



# Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 17 MAY – 24 MAY





# Global Intelligence Summary

Week 20: 17 May – 24 May

## Executive Summary

- Record heatwaves in **Mexico** during the election cycle will **almost certainly** exacerbate the current water shortage and result in widespread unrest.
- Three European states recognise **Palestine** as an offensive in Rafah and increased activity in the **West Bank**
- In **South Africa**, the barring of an opposition leader will **highly likely** lead to civil unrest.
- The first cyclone of 2024 in the Bay of Bengal will **likely** lead to widespread disruption and damage across parts of **Bangladesh** and eastern **India**.

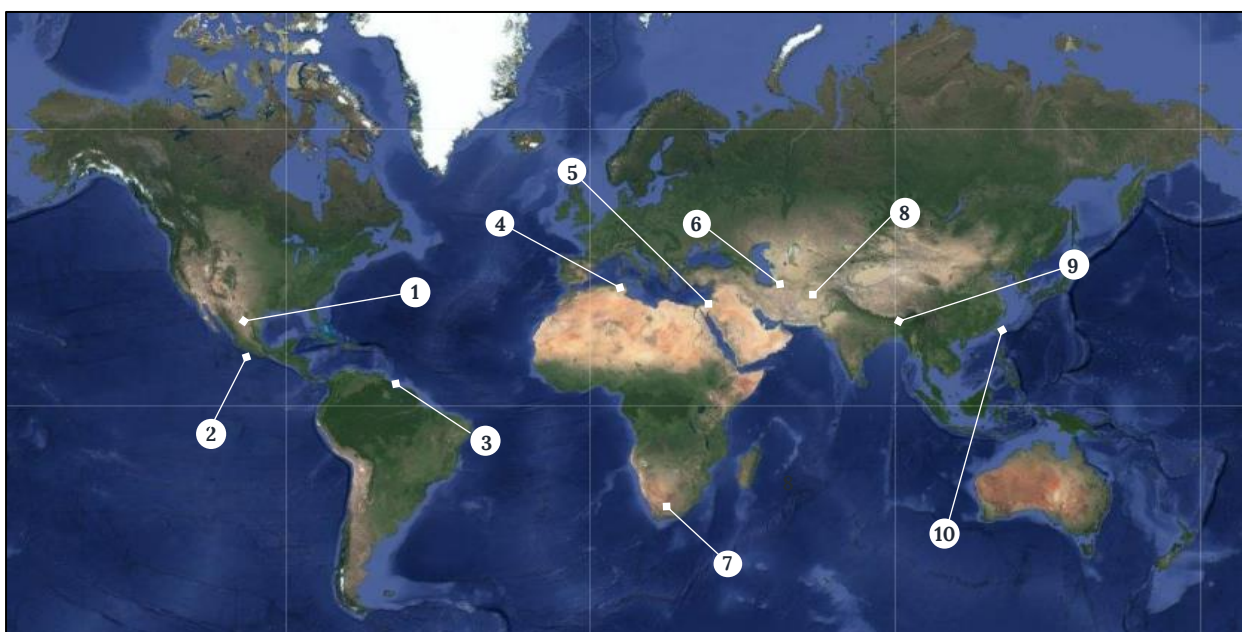


Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

### AMER

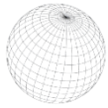
- 1 Mexico:** Wave of political violence as election approaches
- 2 Mexico:** Record heatwave approaches during water shortages
- 3 Venezuela:** Caracas builds military assets in the Essequibo region

### EMEA

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- 6 Iran:** President Raisi, foreign minister dead in helicopter crash
- 7 South Africa:** Zuma barred from running in 29 May elections

### APAC

- 8 Afghanistan:** Foreign tourists killed by Islamic State terrorists
- 9 India and Bangladesh:** Bengal region braces for first cyclone of 2024
- 10 Taiwan:** Protests erupt in response to controversial opposition bill



## Global Dates and Events

**WikiLeaks** founder **Julian Assange** has won a bid at the UK's High Court, granting him the possibility of appealing his extradition to the US. If extradited, Assange possibly faces life in prison for publishing classified documents. The announcement will almost certainly increase pro-Assange demonstrations, especially in London, the United States and Australia.

The American State Department warned of possible attacks and demonstrations targeting global **LGBTQ** communities at **Pride** events taking place in June. The 2023-2024 period has seen some important changes affecting international LGBTQ communities. Some notable regressive steps and trends have been noted: in 2023, Uganda passed one of the most restrictive anti-gay laws globally. More recently, hundreds of anti-LGBTQ bills have been proposed in the US, and EU organs have recorded an important rise in homophobic and transphobic violence, even in the most progressive European countries. At the same time, some important progress has been recorded. Singapore decriminalised gay sex, and five other countries decriminalised homosexuality. In June, Namibia's high court is expected to rule on whether to decriminalise gay sex, in a ruling that may herald some important progress in a continent that, in recent years, has seen a rise in anti-LGBTQ legislation and violence.

**Kyiv Day** will take place on **26 May**. The day will likely see international demonstrations regarding the war in Ukraine, with most taking place in Europe and North America. In Europe especially, there is a realistic possibility of disturbances, especially in the vicinity of Russian embassies. Moscow will likely intensify its information operations to coincide with the date.





## Americas (AMER)

### Mexico:

#### Wave of violence in Chiapas state as general election approaches.

At least 14 people were killed in the Mexican state of Chiapas during attacks against local electoral candidates between 19-21 May. An attack on 19 May was an attempt to assassinate Nicolás Noriega, a candidate running to lead the municipal government of the town of Mapastepec, which resulted in his wounding and the killing of five members of his campaign team. The surge in violence has led to dozens of candidates withdrawing from the elections in Chiapas alone and a local bishop has suggested that the conditions required for the promotion of elections are currently non-existent.

