

# Conflict Weekly

*A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world*

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Russian military vehicles in the Nagorno-Karabakh. (Image Source: Sergei Grit, AP Photo)

**Violence and Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh**  
**Auto Workers' Strike in the US**  
**Fighting in Sudan**  
**Another Migrant Crisis in Italy**  
**The US-Iran Prisoners Exchange**



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## Azerbaijan and Armenia: Another Round of Violence followed by Ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh

Abigail Miriam Fernandez

### In the news

On 20 September, the Azerbaijani government halted military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh after reaching a ceasefire agreement with ethnic Armenian forces. According to the agreement outlined by Azerbaijan and Russia, the forces are to be disbanded and disarmed as negotiations on the future of ethnic Armenians living in the region begin on 21 September.

On 19 September, Azerbaijan launched a new military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh using precision weapons to target Armenian firing posts and other regional military facilities. A statement from Azerbaijan's Ministry of Defence claimed: "local anti-terrorist" operations in Nagorno-Karabakh were launched to "disarm and secure the withdrawal of Armenia's armed formations" from its territory. The Ministry added: "As part of the activities, only legitimate military installations and infrastructure are targeted and incapacitated using high-precision weapons." Further, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement declaring that the "dissolution" of the unrecognised pro-Armenian government in the region would "achieve peace and stability."

### Issues at large

First, the resumption of large-scale military operations. The scale of operations launched by Azerbaijan was the largest since the six-week conflict with Armenia in 2020. Azerbaijan's army claimed it had captured over 90 positions from the ethnic Armenians. The tensions over Nagorno-Karabakh have continued despite the ceasefire agreement reached in 2020 with frequent skirmishes and fighting at several posts in the region. The situation worsened with Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the mountain road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

Second, Azerbaijan's claims over Nagorno-Karabakh. Over the recent past, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev has been assertive in his rhetoric over the region, despite Armenia recognising that the region is the sovereign territory of Azerbaijan. In May, Aliyev said about the ethnic Armenians: "Either they will bend their necks and come themselves, or things will develop differently." This aggression was seen in the recent developments when he called for "the dissolution of the puppet regime" in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Third, the dwindling status of the unrecognised Republic of Artsakh. The unrecognised government in Nagorno-Karabakh, or the Republic of Artsakh, has claimed to be under "intense fire," describing Azerbaijan's actions as the start of a "large-scale military offensive" and accusing them of "typical ethnic cleansing operations." Its troops have also come under fire during the recent skirmishes, causing them to surrender and agree to the recent ceasefire agreement. Meanwhile, Armenia has indirectly distanced itself from the region as Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan claimed that the country does not participate in military operations, reiterating that they do not have an army in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Fourth, the inability of the Russian peacekeeping forces. Russia has deployed around 2,000 soldiers as peacekeeping forces along the Lachin corridor under a five-year mandate. However, its role in the region has been questioned since the beginning due to its lack of intervention in maintaining peace. Additionally, Russia's preoccupation with Ukraine and the Armenian-Russian tensions have also affected its influence in the region.

Fifth, stalled negotiations. Azerbaijan and Armenia have been engaged in high-level talks since 2020. These talks have been brokered by Russia, the United States and the European Union. Despite the willingness to negotiate, these talks continued to be stalled due to the lack of consensus on key issues, including the fate of ethnic Armenians and the demarcation of the borders between the two countries.

### In perspective

First, the risk of another military conflict. The risk of a full-blown military conflict is unlikely due to the unbalanced dynamics. Unlike in 2020, the regional geopolitics have changed; Armenia has taken a less assertive stance due to the lack of support from the public and Russia and is therefore not able to wage a full-scale conflict. Conversely, Azerbaijan has strategically used aggression to consolidate its position in the region. The tension in the form of low-intensity skirmishes will likely continue with the possibility of a mass exodus shortly.

Second, the difficulties in addressing the issues. The two sides have been brought closer due to the ongoing negotiations; however, the renewed fighting indicates that the diplomatic efforts have failed to reach a sustainable peace agreement. Since 2020, the ceasefire agreements have been criticised for being lopsided, and unable to address the obstacles that continue to disturb the region. Additionally, the exclusion of the ethnic Armenian authorities in the negotiations is also a lacuna that needs to be addressed.

