



Global Intelligence Summary

REPORTING PERIOD: 08 SEP - 15 SEP 2023



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Week 39: 08 September – 15 September 2023

Executive Summary

- In **Morocco**, the most powerful earthquake in decades devastates mountainous rural communities, almost certainly presenting numerous challenges to rescue workers.
- In **Libya**, over 10,000 killed after collapsed dams cause catastrophic floods in Mediterranean city, likely a result of years of neglect.
- In **India**, G20 declaration fails to condemn Russia for the war in Ukraine, likely out of fears of damaging the organisation’s cohesion.
- In **Russia**, President Putin hosts North Korea’s Kim Jung Un, almost certainly in a bid to secure the provision of key arms to be used in Ukraine.



Figure 1: Significant activity identified during the current reporting period (08 September – 15 September 2023)

AMER

- 1 US:** Republicans attempt to impeach President Biden
- 2 Haiti and Dominican Republic:** Border closed in response to controversial canal construction
- 3 Guatemala:** President-elect suspends the transition period
- 4 Brazil:** Investigation into former president Jair Bolsonaro intensifies

EMEA

- 5 UK:** Chinese spy with parliamentary access arrested
- 6 Morocco:** Earthquake devastates southwestern region
- 7 Libya:** Storm Daniel causes catastrophic flooding in eastern Libya
- 8 Syria:** Anti-government protests and Israeli airstrikes raise tensions.
- 9 Sudan:** Drone attack on market kills dozens as fighting rages across the country

APAC

- 10 India:** G20 leads to some developments but refuses to condemn Russia invasion
- 11 Vietnam:** Biden in Hanoi to improve bilateral relations
- 12 Russia/North Korea:** Kim Jung Un in Russia to discuss arms deal
- 13 China:** Venezuelan President hosted to improve strategic partnership



Americas (AMER)

United States:

Republicans' open impeachment inquiry into President Biden.

The United States House of Representatives has officially opened a formal impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden, as announced by the most senior Republican in the House, Kevin McCarthy. The inquiry will focus on allegations of abuse of power, obstruction, and corruption by Biden, with Republicans asserting that there are serious and credible allegations regarding his conduct. This move comes after months of investigations by Republicans since they gained control of the House in January. While these hearings have failed to produce concrete evidence of misconduct by the president, they have brought to light questions about the business dealings of Biden's son, Hunter Biden, and his knowledge of those activities. Kevin McCarthy stated that the allegations collectively paint a picture of a culture of corruption within the current administration. The White House responded swiftly, condemning McCarthy's decision, and characterising it as "extreme politics at its worst".

Assessment: Hunter Biden is currently under federal investigation for possible tax-related crimes linked to his foreign business interests. McCarthy also alleged that the president's family has received preferential treatment from Biden administration officials involved in investigating allegations of misconduct, a claim dismissed by the Biden administration. It is highly likely that elements within the Republican party have elected to pursue a formal impeachment inquiry as this will grant congressional investigators greater legal authority, including the ability to issue subpoenas for documents and testimonies that can be enforced in court. In accordance with the United States Constitution, a president can be impeached for treason, bribery, or other high crimes or misdemeanours, potentially leading to their removal from office. However, a successful impeachment of President Biden is highly unlikely, and any attempt would face significant challenges. Although the Republicans maintain a majority in the House of Representatives, this majority is incredibly slim. It is also unlikely that any Democrats would sponsor an impeachment of President Biden and unlikely that all Republicans would endorse the move. Secondly, the process would need to proceed to the Senate for a trial and a vote in the upper chamber of Congress where the Democrats hold a majority. The chances of the impeachment being passed in both the lower and upper chamber of Congress is highly unlikely.

Kevin McCarthy's position as speaker of the House of Representatives has looked increasingly unsustainable as a result of ongoing budget battles. There is a realistic possibility that McCarthy has only backed the impeachment following pressure from the more right-wing members of the Republican party to consolidate his own position. There is a strong likelihood that this move will fail, with Republicans failing to produce any hard evidence that incriminates the president. It also risks alienating more centrist elements of the Republican party, who likely hold fears concerning the alienation of independent and moderate voters and are also likely unwilling to suffer reputational damage by backing a move that is highly likely to fail. In the very unlikely event that the impeachment gains momentum, there is a realistic possibility of protests across the USA, both in favour and against the impeachment. However, it is unlikely that these will exhibit the same passion and energy as the pro-impeachment protests under President Trump's tenure due to the disparity in the nature of the charges being brought against the respective presidents.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic:

Dominican Republic closes borders over contentious Haitian canal construction.

