



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 25 AUG – 01 SEP 2023



Global Intelligence Summary

Week 37: 25 August – 1 September 2023

Executive Summary

- In the **United States**, Hurricane Idalia wreaks havoc on low-lying Florida and much of the southeastern USA.
- In **Niger**, the coup leaders have ordered the expulsion of the French ambassador with France refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the new government.
- In **Gabon**, the Bongo dynasty has been ousted by the military in yet another African coup.
- In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, dozens have been killed by the army at an anti-UN protest, with the withdrawal of peacekeepers threatening to plunge the nation into chaos.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period (25 August – 01 September 2023)

AMER

- 1 The United States:** Hurricane Idalia batters southeast USA
- 2 Haiti:** Uncontrolled gang warfare forces US to warn citizens to leave
- 3 Guatemala:** Mr Arevalo declared Presidential winner, but his party is suspended

EMEA

- 4 Libya:** Foreign Minister sacked after secret Israeli meeting exposed
- 5 Palestine:** Clashes between Palestinian security forces and Palestinians threatens internal rift
- 6 Niger:** Coup leaders order expulsion of French ambassador
- 7 Gabon:** Dynasty ousted in coup
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APAC

- 9 North Korean:** Nuclear attack on South Korea simulated
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- 11 Palau:** Palau and the US sign a new maritime agreement



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Hurricane Idalia leaves much of Florida and southeast USA in ruins.

On 30 August, Hurricane Idalia struck the state of Florida with devastating force, leaving a trail of destruction, with nearly 100,000 homes across Florida still without power. Idalia made landfall as a powerful Category 3 hurricane on the morning of 30 August before gradually weakening as it moved inland, also affecting the states of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. A state of emergency was declared in Georgia as Idalia entered the southeast of the state, bringing significant disruption, before it was downgraded to a Category 1 storm. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced on 31 August that restoring power and clearing debris would be top priorities. Beyond power outages and debris, local officials are expressing concerns about potential health risks such as flesh-eating bacteria and carbon monoxide exposure. In response to the crisis, President Joe Biden has pledged federal support and announced that he will personally visit Florida on 2 September to assess the recovery efforts. He assured Governor DeSantis of the federal government's commitment to providing whatever assistance is necessary to help the affected communities recover from the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia.

Assessment: It is likely that Hurricane Idalia will continue its path towards Bermuda in the coming days, where it is expected to weaken significantly. However, the storm is still likely to bring heavy rainfall and strong winds along its course. Analysts are expecting Idalia to be the costliest natural disaster event in the United States this year, with insured property losses in Florida alone expected to run towards USD 10 billion. So far there have been no recorded fatalities as it is likely that the most vulnerable residents, who were living in low-lying areas prone to flooding, heeded the evacuation order and moved to higher ground. It is highly likely that the hurricane gained greater energy from the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico before hitting Florida. As sea water temperatures are forecasted to rise, it is expected that hurricanes of this nature will only continue to intensify and gain more energy. Much of Florida is especially vulnerable due to the extent of low-lying terrain and there is a realistic possibility that in the future large parts of the state will be untenable for long-term habitation. As the United States presidential election approaches and the Republican nomination process gets underway, it is highly likely that numerous political figures will make visits to the affected states in an effort to rally support. Nonetheless, there are doubts about the likelihood of reaching a consensus on climate strategy. Democrats are more than three times as likely as Republicans to prioritise dealing with climate change, highlighting the stark differences in their approaches to this critical issue.

Haiti:

Uncontrolled violence in Haiti prompts US Embassy to advise citizens to leave.

The United States Embassy in Haiti has urged citizens in the Caribbean country to leave promptly due to security and infrastructure challenges. Escalating violence has led to displacement of thousands and a sharp rise in homicides. The embassy stated that United States citizens should depart Haiti as soon as possible using commercial or private transport, while emphasising the need for caution. Earlier this month, the US Embassy in the capital, Port-au-Prince, was temporarily closed due to nearby gunfire. To highlight the level of violence, on 26 August, a large protest organised by church leaders marched through the streets of Port-au-Prince demanding an end to the gang violence. The protestors were met by a gang who fired on them with automatic weapons, killing at least seven of the demonstrators. The violence has resulted in waves of

refugees leaving Haiti with the United States alone receiving over 125,000 from last October to July. The United States is currently deporting thousands of refugees back to Haiti.

