

IPRI Conflict Weekly

Research | Review | Forecast

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

IPRI Conflict Weekly #52, 07 January 2021, Vol.2, No.01

GCC lifts Qatar blockade, Iran decides to enrich uranium, Argentina legalizes abortion, French soldiers targeted in Mali, and the AFSPA extended in India's Northeast

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A Gulf Rapprochement: A step towards solidarity and stability as Arab leaders move to thaw relation with Qatar (Image Source: Al Jazeera)

The Gulf Reconciliation: Blockade against Qatar lifted but the GCC crisis far from over

In the news

On 5 January, the Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani headed to Al-Ula in Saudi Arabia, accepting an invitation from the Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz to attend the 41st Gulf Summit. On 4 January, the Abu Samra border between Qatar and Saudi Arabia was opened after more than three years of blockade.

The summit witnessed the 'solidarity and stability' deal (also referred to as the Al-Ula statement) that calls for the end of the diplomatic blockade with Qatar and paves the way to wider negotiation space to extinguish the tensions with Doha. The deal was welcomed by

several members of the Arab World as well as Iran. Egypt also signed a reconciliation agreement with Qatar during the summit.

The Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, under whose oversee the blockade was put in place in 2017, stated that he hopes to see a unified effort towards confronting challenges in the region, most prominently, the threat posed by Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programme.

Issues at large

First, the failure of the Qatar blockade. In 2017, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a diplomatic and trade blockade on Qatar. The quartet accused Doha of its alleged support for terrorist outfits, its close ties with Iran and Al Jazeera's role in exacerbating the Arab Spring crisis. However, Qatar denied the allegations. Since the blockade's imposition, none of the objectives for which it was imposed, could be achieved against Qatar.

Second, the emergence of a strong Qatar. With the assertive policies steered by Emir al-Thani, Qatar has emerged as a more resilient state since the blockade. It had gradually adapted to the regional conditions and has devised ways to sustain its economy despite the blockade. Qatar has been continuing to have a working relationship with Iran.

Third, a divided GCC. Diverging interests and geopolitical imperatives of the concerned parties had delayed an opportune moment for the dispute to be resolved. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was rendered inefficient and weak as the members stood divided. Kuwait and the US have consistently used their diplomatic resources to bring the rift to an end.

Fourth, the US policies towards the Middle East. It has been consistent with bringing all its allies - including Israel, Saudi Arabia and Qatar on the same page. The lifting of blockade should be seen as a part of the American pressure.

In perspective

Despite the signing of the reconciliation deal and the quartet's willingness to mend their relations with Qatar, much has to be dealt with to comprehensively cement the GCC's fissure. MBS has come to realize Iran a bigger threat that needs to be resisted, and Gulf Arab solidarity an instrumental for this purpose. The Middle East's recent geopolitics has been dynamic, with Arab states like the UAE and Bahrain normalizing relations with Israel.

Tensions between the UAE and Qatar have been much deeper. In November 2020, the Foreign Minister of the UAE said that the Gulf reconciliation with Qatar was not even a priority. The two Gulf states were at loggerheads since 2018 over a racial discrimination case at the International Court of Justice. Moreover, Doha had suspected UAE's hands in using Israeli spyware to hack information about Al Jazeera journalists.

Qatar stands firmly determined about the Palestinian cause by not agreeing to establish formal relations with Israel until a two-state solution is arrived at. While the reconciliation is set to improve the economic and diplomatic integration in the GCC, strong divergences of interest between Qatar and the other Persian Gulf Arab states over significant regional issues and concerns set the target point for complete reconciliation very high.

Iran: On the first anniversary of Soleimani's assassination, Tehran decides to enrich uranium

In the news

On 1 January, Iran organized an event that kick-started ten days of commemoration to mark the first anniversary of the US drone strike in Baghdad that killed top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader and the deputy chief of the Iran-aligned Popular Mobilisation Forces, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. At the event, Soleimani's successor vowed that the "path of resistance won't change". Senior officials from Iran-aligned organizations from Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad also spoke at the event.

Later, on 4 January, Tehran announced its decision to resume enriching its uranium stock to 20 per cent at the Fordo facility.

