



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 4 AUG – 11 AUG 2023



Global Intelligence Summary

Week 33: 4 August – 11 August 2023

Executive Summary

- The situation in **Niger** remains unresolved with ECOWAS threatening military action after creating a “standby force”. Any military operation is likely to provoke an enduring conflict with western nations reticent to get involved.
- In **Israel**, it is almost certain that protests will continue with demonstrations now taking place outside the homes of Israeli politicians. Judicial overhaul and Palestinian deaths will likely draw international condemnation.
- In response to confrontations between the Ethiopian army and Amhara rebels, a state of emergency has been declared in northern **Ethiopia**, posing the risk of involving the country in another extended and violent internal conflict.
- Despite the nationwide state of emergency in **Ecuador**, it is highly likely that the internal security situation will continue to deteriorate.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period (04 August – 11 August 2023)

AMER

- 1 United States:** Wildfires kill dozens in Hawaii.
- 2 Ecuador:** Presidential candidate assassinated
- 3 Brazil:** Eight regional states sign the Belem Declaration

EMEA

- 4 Syria:** Israeli air strike kills Syrian soldiers
- 5 Israel:** Israel remains afflicted by protests amid ongoing constitutional crisis and West Bank violence.
- 6 Niger:** ECOWAS create standby force
- 7 Ethiopia:** Major Clashes take place in Amhara
- 8 South Africa:** Taxi strikes in Cape Town turn deadly

APAC

- 9 Pakistan:** Imran Khan arrested, and Parliament dissolved ahead of elections
- 10 India:** Prime Minister Modi survives no confidence vote.
- 11 China and the Philippines:** Disputes continue in the South China Sea



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Wildfires kill dozens in Hawaii.

The last reporting period has seen wildfires ravage Maui County, Hawaii, with at least 55 people killed and dozens still unaccounted for. Igniting on the night of 8 August, the wildfires, fanned by winds from Hurricane Dora located hundreds of miles to the southwest of the islands, burned thousands of acres and at least 1000 structures were damaged or destroyed through 9 and 10 August. A state of emergency was declared on 8 August, activating the state's National Guard, as Governor Josh Green described the situation as the worst natural disaster in the state's history.

Assessment: The speed at which these wildfires spread almost certainly contributed to the relatively high death toll and the extent of the damage. With only one highway passable at the height of the blaze, thousands tried to evacuate at once, with some even fleeing into the Pacific Ocean where the United States Coast Guard were required to rescue them. Nevertheless, at least 11,000 travellers were successfully evacuated from Maui in the first 48 hours with the major airport remaining open. The impact on the island's tourist industry, however, will likely be significant as the fires devastated much of the resort city of Lahaina. Governor Green, who was on planned personal travel outside of the state, returned to the islands almost immediately, submitting a request for a Presidential Disaster Declaration to the White House, highly likely in an attempt to alleviate some of the impacts in the longer term.

The United States National Weather Service (NWS) determined that the cause of the fires was a mix of dry vegetation, strong winds, and low humidity. However, this incident follows on from an international trend of severe wildfires, with Greece, Spain, Portugal, and unusually western Canada, all suffering from conflagrations. It is almost certain that human-caused climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of such extreme weather events, and given Hawaii's naturally hot and dry climate, it is likely that the state will be further impacted by such events in the coming years.

Ecuador:

Presidential candidate assassinated at a campaign event in Quito.

On 9 August, presidential candidate Fernando Villavicencio was assassinated during an evening campaign event in northern Quito. At least nine others were also injured in the incident. Security forces engaged the shooter, who died of his injuries a couple of hours later; six others have been arrested in connection with the attack. In the hours that followed, President Guillermo Lasso declared a 60-day national state of emergency and the immediate mobilisation of the armed forces across the country, and Los Lobos (The Wolves), Ecuador's second largest criminal gang, claimed responsibility for the shooting.

