



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 14 JUL – 21 JUL 2023



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Week 30: 14 July – 21 July 2023

Executive Summary

- Further complex attacks targeting police compounds or government facilities remain highly likely to occur in northwestern **Pakistan** in the short term.
- Violence is almost certain to remain elevated in **Mexico** over the coming weeks.
- Extreme weather is very likely to continue to present health risks across much of southern **Europe** and **Asia** over the next reporting period.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period (7 - 14 July 2023)

AMER

- Mexico's PEMEX responds to oil leak weeks after deadly disaster
- Several fatalities following landslide in central Colombia
- Anti-government protests across Peru

EMEA

- Wildfires and extreme weather plague southern Europe
- Large-scale protests continue in Israel
- Two Libyan oil fields resume operations after former Finance Minister is released
- Attacks in Niger and Burkina Faso highlight regional insecurity persists
- Mass-shooting in separatist region of Cameroon
- Anti-government protests intensify across Kenya

APAC

- Multiple militant attacks in Peshawar
- Thai parliament and courts block election winners bid for PM
- Tensions remain heightened on the Korean peninsula
- Fatal shooting in Auckland ahead of women's football World Cup



Americas (AMER)

Mexico. It has been reported that Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) is currently responding to an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The leak was apparently first discovered on 4 July, just a few days before a PEMEX-run offshore gas platform exploded on 7 July killing at least two and halting production of around 700,000 barrels of oil. At the time of writing the spill is believed to be between 400 and 1000 square-kilometres, with several different size estimates. PEMEX has stated that the spill is now under control and is smaller than estimates show.

So What? At-sea oil and gas platforms routinely leak, although leaks of this size are far less common. Whilst the leak was detected shortly before the explosion of the gas platform, it is unlikely one caused the other. The spill is more likely to be a result of poor maintenance by PEMEX. Indeed, PEMEX has come under pressure in recent months for its safety, maintenance, and environmental record. The company has over USD 107 billion in debt, the highest of any of the world's oil majors. In tandem with this it is facing a liquidity crunch. These issues are believed to be behind the company's poor safety and maintenance record. In May 2023, half of PEMEX owned refineries caught fire, whilst in February 2023 PEMEX reported three different major accidents at three different facilities. There is the more recent deadly explosion on the gas platform in July 2023. Seen in this light, a PEMEX oil spill should not be seen as a surprise. The nature of all these incidents highlights the need for rigorous safety and maintenance standards in oil and gas exploration. Whilst the spill is likely to be successfully cleaned up, there will be an environmental impact on the affected area, however, it will be several weeks before any assessment of this impact will be available.

Colombia. In the early hours of 18 July, a landslide killed at least 14 people in Quetame, Cundinamarca province, with several others still missing, after heavy rainfall caused the Rio Negro to burst its banks. Firefighters and members of the military continue to search for the missing, whilst also trying to re-open major roads in the area.

So What? Landslides are common in Colombia due to the mountainous terrain, frequent heavy rains, and the informal construction of houses. It is highly likely that there will be other fatal incidents related to heavy rainfall in Colombia during the next few months as this is typically when there is most precipitation. This particular landslide, however, has garnered attention because it has closed a major highway connecting Bogota with Villavicencio, the capital of Meta province and an important region for agriculture. There has been no reported impact on food supplies yet, but the damage and blockage reported is significant, and will likely take weeks to remove. There will likely be an impact on food stocks before the situation is resolved, and this will almost certainly worsen the longer the clearance process takes.

Peru. This last reporting period saw an estimated 21,000 people take to the streets of Lima to protest President Dina Boluarte and her government. Organised by left-wing groups and unions the marches passed peacefully for the majority of the day before clashes with police took place in the evening, with eight injured, including two police officers, and six demonstrators detained. Scenes were more violent in associated civil unrest in the south of the country, with protestors in Huancavelica setting fire to the door of a government building.

So What? At the end of 2022 and start of 2023, nationwide civil unrest, that resulted in the death of at least 67 people, rocked Peru following the removal of former left-wing president, Pedro Castillo. Castillo's supporters accuse Boluarte, who was her predecessor's vice-president, and her allies, of illegitimately removing and jailing Castillo. The protests were also highly likely fuelled by underlying anger over widespread poverty and deep inequality that has persisted for several years. It is therefore unsurprising that the most violent unrest was witnessed in the south, a region linked to past social conflicts, considered a Castillo stronghold and the poorest region. With Boluarte deeply unpopular, and elections not scheduled until 2024, it is highly likely that Peru will see protests across the country throughout 2023. If no major catalysts transpire, it is likely these will pass peacefully in most of the nation, including Lima, however violent demonstrations should be expected as grievances remain higher.