Meanwhile, Iraq marked the first anniversary of the US drone strike in Baghdad that killed Soleimani and Muhandis. Thousands of mourners marched in the mock funeral procession leading to the Baghdad airport where the strike had taken place. The head of Hashd al-Shaabi, Faleh al-Fayyad, vowed retaliation against the attackers and demanded that the US troops leave Iraq.

Issues at large

First, the rising US-Iran tensions. Ever since the attack that brought Tehran and Washington to the brink of war, bilateral tensions have been rising. In its letter to the United Nations Security Council on 31 December, Iran condemned the US "military adventurism" in the Sea of Oman and the Gulf, and Washington's dispensing of "fake information, baseless accusations and threatening rhetoric" against Tehran. While Khomeini renewed his revenge vow, the US flew two nuclear-capable B-52 bombers over the Gulf to send a deterrence message to Tehran.

Second, the attack ratcheted up regional tensions. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran's Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, was responsible for Iran's foreign operations requiring him to shuttle between Lebanon, Iraq and Syria frequently. The killing of the two men undoubtedly worsened the Saudi-Iran schism in the Middle East.

Third, Iran's uranium enrichment is its most significant breach of 2015 deal to end nuclear sanctions. Enriched uranium is used for making reactor fuel and nuclear bombs. Although Tehran has previously insisted that its nuclear programme is peaceful, it has rolled back on various commitments as a retaliation to the crumbling US economic sanctions reinstated by President Donald Trump in 2018 following his exit from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In perspective

Three issues need to be looked into - Iran's actions/strategies, regional developments either triggering or following the first, the US response under the new President. Joe Biden has said he would consider reviving the JCPOA provided Iran returns to complete compliance and adheres to further negotiations. Any extreme or erratic US move could significantly dent Middle Eastern politics. Meanwhile, domestic concerns regarding potential escalation or security deterioration are rife in Iran and Iraq.

Argentina: Senate passes bill legalizing abortion, a victory for women rights

In the news

On 30 December 2020, as the year came to its end so did the battle for legalization of abortions in Argentina. Both houses of the Argentine Senate finally passed the bill, legalizing pregnancy termination up to the first fourteen weeks. The lower house had passed the bill earlier this month and finally got an approval from the upper house, thereby formalizing it into a law that could be implemented all over Argentina.

President Alberto Fernandez, tweeted soon after the bill was passed that he was delighted that Argentina was now a country where women had access to safe and medical termination of pregnancies, and they no longer had to resort to clandestine, unsafe and potentially life-threatening abortion procedures.

Issues at large

First, historic win for the regime. The Fernandez regime had begun the political processes for legalization of abortions earlier in March 2020. Though this was one of the agendas that the Fernandez regime firmly supported, they faced immense opposition from pro-life social groups, the church, conservative sections of society, and the opposition parties of the country. It proved to be a long and arduous journey, but finally, Argentina became one of the only three Latin America countries to legalize abortions.

Second, a step ahead for gender equality. The demands by pro-choice groups and more so by women groups for legalizing abortions have been made for decades. In the past decade, these demands grew stronger, and with the advent of social media, their voice reached a larger audience. The high rates of crimes against women and the alarming rates of sexual crimes against women (minors included) are symptomatic of not just a society that does not consider women as equals but also a society that is resistant to change in the context of a growing demand for gender equality. The demand for legalization of abortions was made not only for the obvious reason of medical termination of pregnancies but also for acquiring greater agency over reproductive rights, thereby attaining more social capital in an inherently unequal and biased society towards men.

Third, a history of protests led by women and the passing of the bill. The war cries of #NiUnaMeno or 'Not one less' referring to the women who lose their lives to gender violence have been heard since 2015. The demands for stricter laws for sexual crimes against women and the legalization of abortions, have been made repeatedly and grew in momentum since 2018 when the Senate rejected this bill.

In perspective

The significance of repealing of the antiquated law should be understood in its entirety. The Latin American region is largely catholic, and Argentina is the home to the Pope, the leader of the Catholic world. It is a society that is deeply conservative regarding conventional social norms. While the discrimination and suppression of women in the society might not be superficial enough to be noticed with ease, it is abundantly clear with the barest of the scratching of the surface. While this might not begin a chain reaction that eventually leads to the domino effects in the context of patriarchy and conservatism, it is a definitive victory for women of the country and a beacon of hope to women fighting for the same cause everywhere else.