**Assessment:** The attacks are part of a wider campaign across Mexico targeting politicians intending to seek office in the country's 2 June general elections. Estimates suggest that over 130 people have been killed in politically motivated attacks in 2024 alone, which invariably increase during election cycles. Whilst cartels have previously targeted higher-profile politicians like presidential candidates, it is becoming increasingly common practice to target politicians at the regional or municipal level. Cartel violence affects almost all of Mexico but has become endemic in the southern state of Chiapas, a strategic part of Mexico on the Pacific Coast and the border with Guatemala. The Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), the Sinaloa Cartel, and the Gulf Cartel are all active in the state and are all competing to control the lucrative Guatemala border trade which is a main transit route for narcotics and increasingly human trafficking. The cartels have likely increased their attacks and specifically targeted political candidates to destabilise the area and exert their dominance. There is also evidence to suggest that the attacks correlate to areas where the rival cartels are most actively vying for control, potentially indicating that in some cases the politicians are aligned with different cartels. The most common methodology of the cartels is to target the candidate challenging the incumbent out of fear of changing the status quo, which is also likely a strong indication of the level of corruption throughout Mexico. However, cartels are also likely attempting to shape the elections to their benefit by ensuring compliance from incoming candidates, assassinating those who will seek to challenge the cartels and maximise the chances of candidates that can provide or improve business opportunities for the cartels- especially as the cartels have diversified their activities away from solely the production and distribution of narcotics. The political violence has also likely deteriorated in line with the fragmentation of cartels. Previously, there was a clear vertical hierarchy, which allowed cartels to choose a candidate with almost no opposition. However, as the major cartels have split into smaller and often more violent organisations, there has been an increase in competition for political candidates, leading to more violence against candidates contesting for the same post. With campaigns drawing to a close and polls set to open, it is highly likely that the attacks will increase before 2 June, likely making 2024 the worst year on record for Mexican political violence.

### Mexico:

#### Mexico set for extended heatwave as much of the country contends with water shortages.

Mexico is currently facing a severe heatwave that has shattered records, leading to power outages and casualties among both humans and animals. The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) has issued a warning of potentially "unprecedented" temperatures over the next two weeks. Approximately 70 per cent of Mexico is experiencing drought, with approximately a third of the country in severe drought conditions. The extreme heat is expected to affect the

capital, where temperatures could reach a record 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) within the next fortnight.

**Assessment:** The current heatwave is partly fuelled by the most recent El Niño weather phenomenon. This phenomenon has exacerbated existing drought conditions across the country, contributing to the extreme temperatures. If the predicted temperatures materialise, it could result in further health risks, as evidenced by the 26 deaths reported from heat-related causes between March and May, with most Mexicans unable to access air conditioning. Almost 40 per cent of the country's dams are currently estimated to be below 20 per cent of capacity, and another 40 per cent are between 20 and 50 per cent full. This has resulted in widespread water shortages, especially in the capital where the metropolitan population is estimated at 21 million. Moreover, it is calculated that the groundwater, which serves as the primary source of water for Mexico City, is currently being extracted at a rate twice that of its replenishment. Water shortages have led to multiple demonstrations, some of which have even included police officers staging roadblocks. Political tensions are already high with the country set to hold general elections on 2 June and protests have often adopted a class-related dimension as the water crisis has illuminated socio-economic inequalities. These factors will likely drive further unrest as the crisis in parallel to the election stokes political divisions, with incidents of violent clashes highly likely.

## Venezuela:

### **Maduro builds forces in contested border regions.**

Satellite imagery released by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) indicates that Venezuelan forces have bolstered infrastructure that could be used for military operations at the contested border regions with Guyana. Maduro, who is currently facing a resurgent opposition and elections scheduled to be held on 28 July, has increasingly sought to bolster public support by reiterating calls for the annexation of the Essequibo territory, which his government unilaterally declared as part of Venezuela.

**Assessment:** It is likely that Maduro is attempting to imitate Putin's rhetoric and aggressive foreign policy to garner support. However, unlike Russia Venezuela's economy and civil society have not been prepared for a conflict, which will likely be protracted due to the difficult jungle terrain in Guyana. Therefore, it is unlikely that Caracas would risk starting an open conflict, especially considering the threat posed by international isolation and sanctions. Instead, Maduro may opt to continue to seek marginal and limited, but progressive, gains at Guyana's expense. So far, this line has been successful, with the Guyanese government ordering a moratorium on oil extraction in waters facing the contested Essequibo territory. In this sense, the military buildup likely aims at both putting further pressure on Guyana, while also giving credence to Maduro's bellicose rhetoric, thus seeking to obtain a "rally round the flag" effect before the elections. By heavily investing in the armed forces, especially in the context of possible future operations in Guyana, Maduro has likely reduced the threat posed by civil unrest at home and ensured the support of the armed forces. However, the investment may prove a double-edged sword. First, the buildup at the border increases the risk of miscalculation, leading to an escalation that Caracas may not desire. Secondly, adopting an aggressive posture will likely exacerbate the associated risks if the administration is forced to back down. In such a case, Maduro may disappoint the hopes of his nationalistic supporters, while also having to face the task of reducing the military's resources, which is likely to be unpopular with Venezuelan officials. Furthermore, by making the strength of the military increasingly central to the regime's survival, Maduro has likely become over-reliant on support from the country's military command, which may impose constraints on the regime's independence.

## AMER Summary and Forecast:



### Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

On 28 May, closing arguments for the hush money trial of former **US** President Donald Trump will take place in **New York City**. The final stage of the trial will likely result in an increased risk of civil unrest in Manhattan, and near US federal government buildings. With the first presidential debate between Trump and incumbent Joe Biden scheduled to take place in 27 June, the trial is almost certainly going to become a fundamental element in the two candidates' electoral campaigns, which may in turn affect risks of protests and violence in New York City.

Popular leader President Luis Abinader secured a second term as president of the **Dominican Republic** following elections held on 19 May. Abinader's popularity stems from his success in restoring the country's economy after it sank during the COVID-19 pandemic when the island had to shut down its most popular tourist destinations. Abinader has pledged to implement a constitutional reform to ensure that the continuation of power is not subject to the "personal whim" of the sitting president. He is also likely to reinforce the government's tough stance on its shared border with **Haiti**, by pushing for the deportation of illegal migrants.