AMER Regional Forecast. The region is likely to see protests occur in both Panama and Guatemala in the next reporting period. In Panama, supporters of the former president, Ricardo Martinelli, are likely to protest the fact he has been convicted of money laundering and sentenced to a decade in prison and a USD 19.2 million fine. This conviction also threatens to up-end the campaign for 2024 Presidential election, in which he is the front-runner. In Guatemala meanwhile, protests are scheduled for 23 July where demonstrators will showcase increasing discontent with the nation's electoral courts and judiciary, amid the dispute over the country's ongoing Presidential elections. In the United States, the 27 July will see the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni visit President Biden at the White House. It is expected that discussions will focus on Ukraine, China, and Italy's forthcoming presidency of the G7. Other topics which may be raised include the Mediterranean migration crisis. Biden is likely to offer US support to Meloni who is almost certain to pull Italy out of the Chinese led, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a decision likely to annoy Beijing, as Italy is the only G7 member of the BRI.

Violence is almost certain to remain elevated in Mexico over the coming weeks. Recent weeks have been marked by several attacks which have reverberated around the nation for their intensity and deadliness. Some of these attacks seem linked to ongoing battles between cartels for influence, whilst other seems directly designed to try and intimidate the Mexican government into submission. Government security forces are likely to respond with more force to show they are not intimidated, whilst the intra-cartel violence will be unlikely to cease until only one cartel is dominant per region. In St. Vincent, forthcoming weeks are likely to see an increase in security protocols in the wake of five people being shot dead in 24 hours in the capital, Kingstown, and in the wake of the announcement that the US wanted to help St Vincent and other Caribbean Island states crack down on weapons and drugs smuggling.

The heatwave which is leading to record temperatures in the US will persist until the next reporting period and possibly indeed beyond that, indeed, in recent days, the heat dome effect has only continued to worsen in the southwest of the country. Meanwhile, expect wildfires to continue to burn across both the US and Canada, with continual detrimental impacts on air quality across the entirety of North America. Continued volcanic activity from the Ubinas Volcano in Peru should also be expected after it produced an ash plume 7,300 metres high in recent days. Resultingly, a sixty-day state of emergency has been implemented. If volcanic activity continues to worsen, then it is almost certain authorities will implement an evacuation order around the vicinity of the volcano and look to open emergency shelters.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Southern Europe. The last reporting period has witnessed several environmental extremities across the south of Europe. Wildfires in Greece have been the most severe, with firefighters still battling a blaze to the west of Athens on 21 July, five days after it first arose. Wildfires around Athens have severely damaged more than 100 houses and businesses. Two other blazes on Rhodes and in Lakonia were brought under control on 21 July though. In Switzerland, a wildfire broke on 17 July in Bitsch, Valais, near the Italian border, forcing more than 200 people to evacuate. Turkey's Minister of Agriculture and Forestry also reported this week that in the last ten days the country had witnessed 203 forest fires in 40 provinces. Elsewhere, in the Balkans, a violent storm killed at least four and injured at least 150 more.

So What? Whilst wildfires are common in Greece, hotter and drier summers in recent years have led to more intense and more frequent blazes. In Switzerland, the country is warming at more than twice the global average due to its distance from the sea. It is highly likely that forest fires could become more frequent from the country as a result. Turkey is also experiencing much higher-than-average temperatures this summer. These three nations, who are geographically distant and whose typical climate juxtaposes each other, all suffering the same extreme weather-related events suggests that it is almost certain these incidents are a consequence of global warming. It is highly likely that all countries in the region will experience more regular and intense wildfires in coming years, with countries like Spain, Portugal, and Greece, highly likely to be the worst affected. To re-enforce the impact climate change is having, the intense storm that hit the Balkans was the first of two in seven days, with the second expected to make landfall on the evening of 21 July. It is likely that alongside increasing summer wildfires, other abnormal weather events also begin to take place in summer months.

Israel. Nationwide protests have continued throughout the reporting period, as the Israeli Knesset approved the proposed judicial reform bill during its second reading, after a National Day of Resistance resulted in blockages to major highways and rail lines throughout Tel Aviv on 18 July. Protestors have marched from the city to Jerusalem and intend to demonstrate outside the parliament building on 22 July.