The President of the Dominican Republic, Luis Abinader, has announced the temporary closure of the entire border with neighbouring Haiti due to an ongoing conflict regarding the construction of a canal from a shared river. The closure is set to take effect on the 15 September and will continue indefinitely. The dispute centres around the construction of a canal on the Haitian side of the border which Dominican officials claim will divert water from the Massacre River, which flows through both countries and forms part of the northernmost border between the two countries. President Abinader stated that the closure was a regrettable but necessary measure, and that the construction of the canal would be in contravention of the 1929 Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Arbitration which covers many areas including border demarcation and water resources. He emphasised his country's readiness to handle the situation, even suggesting the possibility of deploying a peace force in Haiti if required. The border closure will entail all land, sea and air routes and will be enforced by the Dominican military and police forces.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the decision to close the border is an attempt by the Dominican Republic to dissuade Haiti from proceeding with the canal construction. The Dominican Republic likely has concerns that the canal's construction could divert water away from their country, potentially harming Dominican farmers. However, some water experts have suggested that the Dominican Republic's border closure might be an overreaction, given that there are already eleven canals along the Massacre River. There is a realistic possibility that the Dominican Republic is using the canal issue as a pretext to close the border, primarily due to concerns related to the security situation in Haiti and to restrict the flow of Haitian refugees, many of whom may have attempted to flee to the Dominican Republic before the border closure.

Haiti is grappling with a multitude of challenges, exacerbated by armed gangs exploiting the security vacuum following the assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moïse in July 2021. It is now estimated that a significant portion of the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince, is under the control of these gangs, along with large areas across the country. This dire situation has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis, with the United Nations estimating that nearly half of the country's population is facing starvation. Consequently, hundreds of thousands of Haitian refugees have sought safety in the Dominican Republic, the only neighbouring country with a land border. The closure of the border, coupled with the substantial deployment of Dominican soldiers and police officers, will not only deny Haitians their safest route out of the country but is also likely to further isolate Haiti. This isolation could seriously harm Haiti's economy and exacerbate an already dire humanitarian situation. The violence and living conditions in Haiti have deteriorated to such an extent that the United States Embassy in Port-au-Prince recently issued an advisory urging all US citizens to leave the country immediately. Additionally, it stated that individuals attempting to cross the border into the Dominican Republic should make alternative travel arrangements. If a resolution cannot be reached between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the situation is likely to deteriorate further. However, this outcome may be difficult to reach, as some reports suggest that the canal construction is not being initiated by the Haitian government but rather by local farmers and businesses, highlighting the absence of an effective and functional government in Haiti.

Guatemala

President-elect suspends the transition period.

On 13 September, the President-elect, Arevalo, announced that he wished to suspend the country's transition of power to him. He also called once more for the country's Attorney General to resign. Both these calls came after electoral offices and facilities controlled by the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal were raided by officials from the Guatemalan Attorney General's Office. During the raids, officials opened boxes of votes, photographed their contents, and tampered with materials pertaining to the election. The raid came less than 24 hours after the country's outgoing president, Alejandro Giammattei, promised a smooth and peaceful transfer of power to Arevalo.

Assessment: This raid comes as the Attorney General of the country is still embroiled in legal efforts aimed at trying to disbar Arevalo's party, Movimiento Semilla. The raid will likely only further exacerbate the

country's increasingly protracted political crisis. It also further starkly illustrates the divides in the country between the Supreme Electoral Tribunal and the Attorney General. The Election Tribunal has asserted that

the raid has disrupted its chain of custody related to the election. Whilst Arevalo has stated his suspension of the process, it is unclear if he can suspend such a transition of power, and this has only further likely complicated matters. According to the country's constitution, the transition of power to Arevalo should be completed by 14 January. The Organization of American States (OAS) has strongly criticized these recent events, viewing them as an attack on the integrity of the country's electoral process and a challenge to the will of the people. This ongoing political crisis has persisted for several weeks and shows signs of deepening. Consequently, it is likely there will be continued political instability in the country, with the possibility of escalating civil unrest if voters perceive attempts to obstruct Arevalo's assumption of the presidency.

Brazil:

Supreme Court trials Bolsonaro supporters and authorities investigate former president.

On 13 September, Brazil's Supreme Court began the trials of protestors who stormed many of the country's government offices in support of far-right President Jair Bolsonaro on 8 January 2023. The trials focus on the events that saw Bolsonaro supporters congregate at the Three Powers Plaza in the capital city of Brasilia, breaching the premises of the country's Supreme Court, Congress, and Presidential Palace, and calling for a military coup after the incumbent president lost to his left-wing opponent Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. The initial rounds of trials will involve four men accused of crimes including armed criminal conspiracy, violent uprising against the rule of law, and an attempted coup. All 11 of Brazil's Supreme Court justices will give their individual verdict with a majority required for a conviction. Additionally, Brasilia has requested assistance from United States law enforcement into investigations that involve former President Jair Bolsonaro after his ex-aide agreed to cooperate with Brazilian authorities. The request for assistance entails a number of probes into criminal activity which includes falsified vaccination records and the sale of expensive jewels gifted by foreign governments.

Assessment: Brazil's trials of Bolsonaro supporters who stormed government offices mirrors the political unrest witnessed during the Capitol Hill riots in the United States in January 2021, with both former presidents contesting the election results and making suggestions that they would not leave office in the result of a loss. The incidents highlight a dangerous pattern of political polarisation and diminishing trust in democratic institutions in the West and the tendency for these trends to turn violent. It is highly likely that technology like social media was crucial in fomenting grievances and facilitating both protests. During the protests, Bolsonaro supporters camped outside of military buildings and pleaded with the military to instigate a coup to prevent Lula from gaining power, likely suggesting that the protestors felt that they could indeed inspire a coup.

