RISK ADVISORY

THE SECURITY CENTRE

Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 24 MAY – 31 MAY

Powered By Solace Global Risk

Global Intelligence Summary

Week 21: 24 May – 31 May

Executive Summary

- The targeted killing of foreign NGO workers in **Haiti** is **highly likely** reflective of a strategy to limit foreign intervention and oversight in the country dominated by criminal gangs.
- The **Spanish** parliament's controversial passing of an amnesty bill for Catalan separatists is **likely** to provoke demonstrations throughout the country.
- The charging of pro-democracy activists in **Hong Kong** under **China's** new national security law will **likely** affect the special administrative region's status as a financial hub.
- There is a **realistic possibility** of civil unrest in **Thailand** after the charging of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra under the strict "lese majeste" laws.

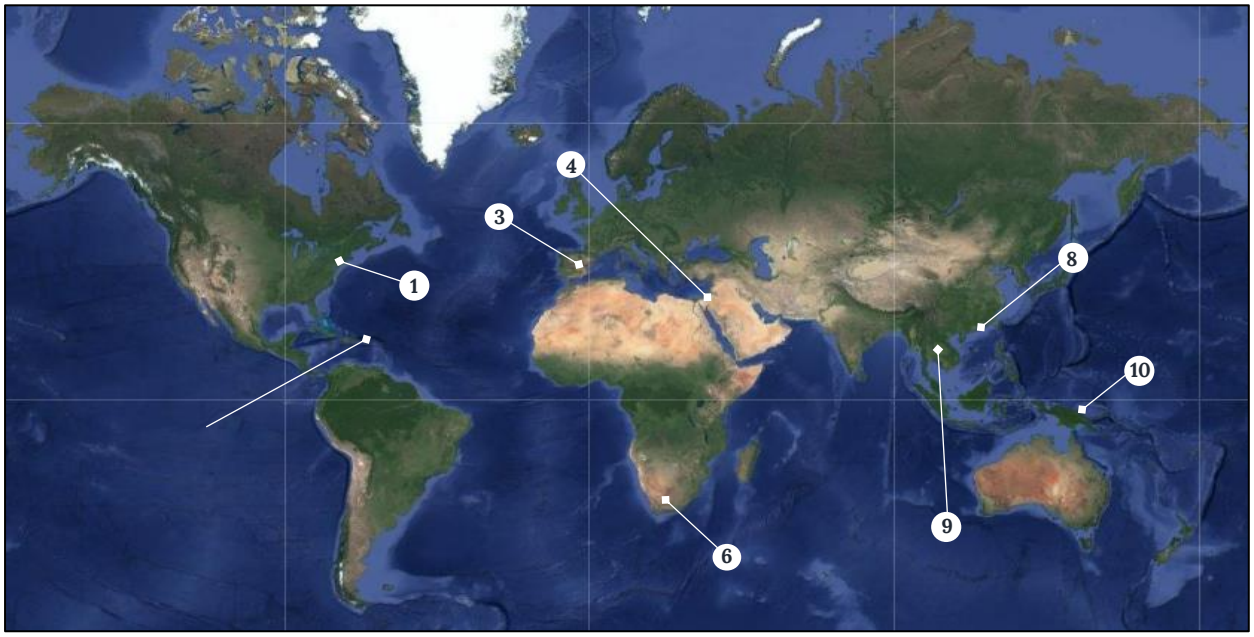

Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period.

AMER

1 USA: Trump found guilty in historic trial
2 Haiti: Gangs target NGOs to prevent foreign intervention

EMEA

3 Spain: Lower house approves controversial amnesty bill
4 Israel & Palestine: IDF advance in central Rafah and Philadelphi corridor
5 Cameroon: Anglophone separatists bomb regional capital
6 South Africa: 29 May elections result in ANC losing majority for the first time

APAC

7 Pakistan: Border clashes with Pakistani Taliban
8 Hong Kong: Pro-democracy activists charged under new security law
9 Thailand: Former PM charged under lese majeste laws
10 Papua New Guinea: Landslide buries up to 2,000

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Global Dates and Events

31 May - 7 June

Pride Month begins on 1 June and will be marked by global events. There is a high likelihood of an increase in online harassment against LGBTQ individuals, especially on social networks like X.com (formerly Twitter). There is also a realistic possibility of violence, including lone wolf terrorism, targeting Pride events. Last week, the FBI issued a rare "worldwide" security alert to coincide with the month, a warning that was also echoed by the US Department of Homeland Security.

On 5 June, **World Environment Day** will be celebrated. The event commemorates a 1972 UN conference on the Human Environment and is marked by events led by the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). In 2024, the summit will be hosted by Saudi Arabia and will focus on land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience. Riyadh's leadership in the summit is likely going to be met with accusations of "greenwashing", as the kingdom continues to engage in questionable practices beyond its economic reliance on oil exports, such as the construction of architectural "megaprojects" that have severe environmental impacts.

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Americas (AMER)

United States:

Trump's trial verdict poses a risk of terrorism and civil unrest.
On 30 May, jurors for the hush money trial of Donald Trump, currently taking place in Manhattan, New York City, found the former US President guilty on all 34 counts of campaign finance violations. All of the 34 counts are classified as "E class" felonies, the lowest tier of felonies in New York state. The conviction is almost certain to face appeals, with Trump referring to the trial as "rigged" and a "disgrace" in the immediate aftermath of the verdict's release. Despite being found guilty on all counts, Trump will still be able to run in the November elections. Sentencing is expected to take place on 11 July.