Assessment: Villavicencio, a serving congressman and a former journalist was polling fifth out of eight candidates, with roughly 7.5 per cent of the vote share. He was a vocal critic of Ecuador's corruption and organised crime, alleging links between the criminal gangs and government officials, and suggesting that these relationships had contributed to the deteriorating security situation in many parts of the country. It is highly likely that it was Villavicencio's vow to crack down on these issues that meant he was targeted. Los Lobos were also certainly emboldened by the current deteriorating security crisis in Ecuador. This is being fuelled by drug trafficking and a turf war between rival gangs. The incident intensifies the focus during this presidential campaign on the Andean nation's internal security situation, with rising drug-related violence almost certainly a primary concern for voters. It is likely that the candidate best perceived to deal with this issue will ultimately win the presidency. As campaigning resumes, it is highly unlikely another incident like this takes place, however, this is the third political assassination of 2023 in Ecuador, and a similar attempt cannot be ruled out.

President Lasso, who said the assassination was clearly an attempt to sabotage the election, also resolutely declared that voting would still take place on 20 August. However, Lasso lacks a mandate to deal with the current security situation, and therefore the new president's first few months in office will almost certainly be defined by trying to resolve these issues. It is highly likely that this will involve numerous further states of emergencies and there is a possibility that the national army stays mobilised for an extended period of time.

Brazil:

Eight regional states sign the Belem Declaration.

The last reporting period saw the eight members of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation (ACTO) sign the Belem Declaration, a list of unified policies and measures to help bolster regional cooperation on matters pertaining to the Amazon rainforest. ACTO, made up of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname and Venezuela, however, failed to reach an agreement on a common agenda for ending deforestation with the delegates at the summit unable to agree to the key demands of environmentalists and Indigenous groups. These demands included for all member countries to adopt Brazil's pledge to end illegal deforestation by 2030 and Colombia's pledge to halt new oil exploration. However, the Belem Declaration does agree on measures intended to promote sustainable development, combat illegal resource mining, and fight the organised crime that fuels it.

Assessment: This was the first ACTO summit in over 14 years and this in itself is seen as progress. Whilst a number of international experts will be disappointed by the lack of an ACTO-wide agreement on ending deforestation, there remains much to commend in the Belem Declaration. On top of this, individual member states have said they remain committed to their respective national pledges. It should be noted that Bolivia and Venezuela are the only Amazon countries not to sign a 2021 agreement of more than 100 countries to work towards halting deforestation by 2030. It is likely both nations' reluctance here stymied ACTO's movement towards this goal. Meanwhile, Colombia's desire to see ACTO halt all new oil exploration was likely scuppered by Brazil which is currently debating whether to develop a recently discovered offshore oil well near the mouth of the Amazon River.

The Amazon remains the world's largest rainforest and is home to at least ten percent of Earth's biodiversity, 50 million people and hundreds of billions of trees. Crucially, in the fight against climate change, it is also a vital carbon sink. However, around 17 percent of the forest has been felled, and scientists believe that the ecosystems in the forest are close to beginning to die off, a scenario which would release carbon, rather than capture it. Recent years have seen the deadly and destructive effects of climate change become increasingly apparent across the world, with this reporting period alone seeing deadly storms in Scandinavia and wildfires in Hawaii. It remains to be seen whether ACTO will meet again next year, however, it is hoped that the Belem Declaration will help spur the region towards greater climate cooperation in the run-up to the 2025 UN climate talks, which will also be hosted in Belem.