To mitigate against the potential for future coups or violent uprisings, it is likely that Brazil's justices will convict the accused to deter similar future activity. The trials come in the wake of a series of high-profile sackings of prominent government officials, many of whom are now under investigation, accused of facilitating the insurrection or refusing to halt it. This includes Brasilia's public security chief, Anderson Torres, who was previously Bolsonaro's justice minister and was removed from the post on the grounds that he failed to stop the invasion of the key government buildings. There is also anecdotal evidence suggesting that Bolsonarista reinforcements were set to be bussed into the capital from three Brazilian states, São Paulo, Minas Gerais and Goiás, to bolster the coup attempt, suggesting that this was not an impromptu protest but one that involved serious planning. To date, there is no public evidence that alleges Bolsonaro was himself involved in the coup. However, to prevent Bolsonaro from ever returning to power and to curtail the strength of the far right, it is likely that the Brazilian authorities under Lula will continue to investigate Bolsonaro, hoping to discredit him as a legitimate political force.

AMER Forecast. In New York, the United Nations General Assembly is set to convene for its 78th session on 19 September. Talking points are expected to include current global challenges to peace, security, and sustainable development through an approach to building global solidarity and rebuilding trust between nations and institutions. A number of notable absences have already been confirmed, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and French President Emmanuel Macron. In Mexico, the former Foreign Minister, Marcelo Ebrard, who has left

the ruling party, begins his nationwide tour on 18 September. It is increasingly likely that this tour will be the launchpad for his new political party and it is realistically possible he will announce that he is running for president.

In Suriname, French supermajor, Total Energies, has announced a USD 9 billion investment in offshore oil in the country. This new project is expected to radically help reshape the country's economy, ease poverty levels, and ease austerity measures imposed by the IMF. These issues have increasingly led the country to become unstable, as highlighted by the fact that in February, protesters stormed Suriname's Parliament to decry the end of government subsidies that sparked a rise in the cost of power, fuel and water.

After the killing on 12 September of a representative of Mexico's Attorney General office in the southern state of Guerrero, and the earlier killing of a regional prosecutor in Guerrero's Coyuca de Catala, more violence is almost certain. The state of Guerrero is one of Mexico's most impoverished and has long been a battleground for multiple gangs and cartels. These killings of officials are likely to lead to enhanced security measures in the region as the state tries to demonstrate it still has control of the area.

In Hawaii, the ongoing eruption of the Kilauea volcano, whilst unlikely to pose a threat to communities through lava flows, is highly likely to lead to worsening air quality through the release of volcanic particles and gases. In turn, this is likely to create breathing problems for those in the local area and will disproportionately affect those with pre-existing respiratory issues. Meanwhile, the United States region of New England is expected to be impacted by Hurricane Lee in the next reporting period. Due to Lee's size a large geographical area is likely to be impacted. Lee will bring strong winds and heavy rainfall which will hamper the area's ongoing recovery effort from the flooding and once-in-200-year rainfall it has received over the last few days, which have resulted in the governor of Maine declaring a State of Emergency.



Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA)

United Kingdom:

UK national with access to Parliament arrested for spying for China.

On 11 September, details were released by the Sunday Times newspaper of the United Kingdom regarding a British national who was arrested in March for allegedly spying for China. The man was reportedly a British national and a senior parliamentary researcher who had access to the Houses of Parliament. In addition, the man is reported to have been in close contact with several senior Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs). He was arrested in March under the Official Secrets Act alongside another man in the English county of Oxfordshire. The man maintains his innocence and there have been no detail releases regarding the nature of the spying.

Assessment: There is a realistic possibility that the details of the alleged spy's arrest were not released until September in an attempt to not damage relations between London and Beijing during a time of heightened relations. Nevertheless, it is almost certain that many Conservative MPs will be outraged by Downing Street for not divulging the information sooner and by the fact the story was released in the press. The news will likely trigger a debate within UK politics as to how to deal with China with many Conservative politicians likely calling for a hardline response. Chinese human intelligence operations are almost certainly widespread in the West and have likely penetrated senior levels within politics, the military and the commercial sector. If the suspect was indeed spying for China, it is likely that he was targeted for his parliamentary access. Parliament houses several bars offering subsidised alcohol which are open late, and members are permitted to admit guests, providing a scene of networking where potential spies can access key decision-makers. In response, it is likely that many MPs will demand that China should be deemed a threat to the UK rather than use the current term of a "strategic challenge". It is likely that some MPs, some of whom are sanctioned by China for comments regarding human rights abuses, will call for a suspension of efforts of rapprochement with Beijing, such as the UK's Foreign Minister's recent visit to China. However, even though there are calls from hawkish MPs for a more assertive stance towards China, it is improbable that London will veer away from its existing strategy of seeking to improve relations with China, particularly due to economic considerations, including trade.

Morocco:

Largest earthquake in six decades kills thousands in southwest Morocco.