Assessment: Years of instability, disasters, and economic challenges have positioned Haiti as one of the world's poorest and most violence-stricken nations. Security in the small Caribbean nation deteriorated precipitously in the aftermath of the assassination of President Moïse in 2021. Gangs are now in control of much of the country, with the capital assessed to be 80 percent under the control of gangs. This has led to endemic violence and an over-stretched police force. The United Nations estimates that almost 2,500 people have been killed as a result of violence in 2023 alone. To compound the issue, a movement called “bwa kale” has emerged, essentially a vigilante anti-gang movement that has conducted extra-judicial killings of known gang members and almost certainly triggered violent reprisals. It is highly likely that Haiti is unable to contain the violence without international assistance. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres of the United Nations has called for an international police force to deploy to Haiti. To date, Kenya looks like the most likely country to lead such a force after conducting a recent reconnaissance mission to Haiti. However, the prospect of Kenyan led forces has drawn scepticism due to their historic human rights abuses. Indeed, the introduction of any foreign police forces could face additional challenges due to various factors. These include insufficient community involvement, operational strain, limited accountability, language differences, and unfamiliarity with local customs, laws, and the operational environment. With international assistance unlikely to materialise in the immediate future and the prospect of it threatening to compound the situation, it is likely that the United States warning to leave will be echoed by other nations.

Guatemala:

Mr Arevalo declared Presidential winner, but his party is suspended.

On 29 August, officials from Guatemala’s Supreme Electoral Tribunal confirmed that Bernardo Arevalo was the winner of the recent Presidential elections. The official tally shows that he secured 60.9 percent of the vote. However, the Electoral Registry circulated a document that decrees a temporary suspension of the Seed Movement, Arevalo’s party. The country’s Attorney General had previously threatened to suspend the Seed Movement from even contesting the election. The suspension was sanctioned due to alleged irregularities in gathering signatures for the Seed Party’s formation. Following this suspension, the Guatemalan Congress, which is controlled by Vamos, the incumbent party, and opposition to Seed, has refused to recognise seven lawmakers as being from Seed, instead declaring them independents. Meanwhile, the Organisation of American States (OAS) has asked that the government of Guatemala provide protection for Arevalo after it learnt of credible plots to kill him.

Assessment: With Arevalo not due to take office until January 2024, the suspension of the Seed Party, and the refusal by the Vamos controlled Congress to recognise their lawmakers as anything other than independents, heightens the uncertainty around his presidency before it has even commenced. The Seed Movement have three days to challenge the suspension and the challenges will be heard by the country’s Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which certified Arevalo’s victory, and sits above the Electoral Registry which has suspended Seed. A number of Guatemalan elites are alleged to be seeking ways to undermine Arevalo and the Seed Movement, as he came to victory on a pledge to restart the country’s long stalled campaign against corruption. He has also vowed to reverse the country’s recent trend of democratic backsliding. It is likely that Arevalo will still ascend to the presidency. However, certain political elites in the country will continue to undermine his presidency, likely making his time in office and government unstable and ultimately impeding any anti-corruption investigations. The warning from the OAS around the plots to kill Arevalo comes at a time when much of the wider region is on high alert for political assassinations after Ecuador saw a spate of high-profile assassinations in the run-up to its own elections.



AMER Forecast. In Mexico, the opposition has picked Senator Xochitl Galvez to run as their candidate in the 2024 Presidential election. Her selection moves the country closer to the possibility that it may elect its first female President as it looks highly likely that the ruling Moreno coalition will nominate Mexico City mayor, Claudia Sheinbaum, as their candidate. In Argentina, economic indicators continue to worsen with the central bank expecting prices to increase by at least ten percent from July to August, the fastest monthly increase since the end of hyperinflation in the country three decades ago. These economic challenges further constrain the government's fiscal flexibility ahead of elections and bolster the chances of the radical Presidential candidate, Javier Milei. In Chile, the Central Bank is poised to embark on the world's most significant interest rate reduction cycle, in contrast to many other central banks that are raising rates. This shift comes after the bank aggressively raised rates two years ago to combat inflation, which had reached nearly 12 percent. While this approach led to a mild recession, it now positions the bank as one of the first globally to begin reducing rates.

