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This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to the academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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Putin arrest warrant issued by ICC: will it have any impact?

In mid-March, the International Criminal Court (ICC) at the Hague made news when it issued an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin after concluding that the Russian leader had committed war crimes in connection with the abduction and deportation of thousands of Ukrainian children since Russia's invasion of Ukraine starting from 24 February 2022. The ICC found that Putin and Russia's commissioner for children's rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, bore personal criminal responsibility for the unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children to Russia. Russian authorities have dismissed the development, with Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov saying any of the court's decisions were "null and void," while former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev compared the warrant to toilet paper.

However, since the ICC does not have any power to arrest suspects, and Russia is not a state party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, it is highly unlikely the arrest warrant will have any effect. It will, however, limit Vladimir Putin's ability to travel internationally and damages the credibility of the Kremlin in the international arena. Although the ICC's attempt has received praise from European governments and United States officials, some critics argue that it holds little significance given that the US, a serial offender, is not a party to the Rome Statute or the ICC. Furthermore, the US continues to hinder efforts aimed at holding its military personnel accountable for crimes committed against innocent victims in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other places. Moreover, in another recent development that undermines ICC efforts, Russia assumed the presidency of the UN Security Council for the month of April; Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the development, saying that it proved the "complete bankruptcy" of such international institutions.

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Turkiye's realignment policy: Shaping NATO and the Middle East

Finland's bid to join NATO finally secured the backing of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Erdogan praised Finland's "authentic and concrete steps" on Turkish security during a press conference in Ankara with his Finnish colleague. With this backing, expected to be approved by the Turkish parliament, Finland is now a step closer to joining NATO. Earlier, in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine, Finland jointly applied with Sweden to join the West's defensive alliance last May. Both were held up by Turkish objections, and Türkiye still refuses to support Sweden's bid over its lack of progress in dealing with PKK activity and Islamophobia concerns. With Ankara's continued objections regarding Sweden, Finland has decided to push ahead alone.

On the other hand, Egypt and Türkiye took a major step towards mending and normalizing bilateral relations when Ankara's top diplomat visited Cairo on 18 March 2023 and held talks with his Egyptian counterpart for the first time since ties were ruptured a decade ago. At a joint news conference, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu discussed the possibility of restoring diplomatic ties to the ambassadorial level at the earliest. Among contentious geopolitical issues between the two countries are the Libyan situation and the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The consultations between senior foreign ministry officials in Ankara and Cairo began in 2021 amid a push by Türkiye to ease tensions with Egypt, the UAE, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Experts have opined that this diplomatic push is part of Türkiye's multilateral dynamic foreign policy in the region and the global stage and has the potential to shape the Middle East and the power dynamics in the process.

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Russia-China ties strengthen after Xi's two-day visit to Russia

At the end of a two-day state visit to Russia, Chinese President Xi Jinping said that he had signed an agreement with Russian President Vladimir Putin cementing their 'no limits' partnership, which had been earlier announced by the two leaders in February last year, less than three weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine. The agreement comes just days after Putin was issued an international arrest warrant for his role in the invasion of Ukraine. It appears to be more about "practical cooperation" and is mainly economic in nature. The agreement pushed forward the planned Power of Siberia 2 pipeline, which would deliver 50 billion cubic metres (bcm) of natural gas per year from Russia to China via Mongolia, which Russia sees as an opportunity to move away from reliance on Europe as its main consumer. According to the Russian news agency TASS, the leaders also discussed support for the "creation of a multilateral, equal and transparent global management system of the Internet with the support of sovereignty and security of all countries in this sphere."

Regarding Ukraine, the Chinese leader said that Beijing was "guided by the principles of the United Nations ... and promoted a peaceful settlement" in Ukraine, stressing Chinese neutrality on the issue. The Russian President, for his part, voiced his support for a Chinese proposal to end the conflict, which he said could be used as the basis of a peace settlement, although the West and Ukraine were not ready for it. The United States has been dismissive of the 12-point Chinese plan, which stresses de-escalation followed by a ceasefire, given its lack of detail and Beijing's refusal to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and has said a ceasefire would lock in Russian territorial gains and give Putin's army more time to regroup. For its part, while Ukraine welcomed the Chinese diplomatic initiative, Ukrainian President Zelensky stated that Russia must withdraw its troops from Ukraine and emphasized the significance of Ukraine's territorial integrity.