**Argentine** President Javier Milei caused another diplomatic row on 19 May. Madrid recalled its ambassador in Buenos Aires after Milei called the wife of **Spanish** Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez "corrupt". The attack came during Milei's speech at a right-wing summit being hosted in Madrid (see EMEA Politics, Economics and Civil unrest section). It is highly unlikely that the episode will result in Spain taking a less friendly stance towards Argentina. However, Milei's opponents at home will almost certainly use it to attack the president further.

### Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

The transitional council of **Haiti** stated that the UN-backed mission to restore order in the country and combat the gangs that control much of its territory will be led by the country's police force. The announcement is likely linked to recent attempts by Kenyan policymakers to block the country's pledged deployment of 1000 security personnel to the Caribbean nation. The Haitian police have suffered at least 80 dead and hundreds of casualties in the last months in firefights with heavily armed gangs.

On 20 May, **Colombian** guerrillas of the Central General Staff (EMC) launched attacks against police assets in the town of **Morales, Cauca** department. The assaults, which involved firearms and explosives, resulted in at least two dead police officers and a dozen injured. In April, the disintegration of the EMC-government truce deal led to the Cauca and Valle del Cauca departments becoming hotspots for militant activity, with authorities likely unable to make significant gains against the insurgents.

Also in **Colombia**, the prison director of a facility in **Bogota** was shot and killed on 17 May. The case likely illustrates a reaction to the government's calls for a "prison emergency" state in February after a surge in riots, killings and attacks within the country's prisons. Colombia's penitentiaries are mostly overcrowded and functionally work as headquarters for some of the country's most violent gangs. Authorities' attempts at suppressing these cartels have often resulted in riots, leading at times to dozens of casualties.

**Ecuador's** President Noboa has declared a new state of emergency in seven of the country's 24 provinces, citing a wave of murders and violent crime. The measures will be enforced for 60 days and are further evidence that Noboa is emulating the tactics of El Salvador in an attempt to curb the influence of gangs in the country after designating 22 criminal gangs as terrorists in January. Noboa will likely point to a decrease in the murder rate of the affected provinces when contrasted to the same period in 2023. However, the measures will enable the military to enter homes and intercept correspondence without prior authorisation- a development that will invariably be criticised by civil rights groups. Ecuador's attorney general's office is already investigating eight

suspected extrajudicial killings reported to have taken place during the last state of emergency with more likely to occur during the next round.

Defence officials from **Chile** have convened at an air base in the Chilean-claimed portion of **Antarctica**. This move is seen as an affirmation of Chile's claims to the region, following the recent Russian discovery of over 511 billion barrels of oil in the British-claimed territory. Chile's actions serve to heighten concerns that the Russian oil discovery will escalate tensions regarding the partitioning of Antarctica, disrupting the relative calm that has prevailed in recent decades.

#### **Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.**

The **Canadian** state of **Ontario** recorded the first case of measles-related death since 1989. The case likely reflects the decline in measles-containing vaccine (MCV) during and since the COVID-19 pandemic. Measles is a highly contagious disease, and Ontario reported 22 cases in 2024 as of the time of writing. Authorities will likely respond to the case by amplifying efforts to promote vaccinations. However, in turn, this may embolden the country's anti-vax movement to boost its spread of misinformation and to stage limited protests and disruptions.

Ongoing floods in **Brazil** have killed at least 161 people, and affected more than 2 million across the country, with the state of **Rio Grande do Sul** being especially affected. On 22 May, reports of the first cases of deaths from waterborne bacterial diseases emerged in the country's south, likely due to the dispersion of sewage into the floodwater. With stagnant water continuing to be present in various urban centres, it is highly likely that the impacts of diseases such as Hepatitis B and Leptospirosis will grow.





## Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

### Tunisia:

#### Civil unrest following media crackdown.

Protesters and counter-protesters increasingly occupied the streets of the main Tunisian cities amidst a series of authoritarian measures taken by the country's government, culminating in the sentencing of two journalists to a year in prison for "publishing false news". Supporters of President Kais Saied took to the streets following anti-government demonstrations to denounce the threat of "foreign intervention". The only democracy to successfully emerge from the Arab Spring, Tunisia has drifted towards authoritarianism during the past five years, also due to growing pressures at the domestic and foreign levels.

**Assessment:** Tunisia has emerged as a base of operations for a number of European NGOs, and as a privileged partner for the European Union, both due to its relative stability compared to its neighbours and due to its closeness to the European landmass. Saied's presidency has been characterised by a noticeable shift towards authoritarianism, culminating in a "self-coup" in 2021 and a wide-ranging constitutional referendum that awarded the office of president much more extensive powers, and essentially unchecked authority vis-à-vis the judiciary. At the same time, Saied's presidency has been marked by socioeconomic and political difficulties, most notably a post-pandemic increase in the number of sub-Saharan African migrants arriving in the country in the hope of reaching EU states, which has caused widespread protests and even riots in some Tunisian coastal cities. These developments have likely contributed to securitising the government's internal policies, which have led to anti-media crackdowns. Still, the Saied administration is likely too important to Brussels for EU states to meaningfully seek to coerce Tunis into compliance with international human rights standards. With the accession of right-wing governments in southern European states, most notably that of Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who has heavily invested in diplomatic initiatives to improve relations with North African states, Brussels' pressures on Tunis are likely to remain low, except in cases of exceptional state repression. With no organised protest movement capable of seriously threatening Saied's authority, there is a realistic possibility of a continuation of the process of presidential centralisation of power, with possible adverse effects on foreign NGOs and media channels operating in Tunisia.

### Israel and Palestine:

#### European states recognise Palestine, clashes in Jabalia, Rafah, Jenin.

On 21 May, three European states, Norway, Ireland and Spain, recognised Palestine as a sovereign state. The declaration comes in the aftermath of a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution calling for the recognition of Palestine, and the announcement of an arrest warrant for Netanyahu, Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, and various Hamas leaders by the International Criminal Court (ICC). In Gaza, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) continue to pursue their strategic objective of destroying Hamas and rescuing the approximately 100 Israeli hostages still in Palestinian captivity, albeit encountering stiff resistance in both Rafah and Jabalia. A US intelligence report indicates that, seven months into the conflict, 30 to 35 per cent of Hamas fighters that were part of the group before 7 October have been killed. Finally, this reporting period coincided with an increase in violence in the West Bank, especially in the area around Jenin, following the introduction of a law that allows Israelis to re-enter settlements that had been previously abandoned.