In Ecuador, ongoing violence continues to plague the nation as it prepares for the second round of its presidential election. Recent incidents included two bombings in the capital, Quito, and two more near the southern border with Peru. It is highly likely that this high level of violence will persist in the near future. As the international community continues to equivocate on sending an international task force to Haiti, it is almost certain more parts of the country will fall under the control of gangs. It is likely the United States order for its embassy personnel to leave will prompt other states to consider issuing similar orders. Elsewhere, the Canadian government has issued a travel warning for LGBTQ travellers visiting the United States. This action underscores growing concerns about state-level anti-LGBTQ laws and rhetoric in the country. There is a realistic possibility that other Western nations, particularly in Europe, may follow Canada's lead and update their travel advisories for America in response to recent developments in anti-LGBTQ legislation and rhetoric.

In Brazil, unsettled weather is expected to persist as some parts of the country have witnessed temperatures soaring to 41 degrees Celsius. Brazil is currently grappling with an unusual winter heatwave, adding to the unpredictability of its climate. Meanwhile, in Chile, disruptions caused by heavy rain and floods continue to affect the country. Authorities have been forced to suspend drinking water supplies to at least four million people as the run-off from the rains has contaminated water sources used for drinking. Initial estimates indicate that the total cost of the damage from the rains exceeds USD 1 billion, particularly impacting the country's agricultural sector.



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Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

Libya:

Foreign Minister flees after meeting with Israeli counterpart.

On 30 August, it was reported that Libya's Foreign Minister, Najla al-Mangos, had fled the country after news of the secret meeting between her and her Israeli counterpart was leaked by the Israelis. This leak caused significant backlash and led to two nights of violent protests in Libya. Prior to her fleeing the country for Turkey, al-Mangos was suspended as Foreign Minister. As a result of this incident, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Eli Cohen, was accused of being amateurish and unprofessional in releasing these details. The Libyan Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, rejected any notion of normalisation with Israel and denied any knowledge of the meeting in Rome. In Israel, Prime Minister Netanyahu has announced that he too had no knowledge of the meeting and that in the future, he must approve all secret talks.

Assessment: Libya, like several other Arab states, has no formal ties with Israel and whilst many Arab states do talk with Israel, it is often done on the understanding these meetings are secret and off the record. One of Israel's major current foreign policy agendas is trying to continue the process of normalising relations with other Arab states, following on from the Abraham Accords. Diplomatic leaks indicate that they are making slow progress in clinching an agreement with Saudi Arabia. However, the actions of the Foreign Ministry will undermine any trust Arab nations have that meetings will be kept secret. The immediate backlash in Libya demonstrated by widespread protests and riots will make any further normalisation deals harder to agree as Arab leaders will almost certainly wish to avoid such a scenario unfolding in their states. There is a realistic possibility that Cohen, now with a much-damaged reputation, loses influence and trust both in Israel and in the wider region and is thus incapable of executing his role. In Libya, the news will have badly dented the fragile government of Dbeibah, who is increasingly dependent on external support for his grip on power. Over the past few weeks, his authority has been challenged by a series of violent clashes between rival militias in the capital, Tripoli.

Palestine:

Deadly clash erupts in west bank amid Palestinian leadership uncertainty.

On 30 August, a Palestinian man lost his life in an incident involving Palestinian security forces in the occupied West Bank town of Tulkarm. Reports suggest that gunmen had blocked roads leading to the Tulkarm refugee camp, a precautionary measure against potential Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) incursions. According to a spokesperson for the Palestinian Authority (PA), local residents had raised concerns about public safety, prompting the intervention of Palestinian forces. Upon arriving at the scene, the Palestinian forces came under fire from the gunmen, leading to an exchange of gunfire. The PA has initiated an investigation into the incident, but the killing of a Palestinian, by Palestinian forces, has sparked outrage within the West Bank. A video has surfaced featuring gunmen expressing their determination not to remain silent on the matter.

Assessment: There is a realistic possibility that the gunmen fired on Palestinian forces under the mistaken assumption that they were IDF conducting a raid. Nevertheless, this incident occurred amid growing uncertainty surrounding the future of Palestinian leadership, which has exacerbated internal divisions. The Islamist Hamas movement, which controls the Gaza Strip, has recently intensified its challenge to PA rule in the West Bank and is likely to exploit this incident as evidence of destabilisation in the region. The situation is further complicated by a wave of violence that began in early 2022. In 2023, the IDF has recorded the highest number of Palestinians killed since



United Nations records began in 2005. Tensions have escalated between Palestinians and Israeli settlers, resulting in numerous casualties on both sides. This incident may heighten tensions within the Palestinian community and could lead to retaliatory actions. Israel is currently grappling with a constitutional crisis, and its security forces are likely stretched. In the short term, Israel may welcome any internal divisions among Palestinians if it diverts their focus inward rather than towards exploiting Israel's internal issues. However, should the PA lose influence to more militant factions, like Hamas or the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, Israel may face an increase in attacks from the West Bank, likely triggering a reciprocal response.