Assessment: It is extremely unlikely that Trump will be sentenced to prison time for the offences. Instead, the conviction will likely result in fines, probation, or community services. Still, the guilty verdict is highly likely to have an important political impact. The conviction is almost certain to prompt an increase in the threat of civil unrest and domestic terrorism at least until the November vote, and possibly beyond it. In Manhattan, confrontations between Trump supporters and their opponents may turn violent, albeit disruptions are likely to be minor due to the extremely large police presence near the court. More broadly, there is a realistic possibility of lone-wolf terrorist attacks targeting federal and state officials, police officers, or political activists across the United States. OSINT analysis has revealed an increase in online violent messaging focusing on the New York area. On the evening of 29 May, a viral post on X.com (formerly Twitter) included alleged threats of a terrorist attack being planned in Times Square on the following day. While no such attack has taken place, and the post's provenance is unclear, there is a realistic possibility of political actors carrying out information operations to increase political tensions in the city, in an effort possibly linked to the ongoing trial. Furthermore, foreign actors may take advantage of the period of civil unrest that will follow the verdict to conduct information operations in the US to further polarise the US.

Haiti:

The killing of three US missionaries highlights gangs' "strategy" against foreign intervention.
On 24 May, three US missionaries were ambushed outside of a church in Lizon, Port-au-Prince and killed by gang members. The missionaries were members of an Oklahoma-based organisation founded in 2000 by Pentecostal Christians. According to social media posts by the organisation, the three were initially assaulted and restrained by a group of gunmen, before being killed by another group that arrived on the scene. The victims' bodies were also apparently burnt, and, following the killing, gang members also reportedly threatened to stop proceedings to repatriate the remains to the US. While responsibility for the killings remains unclear at the time of writing, OSINT research indicates that a group called "Viv Ansanm" led by Claudy Célestin, initially developed as an offshoot of the G9 coalition – the largest gang network in Haiti - is operating in the Lizon area.

Assessment: The killing's dynamics almost certainly demonstrate premeditation and may fit into ongoing gangs' efforts to prevent the deployment of international forces in Haiti. Uncorroborated reports that the gang responsible for the killing had previously "protected" the mission may signal a larger "shift" in gangs' objectives and policies. Already in April, reports emerged of Haitian gang leaders increasingly targeting civilian infrastructure, including churches, in apparent efforts to dismantle any potential administration-capable structure and force civil society to become completely dependent on the crime syndicates. Some Haitian gang leaders have even publicly

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called to be included in the transition council, albeit Haitian and international authorities have mostly ignored these appeals. With public services mostly disrupted and government authority significantly reduced, foreign NGOs have increasingly played a role in providing medical services and basic necessities such as food, clean water, and shelter. There is a high likelihood that, for this reason, gangs are increasingly seeking to target NGO operations in the country. According to local sources, the Viv Ansanm gang is currently targeting humanitarian facilities in Lizon, as well as the remaining police holdouts. On 23-24 May, gang members reportedly kidnapped employees of the Bon Espoir orphanage, also located in the area. Other reports, corroborated by video evidence, claim that Viv Ansanm regularly distributes cash to local inhabitants. These actions highly likely indicate that the targeting of NGO workers fits within this broader effort to ensure that gangs remain the only viable sources of authority in the country. The recent "acceleration" in the preparations for the deployment of Kenyan UN-backed forces to Haiti has likely influenced this increase in gangs' attacks on NGOs. By deliberately killing US nationals, gangs may seek to affect US and international public opinion to prevent or delay the deployment of foreign personnel to the country, to further dissuade foreign actors from intervening in the conflict and to limit foreign oversight.

AMER Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.
President Biden is expected to sign an executive order next week to limit migration into the **US** from the **Mexican** border. The move has likely been done to improve the Democrat's electoral hopes in November. Previous immigration reforms have sparked protests throughout the US, especially from the Latino community, such as the 2017 "Day Without Immigrants" or the 2021 "We are Here to Stay Rally" under Biden, which drew thousands to the streets of Washington D.C., Los Angeles, New York and Chicago.

On 29 May, large pro-Palestine protests were held outside of the Israeli embassy in **Mexico City**. The demonstration, which was attended by at least 200 people, descended into violence, with protesters allegedly throwing Molotov cocktails inside the compound, and police forces deploying riot control agents, including tear gas and pepper spray. There is a realistic possibility of further protests and violence in the Mexican capital.

On 28 May, **Venezuela** revoked the **European Union's** invitation to send election observers for the presidential contest in July, citing economic sanctions for the revocation. However, the bloc only imposes sanctions on 50 individual Venezuelans and not the country as a whole, suggesting the real reason may be to limit international oversight of the election, with President Maduro seeking to gain re-election.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.
There has been widespread political violence in the build-up to the **Mexican** election scheduled for 2 June, particularly in the states of **Chiapas** and **Guerrero**. Cartels are almost certainly attempting to influence candidate selection and will likely continue their attacks up until the election, targeting political rallies, offices, convoys and even the homes of politicians.

Government forces have clashed multiple times with dissident elements of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of **Colombia** – People's Army (FARC) in the Colombian departments of **Cauca** and **Valle del Cauca**, and on 30 May, the Colombian military defused 600 kilograms of explosives found in two car bombs in Jambalo, Cauca, allegedly planted by FARC dissidents. The dissident "Estado Mayor Central" (EMC) wing walked away from peace talks in April and has intensified its attacks recently, likely in a bid to present itself as the only armed group in Colombia that is directly challenging the state.