**Assessment:** Tel Aviv's strategic goal of destroying Hamas and rescuing hostages is likely not achievable in the short term. The heavy clashes in Jabalia, and the likely heavier resistance that IDF forces will encounter in the central and western quarters of Rafah, demonstrate that, despite losing more than a third of its pre-7 October manpower, the Palestinian militant group has managed to retain most of its combat-effectiveness. The strength of Palestinian resistance is also likely influencing the IDF's current operations. By advancing along the Philadelphi corridor rather than directly through the centre of Rafah, IDF units are highly likely seeking to isolate Hamas pockets of resistance from the Egyptian border and disrupt the facilitation of lethal aid into Gaza. This axis of advance will also push refugees towards the al-Mawasi Humanitarian Zone and block refugees from heading to Egypt, thus provoking a diplomatic crisis with Cairo. The intensification of operations in the West Bank is likely the first step in a more protracted deployment of the IDF to the area. The "Axis of Resistance" forces almost certainly see the West Bank as a possible second front from which to attack Israel and overstretch the IDF's assets. Settler communities, many of which espouse fanatical ideologies, are likely seen as an asset by the Netanyahu administration to control and fragment the Palestinian political community in "Judea and Samaria". In this sense, the report of IDF forces leaking aid convoys' paths to settlers resulting in their interception and destruction of aid may be credible. Firstly, settler actions may be used as an excuse to deploy more IDF resources to the West Bank and secondly, anticipated settler violence may help counter the increase in Palestinian militia activity.

The increase in operations in the West Bank, and in cities as deep as Jenin, will almost certainly result in an increase of risks for humanitarian personnel operating in the area. It will also result in an increased risk of lone-actor terrorism within Israeli territory, and will likely be interpreted as a land grab- a move that will incite further unrest across the globe. In regard to the latest diplomatic developments, it is unlikely that the recognition of Palestine by three European states will cause tangible changes in the war's overall progression. However, it may result in adverse reactions and possible violence targeting European assets and citizens in Israel, with a particular threat to European humanitarian organisations. Settlers, in particular, may increasingly seek to target European aid workers working in the West Bank, as retaliation for their states' perceived increased support for Palestine. Moreover, there is a realistic possibility that, in the coming weeks, Israeli authorities may seek to impose artificial restrictions on aid workers' operations, for instance by slowing checkpoint controls or preventing the entry of aid to Palestinian areas altogether.

## Iran:

### President Raisi, foreign minister dead in helicopter crash.

On 19 May, several senior Iranian officials, including President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, were killed in a helicopter crash in the East Azerbaijan region of northwest Iran. At the time of the crash, which authorities stated was caused by a technical failure, the delegation was returning from a state visit to Azerbaijan. Raisi's death was mourned by Tehran, albeit reports of muted celebrations were also recorded.

**Assessment:** The death of Raisi will likely result in an internal power struggle at the highest echelons of the Islamic Republic. The president was the most likely candidate to succeed the 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. His death leaves the only other candidate for the role, Khamenei's son Mojtaba, essentially uncontested. More broadly, it also allows for greater opportunities for power reshuffles within the Iranian political landscape. Raisi's death leaves the conservative bloc leaderless, possibly creating more opportunities for the wave of young ultra-orthodox leaders who entered parliament at the last elections. The members of this new, loosely-defined faction, almost exclusively grew up in the post-revolutionary Islamic Republic and have increasingly challenged the pragmatic policies of the "patriarchs", the older conservatives headed by Raisi. For the reformists, who enjoyed periods of widespread popular support under Presidents Khatami and Rouhani, Raisi's death may prove useful to arrest the decline they have faced in recent years, marked by hardline control over all three branches of government. Finally, the incident may incite anti-government sentiment and protests, albeit not of a scale comparable with those of 2022. The circumstances surrounding Raisi's death are almost certain to prompt

accusations that the helicopter was deliberately brought down. In turn, this may prompt accusations towards the government possibly hinting at the Islamic Republic's possible transition to an informal "monarchy" led by the Khamenei family. However, footage from the crash site reveals a compact area of debris, suggesting that the helicopter did not suffer an in-flight breakup typical of a deliberate attack. The more likely cause of the crash is pilot error, specifically spatial disorientation or controlled flight into terrain (CFIT). This view is supported by the heavy fog conditions at the time of the flight and the mountainous terrain the flight traversed. These circumstances are reminiscent of the Smolensk air disaster of April 2010, which claimed the life of the then-president of Poland, Lech Kaczynski. Initially suspected by theorists to be a political assassination orchestrated by Russia, later investigations attributed the crash to CFIT in poor weather conditions.

## South Africa:

### Former President Zuma barred from election.

On 20 May, South Africa's Constitutional Court ruled that ex-President Jacob Zuma will not be allowed to run in the country's parliamentary elections, scheduled to take place on 29 May. The ruling is based on the constitutional clause barring anyone who was given a prison sentence of above 12 months from running for parliament. In 2021, Zuma was sentenced to 15 months by the same court for contempt.

