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## ISRAEL AFTER BIBI?

In early March, Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer caused a stir when he called for Israel to have new elections, lest the continued reign of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu further alienate the international community and turn Israel into a pariah. Netanyahu has dominated Israel's political scene for the past 20-30 years. Once the war is over, his time in office will almost certainly come to an end. Having presented himself as 'Mr Security', the atrocities of 7th October have ruined his reputation. [Writing for Chatham House](#), Nomi Bar-Yaacov, a veteran of the Middle East Peace Process, argues that the UK and its partners across Europe and beyond should start to put plans in place for how to revive prospects for peace once Netanyahu is gone.

## IS WAR WITH HEZBOLLAH INEVITABLE?

There are growing concerns that a conflict on Israel's northern border is almost certain to break out. Since the Hamas attack of 7th October 2023, Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged fire on 4,400 separate occasions, creating an ongoing low intensity conflict. Arable and economically valuable land either side of the border largely lies abandoned as residents have fled, creating pressures to bring some sort of finality to the tension. This superbly thorough [briefing from CSIS](#) utilises graphics and maps to outline the major flashpoints along the border and the likely military escalation patterns that could occur in the event of war. It also dissects the military objectives of each side and how they will seek to achieve those objectives. Lastly, the brief makes a stark warning that only a concerted US effort to de-escalate increasingly violent exchanges will be enough to prevent war.

## THE WAR THROUGH ISRAELI EYES

Much of the international media coverage of the Israel-Hamas war has understandably focused on what is happening in Gaza, including the widespread destruction and high civilian death toll. The Israeli Institute for National Security Studies is keeping an often-updated [tracker](#) of what the war looks like from the perspective of Israeli society. Organised as an interactive online resource, readers can click through surveys of how Israelis see their government (trust is very low and declining) and armed forces (trust has remained consistently high); various indicators highlighting the strain the war is putting on the Israeli economy; and data on evacuations of civilian populations from areas near the borders with Gaza and Lebanon.

## THE REGIONAL IMPACT OF THE WAR

In the immediate aftermath of Hamas' 7th October attack on Israel, the risk of a wider regional conflagration seemed acute. Half a year later, a full escalation into regional war has not materialised. That said, regional instability – and extremely high levels of violence – have nevertheless spread dramatically. The geopolitical landscape of the region is in flux, old and new battle-lines are shifting, often on a week-to-week basis. Julien Barnes-Dacey, Cinzia Bianco and Hugh Lovatt from the European Council on Foreign Relations have produced a highly useful [report](#) mapping the complex conflict dynamics across the Middle East. Their report also includes some interactive features allowing readers to click through the various hotspots in the region.

## RUSSIAN MOMENTUM AHEAD OF THE THIRD SUMMER

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Russia's war in Ukraine is about to enter its third summer. While this time last year media coverage and policy debates were dominated by the hopes of an impactful Ukrainian counter-offensive, in early 2024 the mood in Ukraine and countries backing Kyiv is gloomy. Russia seems to be coming out of the winter with some momentum and could make significant new territorial gains. Writing for the International Institute of Strategic Studies, [Ben Barry provides a useful overview](#) of what the current state of play may mean for the course of the war throughout 2024. He warns that Ukraine may well be facing the most dangerous months since the early days of the invasion in February 2022.

## PUTIN'S INNER CIRCLE

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Russian elections in March were hardly a much-anticipated event; the results were never even remotely in question. Nevertheless, the war in Ukraine and Russia's struggle against international isolation is having implications on domestic power structures. The Atlantic Council has published a very interesting – and highly readable – [report](#) surveying Putin's inner circle and the various constituencies across the Russian system that continue to matter.

## SUDAN: IS THE CONFLICT SPIRALLING OUT OF CONTROL?

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There is little doubt that the 11-month conflict in Sudan has begun to take a dramatic turn for the worse. The [stories emerging from the conflict zone](#) are truly horrifying, mass slaughter, ethnic cleansing, rape and widespread starvation abound. At the time of this *Digest* there appears no way to stop the violence from spreading. For those wanting to understand how we got here, this [warning](#) from the International Crisis Group – published back in January – serves as a good primer to explain why the conflict has become so severe. For those wanting to deep-dive and find regular updates from the frontlines, the latest open-source intelligence-related analysis from the [Sudan War Monitor](#) should be required reading. This is regularly updated with excellent in-depth reporting and is recommended.

## THE THREAT OF ISIS – FIVE YEARS ON

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It is now five years since the Islamic State was defeated militarily by the Coalition to Defeat ISIS in the remote town of Baghuz, Syria. But despite the passage of time, the situation in North-Eastern Syria appears largely frozen. Repeated ISIS attacks have failed to re-establish the Caliphate or defeat Western-backed Kurdish forces in the region. But there are now other players operating in the space, including Turkish-backed forces, Iran, and of course the revived regime of Bashar Al Assad, making for a complex mosaic of competing forces and political interests. This comprehensive [piece](#) by the Washington Institute outlines the fragility of the current security situation, and the potential for a semi-permanent extremist insurgency to take root and potentially re-emerge as a serious global security threat. The trends are expertly explained and this piece should be required reading for those interested in counter terrorism and counter insurgency.