AMER Regional Forecast. It is almost certain that this forthcoming reporting period will see retaliation from Beijing regarding the announcement from the United States that they will begin to restrict investments in China. The new rules regulate United States investments in semiconductors and microelectronics, quantum computing and artificial intelligence, and will only apply to future investments. It is likely that the United States' allies, who share similar fears relating to Chinese technological developments, in particular the United Kingdom, European Union, and Australia will unveil similar restrictions. William Lai, the front-runner in the Taiwan Presidential election, is due to visit the United States this coming week. Lai is a staunch supporter of Taiwanese sovereignty, however, due to the United States wishing to remain neutral in the upcoming Taiwanese domestic elections, it is likely that he won't receive a high-level reception, and this will also be a move to limit the Chinese response. Preparations will continue for the United States, South Korea and Japan summit at Camp David which will commence on 18 August and is aimed at strengthening their ties in the Asia-Pacific.

News and developments regarding Donald Trump's court case for election subversion are almost certain to continue over the short term. The news that a provisional date of 2 January 2024 has been set, two weeks before the Iowa Caucuses, is almost certain to provoke angry rhetoric from pro-Trump Republicans and

maybe trigger localised unrest. In Latin America, Argentina will hold its primary elections for the country's Presidential elections on 13 August. There is deep-rooted anger at the ruling Peronists for allowing Argentina's economy to once again collapse. The primary will show if the potential, outsider candidate, a libertarian named Javier Milei, can translate his polling successes into votes, and which one of the two traditional conservative candidates will move forward for the Together for Change alliance.

The news that Keyna is willing to send a police task force to Haiti has been greeted positively, with other states in Latin America stating they would contribute. The United States is also likely to announce what help and support it would provide. This is unlikely to be "boots on the ground", however, it is likely to provide technological, training, and financial support to the task force. The United States is likely to enhance its defensive capabilities in Alaska and Northern Command after 11 Chinese and Russian warships working in concert approached American territory. This is believed to be the largest flotilla of warships to come close to United States territories for several decades, and in the context of tensions with both China and Russia will be seen as extremely provocative. The recently announced ceasefire between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the Colombian government will remain under pressure in the wake of the news that ELN had allegedly planned to assassinate the country's Attorney General. The Attorney General has vocally opposed many of the promises in the proposed ceasefire and other peace deals between the rebel groups and the government, and there will also be suspicion as to whether the Attorney General is seeking to undermine the ceasefire given his known hostility to aspects of the process.

The remnants of Tropical Storm Eugene are expected to continue heading for southern California, which will bring much-needed rain to the state's southwestern region. It is also expected to bring high levels of humidity across the state. In Hawaii, it is almost certain the damages and death toll from the island's wildfires will rise, with over 1000 people remaining missing. Whilst several fires across the Hawaii island chain are now under control, it is almost certain they will continue burning through the forthcoming reporting period. In Uruguay, the country's prolonged drought, which has seen the capital Montevideo run out of water, is likely to continue easing. Reservoir levels at the Paso Severino, which supply half the country's drinking water have risen from 2.4 percent to 15 percent, however, government guidelines around not using tap water, due to high saline levels will persist for some weeks yet.



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Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Syria:

Israeli air strike kills four Syrian soldiers near Damascus.

In the early hours of 7 August, four Syrian soldiers were killed and another four were wounded, in an Israeli missile strike on Damascus. Syrian air defences intercepted some of the projectiles, but significant material damage was also inflicted. It was also reported that two members of non-Syrian militias aligned with Damascus were also killed in the barrage.

Assessment: Israel almost certainly carried out this missile attack in Syria in an attempt to disrupt Iranian facilitation networks and weapons shipments in the country as Tel Aviv has been persistently conducting similar strikes in recent months. This has failed to have any significant impact, however, as Iran's proxy militias, primarily the Lebanese armed group Hezbollah, now hold sway in large areas of eastern, southern, and northern Syria and in several suburbs around the capital. They have also become more vocal regarding the Israel-Lebanon border, and it is likely Hezbollah are looking to take advantage of the recent chaos in Israel. Israel has been plagued by civil unrest instigated by its judicial reform bills and increased tensions between the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and Palestinian armed groups. As a consequence of the controversial reforms in Israel, significant IDF resources have been reallocated to police the protests and many IDF reservists are actively challenging the reforms and refusing to report to duty. This has led to several current and former elements of Israel's defence infrastructure warning that Israel is at a historic weakness, with a divided Israel beset by internal problems and receiving condemnation from some of its strongest allies, a situation likely to be exploited by groups like Hezbollah. It is highly likely that Israel will continue its airstrikes into Syria to project strength and deter Iranian-backed militia groups from conducting any attacks on Israel.