**Assessment:** Zuma is the leader of the uMkhonto We Sizwe (MK) party, a group that was established as a direct challenge to the ruling African National Congress (ANC). After 30 years of post-Apartheid rule, the ANC faces, for the first time, a contested election, where it is likely to lose its majority. While the party continues to benefit from the memories of its historic leader Nelson Mandela and its fundamental role in ending Apartheid, today its support base has dwindled due to South Africa suffering from a worsening economy, growing inequalities, high violent crime rates, and faltering infrastructure, which continues to lead to widespread issues and disservices. Moreover, the party is largely perceived as corrupt and nepotistic. In what is likely a populist bid to gain back some support among younger and poorer South Africans, the ANC recently approved a sweeping healthcare reform, which however entails significant expenditures that may only take their toll after the elections. The MK party has campaigned solely on Zuma's popularity and lacks a clear political platform. On one hand, this made it a particularly appealing candidate as a potential coalition partner in a minority ANC government. However, the recent ruling will highly likely damage this scenario irreparably. The MK party, while only established six months ago, styles itself as an informal successor to a group of the same name, which was the ANC's paramilitary wing during the struggle to abolish Apartheid. While drawing less international attention compared to the radical leftism of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, much of MK's messaging has been surprisingly violent and anti-democratic. In March, a top MK party candidate threatened "civil war" if MK's participation in the elections were to be restricted. More recently, the party's youth wing leader has reiterated that violence would follow possible restrictions on MK's election bid. Following the court's decision, an official MK party response committed to keeping Zuma on the party's candidates list. These elements, as well as the increasing volatility of the South African political space, make that of violence and civil unrest a high likelihood, especially in case the MK party performs worse than expected at the polls. In 2021, Zuma's arrest resulted in widespread protests and riots, causing more than 300 deaths, in the KwaZulu-Natal state, which is now an MK fortress. A negative result, or a further move on the part of the judiciary or executive to restrict Zuma's participation, will likely translate into disruptions across the state, possibly also bolstering opportunistic violent crime on the parts of individuals or gangs. In turn, unrest in South Africa, and in KwaZulu-Natal in particular, may have unpredictable consequences for international business and travel. Zuma's home state and the epicentre of the 2021 protests is an industrial hub, with a large manufacturing sector focusing on ferroalloys, chemicals, and paper products, as well as some large ports that play a key role in South Africa's foreign trade (Durban and Richards Bay) and whose global importance has grown due to the ongoing Red Sea crisis, which has redirected large volumes of shipping towards the

Cape of Good Hope. Manufacturing facilities may especially suffer from roadblocks and looting of cargo trucks, both common occurrences during past protests in South Africa, and there is a likelihood that large businesses will be particularly appealing targets for opportunistic crime and looting following a possible breakdown in police presence and order. Disruptions in KwaZulu-Natal may therefore ripple across the country and region and have distant impacts on global supply chains and trade.

## EMEA Summary and Forecast:

### Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

**British** Prime Minister Rishi Sunak announced a general election to be held on 4 July. The choice of an early election date likely reflects the ruling Conservative Party's poor performance in the polls, as well as its disastrous showing at the recent local elections. The six weeks of electoral campaigns will highly likely be characterised by civil unrest, as the UK continues to be one of the European countries most affected by the pro-Palestine protests, among a variety of domestic protest and anti-government movements.

The Council of the **European Union** (EC) approved a bloc-wide legal framework for Artificial Intelligence (AI) regulation. The law categorises different types of AI systems on the basis of risk, establishing different levels of government oversight, as well as banning certain types of systems completely. It is almost certain that the framework, the first in the world, will have an impact beyond Europe's borders, as foreign companies dealing with EU citizens and their data will be expected to comply. As in the case of previous European frameworks on data and privacy, there is a high likelihood that the AI law, or similar versions, will be adopted by third countries, a phenomenon that is sometimes described as the "Brussels effect". The law will almost certainly have sector-wide effects, albeit their extent remains for now difficult to predict.

On 19 May, the **Spanish** right-wing Vox party hosted a summit in **Madrid** with representatives of many of its European counterparts, as well as **Argentine** President Milei. Populist right-wing parties are not all members of the same parliamentary group. Rather, they are mostly split between the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the Identity and Democracy (ID). Nevertheless, in recent years European populists have sought to appear as a united right-wing front, in opposition to the Union's various establishment and left-wing formations. The summit, which follows other meetings in Italy and France, was likely meant to demonstrate this transnational unity. It is notable that this project of a united populist right in Europe approximately resembles the project of American ideologue Steve Bannon, which fell out of relevance following Trump's election in 2016. The event was met with protests from left-wing groups, and it is likely that further disorders will take place in the next weeks before the European Union's parliamentary elections on 6-9 June.

The next event in this year's G7 calendar will take place between 23 and 25 May, as G7 members' finance ministers and central bank governors will meet in **Stresa**, north **Italy**. Italy has a history of suffering protests during past G7 and G8 summits, including massive clashes in 2001 during the Genova summit, and the government has likely opted to restrict this year's events to smaller towns for security concerns. Nevertheless, there is a realistic possibility of left-wing protests taking place in major Italian cities during the event, including Milan and Bologna. Protests may combine anti-G7 sentiment with pro-Palestine positions, thus attracting larger crowds.

On 18 May **Georgian** President Salome Zourabichvili vetoed the controversial foreign influence bill that has incited unprecedented protests in the country for weeks. Zourabichvili's veto does not prevent the bill from being passed, it only delays it as the parliament can still override the veto with another vote. Mass protests across Georgia are almost certain if parliament votes to override the veto.

The junta government of **Mali** signed an agreement with Chinese company Ganfeng Lithium, granting it operational rights to the Goulamina lithium mine. As part of the deal, the Malian government's stake in the mine project will increase from 20 to 35 per cent. The deal likely reflects China's continuing interest in expanding its role in the rare minerals and metal extraction sector in Africa, and the growing partnership that Beijing has with the junta government of the Sahel. Still, the move may increase the security risks in the area: like its neighbours, Mali continues to face an Islamist insurgency led by Boko Haram splinters and Islamic State-affiliated groups like the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) branch. IS has increasingly sought to target Chinese assets in Afghanistan and, as ISWAP maintains connections with other IS chapters, there is a realistic possibility that Islamists will seek to attack the Goulamina project. In this sense, the role of Russia – which has become a regional security provider through its Africa Corps (formerly the Wagner Group) – is likely to become even more crucial, with the deal thus benefitting both Moscow and Beijing's foreign policies.