On 8 September, Morocco experienced its worst earthquake in over six decades when a 6.8 magnitude earthquake devastated the Marrakesh-Safi region. The earthquake's epicentre was located 73km to the southwest of the popular tourist destination of Marrakesh, near the popular ski resort of Oukaimeden in the Atlas Mountains. To date, almost 3000 deaths have been reported and thousands more remain missing. The earthquake destroyed several landmarks in the historic old town of Marrakesh and was so powerful that it was felt in Spain, Portugal and Algeria. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that at least 300,000 people have been affected, including over 100,000 children. The majority of the fatalities were recorded in the rural communities to the south of Marrakesh. Despite offers of support and aid from several countries, Morocco has refused some foreign assistance, including assistance from France.

Assessment: Given the earthquake's disproportionate impact on rural and mountainous regions, it's almost certain that both Moroccan and international search and rescue teams have faced significant challenges. They have likely been hindered by the geographical distribution of the damage, making it difficult to reach all the affected communities. These difficulties have doubtlessly been exacerbated by inadequate transportation infrastructure and the consequences of landslides. Reports suggest that much of the aid being distributed on the ground in remote areas is being done by volunteer groups. Consequently, as the rescue efforts continue, it is highly likely that the official death toll will continue to increase, especially as it will be challenging to deploy heavy machinery such as diggers and excavators to these areas in sufficient numbers

and within demanded timeframes. The chances of finding survivors under the rubble have likely been greatly reduced by the style of buildings in these regions. In the rural areas impacted by the earthquake,

numerous settlements rely on traditional mud-brick construction for their houses. It is highly probable that these structures have suffered total collapse during the earthquake, leaving very few air pockets or safe spaces for any survivors. Many areas will now be without a clean water supply, electricity, shelter, food or medical kits and these will be the priority of aid agencies to prevent a potential humanitarian crisis. There is a realistic possibility of violent aftershocks in the coming days. Although these are not expected to inflict the same level of damage, they are likely to pose additional challenges by disrupting ongoing rescue efforts and humanitarian operations.

Despite being in desperate need of assistance, the Moroccan government has refused to accept help from multiple countries like France and Algeria, electing to only accept assistance from a few select countries like the UK, Qatar and Spain. Whilst the official excuse is to prevent chaos on the ground through a lack of coordination, it is highly likely that the real reason is couched in geo-political reasons and issues concerning sovereignty, such as the Western Sahara dispute and territorial rivalries with Algeria. It is likely that the government's response to the earthquake and its refusal to allow help from such states will provoke condemnation among many Moroccans and could lead to incidences of protest in the near term. To mitigate against future damage caused by earthquakes, it is likely that the authorities will be forced to introduce a host of building regulations that ban traditional building methods, a measure that will likely be hard to implement due to limited societal, economic and technical resources.

Libya:

Rains from Storm Daniel cause catastrophic floods in eastern Libya killing thousands.

Rains from Storm Daniel have resulted in catastrophic flooding in much of eastern Libya. The port city of Derna on the Mediterranean coast has been inundated after floods overwhelmed two dams outside of the city, causing huge amounts of water to race towards the sea and devastate the area. Reports suggest that up to a quarter of the city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants has been wiped out, with scenes of swept away cars and collapsed buildings after their foundations had been effectively washed away. The Libyan Red Crescent estimates that the death toll in Derna alone has surpassed 11,000, with thousands of injured, and over 10,000 are estimated to still be missing, and tens of thousands of people in eastern Libya have been displaced. Libya's internationally recognised government in Tripoli, which does not currently exert control over much of eastern Libya has stated that it will review all offers of international aid and only accept what it deems as necessary.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the extent of the damage in Derna has been caused by years of negligence. The population of Derna was hostile to the regime of Libya's former leader, Colonel Gaddafi who limited resources to the port city. The city has been further neglected after the 2011 revolution, with the military leader of eastern Libya and head of the Libya National Army (LNA), commander Khalifa Haftar, reported to be suspicious of Derna's population. Years of neglect have led to ill-maintained public infrastructure and the dams had not been maintained since 2002 according to Derna's deputy mayor. The dams were likely not tall enough to withhold the flood water and were not constructed out of concrete but made from rockfill structures, a practice that entails dumping and compacting soil or rocks, and the resulting structure is not as strong as its concrete equivalent. It is likely that the first dam failed as a result of overtopping, leading to a surge of water which destroyed the second dam leading to a breach. The water then flowed through a rocky valley towards Derna with little water being absorbed by the impermeable ground. Flash floods then washed away many buildings, including the foundations of taller buildings resulting in total collapses. It is highly likely that rescue efforts will be hindered by the extent of the flooding and access will be limited to heavy machinery. The death toll is almost certain to increase as rescue operations continue, however, many bodies were likely washed out to sea, and many are unlikely to ever be recovered. The hard-to-access city will doubtlessly be in dire need of clean water, food and medicine and there is likely an acute risk of waterborne diseases after sanitation and hygiene infrastructure was severely damaged. Several nations have already sent personnel to assist with the rescue effort, however, it is likely that the Government of National Unity in Tripoli is being selective when accepting foreign aid due to the unresolved political situation in the country and that the factionalism in Libya will likely hamper rescue and humanitarian operations.