Separately, on 17 July Lebanese militant group Hezbollah released a propaganda video showing a simulated attack on an Israeli military base.

So What? The reform bill will now pass to a final vote in the greater Knesset before it becomes law. The bill is highly likely to pass, despite the mass protests, given Prime Minister Netanyahu's parliamentary majority. Unrest in Jerusalem on 22 July is likely to remain mostly peaceful, although security forces will very likely utilise water cannon and other physical crowd dispersal tactics. Protests are almost certain to continue in the short term and will very likely intensify around the final vote.

The timing of the Hezbollah video coincides with the anniversary of the 2006 Second Lebanon War between the militant group and Israeli forces. Tensions between Hezbollah and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) have been particularly heightened in recent months following a series of security incidents along the Israel-Lebanon border and several Israeli airstrikes against Hezbollah targets inside Syria. The video is almost certainly intended as propaganda and is highly unlikely to indicate genuine Hezbollah intent to attack Israeli military facilities in the short to medium term.

Libya. This reporting period saw the reopening of Libya's Sharara and al-Fil oil fields on 15 July, although field 108 remains closed. Operations ceased last reporting report in protest of the arrest of the country's former finance minister, Faraj Bumatari. Mr Bumatari was initially detained by the Internal Security Agency (ISA) when he arrived at Mitiga Airport on 11 July. The ISA, based in Tripoli, are loyal to the government of Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah. In response to his arrest, members of Mr Bumatari's al-Zawi tribe successfully closed the aforementioned oil fields.

So What? The stoppage of operations at the three oil fields had cost the country the production of 340,000 barrels of oil by the 15 July. Due to the closure, there was also speculation that the country might have to declare force

majeure. Since two of the oil fields have subsequently reopened, including Sharara, which is one of Libya’s largest with a maximum output of 290,000 a day, it is unlikely force majeure will be declared. Mr Bumatari was believed to have been targeted by the ISA due to his stated ambition in wishing to replace Sadiq al-Kabir as governor of the Central Bank of Libya. Mr Kabir has been governor of the central bank, and is credited, with having prevented the country see an economic and financial split like its political equivalent. The blockading and shutdown of Libya’s oil fields are a common tactic by protestors and militia groups when they are involved in a politics protest. For instance, al-Fil was closed in March and April 2022 by protests, whilst Sharara was also closed in March 2022

Burkina Faso/Niger. This reporting period has seen continued conflict in West Africa, with it centred on the Burkina Faso and Niger. In Niger, on 15 July seven were killed and 19 injured after terrorists attacked a convoy escorted by paramilitary police in the country’s southwestern Tillaberi region, which is located close to the country’s border with Burkina Faso. In Burkina Faso meanwhile, on 18 July the Burkinabe military reported that they had “neutralised” at least sixty terrorists in Ougarou and Partiaga in the Eastern region, after militants had attempted to launch an assault in Ougarou. Less than 24 hours later, on 19 July, 10 civilians were killed in two separate attacks. The first attack, possibly a mortar attack, according to eyewitnesses, left six dead and four wounded in Nouna, Kossi province, in the country’s west. The second attack took place in Tondoura, near the border with the Ivory Coast, and saw the settlement “overrun” by terrorists resulting in four dead and several wounded.

So What? The Sahel has long been a major location for insurgent and jihadist activity. This activity had led to major political destabilisation, with the region seeing several coups. Until recently, Niger had been one the least affected states in the region, however, this attack shows how this country is now too struggling to contain the jihadist violence which is now permeating across its border from Burkina Faso. Niger also has issues with violence spilling across its borders from the restive northeastern region of Nigeria. The insecurity in Burkina Faso’s border regions has been highlighted by three different attacks which took place in the country. Due to regional political and security dynamics, it is almost certain that the security situation in the region will only get worse. In Mali, the UN security mission will be ending in September, leaving a security vacuum. Niger has now become the hub for French anti-jihadist efforts in the region, however, there is increasing societal discontent with the French presence, and it is highly likely that similar public discontent led to the cessation of French operations in Mali and Burkina Faso. Alongside this, the head of the Wagner Group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, has announced many of his troops will be deploying from Ukraine to “concentrate on Africa”. Wagner already has a presence in Mali, and with a pledge to concentrate on Africa, it is likely that they may well seek to gain a presence in Burkina Faso, which the French left in February 2023, amid protests which saw citizens waving Russian flags. Since the French departure, the state has only seen a continuous decline in its security.

