominated Daniel Francisco Chapo as its candidate for the country's October presidential elections. Chapo is being viewed as the prime candidate to restore security and order in Mozambique's restless Cabo Delgado province. The oil and gas-rich province is suffering from an insurgency led by Islamic State-linked militants that have killed

thousands, displaced hundreds of thousands and forced the interruption of multi-billion dollar projects.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

On 7 May, a senior politician in **Berlin**'s municipal administration was attacked at an event at a library in **Germany**'s capital. Franziska Giffey was attacked by a 74-year-old man, whose motive remains unclear. The episode is a worrying sign amidst rising political tensions in the months preceding the European parliamentary elections. Last week, a candidate from the ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) was assaulted by four far-right activists in Dresden. Such attacks will likely increase in the following weeks, as the EU elections look to be especially charged, also due to the recent slump in the polls by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) far-right party. With a positive result out of grasp, far-right activists may be particularly likely to take violent actions.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has suggested that Turkish forces may execute another military operation inside **Syria** against Kurdish militants in the country. Erdogan stressed that the Turkish people would not feel safe as long as the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was present in Iraq and Syria. Erdogan is likely seeking to exploit the current situation in Ukraine and the Middle East which has overstretched Western military, economic and diplomatic resources. A Turkish military offensive will likely result in more terror attacks in Turkey and could draw Kurdish resources away from the Islamic State insurgency, allowing the militants more freedom of movement.

The Iranian-backed proxy Kataeb Hezbollah has reiterated calls for the US to withdraw from **Iraq**, months after suspending its attacks on US forces in the region. A spokesperson for the group suggested that neither the Iraqi government nor the US is taking the withdrawal seriously. The announcement is likely a veiled threat that the group and other groups belonging to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq may resume their attacks on US bases in the region soon if they fail to see any evidence of a planned US withdrawal.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

Kenya continues to be affected by extremely severe flooding, which has killed at least 200 people and displaced more than 100,000 since the beginning of the rainy season in March. Among the most affected areas are the informal settlements near the country's capital, Nairobi, but rural areas have also seen disruptions, worsened by the lack of infrastructure and the relatively non-absorbent soil, which has made terrain difficult to traverse. There is a high likelihood of continuing disruptions to travel and business nationwide. Moreover, Kenya's government commitment to an ambitious UN-sponsored police operation in Haiti may provoke protests in the country, as citizens may call for government resources to be directed towards reconstruction efforts at home.

Oxfam has warned that more than six million people in **Zambia** are facing acute food shortages and malnutrition until the next growing season. Food shortages have almost certainly been caused by the combined effects of the El Niño phenomenon and climate change. The country is currently in a state of emergency and will require international assistance.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan and Afghanistan:

Islamabad and Baghdad continue diplomatic battle over terrorism, as attacks continue.

Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan remain high after the Taliban defence ministry rejected Pakistan's accusations of Afghan involvement in a terrorist attack on Chinese nationals which took place in March. The incident, which occurred in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, led to the death of five workers involved in a dam construction project in Dasu. Also in March, Pakistan carried out airstrikes on suspected terrorist assets within Afghan territory. In the early hours of 9 May, seven Punjabi workers were killed by unknown assailants in their accommodations near the port of Gwadar.

Assessment: Over the past weeks, there has been an increase in terrorist activities in Pakistan, primarily driven by Islamist and ethno-nationalist groups. The recent attack in Gwadar and the one in Dasu were likely carried out by Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) militants. The BLA has repeatedly targeted Gwadar in its campaign against Chinese-sponsored projects in Pakistan. In March, eight BLA militants were killed in a firefight after they attempted a takeover of some port facilities. The recent killing may have been conducted for intimidation purposes, or to cause further instability in the region of the port. Despite the relative clarity of BLA responsibility – and the fact that Baluch militants are equally hostile to the Afghan central government – Pakistan's continuing accusations of Afghan involvement in the attacks may have a diplomatic utility. First, it is almost certain that Afghanistan is maintaining close ties with elements of the Taliban forces in Pakistan (TTP) operating near the Durand line, where tribal control and lack of infrastructure ensure the continuing difficulties of government counterterrorism operations. By accusing the Taliban government of being responsible for other attacks, Islamabad may seek to bring further international scrutiny on Baghdad and send a signal to Tehran, as Iran continues to maintain uneasy relations with the Taliban government. Second, both Kabul and Islamabad are seeking closer ties with Beijing, and likely seek to reassure their Chinese partners of their assets and operations' security within their respective countries. China, in particular, sees the port facilities in Gwadar – the key project in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – as crucial in its strategic aim to contain India's power projection in the region and create a more solid connection to its asset's further west. However, with the solidifying of the Taliban government, Beijing has increasingly looked to Afghanistan as a key route into central and west Asia, and also as a provider of strategically important materials, including lithium, copper, and rare earth minerals. While the country is plagued by its own homegrown terrorists, Chinese investments in Afghanistan have expanded, most notably with a large oil extraction project in the Amu Darya basin, in the country's north. These developments, as well as Beijing's growing unease concerning the rise in attacks on its Pakistan-based assets, are likely worrying Islamabad, and fuelling the ongoing public diplomacy efforts attacking the Taliban government.