Syria:

Anti-government protests and Israeli airstrikes raise tensions.

The last reporting period has seen anti-government protests again emerge in the southern city of Suweida, with the largest demonstration attracting around 2,000 protestors. This follows protests in the neighbouring Deraa province. Later in the week, two Syrian soldiers were killed, and six others wounded, in an Israeli air strike on the Mediterranean port city of Tartous. This was followed by further strikes on the outskirts of Hama.

Assessment: The protest in Suweida was the latest to take place in the south of the country. They are almost certainly occurring as a result of the removal of fuel subsidies and the deepening widespread economic hardship. The Deraa province is where the 2011 anti-Assad uprising began so whilst the security forces have not yet intervened, there will highly likely be a forceful crackdown if the demonstrations escalate.

Israeli airstrikes have become more frequent in Syria during recent years, but they have mainly avoided hitting areas that Russia operates in. Both Tartous and Hama however are situated in provinces with a Russian presence, with it a realistic possibility that Tel Aviv is becoming increasingly emboldened by the lack of response by international actors. Israeli strikes into Syria are highly likely to continue as Tel Aviv seeks to slow down Iran's growing entrenchment in the country.

Sudan:

Dozens killed in market drone attack as fighting continues to rage across Sudan.

On 10 September, at least 40 people were reported to have been killed and 70 injured after a drone attack on an open market in the Mayo neighbourhood in the south of the capital, Khartoum. Fighting has raged in Sudan between the Sudanese government forces and the paramilitary group, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) since April 2023 and the RSF was quick to accuse the Sudanese military's air force of this latest attack. The Sudanese military has rejected the accusation, decrying it as "false and misleading". The clashes between the two rival factions have spread to much of Sudan, with fighting on the streets of Khartoum becoming a daily occurrence. Rights groups and activists have accused the Sudanese Army of indiscriminate shelling and bombing of residential areas in their bid to contain the RSF.

Assessment: There is a realistic possibility that the current conflict in Sudan will escalate into a fully-fledged genocide as witnessed in the early 2000s, especially in the remote, hard-to-access areas like Darfur where media coverage and international scrutiny are minimal. Reports already suggest that the RSF with allied Arab militias are attacking ethnic African groups in the remote provinces, leading to the internal displacement of over 7 million people and millions of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries. Estimates from August indicate that over 4,000 people have so far been killed by the conflict. However, it will be hard to accurately estimate the true number of deaths in Sudan because of the ongoing conflict, the displacement of populations, the involvement of multiple armed groups, and the difficulty in distinguishing between combatant and civilian casualties, and it is almost certain that the true number killed is much higher. The previous genocide in Darfur claimed the lives of more than 300,000 people, and if the current conflict is not brought under control, it has the potential to result in a comparable number of casualties. It has traditionally been a volatile flashpoint for interethnic and intertribal violence with groups like the Fur, Zaghawa, and Massalit frequently clashing over scarce resources in an arid and often inhospitable environment. It is also likely that the competition for resources and land has been exacerbated by long-term trends such as a growing population, higher rates of drought and desertification, and decreased access to water and arable land. In a bid to curtail the violence, the US has imposed sanctions on RSF commanders for human rights violations including conflicted-related sexual violence and killings based on ethnicity. The US has also called on all external actors to avoid fuelling the conflict, possibly a reference to countries like Russia who have likely been tempted to supply arms to the warring factions. However, both sides have so far failed to engage in productive talks, and it is unlikely that the RSF will be willing to talk to the Sudanese military after conducting attacks like the one on the open market. The UN head of mission to Sudan resigned on 13 September after being declared unwelcome by the Sudanese government after expressing tensions

concerning the conflict and blaming both sides. With decreased UN oversight and influence, it is likely that the fighting will continue to escalate.

The United Nations and many humanitarian groups have warned that millions are at risk of running out of food and that people are dying due to restricted access to healthcare. The United Nations has also warned that the violence is prohibiting farmers from planting their crops, prompting fears of further starvation. In Khartoum and inside the major population centres in Darfur and Kordofan, there are reports of looting, electricity blackouts, communications disruption and water cuts. Access to the worst areas like Darfur will be incredibly challenging for aid organisations given the conflict and remoteness of the areas affected. Moreover, neighbouring countries like Chad are struggling to deal with the extent of refugees crossing the border, with hundreds of thousands living in tents with limited food and water. It is highly likely that if external aid does not reach Sudan and neighbouring countries, it will result in a dire humanitarian crisis that has the potential to escalate the conflict, instigate economic instability, and cause a public health emergency, all of which will certainly have long-term consequences for the area.

EMEA Forecast. Across Iran, expect a heightened security posture over this forthcoming weekend, as 16 September is the 1st anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini. Her death sparked one of the largest protest movements in recent times. In Syria, anti-regime protests in the southern city of Suweida will likely continue, with 2,000 anti-government protestors demonstrating and tearing down portraits of President Bashar al-Assad during this reporting period. If they continue, expect Syrian government forces to intervene in a robust manner. Widescale and highly disruptive protests are almost certain to occur over the coming days across Israel. This is as the country's supreme court has commenced the hearing on the government's controversial judicial reforms. If they are struck down, the government has indicated it would refuse to abide by the ruling, likely further plunging the country into a constitutional crisis.