## CALL FOR A EUROPEAN ARMAMENT COMMISSIONER

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has revealed not just political fault lines across the European continent, but also highlighted the under-preparedness of European defence industries to produce enough munitions to sustain a major land war. With elections for a new European Parliament approaching, and discussions about the re-formation of the next European Commission having already begun, Guntram Wolff, head of the German Council on Foreign Relations, argues that [Europe needs a dedicated Armament Commissioner](#). Recognising that defence and security cooperation across the continent has long been an issue of some difficulty, Wolff suggests that at least the procurement and production of enough weapons and ammunition could be furthered through a more coordinated approach.







## NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the wars in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza and their multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

As the civil war in Sudan continues, often far outside the international spotlight, [famine looms large](#) for the country's civilian population.

In Niger, [extremist groups roaming the Sahel](#) are increasingly threatening the lives and livelihoods of rural populations.

As European efforts to counter cross-Mediterranean migration by engaging with North African leaders continue, [devastating shipwrecks](#) highlight the ongoing humanitarian suffering in the region.

[The US is planning to open an embassy in Vanuatu](#), driven by concerns about expanding Chinese influence over island nations across the Asia-Pacific region.

[The US has imposed restrictions on arms sales to Nicaragua](#) over human rights and security concerns.

As lawmakers in Washington mull a [ban on TikTok](#), the Chinese social media network hits \$16bn in annual revenues.

The [Indian government is pushing back](#) against US and other Western countries' concerns regarding its new citizenship law.

## FAR-RIGHT GEOPOLITICS IN EUROPE

In June, citizens across the 27 members of the European Union will elect a new European Parliament. As things stand, it seems that far-right parties are likely to make significant gains. While the Parliament is arguably the least influential of the Union's main political institutions, a significant shift to the right could nevertheless have significant implications – including for European foreign and security policy. Max Becker and Nicolai von Ondarza, writing for the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, offer a useful and sober [analysis](#) of what a more right-leaning Parliament could mean for European geopolitics – and for European views on geopolitics beyond the continent's borders.

## HAITI'S CONTINUING COLLAPSE

In early March, a mass-prison break signalled the next stage in Haiti's collapse into failed statehood. In recent years, the Caribbean nation has been riven by ever escalating violence pitting armed criminal gangs against each other and against woefully ill-equipped security forces. The government has repeatedly called for international support, even inviting foreign military intervention. A new [episode](#) of *The Redline* podcast provides a useful overview of the situation in Haiti, tracing how the country has turned from a symbol for anti-colonial freedom and resistance into a classic example of a failed state. For those wanting quick but detailed reads on the situation, the BBC has produced some excellent [reporting](#). Chatham House has also produced a good [article](#) arguing that Haiti is on the brink of total collapse, a situation which demands more US attention, resources and troops.

## CHINESE GEOSTRATEGY IN AFRICA

Over the past two decades, China has significantly expanded its economic footprint and political influence across the African continent – not least by exploiting US and European tendencies to regard Africa as a secondary or tertiary priority. In an interesting [analysis](#) for the Royal United Services Institute, Benedict Hamlyn explains how China's development financing in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, is driven by a concerted geostrategic approach aimed at strengthening Beijing's supply chains in a way that makes them resilient to potential future Western sanctions. He also highlights investments in port infrastructure, often with fairly obvious dual use possibilities.



## OUT NOW...

● “Some of the most remarkable stories are of those who were civilians on the 23rd February 2022 and who volunteered to fight on the morning of the 24th. Mobilisation was chaotic but essential – these initial volunteers went on to make up a significant portion of the forces that defended Kyiv.” – **As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine enters its third year, this timely special edition of *The British Army Review* provides a hugely valuable insight into the opening chapter of Ukraine's ongoing fight against a numerically-superior enemy. Click the cover left to flick through its digital pages.**

## MUST WATCH...

● “I would say the opening meeting with the Russian side was frosty. I said: ‘I'm not here for a social call, I know exactly what you did in Salisbury – you killed one of our citizens. There is going to be no turning the page, no return to normal, no cooperation for the sake of cooperation.’” – **John Foreman CBE – who served as the UK Defence Attaché in both Moscow (2019-2022) and Kyiv (2014) – describes the life of a diplomat and shares his [assessment of Russia and Ukraine's aspirations for 2024](#).**

● “Humans aren't quick enough to defeat machines. We need machines to defeat machines.” – **Former Royal Artillery officer Christopher Lincoln-Jones [on the evolution of drone technologies and the risk and rewards of the military's embrace of automation](#).**