Third, the role of external actors. The US, the EU, Turkey, and Russia will continue to play a mediating role in the conflict. However, it is unclear to what extent these countries would contribute in resolving the issue. For now, the US and the EU have taken up a prominent role in the peace negotiations, while Russia's intervention is limited. Conversely, Turkey would continue to be an ardent supporter of Azerbaijan. However, the power politics over the region is yet to manifest itself.

## **The US: The Auto Workers' Strike against the Detroit Three**

Lakshmi Parimala H

### In the news

On 15 September, 12,700 workers from the UAW (United Auto Workers) union walked out of the Detroit Three, which includes General Motors, Ford Motor and Chrysler. UAW is a North American industrial union of automotive and other vehicular workers headquartered in Detroit, representing workers in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico. The workers started strikes after failing to reach an agreement over the new contract after the prior four-year labour agreement expired on 14 September, marking the first simultaneous strike against the three companies.

On 14 September, stating that a new offer had been made by them, General Motors stated that the company engaged in “continuous, direct, and good faith negotiations” to avoid a strike.



Ford and Chrysler have also emphasised bargaining overstrikes.

On the same day, US President Joe Biden expressed his support to the union autoworkers, stating: “Over generations auto workers sacrificed so much to keep the industry alive and strong, especially through the economic crisis and the pandemic. Workers deserve a fair share of the benefits they helped create for an enterprise.” Acknowledging and appreciating the offers made by the companies, he underlined the need for them to go further to ensure that “record corporate profits mean record contracts for the UAW.”

### Issues at large

First, the demands put forth by the union. The UAW is demanding a 40 per cent wage rise by 2027, including an immediate 20 per cent boost. Besides the wage hikes, union negotiators are also seeking restoration of cost-of-living pay raises, removal of the tier-system of wages, a 32-hour week with 40 hours of pay, and pension increases for retirees. However, the three automakers have proposed a 20 per cent raise through 2027 and an immediate wage boost of 10 per cent, which the union has not accepted.

Second, failed negotiations. The negotiations over the demands have been in process for six weeks before the date of expiry of the previous contract. The concessions put forth by the companies during the negotiations did not contend with the union’s demands, hitting a roadblock. While the UAW is pushing for significant wage increases, aiming to align them with the salaries of top automaker CEOs, the automakers argue that the union's demands are unrealistic and could pose challenges to their operations.

Third, the approach of the first elected president. Shawn Fain, a 54-year-old American labour unionist leading the strikes for a reformed contract won the election in 2022 to become the leader of the UAW. Automakers had expressed outrage against his tactics and stance attacking the “billionaire class” and “corporate greed.” During the counting of votes, he stated: “This is the end of company unionism, where the companies and the union work together in a friendly way because it hasn’t been good for our members.”

Fourth, limited and targeted strikes. On 14 September, Fain announced that the initial strike locations would be “limited and targeted.” Unlike the previous strikes of the union, which were strikes against a single automaker, this strike targeted three companies at a time. The strikes are limited to three assembly plants: a GM factory in Wentzville, a Ford plant in Wayne, and a Jeep plant run by Stellantis in Toledo, Ohio. This strategy helps the union in two ways: first, by inflicting a wider impact on the companies, and second, by allowing the union to strike for longer and preserving its strike fund.

### In perspective

First, a potential effect on the companies and the economy. The automotive industry, which has just recovered from the pandemic, is facing another obstacle. The strikes are affecting the companies' ability to manufacture due to the number of people leaving the companies. There is also an indirect impact as the halt of production in one plant affects the supply of materials in the other plants. If the strikes continue and expand to other plants, they are expected to lead to a rise in car prices leading to inflation and a subsequent rise in interest rates. The strike is also affecting the workers who are being laid off.

Second, the rising number of strikes in the US. This year, workers across industries in the United States have been walking out of their jobs or are threatening to do so. In July, Hollywood saw a strike with thousands of actors and screenwriters joining the picket line. Similarly, an imminent strike by nearly 300,000 workers of United Parcel Service was averted with a last-minute agreement in August.