Cameroon. On 17 July, 10 civilians were killed and a further two wounded following an attack by a heavily armed group at Nacho Junction in Bamenda, Northwest Region. The Cameroonian Armed Forces (FAC) confirmed that 12 armed individuals had been wearing military uniforms during the attack, with the FAC subsequently arresting several rebels suspected of involvement in the shooting.

So What? Multiple Anglophone Ambazonian rebel groups are active in Cameroon’s Northwest Region and have been engaged in separatist conflict against FAC and the Cameroonian government since at least 2016. Rebel groups almost exclusively target FAC or Cameroonian police forces, although attacks by such groups have also previously resulted in civilian casualties. The attack at Bamenda is the most significant incident since a series of explosions wounded 19 people in Buea, Southwest Region, on 25 February. Separatist groups were quick to deny responsibility for the attack at Bamenda, which almost certainly represents an attempt to distance themselves from civilian casualties. In the immediate term, FAC are highly likely to enhance their operational intensity in the region and further arrests remain possible. Lethal violence will very likely remain limited to infrequent attacks targeting FAC outside of major regional population centres.

Kenya. This reporting period the country has continued to see protests against the high cost of living and government tax increases. These protests have been led by the country’s opposition leader, Raila Odinga. These are the third round of protests to take place this month over this issue and they have run from the 19 to the 21 of July. On 19 July, it was reported that at least six people were killed in clashes between the security forces and the protesters, whilst nationwide at least 300 were arrested, including senior opposition leaders. Those arrested

will be charged with looting, malicious damage and arson amongst other charges, according to governmental spokespersons. To try and disperse the protests, the police liberally used both tear gas and water cannons. In the last reporting period, 14 were left dead by the protests. In the country's major cities, such as Nairobi, protests have also taken to barricading roads, and hurling projectiles at security forces. Many businesses were shut as a result of the protests, whilst in Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa, schools and other centres of education were closed on the orders of the Ministry of Education. Business closures resulting from the protests are estimated to be costing the Kenyan economy as much as 20 million USD a day.

So What? Incumbent President Ruto promised when in office he would champion the poor, however under him taxes have risen and the cost of living has risen rapidly, due to global factors, such successive rounds of international monetary tightening, the effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and local factors such as the country's successive droughts placing pressure on domestic food security. Whilst the tax rises are unpopular, the government realistically has little option but to keep them. This is as prior governments have rapidly increased Kenya's debt, which whilst low compared to other emerging economies, is still high. Subsequently, unless addressed through a process of fiscal consolidation it would likely lead the country to enter debt distress and possibly default in 2024. The necessity of keeping the tax rises, plus the fact that over 56 percent of Kenyans think the country is heading in the wrong direction, are both only likely to continue to work to fuel tensions and mean that the deadly protests and unrest persist into the near future. Further adding to tensions are the accusations from Mr Odinga, that the government has recently targeted him for assassination. Despite the likelihood that the unrest persists, however, it is not likely to lead to sectarian violence. This because the support base for both Odinga's and Ruto's cuts across Kenya's many ethnic and tribal divides.

EMEA Regional Forecast. The forthcoming reporting period will see the Spanish general elections take place. It is likely that the conservative People's Party (PP) will achieve a narrow victory, although it is likely that to gain an outright majority, they will have to enter an agreement with the far-right Party Vox. This would make Spain the latest country in the EU to see the emergence of a far-right party in government. In Zimbabwe, the country's current main opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, launched his party's national campaign in the run up to general elections in August. This launch comes amid a sustained push by both the police, incumbent Zanu-PF government, and judiciary to ban all activities of Mr Chamisa and his party. It is likely that election campaign will see large demonstrations, protests, and these could result in clashes between supporters of the opposition and the government. There is a realistic possibility that protests could once again break out in Iran after the news that the country's widely disliked "morality police" are once more resuming their virtue patrols to ensue female dress codes relating to hair and face coverings are abided to. More widely, the region's Islamic states and states with large Islamic minorities may see outbreaks of unrest resulting as a result of the recent burning of the Quran in Stockholm. Expect to see further evidence of reproachment between Ankara and the gulf states, after it was announced that the UAE and Turkey have agreed to deals worth USD 50.7 billion. It is likely that deals between Riyadh and Ankara may follow. The next few weeks are likely to see EU member states commence the process of approving the EU-Tunisia migrant agreement, expect to see this adopted the quickest in EU member states which have governments involving populist and anti-migration parties. Whilst the Russia – Africa summit is expected to take place on 27 July, it is almost certain that President Putin wont, attend so as not to place South Africa in an internationally embarrassing position around the issue of arresting him in according with international obligations. This summit will see at least 40 African leaders and officials from Moscow meeting to discuss political cooperation, economic and security ties, and cultural engagement with the aim of advancing Russian – African cooperation and development. The news that Wagner troops have arrived in the Central African Republic is not surprising and comes as the country is set to hold a referendum on abolishing term limits. It is expected that President Toudera will win this referendum which will allow him to run again for office in 2025.