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US naval forces have conducted joint naval drills with the **Argentine** Navy during Exercise "Gringo-Gaucho" off the coast of Argentina. This was the first joint drill conducted since 2010 and is almost certainly a symbolic confirmation of Argentina's pivoting back towards Washington and its rejection of **China** under President Milei.

Two women were fatally shot on 30 May in **Campo Sales**, in eastern **Brazil** in what is being described by the authorities as an apparent homophobic attack. The country has suffered a series of homophobic attacks in recent years, with attacks likely to increase during Pride month.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

On **26 May**, storms that moved through four in the central **US** killed at least 21 people and damaged hundreds of buildings. Eight fatalities were recorded in Arkansas, seven in Texas, four in Kentucky, and two in Oklahoma. Nearly 100 people were injured when a powerful tornado struck communities in north Texas, near the Oklahoma border. It is highly likely more casualty-causing tornadoes will occur in the near future, with the Atlantic hurricane season beginning on 1 June.

An air quality alert has been issued for **Mexico City** at the same time as authorities have warned that "day zero" is approaching for when the metropolis runs out of water, with one of the city's primary water systems running at below 30 per cent. The environmental issues combined with the 2 June election will likely provoke civil unrest in the capital.

The death toll from **Brazil's** dengue outbreak has surpassed 3,000 with an estimated five million cases recorded across the country since the start of 2024. Dengue cases in the Americas are now estimated to be five times greater in the 2020s than in the 1990s, forcing the Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO) to urge countries in **Central America**, **Mexico**, and the **Caribbean** to strengthen their efforts to prevent dengue infections. There are also growing concerns that the disease will rapidly expand into the southern **US**. Authorities in Brazil have also warned that recent flooding has led to an outbreak of waterborne diseases. The state of **Rio Grande do Sul** has now recorded seven deaths linked to leptospirosis or "Weil's disease" with a further 800 cases being investigated.

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Spain:

Separatists granted amnesty by Spain's lower house.
On 30 May, the Spanish parliament gave final approval to a controversial amnesty law which will effectively end all legal action against hundreds of Catalan separatists involved in the 2017 secession bid and other secessionist pushes since 2011. However, the bill only passed with a vote of 177 to 172, demonstrating how polarised the country is on the issue.

Assessment: Whilst the amnesty bill seeks to end a divisive period of Spanish politics from a legal perspective, the issue remains emotionally charged and is likely far from a comprehensive political conclusion. The bill, which only narrowly passed, was opposed by Spain's conservative Popular Party (PP) and far-right Vox party, as well as elements from other parties. The bill was previously passed by Spain's lower house but vetoed by the upper house, where the right has a majority, but the lower house controversially pushed it through regardless. It is almost certain that the majority of the right-wing parties' bases are in line with party leadership and see the amnesty as an attack on Spanish territorial integrity. A recent survey conducted in March 2024 indicated that 62 per cent of Spaniards rejected the amnesty, suggesting that it has not solely antagonised the right, but the majority of the Spanish population. Previous developments in Prime Minister Sanchez's push to pardon the separatists have resulted in widespread civil unrest throughout the country and the bill's approval will likely provoke further demonstrations. In November 2023, Sanchez's decision to grant amnesty in exchange for support from the separatists in a coalition government resulted in almost 200,000 protestors amassing in Madrid, as well as smaller protests in multiple other Spanish cities. The bill will also likely pave the way for contentious separatist leaders like Carles Puigdemont to return from exile, whose re-entry into Spain could be a catalyst for major protests. Furthermore, the issue is unlikely to quietly go away, with right-wing parties set to challenge the bill in court, suggesting that the issue may be at the forefront of Spanish politics for months or even years to come.

Israel and Palestine:

Israeli forces take control of the full border with Egypt, enter central Rafah.
Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have entered a second stage of their offensive into Rafah, after securing control of the Philadelphi corridor, the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. On 27 May, IDF units at the border reportedly engaged in a firefight with Egyptian forces, during which at least one Egyptian soldier was killed. At the same time, IDF forces have entered the centre of Rafah, where it has encountered heavier Hamas resistance than in the city's east. On 26 May, an Israeli airstrike on a refugee camp close to the al-Mawasi humanitarian zone killed at least 45 Palestinians.

Assessment: The Philadelphi corridor is almost certainly the main source of materiel for Hamas forces in the Gaza Strip, as the militant group has successfully maintained an ability to smuggle weapons and explosives from Egypt. Occupying the border will likely allow IDF forces to destroy Hamas infrastructure in the area more comprehensively. On 29 May, an Israeli military spokesperson stated that the IDF expects the Rafah Brigade to be the last fully operational unit at Hamas' disposal. Moreover, beyond its strictly operational utility, IDF presence in the Philadelphi area will likely contribute to facilitating the exodus of Palestinian internally displaced persons (IDPs) towards al-Mawasi, rather than the Egypt border. Still, as the firefight incident likely indicates, the IDF presence entails a high risk of a diplomatic incident between Egypt and

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Israel, which may result in a significant worsening of the domestic situation in Egypt itself, and may have broader international implications. With the border areas secure, IDF operations in central Rafah are highly likely aimed at rooting out the remaining Hamas assets in the city, and at capturing or killing the Hamas commanders that may still be operating from the vast tunnel network below it. At the same time, Tel Aviv continues to face international pressure, which will likely increase in the aftermath of the 26 May strike. The Netanyahu administration has recently seen an increase in domestic pressures, likely underscored by its ongoing inability to achieve its stated war objectives, as well as the continuing worsening of Israel's international position. As the Rafah operation continues to compound the humanitarian crisis faced by Palestinian IDPs in the Gaza Strip's south, the coming weeks may see an increase in overt challenges to Netanyahu's authority coming from within Israel, as well as from international allies. Moreover, the West Bank, and Jenin in particular, continues to remain a hotspot for violence, with IDF forces conducting repeated raids and allegedly detaining a journalist. Military activity in the West Bank has increased in the latter stages of the conflict, with Tel Aviv likely seeking to stifle possible Palestinian-organised resistance in the area. However, this has in turn increased the risk faced by international NGOs operating in the area.

