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The International Peace Institute's (IPI) Regional Insights covers select regional and thematic developments based on information from a variety of sources. It draws on the research of IPI experts and is provided exclusively to major donors and members. Each monthly issue covers challenges and opportunities related to international peace, security, and development.

Africa

Madagascar: On May 3rd, President Andry Rajoelina of Madagascar rocked the country's political reconciliation process by announcing he will stand as a candidate in the presidential elections on July 24th. In 2009, the military seized power from President Marc Ravalomanana and handed power to President Rajoelina. The event was denounced by the international community as a coup and Madagascar was suspended from the African Union. In the negotiations that followed, both men agreed to a roadmap brokered by the South African Development Community and committed not to stand in the forthcoming elections. Thus, Rajoelina's unexpected decision has drawn regional and international criticism.

President Rajoelina's advisors say the move was in response to Mr. Ravalomanana's wife, Lalao, deciding to stand and that this instigated the breakdown in political reconciliation. The president maintains his candidacy is also justified by former President Didier Ignace Ratsiraka's registration as a candidate. Madagascar's Special Electoral Court has been criticized for allowing President Rajoelina to register, at a time when some had considered the registration period closed. The court's seemingly limited response has also led to some speculation about its capacity to ensure a free and fair election in July and concerns of procedural delays. While the list of candidates for the presidency currently stands at 48, Mr. Rajoelina and Mr. Ravalomanana continue to dominate the political landscape. It remains to be seen whether the July elections, presuming the current issues are resolved, will change this.

Sudan and South Sudan: The signing of a peace agreement by Sudan and South Sudan on March 8th in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, removed some of the obstacles to the implementation of the nine cooperation agreements signed by the two countries in September 2012. As a result, Sudanese and South Sudanese forces withdrew from their respective sides of the Safe Demilitarized Border Zone. President Salva Kiir ordered the resumption of oil exports suspended in January; the first oil export shipment reached Sudan in early May. This progress was met by a spate of attacks, border incidents, and killings. One notable example is the assassination of Abyei paramount chief Kuol Deng Kuol, who was killed together with an Ethiopian peacekeeper from the UN Interim Security Force for Abyei on May 4th. This has led to further claims by South Sudan against Sudan, with the assassination seen in Juba an attempt by Khartoum to undermine the ongoing efforts to peacefully resolve the dispute over Abyei. In addition, Sudan appears to be gearing up to fight—the country has agreed to increase military salaries by 22 percent, and members of parliament suspended their session to travel to their constituencies and lead a mobilization campaign in support of the Sudanese Armed Forces. Continuing regional and international efforts to ratchet down the tensions remain vital.

Latin America

Guatemala: On May 10th a Guatemalan court convicted General Efraín Ríos Montt of genocide and crimes against humanity after a turbulent two-month trial. Ríos Montt ruled Guatemala by dictatorial decree for 17 months in 1982 and 1983, at the height of the Guatemalan civil war. Ríos Montt was on trial for having directly overseen a scorched-earth campaign against the Maya Ixil that resulted in the massacre of 1,771 civilians and the displacement of over 20,000 people. He was sentenced to 80 years in prison, but his co-defendant, former intelligence chief José Mauricio Rodríguez, was cleared of all charges.

This is the first time a former head of state has been convicted of genocide domestically rather than in an international court. The conviction also represents an important victory for the rule of law in Guatemala, which has long suffered from a culture of impunity. This progress has been largely due to the efforts of the widely respected Guatemalan attorney general, Claudia Paz y Paz, and the support of the UN-backed International Commission against Impunity (CICIG). The 86-year-old former dictator is likely to appeal. Due to his advanced age, a request for a special presidential pardon on health grounds should also be expected.

Middle East

Egypt: This month's political scene opened on a low note, as human rights and civil liberties are seemingly being circumscribed. For example, on May 10th, Ahmed Maher a founder of the influential "April 6" youth movement was arrested upon his return from the United States, allegedly for inciting a protest in Cairo in March. He was held overnight before being released, reportedly without explanation. Three days later, Maher survived a major car accident—the cause of which remains unknown—leading the activist to file a police report and suspect foul play. On the policy front, Egypt nervously awaits a draft law on civil society groups to emerge later this month, a document that has already prompted a top UN human rights official to urge the Egyptian government to ensure that the law does not risk "placing civil society under the thumb of security ministries."

Official Egyptian politics and governance also continues to be rocked by flux and instability. On May 7th, Prime Minister Kandil named nine new ministers in the second cabinet reshuffle since President Morsi assumed office, two of whom are directly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement. The opposition thus took this opportunity to criticize the Islamist party for continuing to consolidate its grip on the country's political institutions. The reshuffle is significant (and potentially disruptive) given that both the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of International Cooperation and Planning—two key institutions that have been dealing with the ongoing yet elusive IMF negotiation—are now under new leadership. Though the country's foreign reserves rose by \$1 billion (to \$14.42 billion in April) as a result of an earlier Libyan loan, they are still short of what authorities have referred to as a "critical minimum" of \$15 billion. The political and economic malaise has, in recent days, led to a campaign known as "Tamarod" (Arabic for rebellion)—currently supported by more than 2 million signatories—which seeks to force Morsi out of office.