In Somalia, Al-Shabab will continue their blockade of Baidoa in the south of the country. This blockade has caused severe food and energy shortages and comes as Somalian armed forces are apparently preparing to prepare to retake the city. Consequently, it is almost certain the region around the settlement will see a significant uptick in violence in the coming weeks as this operation commences. Violence is almost certain to continue in the eastern DRC, whilst the DRC and Rwanda regularly accuse each other of supporting rebel groups in the other territory the claim from the DRC that Rwanda is preparing to send its troops to Congolese territory is significant diplomatic

escalation. In Ethiopia, as a result of ongoing violence, authorities in Gambella have imposed a curfew between 19:00 and 06:00, it is likely that this will prevent any significant escalation in violence, however, it will not solve the underlying tensions, as such expect, tensions and violence to continue to manifest. The news that the US is to send addition fighter jets and warships to the Middle East to help monitor key waterways in the region following Iran's seizure and harassment of commercial shipping vessels in recent months will be pleasing to international maritime companies. It is almost certain that in the coming weeks Iran will launch some form of naval or military exercise to protest this new deployment.

Across Europe, searing temperatures will be set to continue with several southern European countries expected to see temperatures surpass 45 degrees Celsius. As a result of the heatwave and the country's warmer than usual winter, the wildfire season has already commenced. Wildfires are already burning in Greece and Spain, with warnings issued that the extreme heat could seed further fires across the continent.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan. At least eight people were injured after an explosive device detonated near a vehicle carrying Frontier Corps paramilitary forces in the Hayatabad suburb of Peshawar, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, on 18 July. The attack was claimed by Tehreek-e-Jihad Pakistan (TJP). On 20 July, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed to have killed two police officers in a shooting attack at a checkpoint in the Regi Model Town neighbourhood, with a further four police officers killed and 11 injured after two attackers detonated explosive vests at a police/government compound in the Bara neighbourhood.

Separately, more than 50 senior members of former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party have established a new political party known as the Tehreek-e-Insaf Parliamentarians (TIP).

So What? The TJP has reportedly been active in Pakistan since February 2023 and has claimed at least two attacks against Pakistani security forces since then. In the short term, the group's operational effectiveness is likely to remain limited, evidenced by the contrasting scale and complexity of their attacks versus those of the TTP. However, the emergence of the TJP as a capable armed actor likely portends a renewed intensity of violence in KPK province as both groups contest for influence and primacy. All three attacks occurred within western suburbs of Peshawar, possibly indicating difficulties penetrating into the city centre which is likely to remain heavily securitised since the Jamaat-ul-Ahrar Mosque attack in March 2023. Further complex attacks targeting police compounds or government facilities remain highly likely to occur in the short term.

Although Khan's divisive politics have been cited as the primary rationale for establishing the TIP, concern that the PTI will be prevented from participating in the next election is also likely to be a notable motivating factor for the former members. Khan is highly unlikely to be permitted to stand for election, given the myriad charges against him, and his PTI party has been systematically dismantled by the incumbent government under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. It is currently unclear whether the move will ultimately split the opposition vote between the PTI and TIP in the upcoming election.

Thailand. Pita Limjaroenrat and his Move Forward party were dealt a major blow on 19 July when a constitutional court suspended him as a lawmaker and rivals won a vote barring him from being re-nominated as prime minister. Protests were reported across Thailand's major cities, with all incidents passing off peacefully. Move Forward subsequently stepped aside and let coalition partner Pheu Thai try and form a government. Elsewhere, one member of Thailand's security forces was killed, and two others were injured in Bacho, Bannang Sata as an improvised explosive device was detonated as their convoy passed.