The death and injuries of Syrian soldiers is an interesting development as the casualties from previous airstrikes have exclusively been linked to Iranian militias, despite targeting Syrian infrastructure. It is unlikely that Israel targeted the warehouse knowing that Syrian security forces were present. However, if Israel was aware, and more importantly if Damascus thinks they were, then this is an escalation that could illicit a response from Syria.

Israel:

Israel remains afflicted by protests amid ongoing constitutional crisis and West Bank violence.

Throughout the reporting period, Israel has continued to be plagued by issues relating to both the judicial reform bill and historically high clashes between the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and Palestinian factions. Anti-judicial overhaul protestors have been conducting protests since January 2023, almost immediately after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing coalition government signalled its intent to decrease the powers of Israel's Supreme Court in favour of the government. Although there have been sporadic nationwide protests, the majority of Israel's protests have been aggregated in central Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. However, protestors have now changed tactics and are now demonstrating outside of the homes of politicians that support the controversial reforms. Protestors have also blocked part of the main highway that runs through Tel Aviv and have formed demonstrations in the Golan Heights where Netanyahu is reportedly on holiday. Against the backdrop of the civil unrest, IDF forces continue to conduct almost nightly raids into the West Bank. Already, the year has seen the highest number of Palestinian deaths in a year since the United Nations began records in 2005 with the total soon to eclipse 200. This reporting period has witnessed a major IDF raid on a Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin which led to the deaths of three suspected militants, and a raid on another refugee camp in Tulkarm which resulted in the death of a member of Fatah, as well as multiple injuries. In a separate event, two Israeli settlers were arrested after killing a Palestinian teenager; an incident which provoked international condemnation. The spike in sectarian violence has led to further protests in Tel Aviv, with thousands of Arab Israelis being joined by many Jewish Israelis to protest



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the authorities for their perceived indifference towards Palestinian killings in what is being called the “March of the Dead”.

Assessment: It is almost certain that there will be no resolution to the controversial judicial reform bills in the immediate future, with sustained protests and counter-protests expected to occur throughout Israel in the coming weeks. Israel’s High Court is due to hold hearings on petitions against two of the contentious laws passed by the coalition government on September 12. The hearings could mark a deepening of the constitutional crisis for Israel and will doubtlessly provoke protests from both sides. With demonstrations evolving to target politician’s homes, it is likely that the protests will be more dispersed throughout Israel bringing major disruption to the transport networks within the country and it is likely there will be continued attempts to block major highways and Ben Gurion airport. With dispersed demonstrations, it is likely that Israeli security services will be further stretched at a time of heightened tensions fomented by IDF raids on the West Bank. A divided Israel, under international scrutiny and struggling with an encumbered security service is likely to provide an opportunity for Palestinian factions who seek to capitalise on the discord, with any direct action almost certainly to receive a disproportionate response from the IDF and will this will perpetuate the cycle of violence.

Niger:

ECOWAS forms standby force in preparation for direct military action.

On 10 August West African leaders convened at an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) summit in order to discuss how to best deal with the coup in neighbouring Niger. A resolution led to ECOWAS forming a standby force that has been activated to potentially deal with the coup and reinstate democracy in Niger through direct military action. However, the West African organisation stated that the door was still open for a peaceful and diplomatic resolution and that military action would be a last resort. In Niger, members of the country’s deposed government have formed a resistance council calling for the reinstatement of President Bazoum. The movement declared that it is entirely political in nature for now but warned that it will give itself all the necessary means to overturn the undemocratic actions conducted by the coup leaders. The coup leaders have begun to consolidate their power by announcing a new government and appointing new members to the cabinet. The new government has also continued its anti-French rhetoric, suggesting France has violated its airspace after the junta closed it, and they have also accused France of attacking a camp and freeing “terrorists”.