Mali: Tensions simmer as militants target French soldiers once again

In the news

On 4 January, a North Africa branch of Al Qaeda, known as the Group to Support Islam and Muslims (GSIM), claimed the IED attacks on an armoured vehicle in Mali's eastern region. In the attack, two French soldiers were killed, and one was injured. The two soldiers were on an intelligence operation when the attack occurred.

The attack comes barely a week after three French soldiers were hit in a similar IED blast on 29 December 2020. Like the latest incident, the three deceased soldiers were involved in an operation to curb the threat of armed rebels in western Africa.

In the latter half of 2020, several attacks were targeted at French military bases in the country. With the latest attack, the death toll of French soldiers deployed in Mali has gone up to 50 since France intervened to fight against armed rebels in 2013.

Issues at large

First, a brief background on the instability in Mali. Since June 2020, Mali has witnessed anti-government protests, a military coup, and a transitional government, largely led by former military officials. However, Mali has been mired in political instability since 2012. Simultaneously, the Islamic State started cementing itself in the West African region. At the same time, Mali has been the recent epicentre of Islamist extremism, Burkina Faso and Niger are also feeling its impact.

Second, the rising anti-French sentiment. In its latest statement, the GSIM listed reasons behind it attacks the French personnel: France's military presence in the region, recent publications of the Charlie Hebdo cartoon of Prophet Muhammad. The group also resented Macron's defence of the same under the banner of freedom of expression. This resentment has been resonated with by other Islamic countries across the world.

Third, the external presence in Mali. In 2013, France led its first intervention in Mali against Islamist insurgency and currently, there are more than 5000 French troops in the country. In December 2020, the UK announced its decision to deploy 300 British troops as a part of the UN peacekeeping force in Mali. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, Mali has nearly 14,000 foreign troops from 56 countries.

Fourth, the rivalry between Islamist groups in the region. While threats from one extremist group are imminent, the rivalry between different groups adds to the region's instability. For example, the GSIM and the Islamic State in Greater Sahara have had frequent violent clashes. The IS, critical of other terrorist organizations in the region, including GSIM, Boko Haram, said these groups are not deadly enough to destabilize the region. On the other hand, the GSIM criticizes the IS for targeting civilians and has equated the IS with "French occupiers and criminal militias."

In perspective

Despite the French presence in the region, militant attacks against civilians and security forces in the western Africa region have increased in recent times. Further, the IS made a gradual but strong emergence in the region while security operations weakened its presence in the Middle East, thereby signalling a shift in terrorist organizations' operational base.

Northeast India: NSCN(K) faction intends to join the Nagaland peace process, AFSPA remain extended

In the news

On 30 December 2020, the Ministry of Home Affairs extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958, in Nagaland thereby designating the state as a "disturbed area" for another six months. The extension is a routine affair as the state has been under AFSPA for almost six decades and the last such extension was on 30 June. The extension follows amid ongoing peace talks.

On 23 December 2020, the Niki Sumi faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-SS Khaplang (NSCN-K) or NSCN-GPRN announced their intent to join the peace talks and revive the ceasefire with the Government of India. The faction further added they expect the government to respond positively and honour their decision.

Issues at large

First, second split in NSCN(K) and takeover by Yung Aung faction. Niki Sumi has been the most-wanted militant on the National Investigation Agency's list who controlled NSCN(K)'s extortion networks and jade mines in Myanmar. His intention for peace talks completes the division of NSCN (K) along national lines. Sumi's group emerged in July after differences with Yung Aung, the nephew of Khaplang and torchbearer of the Nagas in Myanmar. Since the death of Khaplang in 2017, NSCN(K) operating in Sagaing division of Myanmar, has split twice over the leadership tussle with Yung Aung. The first split in 2018 led Khango Konyak, a Mon from Nagaland, to join the NNPGs. The second split came in July 2020 when camps of Niki Sumi, Nyamlang Konyak Naga, Starson Lamkang Naga, all hailing from Nagaland, were attacked and subsequently purged out the NSCN(K) by Aung.