**Chad's** Prime Minister, Succes Masra, resigned on 22 May, weeks after losing in his bid to challenge President Idriss Deby at the last general elections. Masra was appointed as the prime minister of the junta government in January, in a move that was almost certainly meant to appease the opposition. The development will likely lead to a further centralisation of power in the hands of the junta. While a likelihood of protests remains, these are unlikely to match the intensity of the violence that occurred in late February, when government forces attacked the headquarters of the Socialist party in the country's capital, N'Djamena. In case of civil unrest, junta forces are likely to react violently, also by shutting down internet services in the country, leading to broader and non-localised disruptions across Chad.

After an Apostolic Church bishop joined anti-government protests, leading **Armenian** officials threatened to increase taxes on the religious body, in a case that threatens to worsen the country's already unstable political situation. Archbishop Bagrat Galstianian has become a leader of the nationalist movement opposing Armenia's border deal with Azerbaijan, which agrees to Azeri sovereign claims over some contested border areas. Following the disastrous Second Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, Yerevan, which has lost much of Moscow's traditional support, has repeatedly sought to avoid a resumption of hostilities with Baku. This policy, however, has ignited nationalist opposition within the country. With the Armenian administration unlikely to change course, a more direct involvement by the Church may prompt further protests and violence. There is also a realistic possibility of Armenian Churches in third countries becoming targets for lone-wolf terrorist violence by pro-Azerbaijan individuals.

### **Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.**

On 19 May, a former **British** Royal Marine commando, who was charged with spying for the Hong Kong intelligence services, was found dead in a park in **Maidenhead, Berkshire**. The man had appeared in court as late as 13 May and was scheduled to attend another hearing on 24 May. He was accused of carrying out intelligence-gathering operations in the UK for the benefit of a foreign agency, including breaking into a private residence. After the first court date, Beijing's embassy in London released a letter categorically denying the reported espionage claims. As of the time of writing, no details have emerged regarding the details of the incident.

At least one person was killed in heavy clashes in the western **Libyan** town of **Zawiya**. The fighting was reported as involving "individuals" rather than armed groups and is therefore likely not linked to the broader civil conflict that continues in the country. Zawiya is strategically important as it has the largest functioning oil refinery in Libya. Zawiya's stability rests upon an unstable truce between the local Awlad Saqr tribe and a faction including the Abu Zariba and Khushlaf families. The former controls much of the urban centre, while the latter administers the refinery. It is possible that the clashes reflected the inter-factional tensions and may hint at a possible worsening of the balance of power in the city.

The newly-elected prime minister of **Senegal**, Ousmane Sonko, raised the possibility of expelling the French forces stationed in the country. While Sonko's electoral victory was hailed



internationally as a democratic success, one of the rare ones in the Sahel region in recent years, the prime minister's foreign policy positions stress the need for friendly relations with the regional junta governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. In all three cases, eliminating French domestic presence constituted a popular policy due to recent memories of Paris' imperial rule. It is possible that Sonko's anti-French rhetoric is a populist tool to increase public support, while simultaneously seeking to maintain an open foreign policy towards both the juntas and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

US officials announced that their forces in **Niger** will leave the country by 15 September, following the junta's withdrawal from its security agreement with Washington. In April, Russian troops first arrived in the country, and are likely to take over much of the security functions previously held by Washington. There is a high likelihood that Russian intelligence will seek to foment protests in the coming months in an attempt to hasten the withdrawal of US forces and in the hope of causing a security incident that may further reverberate through the region.

On 20 May, **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)** officials said they had thwarted an attempted coup led by US-aligned individuals. According to reports, armed fighters stormed the residence of a federal legislator and the Palais de la Nation in **Kinshasa**. The militants were reportedly led by Captain Christian Malanga, a former army official residing in the US, and may have been operating out of Congo Brazzaville. Later, photos emerged showing a dead Malanga, as well as captives, including, allegedly, three US nationals. The DRC is one of the world's key hubs for rare earth minerals, which are especially abundant in its eastern border regions. The government in Kinshasa has increasingly struggled to maintain control of these areas, where proxy groups, such as M23, linked to the Rwandan government, are engaged in a low-intensity conflict fuelling the illegal traffic of minerals and other resources. While it is impossible to reject the hypothesis of Washington's involvement, the dynamics surrounding the reported coup remain unclear. It is, however, extremely likely that the episode will sour relations with Washington at a time when the US is retreating on all fronts across the continent, especially in the Sahel region.

**Kenyan** President William Ruto has conducted a three-day state visit to the **US**, where President Biden is expected to designate Kenya as a major non-NATO ally. This would make Kenya the first sub-Saharan African country to receive the designation and has likely been influenced by Washington's desire to pull Nairobi away from Russia and China and to help the US limit its loss of influence in Africa.

#### **Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.**

The town of **Pozzuoli**, in the **Italian** region of **Campania**, experienced the strongest wave of earthquakes in over 40 years, as it was struck by dozens of tremors, some of which were above 4 magnitude, over 48 hours. The tremors caused moderate damage and forced some residents to temporarily abandon their properties. However, with further phenomena remaining a realistic possibility, seismic activity in Italy's south may negatively affect this year's Summer tourism season and possibly have broader repercussions on transport and business. Southern Italy, despite being a seismically at-risk zone, includes urban centres whose buildings are mostly inadequate to resist major tremors and that in some cases are structurally weak, meaning that damages tend to be amplified.



## Asia Pacific (APAC)

## Afghanistan:

### Foreign tourists killed in ISKP attack.

On 17 May, three Spanish tourists and three Afghan nationals were killed by gunmen of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), in an attack that also left four other foreigners and four locals wounded. The shooting took place in a bazaar in the city of Bamiyan, the city where two colossal Buddha statues were located prior to their destruction by the first Taliban government in 2001, and that remains the main tourist destination in the country. After taking power in 2021, the new Taliban government has sought to encourage tourism to the country and even allowed UNESCO-sponsored preservation work at the Bamiyan site.