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## Sudan: Intense Fighting between the Warring Sides

Jerry Franklin

### In the news

On 19 September, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) reported that more than 1,200 children have died in Sudanese refugee camps from suspected measles and starvation. Additionally, the agency stated that every month in Sudan, more than 50,000 children need to be treated for malnutrition.

On 18 September, for the first time since the war began in April, fighting in Sudan reached the city of Port Sudan, where the Sudanese army battled with tribal militias, the Forces of the Eastern Sudan Parties and Movements Alliance.

On 17 September, clashes between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) resulted in the burning of the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) tower in Khartoum.

On 14 September, the commander of Rapid Support Forces (RSF), General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, threatened to install a government in regions under their control if his adversaries in the army established a government in Port Sudan.

On 13 September, the UN's special envoy to Sudan, Volker Perthes, stated that he would resign after being declared unwelcome by the military administration in the conflict-torn region.

### Issues at large

First, increased fighting in terms of intensity and geography. Heavy artillery and airstrikes were reported in Khartoum as the army and the RSF continued to fight for control of Khartoum. The armed fighting between the warring sides has intensified. The buildings of GNPOC, the Ministry of Justice, and the Sudanese Standards and Metrology Organization (SMO) in the Al Mugran neighbourhood were destroyed by fire during the recent violence in Khartoum. The Sudanese army engaged in combat with tribal militants devoted to the Beja tribe's leader, Sheba Darar in Port Sudan. This was the first violence in the city of Port Sudan in more than five months of conflict. Government representatives and representatives of the United Nations, who have evacuated from the country's war-torn capital Khartoum, are accommodated in Port Sudan, which is the only city with an operational airport.

Second, the search for legitimacy by the RSF and Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). The commander of the SAF, Al-Burhan, recently set up a base in Port Sudan, after departing the General Command of the Armed Forces' headquarters in Khartoum. Many federal government entities have now moved their operations to Port Sudan. The army and supporting political groups reportedly intend to set up an interim administration with Port



Sudan as its capital. In retaliation, RSF leader Daglo has threatened to proclaim a new government with Khartoum as its capital. Besides, SAF leader al-Burhan had carried out regional visits to South Sudan, Qatar and Eritrea, calling for political and humanitarian support. Meanwhile, RSF's special envoy, Yousif Izzat, met with the African Union chairperson, Moussa Faki Mahamat, to discuss RSF's vision to end the conflict. RSF firmly opposes the Sudanese Army's effort to represent Sudan on the international front and claim legitimacy.

Third, failed efforts to reach a long-term truce. Many international actors, including the US, Saudi Arabia and the Arab League, have attempted to establish a ceasefire in the region to de-escalate the conflict; however, they failed to sustain it. Since the commencement of the conflict, both parties have routinely breached several ceasefires led by the US and Saudi Arabia. In August 2023, the RSF's leader Dagalo made a 10-point plan calling for new negotiations to end the conflict. However, the Sudanese army rejected the proposal, declaring that they would not negotiate a deal with traitors, and denying appeals for a ceasefire.

Fourth, the continued cycle of violence. According to estimates from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), nearly 5,000 people have died due to the violence since April. According to UN statistics, more than 4.6 million people have been compelled to evacuate their homes in the four months of conflict. Food supplies are exhausted and humanitarian workers are unable to reach the needy due to conflicts and roadblocks.

#### In perspective

First, the fight for legitimacy. The army attempts to portray that the fight is between the state and a rebel group rather than between two sections of the security forces. The US has imposed sanctions on RSF deputy leader Abdelrahim Hamdan Dagalo's assets in the US and had his visa suspended for the human rights violations committed during the fighting. The SAF has been using the US sanctions on the RSF to seek legitimacy.

Second, the possibility of civil war. The recent violence in Port Sudan poses a threat of violence expanding to other parts of Sudan which could worsen the humanitarian crisis and lead to a prolonged power struggle. The constant efforts to establish regional, national and international legitimacy by both the warring sides may result in a full-fledged civil war shortly. The humanitarian crisis would exacerbate as the conflict worsens and there is less hope for the long-awaited democratic transition.