Assessment: The move by ECOWAS to form a standby force is likely a manoeuvre aimed at pressurising the junta into entering diplomatic talks with the organisation likely reluctant to commit troops to Niger. Moreover, there are likely legal and political challenges ECOWAS would have to overcome in order to conduct military action. Nigeria, whose President Tinubu currently chairs ECOWAS, is almost certainly the most powerful member of ECOWAS and would face challenges with committing troops. For Nigerian troops to be deployed outside of Nigeria, the constitution demands that any proposal must first be approved by the National Assembly. This is unlikely to be achieved in Nigeria given the ethnic, economic, cultural and religious ties between Niger and northern Nigeria, with many Nigerians already appalled by the country’s decision to cut electricity to Niger. It is also likely that many Nigerians fear not only the cost of such action but that the chaos could be exploited by armed groups that already operate in Niger and much of northern Nigeria, leading to increased rates of terror attacks and criminality. Moreover, military action by ECOWAS in Niger will not be looked at favourably by many West Africans who accuse ECOWAS of doing almost nothing to counter the jihadist threat in the region. There is also a chance of a wider West African conflict with both Mali and Burkina Faso pledging military support to Niger. The sustained anti-French rhetoric from the junta is likely shaping activity from the junta that will seek to justify the expulsion of France and likely the US in the near future. In the absence of Western powers, it is likely that the junta will invite the Wagner Group in order to help Niger combat insurgent threats and act as a deterrent to any foreign intervention.

Ethiopia:

Major Clashes take place between Fano and government forces in Amhara.

This reporting period has seen major clashes take place in the country’s Amhara region between the Ethiopian Defence Forces and local militia and rebel forces, known as Fano. On 4 August, it was reported

that the Fano militia had seized control of a number of towns in the Amhara region including, Bahir Dar, the Amharan capital, Gondar and Lalibela. This prompted the Ethiopian government to declare a state of emergency in the region and send troops to the region. Resultingly, across this reporting period, the region has seen significant fighting take place as Ethiopian National Defence Forces (ENDF) seek to regain control of the region. On 9 August residents in the Amhara regions stated that the ENDF had successfully regained control of the centre of Gondar, Amhara's second city, and had entered the outskirts of Lalibela. There were also unconfirmed reports on 10 August that Bahir Dar, the region's capital, had been "freed" by the ENDF. In the wake of the recapture of these settlements by the ENDF, the federal government has announced the region will see a curfew implemented until 23 August. The curfews will restrict movements of people and vehicles after 19:00 local time. Restrictions will also be placed on public meetings, parades, and similar activities in Amhara. The cities which fall under the curfew include Bahir Dar, Gonder, Debre Bierhan, Debre Markos, Showa Robit, and Lalibela.

Assessment: The fighting in Amhara has rapidly become Ethiopia's most serious security crisis since the 2020 - 2022 Tigrayan conflict. During this conflict, Fano and the Amhara region fought alongside ENDF troops and proved crucial in stopping the Tigrayan advance towards Addis Abbas. However, despite this, the Amhara region was not included in the political and peace negotiations, and this created tensions between the region and Addis Abbas. These tensions were further heightened when the peace treaty agreed that status of lands claimed by both Amhara and Tigray, which Amhara forces captured during the war, should be resolved "in accordance with the constitution". The constitution was written by the former Tigrayan-dominated government. Subsequently, actions by the federal government only further deepened mistrust between Addis Abbas and Amhara, such as the arrest and detention of Amhara activists and militiamen. Finally, in April 2023, the federal government ordered that all regional security forces and militia be integrated into the police or federal military. At the time this prompted widespread violent protests, as residents in Amhara accused the government of seeking to undermine their security. Amhara is Ethiopia's second most populous region, with more than three times as many people as Tigray, and parts of Amhara lie just only about 50 km (30 miles) from Addis Ababa. This combined with the increasingly fragile economic and political situation in which Ethiopia finds itself, means that Abiy's government is unlikely to survive a sustained mass uprising in the Amhara region. As such, unless the ENDF rapidly regain control of Amhara and defeats Fano, it could spark a conflict in which Addis Abbas, and Abiy, find themselves fighting for survival.