Niger:

Coup leaders demand expulsion of French ambassador.

Niger's military leaders have ordered police to expel the French ambassador amid a wave of anti-French rhetoric in the country. The visas of French Ambassador Sylvain Itte and his family have been cancelled, immunity revoked, and they have been given 48 hours to exit the country with the justification that France's actions are "contrary to the interests of Niger". The coup leaders have also condemned the French ambassador for refusing to respond to an invitation to meet Niger's new Foreign Minister. On the streets of the capital, Niamey, crowds continue to rally, waving anti-French banners and denouncing France as a neo-colonial power. France has refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the current government, demanded the reinstatement of deposed President Babou, and stated that the coup leaders lack the authority to ask the ambassador to leave. A French military spokesperson has also stated that the French military will respond to any action that threatens French diplomatic or military missions in Niger, with France having over 1000 troops stationed in the country. Meanwhile, both Nigeria and Algeria have developed initiatives that would allow Niger to transition back to democracy over six to nine month periods.

Assessment: It is highly likely that France's refusal to withdraw its ambassador, the French military's veiled threat, and France's refusal to recognise the new government, will only serve to further instigate anti-French rhetoric in the country. Russia is almost certainly perceiving both anti-French and anti-Western sentiment as an opportunity to be exploited. Reports indicate that Russia is already using social media to manipulate the coup, by propagating similar anti-French sentiment and even constructing their own fake stories and narratives to influence users in Niger and likely the wider region. The move to expel the French ambassador is likely a precursor to further expulsions, which will likely culminate in asking the French military to leave altogether. Russia's Wagner Group was looking likely to fill such a security vacuum, however, that now looks uncertain in the wake of its leader Yevgeniy Prigozhin's death. Notwithstanding this, it is likely that Russia will try to capitalise on this in some form, potentially later when the Wagner Group's new leadership has been approved by the Kremlin or by the introduction of an alternative Russian private military company (PMC). The EU has been mulling over the idea of imposing sanctions on Niger and the expulsion of one of its diplomats will likely increase the chances of this happening, with sanctions likely to compound an already acute humanitarian situation. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), who have created a standby military force, have yet to commit to a military intervention. Nigeria, the most powerful country within ECOWAS, developing a transition scheme back to democracy for Niger, is likely an indication of stalled military action. It is likely Nigeria is hoping the coup will submit to international pressure and reinstate democracy within this timeframe to avoid conflict. Military action will likely prove to be incredibly unpopular in Nigeria as well as much of West Africa and almost certainly result in several connected crises.



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Gabon:

Bongo dynasty ousted in Gabon coup.

On 30 August, the Gabonese Election Centre (CGE) announced that President Ali Bongo had won a third term in office, having received 64.27 percent vote share in Saturday's general election. However, a group of senior officers from the Gabonese military announced shortly afterwards on local television that a coup was underway, and the government of President Ali Bongo had been ousted. The group has called itself The Committee of Transition and the Restoration of Institutions and has stated that the elections have been overturned, all borders were to shut until further notice and all state institutions were temporarily dissolved. The coup leaders have since gone on to declare that General Brice Oligui Nguema, the former head of the Presidential Guard, is now the Gabonese leader. Although gunfire was heard in the capital, Libreville, the coup was reportedly bloodless and large crowds have taken to the streets in celebration. Reports indicate that the deposed former president, Ali Bongo, is under house arrest and is surrounded by his family and doctors.