Cameroon:

Anglophone separatists suspected as responsible for bombing in Bamenda.
On the evening of 25 May, a bombing in Bamenda, the capital of Cameroon's North-West region, resulted in two deaths and 41 injuries. The attack targeted a bar located within 100 metres of a Cameroonian Gendarmerie Nationale base, which was reportedly frequented by government security forces. As of 31 May, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, local authorities suspect Anglophone separatist groups. Ambazonian militants, who have long sought independence for Cameroon's Anglophone North-West and South-West regions, are considered likely perpetrators. Support for suspected Ambazonian involvement is bolstered by reports that the bar owner was selling beer associated with Francophone regions, violating prohibitions enforced by Anglophone militants in the city. In response to the attack, a 12-hour overnight curfew has been implemented across the city.

Assessment: The recent bombing exposes the continued and likely escalating threat posed by separatist militants in Cameroon's Anglophone regions. Ambazonian separatists frequently target the Gendarmerie Nationale and other government security forces. This was evidenced on 10 May, when six Gendarmerie officers were killed by separatist militants in Eyumodjock, a village in the South-West region near the Nigerian border. Typically, such attacks occur in rural border areas, where limited border security allows for porous movement between Nigeria and Cameroon. However, carrying out such an attack in one of the region's largest urban areas, within close proximity to a Gendarmerie base, underscores significant shortcomings in the government's efforts to curtail separatist activities. The scale of this attack represents one of the highest casualty tolls since the Ambazonian leadership crisis of 2019. This crisis saw the first president of Ambazonia, Sisiku Julius Ayuk Tabe, dissolve the then-active interim government and reinstate the previous interim administration, resulting in the existence of two interim governments. Subsequent infighting within one of these interim governments in 2022 led to three politicians claiming the presidency of the unofficial state. This prolonged infighting has resulted in fractured militias with differing approaches on how to achieve independence from Yaoundé. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, noted Ambazonian separatist and former militant, Capo Daniel, condemned the bombing as detrimental to diplomatic efforts. Additionally, the absence of a unified political representative for Ambazonia has severely undermined efforts to negotiate peace settlements with the Francophone government. As a result, it is almost certain that separatist militants will continue to conduct attacks within Anglophone regions. Diplomatic settlements are presently unattainable, and government forces appear unequipped to prevent significant attacks. Whilst Anglophone separatist forces typically concentrate on targeting central government forces, there is a realistic possibility that increased militant activity will lead to an increase in

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targeting foreign aid workers for kidnap to raise funds or to achieve political leverage and publicity.

South Africa:

ANC losing historic majority likely to result in socio-economic and political instability.
The South African elections took place on 29 May. While the official results will be finalised over the weekend, available data shows that the African National Congress (ANC), the party that guided South Africa's post-Apartheid political system for 30 years, lost its national majority and only obtained 42 per cent of the votes (as of current projections), forcing the next government to be formed from a coalition. Of the other major parties, the Democratic Alliance (DA) is projected to have made some gains, obtaining around 23.5 per cent of the vote, while the far-left Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) recoiled by a few points to 9 per cent. Former President Jacob Zuma's uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) party likely benefitted the most from the electors' haemorrhage of ANC, obtaining 11 per cent of votes, and winning a plurality in the KwaZulu Natal province. The elections take place in an extremely tense moment. On 27 May, a taxi blockade in the Eastern Cape province resulted in a shootout between drivers and local police forces.

Assessment: The ANC's negative results had long been predicted, as the party continues to be plagued by general perceptions of corruption and nepotism, as well as by a poor government record during the last legislature, marked by infrastructural decay and severe levels of domestic violent crime. Yet, with the projected loss of around 14.5 points compared to the 2019 elections, the ANC's decline is so important that it may mark a watershed moment in South African politics. A coalition government, likely pairing the ANC with MK (and, possibly, EFF), will almost certainly lead to increased political instability. The MK party has no clear ideological core, beyond its extreme personalistic messaging centred on Zuma, and is poised to benefit from ANC's loss of votes. Meanwhile, EFF espouses extreme left-wing positions and likewise embraces an inflammatory brand of anti-establishment populism. In both cases, ANC's possible coalition partners may see an alliance as a momentary arrangement to further erode the establishment party's voter base, by pushing for radical policies that have little chance to succeed in parliament. Among them, the most notable proposal shared by both EFF and MK is that of land expropriation without compensation. The measure would most likely specifically target white farmers, and there is a high chance that its approval, or even just its further mainstreaming, will result in clashes and civil unrest. Moreover, both MK and EFF embrace a militaristic rhetoric and have both repeatedly hinted at the risk of civil conflict if important reforms fail to be implemented. MK dominates the KwaZulu Natal province, the second largest economy in the country and an essential hub for international shipping lanes – further boosted by the ongoing Red Sea tensions. In this context, it is important to note that South Africa sees high rates of gun ownership, with an estimated five million firearms, both legal and illegal, currently in the country. The recent taxi drivers' shootout in the Eastern Cape province likely underscores the increasing frequency of gunfights in the context of mob violence, as noted by South African observers. Finally, EFF and MK support a foreign policy that more clearly aligns the country with Beijing and Moscow, and is markedly hostile to Western powers. These developments may result in a more cautious approach by foreign investors, possibly affecting the country's prospect of recovering from its ongoing economic woes.