South Africa:

Taxi strikes in Cape Town turn deadly.

At least five people have been killed in Cape Town over the last reporting period as the taxi driver strike in the city has intensified. The strike began in response to a new law that allows authorities to confiscate vehicles for offences like overloading, illegally driving in the emergency lane, or taxis not being roadworthy; a law described as "heavy-handed" by the drivers. At least 120 people have been arrested since the strikes, with many detained for looting, stone-throwing, and arson, which has largely been targeted at municipal buses. Significant transport and travel disruption has been reported across the city, with the strikers creating roadblocks along key highways, whilst they have also formed unofficial tolls and have been holding large daily protest marches. South Africa's transport minister, Sindisiwe Chikunga, has stated that city authorities were acting arrogantly and illegally, and taxi workers have announced that the strike would continue until at least 11 August.

Assessment: The strike has meant that most taxi and minicab routes are closed which has caused significant economic disruption, as many are unable to access their place of employment. This has led to the situation escalating to a national political crisis, and it is highly likely media and government attention will remain on the events over the coming days. Moreover, given that the taxi strike has already been prolonged once, it is highly likely that current events will continue beyond 11 August and into the next reporting period. Therefore, the ongoing taxi strike is almost certain to cause significant disruption to traffic and travel across Cape Town in the immediate future. Cape Town is currently governed by the opposition party to the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance. In the 2024 elections, it is looking likely that the ANC will lose its majority for the first time since the end of apartheid, and it is likely that the national government are seeking to implicate a political rival for the ongoing situation in Cape Town. More broadly, the strikes,

combined with the blackouts, political corruption, outbreaks of cholera, and bankrupt public services, highlight how bad governance has failed the country and led it close to becoming a failing state.

EMEA Regional Forecast. In Spain, parliament is scheduled to convene for the first time since the recent general election. It is now likely that the centre-right People's Party (PP) will be able to form a government with the support of the far-right Vox party after the latter softened some of their terms of agreement. There remains a realistic possibility that this does not happen though, and if PP fails to secure a majority in two consecutive votes, incumbent prime minister Pedro Sanchez and his Spanish Socialist Workers' Party will be given the opportunity to form a government. In Iran, registration for the parliamentary election has opened domestically and Tehran is also expected to continue its efforts on the international stage, with a formal application to join the BRICS community likely. Tehran will also move for the continuation of a prisoner exchange and easing of economic sanctions with the United States. These moves highlight an effort by Tehran to help support the flailing domestic economy by being less isolated from international trade. In Senegal, political volatility and civil unrest look almost certain to continue with the news that one of the lawyers of opposition politician Ousmane Sonko has also been arrested.

Between 12 and 15 August, Polish Army Day celebrations commemorating the 1920 victory over Soviet Russia will take place, almost certainly causing significant disruption. There is also a realistic possibility that events will be targeted by those with sympathetic views toward Russia. The events will culminate on 15 August which is a national holiday. Elsewhere, Poland has confirmed that general elections will be held on 15 October.

Storm Hans has brought considerable disruption to both Norway and Sweden, with flooding and landslides prevalent throughout both countries. Whilst the worst of the conditions have now passed, the fallout will highly likely continue to cause issues throughout the next reporting period. Across southern Europe, as temperatures begin to rise again, wildfires are likely to be reported and depending on wind direction and the climatic conditions, these could cause significant threat to life particularly in Portugal and Spain.