Second, the impact on the Naga peace process. Niki Sumi has not yet declared his intention to join the NNPGs, unlike its predecessor Khango Konyak; nevertheless, its presence will make the talks inclusive. The Naga peace talks reached a stalemate when differences emerged between the NSCN(I-M) and interlocutor Governor Ravi on the ground of "shared sovereignty." On the other hand, NNPGs, a group of seven Naga insurgent groups, has continued with its dialogue since it signed the 'Deed of Commitment' in 2017. In 2015, when the government signed the framework agreement with NSCN(I-M), one of the criticisms to the process has been the absence of NSCN(K). With Konyok and Sumi, the factions from NSCN(K) representing the Indian Nagas will have a seat in the talks.

Third, the State's response and extension of AFSPA. In October 2020, the coordinated counter-insurgency operations by Assam Rifles, Indian Army and Tatmadaw targeting the Niki Sumi group have also led Sumi, Starson, and 50 other cadres to surrender or come overground. The security agencies have worked on Sumi's return to India with an eye on concluding the Naga peace deal. The COVID-19 restrictions on cross border movement, operational challenges and infighting with Yung Aung have conclusively forced the leadership to rethink their future course. Simultaneously even though the peace talks and ceasefire continue, it has not translated into the revoking of the AFSPA.

In perspective

Nimmi Suki's intention to join would strengthen the ongoing peace process. It took more than three decades to come out of the woods to the table and yet the NSCN (K-Yung Aung) remains on the outside. In protracted conflicts, the surrender policy has been such that it permits insurgent groups to surrender but also opt to keep arms in reserve, thereby ensuring an option to return if favourable gains are not achieved in the peace process. It remains to be seen whether Sumi joins the NNPGs and it is likely to follow once he is assured of 'no arrest.'

Also, from around the world...

Peace and Conflict from East and Southeast Asia

COVID-19: Japan, Thailand and China to impose new restrictions amid the new strain

On 4 January, Thailand imposed new restriction as cases surged across the country. Prime Minister Prayuth Chanocha urged people to stay home. Similarly, in Japan, officials are considering a state of emergency for Tokyo, the first such declaration since April. Japan has already closed its borders to foreign travellers after a new COVID-19 variant, that emerged earlier in the UK, was discovered in the country. In China, "wartime mode" measures have been imposed in several regions in the north of the country. Mass tests are being conducted while villages that had confirmed infections are being sealed off.

Hong Kong: Over 50 democracy activists arrested under the National Security Law

On 6 January, over 50 pro-democratic activists in Hong Kong were arrested on suspicion of breaking the city's national security law, a local media reported, calling it the biggest crackdown yet against the democratic opposition under the new law. The arrests included well-known democratic figures and former lawmakers James To, Lam Cheuk-ting and Lester Shum, according to the Democratic Party's Facebook page and public broadcaster RTHK. The Democratic Party's Facebook page also said police arrested the activists for participating in an independently organized ballot conducted last year to elect democratic candidates for a legislature election, which the Hong Kong government and Beijing warned at the time may violate the new law.

China: Jack Ma suspected to be missing for two months

Alibaba founder and Chinese billionaire Jack Ma has reportedly not made a public appearance in over two months. He is speculated to have gone missing after his controversial speech in October 2020, in which he criticized the regulation system of China and called the banks' pawnshops.' Further, his absence has come at a time when two of his companies, Alibaba and Ant have come under the scrutiny of China's market watchdog over an antitrust investigation, leading to a lot of speculation.

Singapore-Malaysia: High-speed rail project terminated

On 1 January, Singapore and Malaysia announced the termination of a multi-billion-dollar high-speed rail link between the Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. The termination of the project came after the two sides were unable to reach an agreement on the project after Malaysia sought changes because of the pandemic's economic impact. Further, Malaysia will have to pay compensation to Singapore for costs already incurred. The announcement came just after the 31 December deadline for the second and final extension of the suspension of the project.