EMEA Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.
A labour union representing junior doctors in **England** announced a period of strike action between 27 June and 2 July, ahead of the country's general election, scheduled for 4 July. The British Medical Association called the industrial action as part of the ongoing pay dispute with the government. BMA-organised strikes accounted for 41 days since March 2023, and the union has voted to continue to carry out actions at least until September. The strike will likely result in a

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general decrease in the availability of care across England, with potentially thousands of appointments being cancelled.

Also in **England**, a coalition of far-right groups and activists, led by former members of the English Defence League (EDL), will conduct a demonstration in **London** on 1 June. The march will begin at Victoria Station at noon local time and will continue until Parliament Square. OSINT analysis shows that left-wing counterprotests will take place, and there is a realistic possibility of clashes occurring between the two groups.

Huge demonstrations have taken place on the **Spanish** island of **Mallorca** over mass tourism. Locals are planning on storming popular beaches on 1-2 June in a bid to take them back from the tourists, with a larger beach protest organised for 16 June. Protestors are also demanding restrictions on cruise ships, rental cars and a ban on party boats.

Lithuania's incumbent President, Gitanas Nausėda, has won re-election after a campaign largely driven by defence concerns with neighbouring Russia, with the Lithuanian president largely responsible for the country's foreign and defence policies. His election will likely guarantee future support for Ukraine, pull the country further away from Moscow's sphere, and result in the termination of bilateral agreements with Russia and the imposition of policies that target the Russian diaspora in Lithuania- moves that may inspire greater Russian interference in the country.

Russian officials have invited their **Afghan** counterparts to the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum, the largest economics summit in the country. The move may be a prelude to a Russian recognition of the Taliban government, which would follow neighbouring Kazakhstan's move in 2023. The Taliban have been classified by Moscow as a terrorist group since 2003, and normalising relations with them would likely allow Moscow better access to Afghan mineral wealth.

On May 30th, **Iran** commenced snap presidential elections following the death of President Raisi, with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei aiming for another hardline leadership, suggesting minimal anticipated change. While internal unrest within Iran seems improbable, protests outside Iranian embassies worldwide are anticipated, raising the potential for clashes between regime supporters and those advocating for change.

On 26 May, President Azali Assoumani was re-elected for his fourth term in the African island nation of **Comoros**. The election was marred by allegations of voter fraud which led to violent protests and at least one fatality. The election is only the second one since the constitutional reforms in 2018 that removed a requirement for the presidency to rotate around the country's three main islands, which allowed Assoumani to achieve his third term in 2019. With the last two elections favouring Assoumani's island of Grand Comore, there is a high likelihood of sustained unrest in the country's other islands of Mohéli and Anjouan.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

In **Mannheim**, **Germany**, an attacker was shot by police on 31 May after stabbing a police officer and several other people including a far-right anti-Islam activist, Michael Stürzenberger. The event was livestreamed and the assailant may have been exploiting this for publicity. With further far-right rallies expected in the run-up to the European elections, additional attacks cannot be discounted.

The **Swedish** security service SAPO reported that it identified domestic criminal networks cooperating with the Iranian regime to carry out violent attacks and intimidatory actions against exiled dissidents and citizens of hostile nations like Israel. Sweden has seen its domestic security situation worsen in recent years, also due to an influx of illegal firearms, and there is a realistic possibility that foreign powers are seeking to take advantage of Swedish security vulnerabilities.

On 30 May, **Turkish** authorities threatened to carry out further military operations in **Syria**'s northeast Kurdish-majority regions if local authorities conduct planned local elections. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stated that the proposed vote is tantamount to the creation of a "terror state" at Ankara's borders. A Turkish military intervention may result in an increased threat of

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terrorism in Turkey's large urban centres and of civil unrest in the country's Kurdish-majority provinces.

Iran has broadcasted that the Houthis have obtained the technology to produce their own variant of Iran's Ghadr anti-ship ballistic missile. This development will make the Houthis less reliant on smuggling routes from Iran into **Yemen,** and will greatly increase the militant group's capabilities, with Iran's version reportedly capable of reaching targets almost 2,000 kilometres away. If the Houthi's variant maintains a similar range, the Iranian proxy force will be able to strike international shipping deep into the **Indian Ocean** and vessels as far away as the coast of **Kenya**, increasing the threat posed to vessels avoiding the **Red Sea** and circumventing Africa.

On 25 May, suspected jihadist attacks in the Mopti region in central **Mali** killed at least 20 civilians in an area plagued by Islamic State and al-Qaeda activity. Malian forces were also targeted by the Macina Liberation Front in the southwestern village of Mourdiah on 26 May. Unrelated factions are likely exploiting the security vacuum left by the retrograde of Western and UN forces and are almost certainly overstretching government resources. Bamako's growing fragility will likely force it to continue gravitating towards Moscow, with the recent beginning of construction of West Africa's largest solar power plant in Mali by a **Russian** company a likely indicator of this developing relationship.

On 26 May, **Burkina Faso's** junta government delayed the country's transition back to democracy and extended its rule by five years. Violent extremist organisations linked to transregional groups like the Islamic State and al-Qaeda have exploited the region's lack of governance after a wave of military coups in the **Sahel**. Reporting estimates that over 8,000 people were killed in attacks in Burkina Faso alone in 2023, the year following the military coup of 2022.