Greece has regained an investment-grade credit rating for the first time since the 2009 – 2018 crisis which almost saw the country go bankrupt and leave the eurozone. This upgrade from DBRS Morningstar reflects the country's "ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility". In time, expect other major rating agencies such as Fitch, Moodys, and Standard and Poor to upgrade the Greek credit rating. This upgrade reflects the continuing decline of political and financial volatility in the country and its return to political and financial security. 3000 climate activists were arrested across the Netherlands in this reporting period. It is likely there will be continued nationwide disruption and protests as Extinction Rebellion (XR) has stated despite the arrests, they will continue to take daily action. In Germany, whilst national transport disruption from the political sabotage of the Berlin – Hamburg highspeed route was resolved relatively quickly, there remains a realistic probability that such political sabotage could once more occur and lead to further disruption. On 22 September, the Pope is expected in Marseille, as such the city is almost certain to have a heavy security presence with large numbers of people in attendance. The two will almost certainly cause disruption to travel and transport.

In Uganda, the banning of political rallies by opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi, also known as Bobi Wine, citing public order breaches and defamation against the president, is unlikely to stop Mr. Wine. Indeed, it just further heightens the possibility that such rallies when they do occur will lead to clashes between opposition supporters and security forces. In Tanzania, it is likely that the crackdown on opposition politicians and leaders continues, despite the release, of the opposition leader, Tundu Lissu. He was originally arrested for holding an illegal gathering. Finally, in Gabon, the country's newly appointed junta has stated that a 24-month transition period will be in effect before the country can hold new elections. This marks the first time the junta has announced any timescales to back up their promises to hold new elections.

Israel has once again opened the border with the Gaza Strip to allow cargo and goods in and out of the strip. The border crossing is frequently shut down with little notice. The reopening will help to alleviate the short-term effects such as the shortage of basic goods in the strip which often becomes major catalysts for protests and violence. In Mali, the news that the airline Sky Mali has ceased flying to Timbuktu is indicative of the city's deepening insecurity situation. Sky Mali was the only commercial airline flying to the city, and their cessation of flights deepens the city's isolation as it suffers under a siege mounted by Islamist rebels. As the MINUSMA taskforce continues to withdraw before the December deadline, expect the country's security to

only further decline. In Lebanon, the Ain el-Hilweh camp has seen renewed deadly violence break out. Given the underlying drivers of the violence have yet to be addressed, the continual sporadic outbreak of deadly violence should be anticipated. Finally, whilst a deal between Azerbaijan and Armenia was struck to allow the reopening of the Lachin Corridor, tensions remain. Armenia has long accused Baku of blocking the corridor to manufacture the current humanitarian crisis. If tensions persist, there is a strong likelihood of armed conflict as seen in 2020.



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Asia Pacific (APAC)

India:

G20 summit leads to several key developments but declaration refuses to condemn Russia.

There were several key developments made after the G20 summit was held in New Delhi, India. The summit featured the unveiling of an economic corridor linking India, the Middle East, and Europe through rail and sea routes. It was presented by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, with the aim of making trade between India and Europe 40 per cent faster. G20 leaders also agreed to elevate the African Union (AU) from an invited organisation to a permanent member of G20 during the summit. There were also calls to expand the World Bank's lending capacity to offer developing economies an alternative to loans from China, with leaders emphasising the need for multilateral development banks to play a more significant role in addressing global challenges. The most controversial element of the summit was arguably the G20s use of watered-down language to describe the war in Ukraine, which lamented the human suffering of the conflict but refused to condemn Russia, which provoked outrage from Kyiv.

On the topic of climate change, the summit did not produce binding commitments to phase out fossil fuels, even though the G20 nations collectively contribute 80 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, there was a commitment to triple renewable energy sources by 2030. Developing countries were estimated to require EUR 5.5 billion by 2030 and an additional EUR 3.7 billion annually until 2050 to achieve net-zero emissions, but no specific action plan was devised during the summit to achieve these targets. In addition, Indian PM Modi launched the Global Biofuel Alliance, aiming to foster global collaboration for the advancement and adoption of biofuels, acknowledging that their environmental impact depends on production methods.