## Italy: Migrant crisis in the Mediterranean

Rishika Yadav

#### In the news

On 18 September, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni implemented strict measures over a recent surge in migrant arrivals. The measures include extending the detention period for illegal migrants from three to up to 18 months and constructing new detention centres for those arriving without visas.

On 17 September, during her visit to Lampedusa, EU President Ursula von der Leyen stated: "Migration is a European challenge and it needs a European answer and solution." Meloni

stated: “The ‘problem’ of migrants crossing the Mediterranean to Europe cannot be solved by redistributing migrants within European borders but rather requires tackling the problem externally and preventing the departure of migrants.”

On 14 September, the Associated Press quoted the Italian Red Cross report on the arrival of 6,800 migrants on Italy’s Island of Lampedusa, 100 kilometres off the coast of Tunisia. These migrants arrived in unseaworthy boats in a span of 24 hours. Authorities faced challenges in transferring them to the mainland.

Italian Minister of Interior, Matteo Piantedosi, discussed the increasing number of migrants in Lampedusa, with the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva Johansson, highlighting the need for a new European strategy against human traffickers.

### Issues at large

First, the migrant issue in the Mediterranean. According to the EU border agency, Frontex, the Central Mediterranean is the most active route for migrants into the EU this year with nearly 114,300 arrivals reported by national authorities in the first eight months of 2023. The Central Mediterranean route runs from Libya and Tunisia to Italy and Malta, a popular route for Sub-Saharan African migrants reaching Tunisia. The Eastern Mediterranean route that connects Turkey to Greece, is primarily used by Syrian refugees. Additionally, Migrants aim for Spanish autonomous Canary Islands via the Western Mediterranean route from eastern Morocco and the Atlantic route from western Morocco. Migrants using these routes also face challenges including overcrowded and perilous vessels, exploitation by traffickers, violence, and limited rescue capabilities.

Second, Italy’s migrant crisis. According to the Italian government, nearly 127,000 refugees and migrants reached the country this year. This figure is double compared to 2022, during the same period. Italy’s escalating migrant crisis has triggered protests among Lampedusa residents. Far-right parties including Brothers of Italy and the League emphasise security threats relating to the migrant influx, reviving narratives of criminalising migration. The crisis has overwhelmed Lampedusa’s facilities, prompting concerns about humanitarian conditions. The island’s migrant reception centre capacity is only 400; however, currently, it is hosting 4,000 people, causing devastation.

Third, the divided debate within the EU. Von der Leyen visited Lampedusa, promising to take action on the migrant crisis. However, the EU’s response has been slow due to disagreements among member countries over the deal between the EU and Tunisia to address irregular migration. According to the deal, the EU promised an aid package worth USD 1,01 million to Tunisia as the country struggles with economic crisis and an influx of migrants and refugees seeking to reach Europe.

### In perspective

First, the increasing migrant crossings in the Mediterranean. The increasing influx of migrants from multiple Mediterranean routes is likely to put significant pressure on regional actors, border security and humanitarian efforts. Additionally, climate disasters also contribute to migration. Recent floods in Libya may further increase the influx of migrants.



Second, the effect on Italy. The escalating influx of migrants in Italy is straining resources, sparking political debates on security. It is raising humanitarian concerns, posing challenges pertaining to both the social cohesion and the political in the country.

Third, the impact of the divide within the EU. EU debates might affect cooperation among member states impacting migrant reception. It will further delay a cohesive and effective response to the Mediterranean migrant crisis. It will potentially deepen the humanitarian and political challenges faced by the region. Finding common ground among member countries will be essential to address this complex and multifaceted issue.

## US and Iran: Prisoner exchange deal for USD six billion

Shamini Velayutham

### In the news

On 18 September, after two years of tense negotiations, five US citizens who had been detained in Iran were released in exchange for the US agreeing to unfreeze USD six billion in Iranian oil. Iran's money was held in South Korean banks namely the Industrial Bank of Korea and Woori Bank.

Following the release, US President Joe Biden stated: "Reuniting wrongfully detained Americans with their loved ones has been a priority."

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi stated that the exchange could be "a step in the direction of a humanitarian action between us and America" and "it can definitely help in building trust".