So What? Despite being the largest elected party in parliament, it is now almost certain that Pita and Move Forward will not head Thailand's next government. It is almost certain that Pita's anti-establishment rhetoric and commitment to reforming Thailand's controversial *lèse-majesté* has triggered the conservative leaning judicial system and senate to block his potential premiership. Thailand's parliament will hold another vote for a prime minister next week, and it is now widely expected that Srettha Thavisin, from Move Forward's alliance partner Pheu Thai, will be the coalition's nomination for prime minister. It remains highly unlikely however that Srettha will gather the 376 votes required to ascend to the position of prime minister if he continues with Move Forward as a supporter due to the military's opposition to them. What is almost certain is that as the next vote on 27 July approaches, negotiations and deals will be made in earnest between several potential partners. Looking further ahead, the longer that parliament fails to nominate a prime minister democratically, the more likely it becomes that the military, and the military appointed senate, seize control and perform the latest iteration of a military coup in Thailand. Throughout this process civil unrest is highly likely to continue in major urban areas. Democracy activists are already planning more protests urging demonstrators to protest the constitution created by the military after its 2014 coup that prevented Pita being elected prime minister directly from the popular vote. These will likely increase in size and frequency the longer the procedure takes and, there is a realistic possibility that if the military does take control, violent civil unrest could occur. The IED attack in the south of the country is assessed as being unrelated to the issues surrounding the central government and is not wholly unexpected with

extreme Islamism and separatist movements present in the south. It is likely that one of these entities were the perpetrators although no group has claimed responsibility and there have been no follow up attacks. However, given the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the government, there is a realistic possibility these groups could capitalise on the discord and seek opportunities for further attacks.

North Korea. On 16 Jul the combined navies of the United States, South Korea and Japan conducted a tri-lateral exercise in international waters between South Korea and Japan. The stated aims of the tri-lateral exercise were to improve inter-operability between the three navies and to improve their collective ability to track and intercept computer-simulated ballistic missile threats, almost certainly in preparation to counter the growing nuclear missile threat posed by North Korea. This is the second tri-lateral naval exercise conducted this year by the emerging alliance and the fourth such exercise since Yoon Suk Yeol ascended the South Korean presidency in May 22. In addition, on the 18 July a US Navy nuclear-powered and nuclear capable ballistic missile submarine conducted a port call in South Korea for the first time in four decades, with North Korea responding by launching two ballistic missiles into the Sea of Japan. Although this offers limited operational value to a US nuclear submarine which can operate at sea for months at a time and strike targets up to 7,400km away, it is almost certainly strategic messaging from the USA with the intent on communicating that the mutual defence treaty with South Korea is iron-clad and any North Korean aggression could be met with a US nuclear response.

So What? It is highly likely that tri-lateral military exercises between the USA, South Korea and Japan will continue to develop in scope and frequency to counter the North Korean nuclear threat, with North Korea almost certainly reacting to any perceived military threats with further demonstrations of its developing nuclear capabilities. The continued military co-operation between Japan and South Korea is likely demonstrative of improving relations between the two historically opposed powers, an agenda championed by the incumbent South Korean President and by President Biden who has scheduled a US hosted summit between the three powers in August 22, aimed at further improving relations. However, whilst military cooperation between the three powers has been posited as a measure to contain North Korea, it is almost certain that growing military and political cooperation between the countries will be focused on countering the threat presented by China. It is likely that the long-term aspiration is to establish a more effective military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region to deter both North Korea and China, which would ultimately result in greater levels of inter-operability, intelligence sharing and tri-lateral exercises. It is almost certain that China perceives this as a formidable risk to its own power within the Asia-Pacific region and will likely increase its efforts to de-stabilise US, South Korean and Japanese relations and warn of increased tensions within the region.

New Zealand. On 20 July, a gunman made his way through a construction site in central Auckland, killing two people, with the incident leaving at least ten further people injured. The assailant, who used a pump-action shot gun, was later identified as a worker at the site and police announced that they believed it was an isolated incident.