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Asia Pacific (APAC)

Pakistan:

Imran Khan arrested, and Parliament dissolved ahead of elections.

On 5 August, Pakistan's former Prime Minister and opposition leader, Imran Khan, was sentenced to three years in prison for corruption allegations. Not long after he was arrested, for the second time in three months, he was taken to prison. On 8 August, it was then announced that Khan was to be barred from politics for at least five years. The announcement was made by the Election Commission of Pakistan and came as a result of his conviction. Less than 24 hours later, on 9 August, the Pakistani High Court turned down his appeal that the charges against him be suspended. On the same day, the country's Parliament was dissolved in preparation for elections to supposedly occur before November 2023, ending a volatile term.

Assessment: As a result of the conviction of Khan, the country's next elections will now almost certainly take place without the popular former Prime Minister participating. Whilst elections are scheduled to take place before November 2023, this is almost certain to not occur. Indeed, a delay has already been announced, ostensibly, for a government-led committee to redraw the country's electoral boundaries on the basis of recently completed census data. As a result, the economically fragile, and nuclear-armed state faces a prolonged time frame with a government not backed by parliament.

Taken as individual events, the conviction of Khan and the redistricting would seem to be illustrations that the country's legal and political processes are working as intended. However, the timing of both highlights that actually the country's democratic process is once more tilting away from parliament and back towards the nation's all-powerful military. This is further evidenced by the fact that in the days before parliament was dissolved, several laws were passed or amended, granting the armed forces sweeping new powers of arrest and detention. These come through amendments to the official secrets act, redefining "enemy" to mean anyone engaged in "acts deemed prejudicial to Pakistan", and a new Pakistan Army Act 2023 which allows for the detention of anyone deemed to have been involved in the unauthorised "disclosure" of information or involved in "electronic crimes and defamation". The military, and the current Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, will be hoping that the delay will allow them to consolidate support against Khan's PTI party. However, there is a realistic possibility that this could backfire, and any delay combined with his arrest will serve to only make the PTI more popular. When the elections do take place, it will be almost certain that national agreement and consensus will not be achievable. As such, whilst the prospect of national default has faded, the necessary and politically unpopular economic reforms which need to be completed to avoid further financial problems will likely not be undertaken.

India:

Prime Minister Modi survives no confidence vote.

On 7 August, opposition politician Rahul Gandhi returned to India's parliament after the Supreme Court suspended his conviction for defamation. His return came the day before parliament began three days of deliberations on the vote of no-confidence in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government brought by opposition groups in relation to the recent violence in Manipur. On 10 August, Modi and his government easily survived the vote with opposition politicians walking out before the vote.

Assessment: More than 180 people have been killed, many hundreds more wounded and tens of thousands rendered homeless since violence broke out in Manipur in May. Modi avoided the situation for months before making a public address in July. Manipur, although touted as the oppositions reason for this vote of no confidence, was likely not the key motive. Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hold a large majority and the vote was almost certain to go in their favour, however what the move does show is that the new INDIA alliance, a coalition of 26 opposition groups, have gained enough strength to be able to force such a vote. Ghandi's return highly likely strengthened the momentum INDIA had in parliament, and the group is

making plans to run against the BJP in national elections due by May 2024. This week's events have raised the political temperature and effectively kickstarted that election campaign and whilst it remains highly likely that Modi and the BJP will maintain their majority, it suggests that Ghandi and INDIA present their biggest electoral threat since winning power in 2014.

China and the Philippines:

Disputes continue in the South China Sea.