Assessment: It is almost certain that the declaration on the war in Ukraine was the most controversial element of the summit. Insider reporting indicates that key figures within the Western factions of G20 feared that if the declaration condemned Russia, it would threaten the organisation's future, with previous drafts featuring stronger language having to be shelved. The summit would have also likely struggled to reach a consensus on the war given the attendance of many countries wishing to remain neutral on the matter, such as India and many countries within the African Union. The new economic corridor consisting of both rail and maritime routes, is likely an attempt by India to challenge China's expanding Belts and Roads Initiative. India is likely exploiting the West's developing strategy to contain China's influence and seek alternative supply chains outside of China, with President Biden already praising the initiative. Similarly, the calls to expand the World Bank's provision of loans to developing nations in favour of Chinese loans are also doubtlessly an attempt to hinder Chinese influence. A diversification of loans to developing countries will help curtail incidences of the Chinese debt trap. This theory suggests that nations who accept loans from China, particularly for infrastructure projects, become so heavily indebted to China, that Beijing is able to exert considerable control over a nation's economic or political decisions. The African Union's ascendency to the G20 signifies its increasing global influence, with rival powers seeking to extend their influence over the continent's resource-rich nations. This move is likely motivated by a desire to tap into Africa's abundant resources, including those crucial for addressing climate change, such as lithium, cobalt and nickel.

The G20 summit's failure to adequately address the issue of climate change was likely a symptom of its inflated and diverse membership. Many of the countries within the G20, such as the USA, Mexico, Russia and Saudi Arabia are major exporters of hydrocarbons and would be unwilling to cede too much ground whilst oil and gas are major contributors to their respective economies. Moreover, with the introduction of the AU, many countries represented by the G20 are now developing countries that have yet to fully industrialise and likely prioritise economic development over tackling climate change. It is highly likely that the summit's response to climate change will be denounced by environmental groups who will demand that rich countries provide more assistance to developing nations, especially with the United Nation's Climate Change Conference (COP28) scheduled to take place in November 2023.

Vietnam:

Biden in Hanoi to improve bilateral ties.

On 10 September in Hanoi, U.S. President Joe Biden secured agreements with Vietnam on semiconductors and minerals while elevating diplomatic relations with the Southeast Asian nation. The US-Vietnamese ties were upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP), the highest of Vietnam's three diplomatic levels, which places the US in a tier alongside China and Russia. Biden's visit stressed the importance of trade and investment with Vietnam and emphasised the technology sector. There was special attention on semiconductors, a developing industry in Vietnam. The U.S. plans to provide support for semiconductor supply chains, potentially channelling a significant portion of the USD 100 million annual funding from the CHIPS Act to Vietnam. Biden's trip will be followed by visits to Vietnam by executives from leading American technology firms such as Google, Intel and Boeing. Additionally, both countries aim to strengthen critical mineral supply chains, with Vietnam possessing substantial rare earth deposits. However, human rights concerns, including the release of activists, remained a point of contention in their relations.

Assessment: It is highly likely that Biden's trip to Vietnam was part of the US's developing strategy to diversify global supply chains in order to mitigate any risks posed by an over-reliance on China, especially if China invades Taiwan and is subject to a host of Western sanctions. A move towards alternative low-cost manufacturers in favour of China will also likely pose an economic threat to China. It is also part of a US strategy to pivot towards the Indo-Pacific as part of a wider move to contain China by improving relations with countries in the region. It is likely that the US is exploiting degrading relations between Vietnam and China which are largely a result of China's claims in the South China Sea which involve territorial disputes with Vietnam and are in contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, of which China is a signatory. Vietnamese relations have also likely been targeted for improvement as Vietnam is one of the few nations in Asia prepared to challenge China's regional ambitions, whilst still maintaining open lines of communication with Beijing.

Vietnam is likely to carefully navigate relations between Washington and Beijing as it seeks to establish its own role as a low-cost manufacturing hub. Top Chinese officials are expected to visit Vietnam soon, underscoring Hanoi's efforts to maintain good relations with all major powers. However, more CSP arrangements are expected to be under discussion with Australia and Singapore, suggesting a further tilt to the West. Moreover, Vietnam's trade with the West has hugely increased in recent years and it is unlikely that Vietnam will reconsider better relations with the West out of its own economic self-interest. Biden's discussions in Hanoi also included stability talks with Xi's deputy, recognising the need for diplomatic engagement. However, Beijing is unlikely to be happy with rapprochement between the US and Vietnam and is likely to conduct aggressive manoeuvres in the South China Sea where it has disputes with Vietnam or exercise its economic influence as a warning sent to Hanoi.

Russia and North Korea:

North Korean leader visits eastern Russia amidst developing arms relationship.

On 13 September, North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un arrived at Vostochny Space Centre in Russia's far east Amur province after departing North Korea in an armoured train. The talks are expected to regard the provision of arms and ammunition to Russia from North Korea in support of the war in Ukraine and Kim was accompanied by senior military and arms industry officials. Kim also offered his unreserved support to Russia in its "sacred fight" against the West and follows on from a North Korean military parade and arms exhibition in Pyongyang which was attended by a Russian delegation, including Sergei Shoigu, Russia's Defence Minister. North Korea fired a ballistic missile just hours ahead of the meeting. In response to the meeting, the US has stated that any transfer of arms from North Korea to Russia would be a violation of multiple UN Security Council resolutions and that the US will not hesitate to impose new sanctions on either country. Towards the end of the meeting, Kim Jong-Un invited President Putin to North Korea which Putin "gratefully" accepted.