**Assessment:** ISKP continues its activities in Afghanistan, where it seeks to destabilise the Afghan government with the possible strategic aim of establishing an alternative administration in poorly controlled parts of the country. As part of its plan, ISKP seeks to target Kabul's foreign relations, ensuring the regime's international isolation and blocking its attempts to reintegrate within the international community. So far, Chinese citizens and assets have been ISKP's targets of choice, as Beijing is the regional power that has invested most in the new regime. In 2022, ISKP targeted a Kabil hotel with the explicit aim of killing Chinese nationals, and in January 2023, an IS suicide bomber detonated outside of the Taliban's foreign ministry building during a Chinese delegation visit. To carry out these attacks, ISKP recruiters have increasingly looked to Tajikistan, where anti-Chinese propaganda is particularly effective due to Beijing policies in Xinjiang. In the most recent issue of the *Voice of Khorasan*, ISKP's semi-official journal, Islamist writers accuse the Taliban regime of cooperating with the US and China, and of implementing "man-made" laws rather than the Sharia. The attack on European nationals (and one Australian) likely follows the same logic as those against Chinese citizens, and in particular seeks to discourage tourism to Bamiyan, thus aiming to inflict an economic cost on the Taliban. For Kabul, the attack is a particularly notable security failure, and the response of the Taliban government may play a role in future relations with Western powers.

## India and Bangladesh:

### Bengal region to be hit by first cyclone of 2024.

On 23 May, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned that a cyclone is likely to develop in the Bay of Bengal and affect much of the Bengal region by 26 May. This will be the first cyclone to form in the North Indian Ocean basin in 2024 and will be identified as cyclone "Remal". The current low-pressure system over the Bay of Bengal is expected to track northeast turning into a depression by 24 May, evolving into a cyclone that will move north and hit Bangladesh and parts of eastern India.

**Assessment:** If cyclone Remal materialises it will mark the fifth consecutive year when cyclones have developed in May, a month before the traditional monsoon season. Moreover, scientists have warned that warmer sea surface temperatures mean more moisture in the air, which favours the intensification of cyclones and will invariably stoke fears of a destructive cyclone season. Current projections are that Cyclone Remal is expected to produce wind speeds of up to 102 kilometres per hour, placing it in the category of "severe cyclones" (wind speeds of 89 – 117 km/hr). In India, this has prompted several weather alerts regarding heavy rainfall for the districts of West Bengal, North Odisha, Mizoram, Tripura, and South Manipur. In Bangladesh, the coastal areas from Barishal to Chattogram (Chittagong) and down to Cox's Bazar are likely to be affected. Furthermore, if the cyclone coincides with high tide, coastal flooding is likely to be severe in Bangladesh, a major concern given the country's geographical vulnerability and dense population. Flooding in Bangladesh is likely to lead to multiple fatalities and damage much of the region's agriculture, with rough seas causing the interruption of fishing, thus affecting two of the largest industries in the area. If the major cities of Barishal and Chattogram are majorly affected, there is



likely to be disruption to some of the most important industries in the country, including manufacturing and textiles. Further north, in some of India's more mountainous areas like Tripura, heavy rain is likely to cause flash floods and landslides leading to much transport disruption. Moreover, the sixth round of Lok Sabha – the Indian general elections - is set to take place on 25 May and the harsh weather conditions could disrupt the electoral process.

## Taiwan:

### Protests sparked by reforms to parliament.

On 21 May, tens of thousands of protesters gathered outside the Taiwanese parliament in Taipei, sparked by a controversial attempt to pass reforms without review. The proposed legislation would allow members of parliament to scrutinise any individual, regardless of position or role, under threats of fines or judicial sentences. The bill also includes proposals for lawmakers to punish officials for vaguely defined acts of contempt of parliament, such as making false statements or withholding information. The debates surrounding the bill's passage led to clashes within parliament, resulting in one MP being hospitalised. This unrest coincided with President Lai Ching-te's first official day in office, following poor performances by his Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in the January legislative elections. The opposition parties, Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP), have united to form a temporary majority in the Legislative Yuan to expedite the bill's passage.

**Assessment:** Recent polling indicates that most Taiwanese favour outright independence or a continuation of the status quo. The bill sponsored by the China-leaning opposition has almost certainly been interpreted as a way for parliament to subject the new pro-independence president and administration to more scrutiny and influence, with its timing coinciding with his inauguration unlikely to be coincidental. Early indications are that the protests are being led by Taiwan's youth, with some wearing sunflowers in an obvious homage to the 2014 student-led protests against the KMT's controversial trade deal with China. With the DDP now only leading a minority government in the Yuan since January 2024, it is highly likely that the opposition will attempt to push through further bills that support some form of greater integration or cooperation with China, which will drive further unrest. The disunity resulting from the ongoing crisis is almost certain to be exploited by Beijing. On the morning of 23 May, spokespersons for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Eastern Command announced that extensive military drills had begun in the waters surrounding Taiwan, including the Taiwanese islands of Kinmen, Matsu, Wuqui, and Dongyin. The scale of the drills reportedly focused on sea and air combat readiness, is highly likely a direct response to the distracting nature of the parliamentary reforms. By conducting these operations immediately following the heated debate over the bill, the PLA has increased pressure on the newly appointed President Lai Ching-te, who is already grappling with limited influence in the hung Legislative Yuan. These weaknesses are further compounded by the Kuomintang (KMT) and Taiwan People's Party (TPP) simultaneously pushing for USD 61 billion in infrastructure investments. If successful, this investment would significantly reduce the funds available to maintain defence spending commitments. The timing of these investments, alongside the vaguely defined parliamentary reforms, raises concerns about the extent to which Beijing may have influenced the Taiwanese opposition. The KMT's longstanding efforts to promote greater economic cooperation with the mainland would benefit Beijing if they came to fruition. By influencing the KMT to prioritise domestic expenditure over bolstering the island's defence, Beijing is laying the foundations for either an easier military engagement or greater support for assimilation through economic unity. It is unlikely that the tense political situation in Taiwan will subside soon, as the pro-independence DPP lacks the power to effectively silence opposition parties. Through the KMT, Beijing, whether directly or indirectly, has an avenue to influence decisions that either weaken Taiwan's defensive capabilities or distract the government from Beijing's actions.

## APAC Summary and Forecast:

### Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.