Overnight on **25 May**, at least 160 villagers were kidnapped following a suspected Boko Haram attack on Kuchi village in **Nigeria's** central **Niger State**. A further 10 people were killed in the attack, the majority of the fatalities were armed village guards reportedly. Amnesty International claim that Kuchi village has been consistently targeted by armed individuals since 2021. Kidnap for ransom is common in Niger state, and will almost certainly continue as security services remain overstretched by a host of domestic issues.

Fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has intensified in **North Darfur**, **Sudan**. Reports indicate that artillery shells are landing in displacement camps and the SAF are bombing RSF positions on the outskirts of **El-Fasher**, a city of two million once considered a safe haven which is now becoming the epicentre of the civil war. The UN has repeatedly warned that genocide is being committed under the fog of war and that the conflict in Sudan is being completely overshadowed by the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East.

The rebel M23 group have continued to advance in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC) North-Kivu province**. Reports indicate that **Sake**, a strategic location on the road to the city of Goma has fallen. Its loss will shape the conditions for a future offensive on **Goma**. The central government has received drones from **China** and multiple reports indicate that elements of **Russia's** rebranded Wagner Group, the Africa Corps will be deployed in support of Kinshahsa.

Rwanda has deployed an additional 2,500 troops to the gas-rich **Cabo Delgado** province in northern **Mozambique**. The deployment follows an increase in Islamic State-Mozambique (ISM) activity, with one recent attack forcing Médecins Sans Frontières to suspend operations in the Macomia district. Combined Mozambican and Rwanda operations have already resulted in several ISM fatalities which will likely inspire ISM retaliation.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

The **Icelandic** volcano on the southwestern **Reykjanes** peninsula erupted for the fifth time since December 2023 on 29 May. Keflavik International Airport, Iceland's main airport, is situated only 20 kilometres north of the eruption site but remains open at the time of writing. However, with the lava flows that followed the latest eruptions threatening the nearby town of Grindavik, there is a realistic possibility of disruptions taking place on a local scale.

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At least four people have been killed and hundreds displaced by flooding in the northern regions of **Lori** and **Tavush** in **Armenia**. At least 15 bridges have collapsed as a result of the floods, leading to transport disruptions and lack of access to emergency services. **Russia** has deployed troops to the area, likely in a bid to regain influence in the country after it failed to support Yerevan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Recent reporting by the **Ethiopian** Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) has indicated that heavy rains throughout April and May have sustained widespread flooding across the country, with the **Afar**, **Amhara**, **Central Ethiopia**, **Oromia**, **Sidama**, **Somali**, **South Ethiopia**, and **Tigray** regions worst affected. Almost 600,000 people remain affected with almost 100,000 displaced. Damage to crops has prompted concerns over food shortages and there have been spikes in cholera and malaria- with all regions reporting malaria rates above the emergency threshold.

Djibouti became the second African country to test the use of genetically modified mosquitoes to combat the spread of malaria. The insects that were released have been developed by UK-based company Oxitec and have had their genetic code altered to prevent their female offspring from reaching adulthood. As only female mosquitoes of the Stephensi species are responsible for the transmission of malaria, reducing their numbers is likely to lead to a decrease in transmission rates, which have spiked in the past decade.

Extreme weather events across much of Africa have compounded the current cholera epidemic, with **Malawi** and **Zambia** now registering their worst outbreaks since records began, and **Zimbabwe**, **Mozambique**, **Kenya**, **Ethiopia** and **Somalia** all struggling to contain the outbreak. Estimates suggest that as many as 6,000 have died across the region since 2021, although the real figure is likely much higher. With a worldwide shortage of cholera vaccines, the rate of fatalities will likely increase, with many new vaccines unlikely to hit the market until 2025.

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Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan:

Heavy clashes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
Over the past reporting period, at least 20 Taliban in Pakistan (TTP) militants and seven Pakistani soldiers were killed in separate clashes in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, at the northwest border with Afghanistan. The clashes happened in the context of raids by the Pakistani military in the region, which has long been a hotspot for TTP activity. In recent months, Islamabad has faced high volumes of activity by domestic armed groups, including the TTP and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), as well as operatives affiliated with the Islamic State's Khorasan Province (ISKP).

Assessment: The operations that provoked the clashes almost certainly sought to reduce TTP operational strength in the region and to push Taliban forces back to the Durand Line, the border with Afghanistan. Islamabad likely assesses the task of destroying the TTP organisation as unrealistic, due to the Taliban's ability to find sanctuary within Afghanistan itself, and is instead likely focusing on destroying infrastructure to slow down or reverse recent TTP gains. The TTP has likely taken advantage of Islamabad's difficulties in stifling the Baluch insurgency in its southern regions, which have possibly contributed to overwhelming or overstretching the government's forces. Moreover, the Pakistani Taliban also benefits from Pakistani-Afghan tensions to further leverage Kabul's willingness to provide protection and sanctuary to their forces. The two Taliban groups remain allied and have similar ideologies; however, they also have different strategic objectives, likely reflecting their respective political positions. While the Taliban government in Kabul has entered a "normalisation" phase, seeking to build valuable international ties to prop up the country's ailing economy, TTP benefits from being at a much earlier stage in its insurgency, and essentially continues to maintain its fundamental objective of expelling Pakistani forces from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas and neighbouring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, while creating a security vacuum in which to build an alternative administration. With tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan remaining high, TTP and Kabul's different objectives are unlikely to represent a significant issue. However, one major area of contention likely exists, which could cause a strain in relations between the two Taliban groups. Like the BLA, TTP has also conducted several attacks on Chinese nationals and Chinese-sponsored construction sites in Pakistan. This, in turn, has severely worried Beijing, which has turned to Kabul to seek to restrain TTP attacks. Due to China's crucial economic importance for Afghanistan, there is a realistic possibility that, were TTP attacks on Chinese assets to continue, Kabul could become less amicable to the Pakistani Taliban.