Myanmar:

UN reports exodus of three million, as junta increasingly isolated.

On 8 May, the UN reported that three million people had been internally displaced by the conflict in Myanmar, and that the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) had increased by 50 per cent during the last six months of conflict. Currently, the junta ruling Myanmar is engaged in clashes at the Myanmar-Thai border with ethnic Karen armed groups, and with a broader insurgency of a myriad of political and ethnic formations. The junta recently banned citizens from

working abroad to try to reinforce its depleted assets amidst a conscription drive. In the meantime, former Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra met with several rebel representatives.

Assessment: Rebel forces have been on the offensive against junta positions for the last six months, making notable gains. It is difficult to assess territorial progress in the conflict, as control over villages and settlements is often unclear, and difficulties in maintaining stable operational administrative structures mean that centres may change affiliation suddenly and relatively “quietly”. Still, it is almost certain that the junta’s control is now limited to only parts of central Myanmar and that stable administrative and governance structures are restricted to the areas surrounding the capital Naypyidaw. The junta continues to suffer from low public support, and the latest conscription drive is likely to further increase public backing of rebel groups, as drafted Burmese citizens increasingly choose to escape recruitment in the government forces by joining rebel-held units. Moreover, the international and diplomatic position of the junta is rapidly deteriorating. While initially obtaining strong support from neighbouring states, including most importantly India, the junta’s inability to stabilise the country has led to growing dissatisfaction, and there is a high likelihood that Myanmar’s neighbours are increasingly seeing regime change as a desirable option. The massive growth in the number of IDPs is likely particularly worrying for possible destinations of migrant outflows, and Thailand especially sees it as a threat to its border areas’ stability. Moreover, Beijing continues to be wary of the junta’s government. China had massively invested in relations with the Aung San Suu Kyi government, and its toppling left it in an awkward position. While not directly condemning the coup – thus maintaining an “ambiguity” that characterises China’s diplomatic positioning in particularly at-risk environments – it is likely that whatever amount of patience Beijing had towards the junta is quickly expiring due to Naypyidaw’s inability to contrast an ever-growing insurgency, while continuing to increase risks at the China-Myanmar borders. While the decision to move Aung San Suu Kyi to house arrest, last month, may have been intended as a gesture to appease Beijing, the worsening battlefield situation renders chances of a change in current diplomatic trends unlikely. India, which was much more openly pro-junta, and contributed to arming its forces, has likewise shown signs of weariness. Myanmar’s stability remains essential to Delhi as the country is a member of the Asian Trilateral Highway project, which is projected to further connect India to the ASEAN block. Yet, the conflict has jeopardised further economic integration and the stabilisation of inland trade routes. Additionally, in mid-2023, the imposition of Western sanctions on the junta forced the Indian Adani group to scrap its plans for a port in Myanmar, thus dissipating Delhi’s hope to establish a larger footprint in Southeast Asia. The junta’s position is increasingly trending towards a point of almost complete isolation and facing a growing feeling of international alignment – entailing an unusual partial consensus between the West, China, and Myanmar’s neighbours – over the desirability of the end of military rule.

South China Sea:

Filipino calls for expulsion of Chinese diplomats Beijing leaks sensitive phone call.

The Philippines' national security adviser, Eduardo Ano, has demanded the expulsion of Chinese diplomats following an alleged leak of a phone conversation with a Filipino admiral, marking a significant escalation in tensions over the South China Sea. According to the transcript, the Filipino admiral agreed to a Chinese proposal to work towards a “new model” whereby the Philippines would use fewer vessels in resupply ships to its troops based on a grounded warship at the disputed Second Thomas Shoal and would agree to notify Beijing about the missions in advance.

Assessment: It is highly likely that Chinese intelligence purposefully released the transcript to highlight and sow division and discord within the Philippines’ government and military to help further its objectives in the South China Sea. Ano has also reiterated the Filipino Defence Minister’s calls for the foreign ministry to take appropriate action against embassy officials, claiming that the recording of the call was in contravention of Philippine laws, including its anti-

wiretapping act, as well as diplomatic protocols. It is almost certain that Chinese intelligence has penetrated the Philippines' government and military, with calls to expel Chinese diplomats likely aimed at curtailing these operations, especially as Chinese operatives will be suspected of using Beijing's foreign embassies to facilitate operations. It is likely that many within the Philippines' defence infrastructure are concerned by the country's increase in aggressive responses to China's actions in the South China Sea. Manila has increased military cooperation with the US and other allies, leading to a militarisation of the region that threatens to provoke an escalation which the Philippines is likely ill-equipped to deal with. This has likely caused much division within the country between those wanting to respond aggressively to China and those wishing to pursue softer diplomatic options. However, with Washington committing more resources to the area and showing no signs of buckling to China, it looks unlikely that Manila has much freedom to pursue the softer option. On 9 May, the militaries of the Philippines and the US conducted their largest-ever joint drills, which simulated repelling a maritime invasion along the coast of the South China Sea as well as live-fire exercises within the South China Sea, one of which was effectively disrupted by China. These exercises and the increased military posture of the US in the Philippines have almost certainly raised concerns among the locals, with many fearing they could be caught up in the crossfire of a conflict between Washington and Beijing. However, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr has sought to strengthen ties with the US since coming to power in 2022, suggesting that tensions within the region will remain heightened as diplomacy is side-lined in favour of military assertiveness.