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Humza Yousaf sworn in as the first Muslim Scotland leader

A son of Pakistani immigrants, Humza Yousaf, made history when he was officially appointed the First Minister of Scotland on 29 March 2023, becoming the youngest, first Scottish Asian and Muslim to serve in this capacity. This was followed by his election as the head of the Scottish National Party (SNP) in March, where Yousaf won after defeating Kate Forbes with 52% to her 48% in the final stage. The window of opportunity for Humza Yousaf came after then Scotland First Minister Nicola Sturgeon announced her intention to resign the leadership of the Scottish National Party and First Minister of Scotland on 15 February, which triggered a leadership election within the SNP to elect her successor. Yousaf was a well-known parliamentary member of the SNP, representing the Glasgow Pollok constituency since 2016, having previously represented the Glasgow region from 2011 to 2016.

He was also part of Nicola Sturgeon's cabinet since her election in 2014. He was the Europe minister and minister for transport and the islands in Sturgeon's first cabinet (2014-2016) and was promoted to Justice secretary (2018-2021) and later health secretary (2021-2023) in Sturgeon's second and third cabinets. As health secretary, Yousaf was responsible for overseeing NHS recovery and the mass rollout of the vaccination programme in light of the toll taken by the COVID-19 pandemic. A Sturgeon loyalist, Yousaf is expected to continue her socially progressive policies. This includes pursuing attempts for a second independence referendum led by Yousaf's pro-Scottish independence party, the SNP. He is also a vocal supporter of same-sex marriage and gender reforms for trans people and has vowed to secure the rights of the LGBT community in a written constitution if Scotland gains independence. Observers have been quick to point out the irony that Humza Yousaf, a Muslim of Pakistani origin, will go against British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, a Hindu of Indian origin, to deliver his promise of Scottish independence.

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First Muslim hijab-wearing judges in the US take oath

For some time now, Muslim Americans have begun attaining representation in administrative and legislative positions in the United States, particularly in areas such as Congress and the civil and criminal justice courts. Two recent appointments of Muslim women as state-level judges have made worldwide headlines and have been hailed for the promotion of diversity and greater representation of Muslims in the US legal arena. In the first instance, Nadia Kahf, a Syrian-origin US family law and immigration attorney from Wayne, was appointed to the New Jersey Superior Court, making her the first hijab-wearing judge on the court. According to local media, she will work as a Passaic County Superior Court judge after being nominated by New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy a year ago. Earlier, she served as chairwoman of the New Jersey chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim civil rights group, since 2003.

In the second instance, Dalya Youssef, a family law attorney who also wears the Islamic headscarf, was sworn in to the Superior Court bench in Somerset County the very next day. Youssef was a founding member of the New Jersey Muslim Lawyers Association and its former President. She worked as a supervising attorney at Central Jersey Legal Services, a nonprofit law company, where she helped low-income people get legal help. To be clear, Kahf and Youssef are not the first Muslim women to become state judges, but the images of Kahf wearing a hijab and swearing her oath on the Quran resonated with many people on the internet. Striving to give a positive message to young Muslim Americans, Kahf, at her swearing-in ceremony, said, "I want the younger generation to see that they can practice their religion without fear. That they can be who they are. Diversity is our strength. It is not our weakness." Observers have hailed the elevation of these women to the New Jersey Superior Court at a time when Islamophobia is pervasive in many Western societies, and Muslim women continue to face prejudice and measures to restrict the use of the hijab in countries such as France or India.