Hong Kong:

Pro-democracy figures charged under Beijing's new security laws.
On 30 May, 14 leading pro-democracy figures were found guilty and two were acquitted in Hong Kong under subversion charges. Those guilty were convicted of "conspiracy to commit subversion" for their involvement in an unofficial primary election held in 2020 designed to elect candidates for a Legislative Council election which was later postponed. The prosecution alleged the group intended to use their legislative positions to block Hong Kong's annual budget, aiming to force the city's top leader to step down and dissolve the legislature. The group on trial are part of a larger group of 47 people referred to as the "Hong Kong 47" who are being prosecuted under Beijing's new national security law introduced in 2020.

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Assessment: China's new national security law was implemented after the mass-anti-government protests which started in November 2020. Officially, the law aims to restore stability by criminalising actions deemed as threats to state security, such as subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign powers. However, it is almost certain that the law's primary objective was to ensure Beijing's control over Hong Kong. Since its introduction, civil groups have been disbanded, independent media curtailed and Hong Kong's legislature is now comprised entirely of pro-Beijing loyalists, signalling an almost complete collapse of the "one country, two systems" format that Beijing once agreed would remain in place for 50 years until 2047, following the 1997 handover of Hong Kong. Authorities in Hong Kong have since introduced a new local law in March 2024, which was fast-tracked through its pro-Beijing parliament and resulted in several recent arrests. The law, known as Article 23, covers treason, sedition, foreign intervention or collusion, and state secrets, and provides for trials to be held behind closed doors. This law is likely part of a broader effort to enforce the national security law and according to the authorities, was supported by 99 per cent of the public during a consultation. These laws demonstrate Beijing's intent to erode judicial independence, autonomy and political freedoms in Hong Kong, moves that could have huge ramifications for the Special Administrative Region. The authoritarian shift is likely to jeopardise Hong Kong's status as a global financial hub by deterring foreign investment and creating a hostile environment for foreign nationals working there. Moreover, the authorities will likely exploit the broad definitions of the combined security laws, using them to target any individuals or organisations the Communist Party deems a threat, contributing to an increasingly uncertain environment.

Thailand:

Courts to indict former prime minister under lese majeste law.
Thailand's former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is set to be charged under the country's strict lese majeste law. Mr Shinawatra, who only returned to Thailand in 2023 after 15 years of self-imposed exile, is being charged for comments he made during an interview with a Korean newspaper in 2015. The former prime minister is alleged to have stated that the Thai privy council, the king's top advisory board, was involved in the 2014 military coup that ousted Shinawatra's sister and suspected puppet, Yingluck, from power.

Assessment: Thailand's conservative establishment, which is closely aligned with the military, has been directly challenged in recent years. The 2023 general election resulted in the Move Forward Party (MFP) winning over 36 per cent of the popular vote and becoming the largest party in the country's House of Representatives. The centre-left MFP was formed in 2014, the same year as the military coup that ousted Yingluck Shinawatra, and directly calls for a reduction in the military's influence and major reforms to Thailand's harsh lese majeste laws. The party was barred from nominating a prime minister after the 2023 elections, when its leading candidate, Pita Limjaroenrat, had his candidacy suspended over holding shares in a defunct broadcaster, in a move widely suspected of being engineered by the military junta. Ultimately, MFP was forced to become the leader of the opposition after Shinawatra's party, Pheu Thai, was able to form a fragile coalition government which included eleven parties, two of which are overtly pro-military and suspected of being involved in the 2014 coup. The Thai parliament elected Srettha Thavisin of the Pheu Thai party to become prime minister, once again triggering suspicions that Thaksin was running the country from behind the scenes. It is likely that the recent indictment of Thaksin has been orchestrated to curtail the power of both Pheu Thai and the Shinawatra dynasty, whose populist brand of politics is often seen as a challenge to the military. Thaksin will become the most high-profile figure to face charges under lese majeste. Moreover, his indictment follows hundreds of prosecutions under the laws in recent years- prosecutions that are widely seen as politically motivated and a way for the military to suppress dissent. His indictment also follows the recent death of Netiporn Sanesangkhom, a 28-year-old activist who died during a hunger strike after being charged under lese majeste. These trends have almost certainly provoked fears of democratic backsliding in Thailand and energised much of the country's youth and rural poor and

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urban working class- some of the main demographics that historically comprise the country's "Red Shirt" movement. The movement advocates for greater democracy, populist policies, and a reduction in the military and elite's power, and has long been tied to the Shinawatra family. Historical clashes between the Red Shirts and their anti-Shinawatra, pro-royalist and pro-military counterparts, the "Yellow Shirts" have often resulted in widespread violence, travel disruptions and damage to infrastructure. When the Red Shirts protested in 2010, demanding the reinstatement of Thaksin, violent confrontations with the Yellow Shirts, the police and the military led to almost 100 deaths, prolonged protests, disruption to the tourist and manufacturing industries and a massive crackdown on the Red Shirts. With the underlying causes still unresolved and political tensions currently high, there is a realistic possibility that the responses to a possible Thaksin conviction could eclipse the 2010 crisis and trigger widespread civil unrest and potential violence across the country.