On 19 September, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea apprised: "Our government has been closely negotiating with the United States, Iran and the related countries on resolving the frozen assets and we expect the issue to be resolved amicably."

The South Korean government said that Iranian funds that had been frozen in the country's banks following the US sanctions on Tehran had now been released to Qatari banks. The effective transfer of the cash to a third country in tight coordination with the pertinent countries was confirmed in a joint statement from the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. The government has also expressed optimism that after the unfreezing of the Iranian cash, relations between Seoul and Tehran will improve.

### Issues at large

First, the tensions between the US and Iran. An increase in tension between Iran and the US came following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2019. Since August 2023, the increasing military drills in the Gulf waters further increased tensions. In August, more than 3,000 US personnel were deployed in the Red Sea after the US accused Iran of seizing several international civilian ships in July, which Iran denied. In response, Iran accused the US of fuelling instability and insecurity in the region. Besides, Iran has been critical of regular joint military drills between Israel and the US. In January, the US and Israel carried out its largest joint military exercise, Juniper Oak 2023.



Second, the US sanctions. Trump's reimposition of US trade sanctions in 2019 and 2020 against Iran forced governments and businesses from Europe and Asia to refrain from doing business with Tehran, posing a challenge to Iran's oil exports. In 2022 and 2023, the US Department of the Treasury imposed 38 and 19 sanctions, respectively. On 18 September, the Biden administration announced fresh sanctions on former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence regarding the disappearance of a US citizen.

Third, the internal divide within the US. The Republicans criticised Biden for his move, claiming that the deal would motivate Iran and other countries to detain US citizens further. Former President Donald Trump expressed his concern, stating that the deal had amounted to a “terrible precedent.” Mike McCaul, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, stated that the prisoner swap “creates a direct incentive for America’s adversaries to conduct future hostage-taking.” Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton accused Biden of “paying ransom to the world’s worst state sponsor of terrorism.” Meanwhile, the opinions within the Democrats are divided. A large section has defended the deal as it paves the way for a larger Middle Eastern cooperation. The Democratic chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Bob Menendez, lauded the release of the detainees and stated: “They should have never been detained in the first place, and I welcome them back to the loving embrace of their families. This is a moment to celebrate.” A centrist Democrat, Dean Phillips, stated that the prisoner exchange was “disconcerting on the surface,” and has requested for a closure on the overall deal.

#### In perspective

First, although the deal according to Biden has proven to be successful, the backlash he received from the Republicans has made his candidacy in the forthcoming election uncertain. However, Biden sees the deal as an achievement that will engage the US to a larger perspective in the Middle Eastern corridor. His administration, through prisoner swaps and unfreezing of Iranian funds, is expected to build trust that creates conditions for further discussions on Iran’s nuclear programme. He further seeks to engage with the Middle Eastern countries as his election strategy and to restore the long-lost ties with the adversaries.

Second, despite the backlashes, this deal is significant for both countries in terms of the progression of the nuclear deal. Establishing similar deals will likely foster better diplomatic ties between Iran and the US.

## Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Rishika Yadav, Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis, Padmashree Anandan, Dhriti Mukherjee and Akriti Sharma

### East and Southeast Asia

#### **China: Strategic security consultation meeting in Russia**

On 18 September, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and unnamed members from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited Russia for their annual strategic security consultation. Wang Yi met with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, discussing their resolve to establish a multipolar world order and Wang Yi stressed that as



permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, they bear the responsibility to maintain global stability and development. Lavrov stated: “China and Russia, as leading global powers and permanent members of the UN. The Security Council bears special responsibility for maintaining global strategic stability and global development.” He added: “The importance of Russian-Chinese cooperation for ensuring justice in world affairs, for ensuring a balance of interests in the processes that are developing in a variety of directions.” The meeting comes in light of fraying relations between Russia and China with the West.

#### **China: Open communication with Malaysia over South China Sea tensions**

On 17 September, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced that Malaysia and China agreed to a communication over the South China Sea tensions. This came after he met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang at the 20th China-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Expo in the city of Nanning, China, on 17 September. The Chinese state news agency, Xinhua, quoted Li on Chinese commitment to work closely with Malaysia to maintain peace in the South China Sea, safeguard ASEAN-centred regional cooperation and facilitate China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0.