**China, Japan and South Korea** are set to hold their first joint summit in four years on the 26-27 May. The summit will be held in **Seoul** and will involve the South Korean president, the Japanese prime minister and the Chinese premier. The three will produce a joint statement on the economy, trade, science, technology, health and the shared issue of an ageing population. The three countries will also likely address North Korea's weapons programmes which have stoked fears in the region, with Beijing likely seeing the summit as an opportunity to exert pressure on Seoul and Tokyo away from the influence of Washington.

**Thailand's** Constitutional Court has agreed to hear a case regarding Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin's appointment of cabinet member Pichit Chuenban. The case, brought forward by members of the outgoing senate, alleges that Chuenban's appointment violates constitutional frameworks for deciding senior ministers. The senators argue that Chuenban lacks 'evident integrity' due to a 2008 incident, in which he served a six-month prison sentence for bribing a judge with USD 55,000. The case represents the most significant threat to the current Thai government since its formation in August 2023, and could potentially lead to Thavisin being ousted from office and associated civil unrest.

**Indonesia's** parliament is considering making major changes to its broadcast law. The proposed changes would ban investigative journalism and LGBTQ content and would include online streaming platforms. Civil society groups have criticised the proposed changes suggesting they would curb freedom of expression in the world's third-largest democracy, limiting the press' ability to illuminate issues such as corruption, nepotism and environmental crimes.

**French** President Emmanuel Macron has travelled to the territory of **New Caledonia** in a bid to curb the current civil unrest that has been ongoing since 13 May. Lootings, arson and clashes have resulted in six fatalities, caused widespread damage and led to the deployment of thousands of French gendarmes to the area. However, many locals, particularly the indigenous Kanak people have suggested that France's security deployments will provoke further unrest and have suggested that Macron is not their president.

### Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

On 17 May, **North Korea** tested tactical nuclear missiles equipped with a new "autonomous" guidance technology. The missiles were fired from the eastern city of Wonsan and travelled about 300km east, landing in the East Sea. The maximum range of North Korea's tactical nuclear missiles was previously assessed at approximately 110km, suggesting a marked increase in Pyongyang's capabilities, which now put most of **South Korea** in range from the border. Little was divulged regarding the capabilities of the autonomous system, but it is likely it would at the very least increase Pyongyang's precision targeting and reliance on GPS. The worst-case scenario would enable the missile to adapt its course or follow waypoints, allowing it to avoid countermeasures or circumvent air defence to increase its survivability and achieve mission success.

In a move to disrupt **Russia's** procurement of weapons from **North Korea, South Korea and Japan** have imposed sanctions on individuals and organisations suspected of facilitating the movement of arms. It is highly likely that Seoul and Tokyo fear that this relationship will afford Pyongyang access to advanced Russian military technology that will militarise the Korean peninsula and potentially spark an arms race in the area.

**India's** anti-terror police have arrested four **Sri Lankans** in the western city of **Ahmedabad** for alleged links to the Islamic State. The accused were apparently in communication with a key Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) leader based in **Pakistan** and seized material indicated links to the terrorist organisation. Weapons recovered from a location identified from seized mobile phones are likely indicative that the group were planning a terror attack, with ISKP likely

endorsing a high-profile attack during the contentious Indian general elections which have seen President Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party often make inflammatory remarks about India's Muslim population and champion policies that discriminate against them.

Police have been deployed in the **West Bengal** town of **Nandigram** after election-related violence erupted after a female BJP worker was killed and seven others injured after a politically motivated attack. The attack occurred before the sixth round of the **Indian** general election and may be an indication of growing political violence as the elections enter their final stages.

On 21 May, **Australia's** Defence Minister Richard Marles stated that the **Solomon Islands'** newly elected Prime Minister Jeremiah Manele has initiated a security review to determine the future of policing cooperation. The review follows a 2022 security pact with **China**, which had raised concerns in Canberra and Washington over China's naval ambitions, and will inform both governments about the presence and role of Australian police in the Solomon Islands.

### **Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.**

Flash floods caused by unusually heavy rain in **Afghanistan** have killed a further 68 people, with 50 reported dead in the western **Ghor** province. Thousands of homes and thousands of acres of farming land have been damaged, with rescue workers and humanitarian efforts overstretched by the remoteness of the affected areas, with many areas inaccessible by truck.

A dengue outbreak in Turbat, **Pakistan** has resulted in the deaths of at least 14 people, while over 5,000 cases have been confirmed since the beginning of 2024 across the whole Kech district. An emergency has not been declared currently, but should cases continue to be confirmed, it is likely that one will. Further fatalities from the outbreak are almost certain in the coming weeks due to the lack of adequate facilities in local hospitals.

**India's** official monsoon season will begin in June but at least 15 people have already died flood-related incidents in **Tamil Nadu** state, likely caused by a low-pressure weather event over the Bay of Bengal. Fishermen have been warned not to go to sea, tourist spots further up the coast will likely be affected and flash floods are expected across most of Tamil Nadu. Meteorologists are expecting more rain this year as La Niña conditions develop in the Pacific Ocean.

On 18 May after months of activity, Mount Ibu on the **Indonesian** island of Halmahera erupted spectacularly, spewing a grey ash cloud into the sky and prompting the evacuation of people from seven nearby villages. Indonesian authorities have likely improved their evacuation readiness after the recent eruption of Mount Merapi, which coincided with heavy rain and created a cold lava flow which killed over 40 people.

Tropical Depression Aghon has formed in the Philippine Sea and is projected to make landfall on the island of **Samar** on the eastern coast of the **Philippines** in the early hours of May 25. Although current forecasts suggest that the depression will not intensify rapidly, heavy rainfall and storm surge warnings are in effect across eastern regions. These conditions are likely to cause significant disruptions in the coming days.

Over 100 fatalities are suspected following a significant landslide in Enga Province, **Papua New Guinea**. The landslide reportedly struck in the early hours of May 24, impacting many people while they were asleep. The death toll is almost certain to rise in the coming days due to the limited access to medical provisions in rural areas, further exacerbated by the landslide cutting off several roads.