This reporting period has seen the Chinese Coast Guard continually harass their Filipino counterparts in disputed areas of the South China Sea. On 6 August, a Chinese Coast Guard vessel sparked international condemnation after it fired a water cannon at a Filipino vessel trying to deliver food, water, fuel, and other supplies to its troops stationed on the BRP Sierra Madre, located on the Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands. The BRP Sierra Madre is a World War Two ship purposefully grounded by the Philippines Navy in 1999 and used as a military outpost to reinforce its claims in the South China Sea. In the wake of this incident, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr stated that Manila would continue to assert its sovereignty and territorial rights. Beijing released a statement on 8 August stating that it would not abandon the area and called for the Philippines to vacate the area and stop its "provocative" actions, otherwise it may choose to no longer show "rational restraint". Beijing also took aim at the United States, accusing it of "hyping up" the issue and "gathering allies" to "make mischief and sow discord" in the South China Sea.

Assessment: International maritime law stipulates that a nation's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) will extend no further than 200 nautical miles. However, Beijing claims that almost all the South China Sea comes under its sovereignty, despite much of it being further than 200 nautical miles from mainland China. Beijing's claim overlaps the internationally recognised EEZs of several other countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei and Taiwan. In 2016, an international court ruling stated China's territorial demands were invalid, however, Beijing continues to assert its claims and harass the forces of other nations in the South China Sea, only recognising Southeast Asian nation's waters up to the territorial seas limit of 12 nautical miles. This latest incident comes as the Philippines continues to pivot back towards Washington, with whom it has a decades-old Defence Agreement and has recently signed new security and defence agreements with. In the wake of this latest incident, it is highly likely that the proposed joint patrols of the South China Sea by regional United States allies, and the United States Navy will be fast-tracked into existence as a move to invalidate China's extensive claims. This was first mooted in February 2023 and would include the United States operating with partners such as Japan, Australia, the Philippines and likely other claimants of the disputed waters. China, who has already militarised many of the islands in the South China Sea, will almost certainly continue to harass rival nation's ships with hundreds of vessels from the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), Chinese Coast Guard and People's Maritime Militia at its disposal. China has a long history of conducting dangerous manoeuvres at sea, ramming vessels, firing water cannons, and blinding sailors with lasers, and consequently there is a realistic possibility of miscalculation and subsequent escalation. Politically, it is almost certain that neither Beijing or Manila will abandon its claims any time soon, and as Manila continues its overtures to Washington, it is likely China will intensify its rhetoric and increase its aggression in the South China Sea.

APAC Regional Forecast. Geopolitically, relations between Beijing and Washington are expected to continue to deteriorate considering President Biden's investment regulations, a situation compounded by his remarks on the Chinese economy being a "ticking timebomb". The relationship will be further strained by the public capture of a Chinese national spying for the Central Intelligence Agency. In New Zealand, the threat of China will also be a primary issue in the upcoming general election, with the campaign highly likely to put foreign and defence policy in the spotlight. On domestic fronts, six state elections will take place in Malaysia on 12 August in what is being viewed as a referendum on the incumbent national government. If Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and his party perform well, it is likely that he will continue with his progressive agenda. In Thailand, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra has delayed the return of his self-imposed exile as negotiations continue around the next government and in Cambodia, it is almost certain that Prime Minister Hun Sen officially stands aside for his son to take over.

Chinese warplanes entering Taiwan's Air Defence Zone in the last reporting period is almost certain to occur again as Taiwan's Vice President and presidential frontrunner, William Lai, stopovers in the United States

next week on a visit to Latin America. There is also a realistic opportunity that China goes further and holds military drills around the island. With the American, Japanese, and South Korean summit taking place at Camp David, it is highly likely North Korea will launch several missiles in response in the form of strategic messaging. Kim Jong Un has also called for the expansion of military drills and more preparations for the possibility of war. In India, the sectarian clashes gripping Manipur shows no signs of alleviating, with other instances of violence a realistic possibility across the country.

Environmentally, expect the aftermath of Typhoon Khanun to cause continued disruption in those countries affected, particularly Japan and those on the Korean Peninsula.



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