Assessment: Gabon has been ruled by the Bongo dynasty since 1967, with evidence of election tampering, fraud and human rights abuses used to secure the family's reign. Despite its autocratic rule, the West African country has emerged to be the third richest country by GDP per capita in sub-Saharan Africa. This wealth has been predicated on Gabon's huge oil and magnesium reserves, with Gabon being one of the few sub-Saharan members of OPEC. However, it is almost certain that wealth generated through Gabon's oil reserves has not been equally distributed, with estimates suggesting that around 35 per cent of Gabon live in poverty, whilst elements of the government have accrued personal fortunes. It is almost certain that economic disparities have been one of the major drivers of the coup and why it has garnered much popular support, evidenced by street celebrations across the country. Many West and Central African nations have been plagued by coups in recent years. However, one of the key triggers for these coups was a deteriorating security situation with countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger all struggling to contain major insurgencies. Conversely, Gabon is not faced with these threats to the same degree and there is a realistic possibility that this is a genuinely popular coup against an autocratic dynasty. Furthermore, as with many of the other African coups, Gabon is a former French colony but has yet to espouse the same anti-French sentiment witnessed elsewhere. Notwithstanding this, France's Africa policy is likely to be condemned both at home and abroad in response to so many former French colonies experiencing coups. With over 100 French companies operating in the former colony, it is likely France is preparing itself for an exit strategy, with reports suggesting some French companies have already suspended operations.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC):

Multiple fatalities recorded after army crackdown on anti-UN protest.

On 30 August, in the eastern Congolese city of Goma, an army crackdown on violent anti-United Nations (UN) demonstrations resulted in at least 48 fatalities and multiple injuries. The unrest erupted as Congolese troops forcibly dispersed demonstrators protesting the presence of the United Nations peacekeeping mission and other foreign organisations in the region. The catalyst for the protest was reportedly footage circulating on social media depicting an attack on a policeman, which resulted in a local Christian-animist group to urge its followers to enter United Nations bases and demand their departure. In response to the violence, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in eastern Congo, known as The United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), expressed its condolences in an official statement. The mission emphasised its continued concern over the threats of violence in the region and called for a prompt and independent investigation by Congolese authorities. It also urged authorities to treat detainees humanely and respect their rights. Also in the DRC, the Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO) armed rebel group ambushed civilians in the northeast of the country killing 14.

Assessment: The Democratic Republic of Congo's east has been ravaged by militia violence for three decades, a legacy of regional wars that started in the 1990s and 2000s. This prompted the deployment of MONUSCO and is one of the United Nations' largest and costliest peacekeeping missions in the world. Since 2022, MONUSCO has faced recurring protests, partly driven by grievances that it has failed to protect civilians from decades of militia violence. An anti-MONUSCO protest in July 2022 resulted in more than 15 deaths, including the loss of three peacekeepers in Goma and the city of Butembo. The DRC's President expressed to French media in 2022 that there was no reason for MONUSCO to remain beyond the 2023 December election and United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has stated that MONUSCO is in its final stages. However, no exact departure date has been given and it is likely that locals are attempting to facilitate MONUSCO's egress by making its position in country untenable and mired in controversy. MONUSCO is mainly deployed to DRC's mineral-rich east where militia groups like M23 are most active. Indeed, some areas have fallen to these militias who are likely coveting the mineral wealth. It is likely that once MONUSCO withdraws, these militias will compete for territory and come into sporadic contact, likely leading to a worsening of the security situation in the DRC and compounding any existing humanitarian issues. There is a realistic possibility that armed groups are already becoming emboldened by the forecasted withdrawal of MONUSCO and are increasing their attacks, as potentially substantiated by the CODECO attack.

EMEA Forecast. In Zimbabwe, the opposition has called for fresh elections to be undertaken and overseen by officials from neighbouring countries after the incumbent ZANU-PF party retained power in allegedly fraudulent elections. Any rejection of new elections could result in civil unrest. Disruption should also be expected across France with the 2023 Rugby World Cup due to start on 8 September, with matches being held at nine venues across the country. Travel disruption is likely to occur, and protestors may exploit the attention of the event to stage demonstrations. France's domestic terror threat is at the medium level and while the event will entail enhanced security, an attempted attack cannot be ruled out. Temperatures in France are forecasted to be slightly above average for the event and there is a moderate risk from heat related illnesses.

In the Middle East, Iran has stated that Iraq has agreed to disarm and relocate exiled Kurdish militant groups operating in the autonomous northern Iraq. Iran has promised to take action if Iraq reneges on the promise, but it is unlikely that the militant groups will agree to this or that Iraq will be capable of achieving this in an area where the central government has little recognised authority. An attempt to achieve this by force could result in violent exchanges.