#### **Taiwan: 103 Chinese warplanes detected near the island**

On 18 September, the Taiwanese Ministry of National Defence urged China to stop its military aggression. The ministry claimed that over 103 Chinese warplanes had been detected near the island in a span of 24 hours. The ministry informed that 40 planes out of 103 crossed over the Taiwan Strait and came inside the Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) as recognized by Taiwan. The ministry stated: “The continuous military harassment by the Communist military [People’s Liberation Army (PLA)] can easily lead to a sharp increase in tensions and worsen regional security.” It added: “We call on the Beijing authorities to take responsibility and immediately stop such destructive unilateral actions.”

#### **Japan: China called to remove the buoy from the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone**

On 20 September, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs ordered China to remove its buoy from the Japanese Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). An anonymous Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs official stated: “We have been lodging protests in both Tokyo and Beijing since Japan’s coastguard in July found a buoy.” He added: “We have demanded the immediate removal of the buoy as it is against international laws.” The buoy was detected near the Japanese Senkaku Islands, a disputed region between China and Japan.

#### **Myanmar: Junta troops targeted by anti-junta groups in Kachin State**

On 15 September, Myanmar Now reported that anti-junta groups launched a series of attacks on a Myanmar army force over three days in the state of Kachin’s Hpakant Township near Indawgyi Lake. On 12 September, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Indawgyi People’s Defence Force (PDF) attacked the junta infantry column, comprising around 70 troops, near the village of Shwe Let Pan village in the Hpakant Township. Subsequently, the KIA and Indawgyi PDF fired on the junta troops using heavy artillery. Junta troops took local gold mine workers hostage to use them as human shields. A PDF fighter stated that they “laid the explosives to the side of their route, and they walked right into them.” Resistance forces continued their attacks on the junta, resulting in several casualties among the soldiers and disrupting the lives of locals. The military council is yet to issue an official statement. The Myanmar junta has been fighting for control of the Nam Sang Yang village in the Hpakant Township for more than two months. KIA spokesperson, Colonel Naw Bu stated that more than 50 junta troops have been killed in July and August in the region.

## South Asia

### **Pakistan: Foreign Office rejects claims of secret arms deal**

On 17 September, The Dawn quoted The Intercept report claiming that the US helped to facilitate an International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout for Pakistan earlier this year in place of Pakistan selling arms secretly to the US. This arms sale was allegedly made to supply arms to the Ukrainian military marking Pakistani involvement in the war in Ukraine under US pressure to take sides. The Dawn report quoted an unsourced report released in June claiming that an arms consignment from Pakistan Ordnance Factories was being shipped to Ukraine. It also referred to another report that alleges Pakistan setting up a defence trading firm in Warsaw to ease the arms supply to Ukraine. On 18 September, the Pakistani Foreign Office rejected the report; Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch described it as “baseless and fabricated”.

### **Pakistan and Afghanistan: Reopening of the Torkham Border**

On 15 September, the Torkham border, between Afghanistan and Pakistan was reopened after nine days following clashes between two countries. It is the main land border crossing between the two countries and its closure has left travellers and vehicles stranded on both sides causing inconvenience. It had been closed on 6 September following a clash between the Afghan forces and the Pakistani military killing two Afghan soldiers and wounding several others. The Pakistan government accused Afghanistan of a “constructing unlawful structure” near the border and alleged unprovoked and indiscriminate firing by the Afghan forces that led to the closure. However, Afghanistan’s Taliban government rejected the allegations claiming that they were repairing an old security post and Pakistani forces allegedly opened fire.

### **Afghanistan: Taliban rejects claims of the UNAMA Report**

On 20 September Reuters quoted a report released by the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) which has recorded over 1,600 incidents of human rights violations against people detained by the Taliban authorities. UNAMA stated: “In attempts to extract confessions or other information, detainees were subjected to severe pain and suffering, through physical beatings, electric shocks, asphyxiation, stress positions and forced ingestion of water, as well as blind-folding and threats.” According to the report, nearly half of them underwent torture and ill-treatment carried out by police and intelligence agents; 18 people had died in prisons and custody under police and intelligence in the past 19 months. Additionally, one in ten of the violations were against women. The report covers the period from January 2022 to July 2023. In response, the Taliban-led Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected the claim and called it propaganda.