Assessment: Kim Jong Un's visit to Russia is almost certainly part of an effort by Russia to acquire much-needed weapons and ammunition, given its struggles with domestic production. As the weather changes and decreases the opportunity for manoeuvre warfare, the war in Ukraine will likely be characterised by

positional warfare where artillery is pivotal. It is likely that Russia will offer humanitarian aid in return for artillery shells and small arms ammunition, however many of these munitions will likely be sub-standard as a result of poor-quality control during manufacture and poor storage conditions. North Korea will be reticent to divest itself of too much ammunition given its fear of war with South Korea. Consequently, it is likely that North Korea will demand more in return than humanitarian aid. North Korea has a developing ballistic missile and nuclear programme as well as an embryonic space programme. Many of its ballistic missile firings and all of its satellite launches have recently failed. Therefore, it is highly likely that Pyongyang will ask for Russian assistance in these fields as Russia maintains high competency in both fields. There is also a realistic possibility that North Korea will demand further concessions from Russia including participation in trilateral exercises with Russia and China in the Asia-Pacific, and support for its developing nuclear program. Russia will be unwilling to cede too much ground for fear of escalating tensions with the West, however, Russia is likely to be so desperate for arms that it will have to offer more than just food aid. It is unlikely that the meeting between Russia and North Korea would have happened without Chinese approval, and it is likely that China will stipulate specific conditions for the arms partnership. It is likely that China fears a plethora of consequences if Russia promises too much to North Korea, particularly in the fields of nuclear, ballistic missile, satellite and submarine technology. A militarily advanced North Korea could destabilise the region, lead to nuclear proliferation, diminish Chinese influence, potentially create proxy conflicts, and disrupt China's economic interests.

China:

Venezuelan President hosted in Beijing to boost strategic partnership.

On 13 September, China's President Xi hosted his Venezuelan counterpart, Nicolas Maduro, in Beijing where the two leaders signed agreements relating to the economy, trade and tourism. China upgraded its ties with Venezuela to the status of an "all-weather strategic partnership", a label reserved for a select few of its diplomatic partners. Venezuela confirmed its support for Beijing's Belts and Roads Initiative and also stated that Venezuela is willing to cooperate with China through multilateral frameworks such as BRICS and the United Nations. The two nations also signed deals on science and technology, civil aviation and aerospace, leading Maduro to exclaim that Venezuelan astronauts will venture into space inside a Chinese spaceship.

Assessment: It is estimated that Venezuela has the world's largest oil reserves and fourth largest natural gas reserves. It is likely that Venezuela's diplomatic upgrade by China is largely an attempt to guarantee Chinese access to these resources with China being the world's largest oil importer and eleventh largest importer of natural gas, figures that will likely increase as China continues to develop. Venezuela will have welcomed the agreements as Venezuela is almost entirely dependent on oil exports and has received loans, investment and cash from China estimated to be worth tens of billions of dollars. It is likely that Venezuela has partly succumbed to Chinese debt-trap diplomacy and has few countries to turn to as a result of US sanctions, despite a recent easing of sanctions from the Biden administration. Venezuela also remains isolated on the international stage and is courting membership of organisations like BRICS in order to improve its market access, explore new economic opportunities, attract revenue and investment, and expand its geopolitical influence. Given the country's huge resources in hydrocarbons, it is likely that BRICS will consider extending membership to Venezuela to ensure its energy agenda is met and the group has recently stated that it will expand to include six new members, including the much-maligned Iran. It is probable that China will seek support to admit Venezuela to BRICS to counter American hegemony in the western hemisphere. There is also a realistic possibility that China and Venezuela have held secret talks regarding cooperation on military technology and foreign basing, potentially involving discussions on the establishment of Chinese military bases or the use of facilities in Venezuela, further deepening their military and strategic collaboration.

APAC Forecast. In the Maldives, with no candidate reaching the required vote share of 50 percent in the first round, a presidential run-off will be held on 30 September between the incumbent, President Ibrahim Solih, and opposition candidate Mohamed Muiz. The result will determine the future of the archipelago nation, with Solih being pro-India and Muiz favouring closer ties with China. With under 30 days until election day in New Zealand, it is likely that the opposition party, National, will win the most votes. It is however highly likely that given the recent polls no party gains a majority, meaning that a coalition will need to be negotiated, likely resulting in a period of political uncertainty. It is looking increasingly likely that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will seek to change India's official title to Bharat, a move that has a realistic

possibility of causing civil unrest. In Thailand, Move Forward party leader Pita Limjaroenrat has stepped down from his position following his suspension from parliament, despite having won May's general election. This development has raised the likelihood of potential protests in the country.

Tensions related to Taiwan are expected to persist in the coming weeks and months. The United States and Canada's decision to sail warships through the Taiwan Strait as part of a freedom-of-navigation operation will likely be perceived by China as a direct challenge. Consequently, it is highly likely that Beijing will continue to demonstrate its military power with airspace violations and maritime deployments around Taiwan. The reopening of the main Afghanistan-Pakistan border crossing, which had been closed due to fighting, is expected to alleviate transit issues for both countries and boost local trade. Worsening air quality in Sydney should be expected in the upcoming weeks as controlled burning of the countryside around the city takes place to try and prevent the spread of deadly wildfires.



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