The United Nations has issued a statement indicating that over 180 people have died in the Ethiopian province of Amhara as a result of the localised conflict between the Ethiopian military and Amhara forces. It is almost certain that the true death toll is much higher and that fighting will continue through the next reporting period, exacerbating an ongoing humanitarian crisis. Elsewhere in Africa, a Russia delegation held talks with Burkina Faso's interim President Ibrahim Traore on Thursday. The meeting included talks on possible military cooperation, with Burkina Faso struggling to contain several militant groups. The deal will likely entail the provision of arms from Russia despite shortages caused by the war in Ukraine. There is also a realistic possibility that Burkina Faso have asked for the help of Russia's Wagner Group or another Russian private military company.

In Uganda, a man is set to be charged with "aggravated homosexuality" under the country's new harsh anti-LGBT laws. This will be the first person charged under Uganda's new legislation and if found guilty could face the death penalty. It is almost certain that any conviction will lead to much international condemnation, with the World Bank already halting loans to the country in response to the legislations.



Asia Pacific (APAC)

North Korea:

North Korea conducts simulated scorched earth nuclear attack on South Korea.

On the night of 30 August, North Korea fired ballistic missiles in a simulated scorched earth nuclear attack on neighbouring South Korea. The attack modelled the targeting of military command centres, ports, airfields, and other strategic targets in South Korea and was in response to the United States flying B-1B strategic nuclear bombers close to North Korea just hours before. The simulation consisted of dummy warheads being released at a set altitude after being fired by ballistic missiles that were launched from Pyongyang International Airport. South Korea and Japan confirmed that the missiles travelled approximately 400km at a maximum altitude of 50km and landed in the sea between Japan and North Korea. North Korea stated that the drill exercised their response to an invasion of North Korea and that they will not tolerate any aggressive behaviour from South Korea or her allies in the region.

Assessment: It is highly likely that the North Korean regime is becoming increasingly threatened by the developing relationship between the United States, Japan and South Korea, who only convened at a Camp David based summit last reporting period. The deployment of United States strategic nuclear bombers was the tenth such flyover on the Korean peninsula this year and North Korea almost certainly perceives such activity as rehearsals for war. The nuclear simulation also follows in the wake of Exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield. This was a joint United States and South Korea exercise, designed at enhancing interoperability and ensuring stability on the Korean peninsula, although it is likely Pyongyang sees it as a rehearsal for invasion. North Korea has conducted a record number of weapons tests this year, many of them demonstrating its developing nuclear strength. The effect of these will likely be to facilitate deepening ties between the United States, South Korea, and Japan, all of whom have condemned such activity. It will also likely prompt these nations to enhance their military capabilities in the region. China, who portrays itself as an ally of North Korea, will almost certainly refrain from public condemnation of North Korean aggression. However, it is highly likely that China is secretly very critical of this activity. Historically, China has been able to capitalise on strained relations between Japan and South Korea, leveraging this discord to strengthen its own influence in the region. North Korean activity has likely blunted this opportunity. Not only has it caused rapprochement between Japan and South Korea but has also drawn greater United States activity to the region. Chinese containment is likely the main reason for developing Asia-Pacific relationships, but North Korea is providing a legitimate excuse.

Taiwan:

Taiwan complains of increased military pressure from China.

On 29 August, Taiwan's Defence Ministry warned of a sharp increase in military tensions between Taiwan and China after twelve Chinese military aircraft crossed the sensitive median line of the Taiwan Strait. Taiwan's most recent grievance arises against the backdrop of a continuous three-year period of consistent military pressure from Beijing. This activity has entailed multiple penetrations of Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ); People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels conducting readiness drills within Taiwan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ); simulated amphibious landings and exercising the encirclement of Taiwan. During this reporting period the United Kingdom's foreign affairs committee has published an official document which asserts that Taiwan is an independent country, whilst Foreign Minister, James Cleverly, is visiting China. Meanwhile, the United States has granted approval for a military transfer to Taiwan

through the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program, typically reserved for independent nations. The reported value of this military package is USD 80 million.