Papua New Guinea:

Landslide in remote north buries up to 2,000.
On 24 May, a massive landslide was triggered in Papua New Guinea's (PNG) region of Maip Mulitaka in the country's remote northern Enga Province. The landslide hit the remote village of Kaokalam, approximately 600 kilometres northwest of the capital Port Moresby at around 0300 local time whilst residents slept. Rescue attempts have been disrupted by the region's mountainous landscape, with smaller landslides blocking roads and damaging the main bridge on the primary access route. One UN estimate puts the death toll at 670; however, some local estimates suggest that as many as 2,000 people may have been buried under the rubble. Thousands of local residents have been placed on high alert for evacuation in case of further landslides.

Assessment: No government census has been conducted in this remote part of PNG since 2000, which almost certainly accounts for the significant variance in death toll estimates, with a lack of accurate information likely hindering humanitarian efforts and the allocation of resources. Harsh terrain, blocked access routes, local tribal unrest, the threat of further landslides, and unstable ground preventing the use of heavy machinery have all likely delayed rescue efforts to the extent that finding survivors under the rubble is now improbable. UN reporting indicates that the landslide has also contaminated local water sources such as streams and creeks with few opportunities to treat contaminated water posing a significant risk of disease outbreaks. This will also likely lead to water shortages and potentially incidents of localised unrest. PNG's Prime Minister James Marape has blamed the event on extraordinary rainfall and major changes to weather patterns, with the country suffering several other environmental disasters in 2023-24. Marape is currently facing a vote of no confidence after a round of defections from his party and has failed to visit the site or hold a press conference in response to the incident. The government's prioritising of political issues in Port Moresby will likely further impede rescue efforts and the relative neglect of the issue may provoke unrest in Enga Province.

APAC Summary and Forecast:

Politics, Economics and Civil Unrest.
The **Indian** elections have entered their final stage, with results to be announced on 4 June. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is highly likely to win and increase its parliamentary majority. In recent months, the BJP, which espouses a Hindu-nationalist ideology known as Hindutva, has increased its attacks on India's Muslim minority, and there is a realistic possibility that, following a BJP victory, cases of inter-religious mob violence may break out in urban centres in the country's west and north.

On 29 May, the National Samsung Electronics Union (NSEU) in **South Korea** announced that it would begin to escalate strike action next week, over unmet demands for higher wages. The

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development is notable as it includes a pledge to walk out of work for one day on 7 June. NSEU is the largest labour union at the tech giant, and its move could prompt smaller unions to join in the protest, in a domino effect that could affect global manufacturing chains and outflows of semiconductors from the country. Moreover, South Korea lacks a history of worker unionisation, meaning that strikes have the potential to cause a lasting impact on the country's labour market and employer-employee relations.

Security, Armed Conflict and Terror.

North Korea has continued to aggressively posture by firing more short-range ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan on 30 May and by conducting GPS-denial near disputed islands in the Yellow Sea. Hundreds of North Korean balloons also dropped waste, including manure, cigarette butts, waste batteries and even diapers on **South Korea** in a move reminiscent of Cold War provocation. The balloons were apparently in response to the recent dropping of propaganda leaflets over North Korea by South Korean activists.

Junta forces in **Myanmar** have reportedly launched attacks on the outskirts of **Loikaw**, the capital of **Kayah State**. The city, held by rebel forces since November 2023, is expected to fall under Junta control as several rebel groups in the area are reportedly in full retreat due to limited armaments. The seizure of Loikaw will almost certainly boost morale for regime forces, who have faced successive defeats to the Three Brotherhood Alliance in recent months.

Environment, Health and Miscellaneous.

India is currently grappling with a severe heatwave across its northern and central regions. Daylight temperatures have risen by an average of six degrees Celsius across several states, with **New Delhi** experiencing record highs of over 52 degrees Celsius. In **Bihar** state, the heatwave has already resulted in 19 deaths, with further fatalities almost certain in the coming days due to water shortages and dying livestock. The effects of the heatwave are likely to be compounded by the seventh and final phase of polling on 1 June, with a majority of the 19 deaths in Bihar indicated as polling staff forced to work through extreme heat.

Multiple regions within **India** and **Bangladesh** are reeling from the effects of the year's first cyclone after Cyclone Remal made landfall on 27 May. Dozens of people have been killed by the associated effects, at least 60,000 homes have been destroyed and millions are without power. In the northeastern Indian state of Mizoram, at least 27 people were killed by flood-related events and at least nine were killed in coastal Bangladesh, although estimates will likely increase. Due to an increase in surface temperatures at sea, further damaging cyclonic storms are expected throughout the rest of 2024, with the official cyclone season set to start in June.

A tropical depression currently located in the **South China Sea**, east of **Hainan Province**, is expected to make landfall over **China's Guangdong Province** and **Hong Kong** by May 30-31. Meteorological Agencies forecast the depression is likely to intensify into a cyclone before reaching the mainland. If the cyclone intensifies as forecasted, significant disruptions to travel and essential services are highly likely across the affected regions.

Typhoon Ewiniar, known locally as Aghon in the **Philippines** has killed at least seven people and displaced thousands since making landfall in the east of the country on 23 May. Weather warnings were also issued for the **Japanese Kanto region** and the **Izu islands** but weakened into an extratropical storm on 31 May, which will likely bring heavy rains to the aforementioned areas.

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