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Pakistan in Crisis

The crises facing Pakistan seem to have multiplied and worsened in the wake of the COVID pandemic, stemming from long-term political and economic instability and a foreign policy mainly dominated by defence and security affairs. The current political crisis in Pakistan mainly stems from the time when Imran Khan and his political party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), were ousted from power in April 2022 with a vote of no-confidence led by the opposition. On the one hand, Imran Khan has been campaigning to force the current establishment to call for elections, accompanied by often violent street protests, while on the other hand, dozens of cases have been piling up against Khan, some serious, but most politically motivated, indicating that Khan has run afoul of Pakistan's military establishment. The resulting scenario has been chaos - violent street protests, police repression, and a political deadlock from which there appears to be no easy exit anytime soon.

The political situation has exacerbated an already weak Pakistan economy plagued by debt and fiscal crisis; the current coalition government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and with the military's backing is struggling to manage its 13th IMF bailout since the 1980s to prevent defaulting on nearly \$80bn of international loan repayments over the next three and a half years. The situation on this front is all the direr since even traditional allies such as Saudi Arabia have abandoned their earlier no-strings-attached monetary assistance policy and refused to provide any further bailouts or interest-free loans to Pakistan. Saudi authorities, like the IMF, have demanded fiscal belt-tightening and improved governance practices before coming to the rescue, essentially asking Pakistan to sign a deal with the IMF before providing any assistance. Experts, observing that the current Pakistani government had been delaying the implementation of monetary and fiscal policies as required by the IMF for fear of socio-political repercussions of stringent monetary policies, have called for the implementation of fiscal reforms and return of democracy for any attempts at returning to political and economic stability to succeed.

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Experts convene in Istanbul for the fourth international Islamophobia conference

In lieu of rising Islamophobia targeting Muslims worldwide, an international conference on the topic of Islamophobia was recently held in Istanbul, Türkiye, by the Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA) at Sabahattin Zaim University. With the title of “Examining the Cultural and Geopolitical Dimensions of Islamophobia in Muslim-majority Countries,” the three-day conference, held on March 11-13, 2023, was the fourth such conference to be held by CIGA and brought together 51 speakers from 12 countries. Speakers at the conference sought to focus on the use and instrumentalization of Islamophobia, as well as its devastating effects and long-term impact on society and politics in Muslim-majority countries today.

Several topics connected to Islamophobia were discussed at this conference. Speakers at the conference investigated the origins and intellectual history of Islamophobia and anti-religious discourse in Muslim societies such as the Arab World, Turkey, Iran, the Indian Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. Some participants investigated the influence of political, legal, cultural, and social variables, as well as the spread and proliferation of certain social trends within Muslim societies, while others investigated the role of authoritarian governments and state-sponsored religious scholars in promoting and instrumentalizing Islamophobia. In the final session, scholars engaged in an open conversation about the strategies, policies, and actions required to combat Islamophobia in Muslim-majority nations. They emphasized the importance of accepting plurality, engaging in dialogue, and cooperating in the battle against Islamophobia.

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China gets ahead of the competition in key science indicators

According to the findings of a new report, the United States and other Western countries are losing the race with China to create advanced technologies and retain talent, with Beijing possibly establishing a monopoly in some areas. China dominates in 37 of 44 technologies tracked by the think-tank Australian Strategic Policy Institute. Electric batteries, hypersonics, and advanced radio-frequency communications such as 5G and 6G are among the areas tracked in the year-long study. According to a recent study, the United States currently leads in only seven technologies, including vaccines, quantum computing, and space launch systems. The results were said to be based on “high impact” research in critical and emerging technology fields, with a focus on papers published in top-tier journals and heavily referenced by subsequent research.

According to the report, China is especially dominant in research for the defence, security, and space sectors, producing more than five times as much high-impact research as its closest competitor — almost always the United States. Chinese universities are also at the forefront of study in drones, autonomous systems, advanced optical systems, artificial technology, and machine learning; in some fields, all of the world’s top 10 research institutions are based in China. The year-long study was supported by the US State Department’s Global Engagement Center and a grant from the Special Competitive Studies Project, a foundation aimed at improving America’s long-term competitiveness.

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