Peace and Conflict from South Asia

India: Farmers talks fail again as protests against farm laws return

On 4 January, the seventh round of talks between the Centre and farm leaders demanding the removal of three contentious farm laws reached a deadlock after, three Union ministers' who were part of the negotiations said it was not possible to commit to a rollback of the legislation without wider consultations with higher authorities. The two sides have agreed to meet again on 8 January. Further, the farmers have threatened to hold a demonstration on 26 January if their demands are not met.

Nepal: Supreme Court begins hearing petitions against Oli's move to dissolve House

On 6 January, the constitutional bench of the Supreme Court in Nepal resumed hearing on the 13 petitions against Prime Minister Oli's move to dissolve the House. In response to a show-cause notice issued by the court on 25 December, Oli on 3 January explained that the dissolution was a political move and does not warrant a judicial review. On 30 December, Oli said, "the possibility of the House reinstatement is not even one per cent." Oli, who has been reduced to a caretaker prime minister since he dissolved the House, will now have to face the judicial verdict on the constitutional validity of his actions that have costed a breaking of a majority-elected government.

Pakistan: 11 coal miners abducted and killed in Balochistan

On 3 January, 11 coal miners, all belonging to the Shia Hazara community, were held at gunpoint and slaughtered by unidentified persons in the Mach coalfield in Bolan district. Initial investigation reported that the perpetrators identified the Hazaras, kidnapped them and left the others. Later, the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack. The incident sparked protest among the community as they refused the local administration to shift the bodies to Quetta and coal miners from the community blocked movement on the Quetta-Sukkur highway.

Afghanistan: Second round of talks set to resume in Doha

On 5 January, the intra- Afghan talk are set to resume in Doha, Qatar after the first round concluded after three months with both sides agreeing on the procedural rules for the talks and share their demands. The negotiating team of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan said that their consultations on the agenda of the negotiations have ended and they are ready to enter the new phase of the process. Further, negotiators stated that this round of talks will mainly focus on ending the violence and the structure of a future government. The head of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah said, "We are committed to achieving lasting peace, and we ask the Taliban to do their part. We are looking for a successful second round."

Peace and Conflict from Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Yemen: Airport reopens after deadly attacks rocked Aden

On 3 January, the Aden International Airport reopened, four days after missile attacks targeting the airport, suspected to be carried out by the Houthi rebels, left at least 26 dead and more than 100 injured. As the first commercial flight landed after the gruesome attacks, the Governor of Aden said the airport would remain a "symbol of peace." Previously, on 30 December 2020, three missiles were launched into the airport minutes after a flight with Yemen's cabinet members of Yemen arrived from Riyadh. Following this, another explosion occurred near the Presidential Palace where the cabinet members, including the Prime Minister, were taken to. However, no group claimed responsibility for the attack.

Israel: Rights group reveals atrocities committed by Israeli forces

On 4 January, an Israeli rights group, B'Tselem, said that Israeli security forces killed 27 Palestinians in 2020 in Israel, the Gaza Strip, West Bank and East Jerusalem. Of the 27, seven were minors. Further, B'Tselem said that in 11 of the 16 instances it investigated, the victim posed no threat. It also outlined that 729 Palestinian buildings, including residential ones, were destroyed by the forces in 2020. According to the group, 273 Palestinian homes were destroyed by Israeli forces, thereby rendering more than 1000 Palestinians, including 519 minors, homeless.

Niger: 100 civilians killed in two separate but simultaneous attacks

On 3 January, the Prime Minister of Niger said that 100 people were killed as suspected Islamist extremists simultaneously attacked two villages in Tillaberi region of western Niger the previous day. According to a local mayor, the attackers came on around 100 motorcycles and split up to attack the villages; the PM said the attacks were a retaliation to the killing of two rebel fighters by the villagers. However, travel by motorcycles had been banned to curb such attacks. Both the villages are close to Niger's border with Mali. The latest massacres came on the day Niger announced results of the first phase of presidential elections.

Central African Republic: Touadera wins the second term

On 4 January, provisional results of presidential elections revealed that the incumbent, Faustin-Archange Touadera, had won a second term. However, elections were held amid violence which prevented nearly 14 per cent of the polling stations remained closed due to security threats. Prior to the announcement of the results, armed rebels attacked a town 70 kilometres from the capital city. So far, the rebel groups under a coalition led by former President, have been held off from the capital with the help of Russian and Rwandan forces.