Syria: The conflict in Syria continues to expand in unprecedented and unpredictable ways. The international community is rushing toward various new attempts at a political resolution—an upcoming Friends of Syria meeting in Jordan the week of May 20th, followed by a proposed UN-sponsored "negotiation" in Geneva. But the situation on the ground continues to deteriorate at an exponential rate. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, the death toll has now entered the range of 94,000–120,000 people, while UNHCR updated its figure of internally displaced persons to 4.2 million. The Israeli strikes on Syrian military targets near Damascus between May 4th and 6th brought new levels of tension to the conflict as both the Assad regime and, more importantly, Hezbollah threatened retaliation for what they considered a *casus belli*. Though the Israeli motive was aimed at preventing Iran-supplied weapon convoys from reaching Hezbollah, the episode cannot be isolated from its Syrian context and has thus introduced additional hair-trigger risks into an already volatile landscape.

Libya: The last few weeks have been marked by frequent terrorist attacks, assassination attempts, and street violence. Most recently, there have been explosions in Benghazi on May 14th and May 10th and an incident involving gunmen who besieged two ministries for more than a week, culminating in a brief (several hours) resignation of Defense Minister Mohamed al-Bargathi on May 7th. The unrest and instability led the United States and Britain to announce on May 10th that they will be withdrawing some diplomatic staff from Libya. These diplomatic moves also serve as a wake-up call to

the international community at large that Libya is in desperate need of support to weather the post-revolutionary security storm, as well as to Libyans officials to assert leadership on tough issues, including the militias.

Tunisia: The rift between “secular” and “conservative” factions has been deepening since Ennahda came to power in October 2011, and the political issue became a security problem. On May 1st Tunisian troops clashed with a group of 50 Salafi jihadists in the Mount Chaambi border region. Ten days later, Tunisian police fired tear gas to disperse 200–300 Salafi Muslims who were attempting to set up preaching tents in a residential area in southern Tunis. The incidents have sparked fears in the press that Tunisia may be entering an Algeria-esque “black decade.” What has occurred, however, more accurately reflects the diversity and polarization within Tunisia’s “Islamist” political community.

Asia

Afghanistan: A year after Presidents Karzai and Obama signed the Afghanistan–United States strategic partnership agreement outlining the relationship between their countries post-2014, senior Afghan and US officials were back at the negotiating table in Kabul on May 11th to iron out the details of the agreement. The key issue under discussion remains the nature of a post-2014 US military presence and the terms that will guide it.

Pakistan: Elections on Saturday May 11th brought Nawaz Sharif back to the prime ministership for a third time. His previous two tenures were in the `90s. The election drew 60 percent of Pakistani voters to the polls, a relatively high rate of participation, and gave the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz a stronger than expected position in the Parliament approximately 47 percent. The next six months should be interesting as Nawaz asserts himself in the constitutionally strengthened role of prime minister, while Benazir Bhutto’s widow, Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan People’s Party, keeps the now relatively weakened role of president into the fall of 2013. The presidential transition will occur through an indirect election, which will coincide with leadership transitions in Pakistan’s other two key political institutions—the military and the judiciary. It would be unusual for the prime minister or the president to have much say in the latter two transitions, but the internal maneuvering and power dynamics in Pakistan have surprised observers time and again.

India: The recent skirmishes between India and China over their border in the Himalayas received global attention. In the last week of April, Indian military officials announced their discovery of a group of Chinese soldiers who had crossed the de facto Himalayan border between India and China and set up camp within the Indian territory. The Chinese government was quick to dismiss the reported incursion and clarify that their soldiers were in fact patrolling the border areas within the Chinese territory. The border dispute between the two Asian giants in the Aksai Chin region is one that dates back to the 1962 war, and a final solution on the matter continues to elude the two states. Both countries issued quick statements to defuse tensions. Meanwhile, the Chinese troops were withdrawn in early May, and India’s foreign minister’s bilateral visit to Beijing proceeded as scheduled, in preparation for China’s new premier’s first diplomatic trip to India in the last week of May. The premier’s visit to India may provide the much-needed opportunity to resume bilateral talks over a variety of concerns between the two states, among them the border dispute.

Myanmar: Ethnic and sectarian violence continues to threaten the positive momentum in Myanmar’s current political transition, as well as its regional and international standing. The number of Rohingya Muslims displaced by violence since June 2012 has reached 100,000, and many groups estimate more than 1,000 Rohingya have been killed, though the government maintains that number is closer to 190. In early May, regional effects of the violence emerged, as Indonesian police arrested Islamic extremists suspected of planning a bomb attack on the Myanmar embassy in Jakarta. In northern Myanmar, Kachin rebel groups continue to clash with military units and peace talks originally scheduled for April continue to be delayed due to disagreements about third-party observers. In many reports, it is China that is objecting to the inclusion of third parties, such as the US and Britain, reflecting the continued influence of Myanmar’s longtime ally.

At the same time, President Thein Sein strives to broaden Myanmar’s political alliances and economic partnerships. On May 13th, state media announced that Thein Sein will visit the United States and the White House soon—the first Burmese head of state to do so in 47 years. Two days later, the White House confirmed that Thein Sein’s visit is planned for May 20th. Business and investment deals also reflect improving US relations with Myanmar, as demonstrated by a May 13th announcement by Starbucks that it intends to open stores in the country within two years. In doing so, it will join

companies like General Electric, Coca-Cola, and Ford. These partnerships could all come under criticism if violence against minorities persists.

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