So What? The incident occurred hours before the Women's football World Cup was due to get underway in the Auckland, sparking initial concerns over the motive. Police were however quick to identify that this was an isolated incident and not a terrorist attack. Indeed, Prime Minister Chris Hipkins announced that New Zealand's security threat level would remain 'LOW', the second level of five, indicating that a terrorist attack remains a realistic possibility. Given the heightened security around the international event and the limited timeframe of the tournament, it is unlikely that an attack targeting the competition will materialise. On a domestic front, the incident has reignited the debate around New Zealand's gun control legislation. Gun violence is rare in New Zealand, particularly following the tightening of gun control laws after the 2019 terror attack in Christchurch. In the aftermath of this incident, 50,000 guns were handed back in an amnesty, it is still estimated that there are nearly 250,000 guns in public ownership across the country. As of June 2023, new legislation requires firearm license owners to register any arms on a digital platform to prevent them being obtained illegally, but this process will likely take five years to be fully implemented, and therefore given the number of guns still in circulation, a significant black market for these will likely persist for the foreseeable future.

APAC Regional Forecast. China's relations with regional actors will likely remain in focus during the next reporting period. Following meetings between China's top diplomat, Wang Yi, and Indian foreign minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, both sides agreed that Beijing and Delhi should seek to stabilise ties. With no official formulation of

how this will occur however it is unlikely that relations will be rectified quickly. The political game between Beijing and Taipei will also highly likely continue as Taiwan's Vice-President and presidential frontrunner in next year's elections, William Tai, re-affirms his proposed trip to the United States at end of the month.

On 18 July the Malaysian opposition leader and Chief Minister of the Kedah state, Muhammad Sanusi, was charged with sedition for purportedly insulting the revered sultans. Although Malaysia's sultans assume a largely ceremonial role within Malaysian politics, they are deeply respected in the Muslim-majority nation. The move to charge Sanusi comes just weeks ahead of regional elections within Malaysia, with Sunasi's home state of Kedah being one of the six states electing a new government. Sunasi's arrest has triggered a wave of uproar on social media but has yet to materialise into physical protests, however, should the campaign against Sunasi continue, social unrest is a realistic possibility.

In Cambodia, national elections are due to take place on Sunday 23 July. It is almost certain that incumbent Prime Minister Hun Seng and his Cambodian People's Party will remain in power after a repressive campaign of using the courts to dismantle most viable opposition parties. It is likely that supporters of the remaining opposition parties and other pro-democracy activists will take to the streets in protest in most major Cambodian towns and cities with a realistic possibility that these will be violently suppressed by the authorities as evidenced by the 2013 protests.

French President Macron is scheduled to visit the South Pacific from 24 to 29 July in an attempt to re-establish relations between France and its South Pacific territories where pro-independence movements are gathering traction. In addition, Macron will visit the independent nations of Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea, aiming to signal France's enduring commitment to the region and project France as an alternative power to a region dominated by the US-China struggle.

Reporting indicates that Taiwan is looking to procure the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) from the US amid increasing tensions with China. Built by Raytheon and Kongsberg, NASAMS is a short-to-medium range, ground-to-air defence system capable of intercepting enemy missiles, aircraft, helicopters, and drones, which according to US Defense Secretary, Lloyd Austin, has been 100 per cent effective in engaging Russian missiles. Presented with the constant threat of an invasion by China, it is highly likely that Taiwan will continue to procure advanced weaponry from its western allies to deter Chinese aggression and has likely assessed that unlike Ukraine it will be unable to obtain any materiel during a conflict due to a Chinese encirclement of the island nation.

Elements of the Russian Pacific Fleet and Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy are due to conduct a joint military exercise in the Sea of Japan, consisting of over ten ships and thirty-plus aircraft. According to Chinese reports, the drills will focus on ship-to-ship communications, manoeuvring in formation and maritime search and rescue. However, it is almost certainly strategic messaging communicating mutual support for each other during heightened tensions with the west and will serve as a deterrence to the developing military cooperation of the USA, South Korea, and Japan.

Environmentally, extreme weather will continue to plague the Asia-Pacific region in the coming reporting period. A remote township in Xinjiang documented record temperatures this last week and the same heatwave is set to persist over the next few days. The significantly above average rainfall that has been experienced in Pakistan, India, and South Korea is highly likely to continue for the coming weeks, with the Indian meteorological agency already issuing an alert for heavy to very heavy rainfall in the Gujarat region. In the Philippines, low pressure area over waters east of southern Luzon has formed into a tropical depression. Officially named Egay, the weather front is almost certain to become a tropical storm by 22 July, and it is now likely that it will be a super typhoon by 24 July. At this point however it is assessed as unlikely that Egay makes landfall.