Assessment: The median line has served as a de facto boundary between the two nations which claim each other's territory. However, the line was established with the help of the United States during the Cold War and has no legal status. China, who has advanced exponentially in economic and military terms since the Cold War, almost certainly believes it can cross the median line with impunity. This is because the two opposing nations have never formally agreed on the median line. China is likely penetrating Taiwan's ADIZ and EEZ for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, China is reasserting its claims over Taiwan, and this is often in response to western support of Taiwan or recognition of it being an independent state. Secondly, China is likely testing Taiwan's defence to assess the readiness of both Taiwan's and any potential intervening state's military capabilities and readiness. China will also likely conduct such activity to detract from domestic problems, socialise ordinary Taiwanese citizens to the idea unification is inevitable and to place pressure on the Taiwanese government. The United States, who regularly conducts naval transits of the Taiwan Strait in support of Taiwan and freedom of navigation, is unlikely to respond with similar displays of military strength for fear of escalation. However, the United States aid package, albeit modest in value and significantly less than recent United States arms sales to Taiwan, is of great symbolic importance. The FMF program is usually a mechanism for aid limited to sovereign states. This is likely a subtle way for the United States to publicly recognise Taiwan as an independent nation but also possibly a form of strategic messaging. It is likely conveying the message that the United States will support Taiwan in the case of a Chinese invasion. Of note, the FMF mechanism has been used extensively to provide military support to Ukraine in the wake of Russia's invasion.

Palau:

Palau and the US sign a new maritime agreement.

On 30 August, it was reported that the United States and Palau had signed a new agreement. This agreement is an expanded maritime law enforcement agreement. Under the new agreement, the United States Coast Guard will have permission to enforce regulations without a Palauan officer present. The agreement is designed to help Palau monitor its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and hopefully clamp down on illegal fishing and unauthorised incursions from Chinese vessels.

Assessment: Palau is an ally of the United States and one of the few remaining countries which recognises Taiwan despite condemnation from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Since 2018 Palau's authorities have registered at least four unauthorised incursions by Chinese vessels into its waters, and most recently in May 2023, a Chinese research vessel spent several days in Palau's EEZ "showing interest" in the country's undersea fibre optic cable connections. One of Palau's undersea fibre optic cables connects Palau to Guam, where the United States has a military facility. There is a realistic possibility that the United States uses this cable to transmit sensitive data and that China has the intent to tap into these cables and garner sensitive information. This agreement joins similar recently signed or reworked agreements between the United States and several Pacific islands, such as the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, and Papua New Guinea. These agreements have emerged in the post-Cold War era, a period during which the United States exhibited a reduced focus on the region. This trend reached a critical point in 2022 when the Solomon Islands, in a significant move, declined access to a United States vessel and instead entered into a five-year security agreement with China. It is almost certain that the United States fears a Chinese military presence in the region, given the United States bases at Guam and Hawaii, which ultimately provide the first line of defence against threats towards the Pacific United States. Subsequently, Washington has increased its diplomatic overtures towards its traditional allies and partners in the region, and together, these new agreements further entrench American presence in the sparsely populated area and further illustrate how the US-PRC rivalry is intensifying in the Pacific arena. There is a realistic possibility that this deal marks the beginning

of a developing military relationship between the United States and Palau, with additional reporting suggesting the US will establish military capabilities such as an over-the-horizon radar system on the island nation.

APAC Forecast. China's publication of a map asserting sovereignty over the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh and the entire South China Sea has sparked criticism and rejection from countries like India, Malaysia, Taiwan, and the Philippines. Expect diplomatic tensions and discussions to ensue. Australia is gearing up for a referendum on whether to establish an indigenous voice in the nation's parliament. With political campaigning in full swing, anticipate heated rhetoric, protests, and rallies in the coming weeks. The results of Singapore's Presidential election will be unveiled in the reporting period. Polls opened on 1 September, amid a spate of rare political scandals. The city-state's ruling party, Peoples Action Party (PAP) has been in power for over six decades. Whilst the presidential position is neutral, PAP has a preferred candidate, and whether they win, and their margin of victory will be seen as a litmus test for the popularity of the PAP amid these scandals. Australian LNG plant workers are set to strike from 7 September, likely impacting global liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices. Expect heightened volatility in global LNG prices. Additionally, Japan has threatened to take China to the World Trade Organisation over its ban on Japanese seafood following the release of water from the Fukushima power station.

In the upcoming reporting period, Typhoon Salo is set to make landfall in China, and it is already projected to be one of the country's five most powerful typhoons since 1949. Southern China should anticipate significant travel disruptions, including cancelled trains and flights, potential school closures, and business shutdowns. The typhoon is expected to bring heavy rainfall, leading to flooding and strong winds. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka is grappling with an ongoing drought that threatens its crucial rice harvest and hinders its recovery from a recent economic crisis. This drought is likely to drive up food prices in the country, potentially sparking further civil unrest.



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ISO 18788:2015
Management System
for Private Security
Services
CERTIFIED

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