South Africa: Scientists worry current COVID-19 vaccine may be ineffective for South Africa variant

On 3 January, the British Health Secretary said that the variant of COVID-19 detected in South Africa was more dangerous than the variant found in the UK. The Secretary raised concerns that the current vaccinations may be ineffective on the South African variant. Simultaneously, scientists in South Africa echoed the concerns. However, one of the scientists who led the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine trials in South Africa said that it is unlikely that the South Africa variant would render the current vaccines useless. Yet, there are chances that the variant may weaken the impact of the vaccine.

Peace and Conflict from Europe and the Americas

The UK: Lockdown as new Covid-19 variant spreads fast

On 4 January, Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a nation-wide lockdown thereby restricting the British population in their homes until mid-February as infection rates rise from a new variant of the coronavirus. Schools and nonessential shops remain shut across England and people were told to only leave their homes if necessary. The imposition of a third national lockdown came after the government's chief medical officers warned that a more contagious strain has been spreading quickly across the country putting pressure on some hospitals.

The UK: WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange denied bail by London court

On 6 January, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was denied bail by a London court as the judge concluded there is a risk Assange may abscond while the US tries to secure his extradition from Britain. Earlier on 4 January, the court had blocked Assange's extradition to the US, where he is facing charges for publishing secret documents on the US airstrikes on civilians. The judges denied the extradition on the ground that Assange was at high suicide risk. The US Department of Justice called the extradition ruling "extremely disappointing." The US is likely to appeal in higher court till the Supreme court which would mean longer delays in the extradition attempt.

The UK: Trucks cross into France from Britain as Brexit reality takes shape

On 1 January, as the UK left the EU, the first trucks carrying goods crossed the border under the new customs rule. The truck drivers presented their clearance documents to French agents before loading on to a train to pass through the Eurotunnel. With Britain finally exiting the EU single market and customs union, there were no early signs of feared chaos at the border on 1 January 2021. Prior to the Brexit, the scenes near the French border has been that of apprehension as many passengers decided to stay put to avoid being the first to test the new border controls. British and European businesses have been warned of red tape and disruption as new rules and paperwork sets in.

The US: First African-American to win a Senate seat Georgia

On 6 January, Raphael Warnock became the first African-American to win a US Senate seat in Georgia, as fellow Democratic contender Jon Ossoff clung to a narrow lead in a second contest that will decide which party controls the US Senate. Warnock was declared the winner by the Associated Press in the wee hours of the day and as counting continued, he had 50.6 per cent of the vote with a lead of roughly 53,000 over Republican incumbent. In the other Georgia Senate race, Ossoff led Republican incumbent David Perdue by nearly 16,000 votes. The two run-off elections are triggered after none of the candidates earned more than 50 per cent of the vote in the 3 November general election and comes amid Donald Trump's refusal to yield to Joe Biden. If Democrats win both contests, it would prove pivotal for Biden's presidency as the Democrats would control the Senate along with the House of Representatives.

The US: Pro-Trump rightwing protestors storm the US Congress building

On 6 January, in a historic and an extremely worry development, pro-Trump protestors stormed the US Capitol Hill on the eve of US Congress ratifying the election results. Security officials had to evacuate the lawmakers for a while, though the Congress returned to resume the process. Mike Pence, the Vice President, while convening the progress, stated that violence never wins, only freedom does. Lawmakers across the political divide condemned the unprecedented violence that was witnessed on the day, that claimed the life of a woman. The day also witnessed the Republicans losing both the Senate seats in Georgia.

The US: Leader of far-right group Proud Boys released after arrest for burning the BLM flag

On 6 January, the leader of the far-right group, Proud Boys, has been released after he was arrested on suspicion of burning a Black Lives Matter flag in December. Enrique Tarrio faced charges for destruction of property charges. On 5 January, a judge ordered him to stay out of Washington. He has reportedly admitted for torching a banner taken from a black church during a rally in December in the city. The release comes amid President Donald Trump's urge to the supporters to gather in the capital this week for another demonstration.

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