Cambodia and East Timor:

China seeks closer military ties with smaller Southeast Asian nations.

Sources within China's Defence Ministry have stated that the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has plans to deploy two warships to Cambodia and East Timor from May to mid-June. The deployments will form part of China's naval diplomacy strategy and will include naval training with host navies and a focus on building mutual trust. The PLAN will send its largest and most sophisticated training vessel, the Qijiguang, alongside the huge amphibious transport dock vessel, the Jinggang Shan. The Type 071/Yuzhao-class Jinggang Shan is capable of transporting helicopters, armoured vehicles, boats and as many as 1,000 troops, making it the most capable amphibious vessels in the PLAN.

Assessment: China's naval diplomacy in Cambodia and East Timor is almost certainly of great concern to the US, Western allies and a host of Southeast Asian nations. China's aims are invariably to strengthen political, economic, and military ties with the two Southeast Asian nations and Beijing is communicating this message strongly by selecting two of its most capable vessels. There have long been concerns that the PLAN is seeking to establish a permanent presence at the Ream Naval Base in Cambodia, one of the few Southeast Asian countries that does not have any territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea. The PLAN started joint naval drills with Cambodia for the first time in 2023 and has sent several vessels to the base. Moreover, satellite imagery indicates that dredging and construction work at the base is being conducted, the extent of which suggests it is being done to accommodate vessels currently beyond the capabilities of the Cambodian Navy. A Chinese base in Cambodia will be the PLAN's second foreign base after Djibouti in East Africa and have major strategic ramifications. Firstly, China will secure a naval base on the Gulf of Thailand, enabling it better access to the southern parts of the South China Sea, most of which China claims in contravention of the UN's Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This will allow the PLAN, Chinese Coast Guard and possibly even China's Maritime Militia to conduct more patrols in the South China Sea, helping China reaffirm its territorial claims. This will undoubtedly concern Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, all of which have territorial disputes with China. It will also increase the risk of a miscalculation or escalation in the South China Sea, with China routinely using aggressive manoeuvres to reinforce its claims- a threat that will only increase as the US and its allies increase their patrols in the region. Secondly, the base will improve the PLAN's sustainment operations, allowing it to conduct

more blue water patrols and extend its influence in areas like the Malacca Straits, Indian Ocean or along the east coast of Africa. An expansion in Chinese naval operations will likely draw in more military resources from the US, Western allies, and India to contain the PLAN. There is no evidence that China is planning on establishing a base in East Timor. However, the PLAN's deployment is likely an indication of strengthening military ties that could ultimately lead to a base or guaranteed port access in East Timor, a development that will further extend China's military reach.

APAC Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong will step down on 15 May after almost 20 years in power. His departure will end the Lee family's rule over the Southeast Asian country for over half a century and will be only the third time the leadership has changed in Singapore since its independence in 1965. The successor, Lawrence Wong, will lead the country and will be expected to balance Singapore's position during heightened US-China tensions and will be tasked to retain support for the country's long-ruling People's Action Party.

Junior doctors in **New Zealand** held a strike over pay disputes and ongoing shortages, with approximately 2500 joining picket lines between 7 and 8 May. Doctors' unions have threatened to carry out a 49-hour-long strike next week if an agreement with their employers is not reached. The strikes have resulted in disruptions and longer wait times in hospitals across New Zealand, and a redoubling of strikes next week is likely to result in further delays.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

In the northern **Afghan** province of **Badakhshan**, one of the global centres for opium cultivation, an explosion killed three Taliban personnel on 8 May. The Taliban government has tried to eradicate opium poppy cultivation in the country, a policy that has resulted in protests and local economic disruptions. The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) claimed responsibility for the attack, which was likely meant to capitalise on the wave of public discontent with government in the region.

In **Perth, Australia**, a 16-year-old was shot dead by police after stabbing a man, who luckily survived the attack. Reportedly, the perpetrator previously called the police stating that he would carry out a terrorist attack and had already been reported to the authorities by the local Muslim community. It is almost certain that the attacker is a self-radicalised "lone actor", and that the stabbing was a copycat attack of last month's attempted murder of a bishop in Sydney. The case highlights further risks of self-radicalisation, which especially affects younger people exposed to social media channels.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

On 9 May, the **Japanese** government announced that it would add fin whales to its list of commercial whaling species. Japan is especially criticised by environmentalist groups, which accuse it of threatening oceanic wildlife and at-risk species. The announcement will increase the likelihood of disruptions and protests targeting Japanese embassies in the West, and especially in Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, it may increase the likelihood of incidents at sea, as anti-whaling activists have increasingly sought to physically obstruct whaling vessels' operations.