## Central Asia, the Middle East, and Africa

### **Iran: Several IAEA inspectors expelled**

On 16 September, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Chief, Rafael Grossi, condemned Iran’s move barring the majority of its experienced inspectors assigned to the country hindering its oversight of Tehran’s atomic activities. According to Al Jazeera, the Iranian move is a response to a call led by the US, the UK, France and Germany at the IAEA’s Board of Governors meeting that was held on 11 September. They had called on Tehran to cooperate with the agency on issues of the uranium traces found at undeclared sites. While Grossi termed Iran’s move as “disproportionate,” “unprecedented” and as an “overreaction,” the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the move as an attempt by the US, the UK, France and Germany to misuse the IAEA “for their own political purposes.”



### Iran: First death anniversary of Mahsa Amini's

On 16 September, Iran marked the first death anniversary of Mahsa Amini. Her father, Amjad Amini, was detained by Iranian security forces in an attempt to stop people gathering at her grave amid strikes and protests across the country. According to the Kurdistan Human Rights Network, the Iranian government warned him against marking her death anniversary. The Guardian reported that the security forces had increased their presence across Iran in anticipation of the protests and continued the arrest of dissidents. However, protesters chanted slogans such as "Death to the dictator!" and "Woman, Life, Freedom!" across the capital Tehran.

### Syria: Anti-government protests by Druze community

On 15 September, 10,000 members of Syria's Druze religious minority gathered in the southern city of Sweida to protest against the government, for the fourth week in a row. This gathering in particular was in response to Syrian President Bashar Assad's decision to terminate fuel subsidies. This decision strikes a severe blow to the public, which is already struggling with the worsening economic crisis caused by rising prices and electricity shortages. The protestors chanted anti-government slogans and demanded a "peaceful transfer of power" to make way for a "secular democratic state governed by the constitution and the law." The city's public transportation system also went on strike in support of the protest, and all public buildings were closed.

### Libya: Hundreds protest against the flood management

On 19 September, hundreds of residents in Libya's city of Derna protested against the authorities for their failure to manage the floods that killed thousands in the city. They criticised the leader of the eastern Libyan parliament, Aguila Saleh, and the city authorities, for mismanagement in disaster warning and evacuation operations. The protesters also set alight the house of Derna's mayor, Abdulmenam al-Ghaithi. According to the Red Crescent, at least 11,000 people have died and 20,000 others are missing following the torrential rains caused by the storm Daniel on 10 September and the devastating floods that followed.

### Ethiopia: Continuing human rights abuses in Tigray reports the UN

On 18 September, the UN Human Rights Council released a report titled "Report of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia." According to the report, war crimes and further crimes against humanity are being committed by all of the warring parties in Ethiopia's Tigray region, even after the peace deal signed in November 2022 between the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and Ethiopian federal forces. The Chair of the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia, Mohamed Chande Othman, stated alongside the release of the report: "While the signing of the agreement may have mostly silenced the guns, it has not resolved the conflict in the north of the country, in particular in Tigray, nor has it brought about any comprehensive peace." The report claimed that TPLF, federal forces, Eritrean forces and their respective regional allied militias including the Amhara forces and the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), are carrying out human rights abuses, including sexual violence, in the region. All the parties had previously denied similar accusations.

### Eritrea: 200 anti-government Eritreans arrested in Germany over clashes

On 17 September, more than 200 opponents of the Eritrean government were arrested after clashes with the police in the city of Stuttgart in Germany. The clashes erupted during an

Eritrean cultural festival marking 30 years of independence from Britain, which was organised by the supporters loyal to the Eritrean regime. Police officers reported that they were sent to contain “massive violence” between the opposing groups. Previously, on 2 September Al Jazeera reported that more than 100 people were injured in Israel’s city of Tel Aviv during a clash between a rival group of protesters from Eritrea. The clashes were between the anti-government and pro-government factions of Eritrean asylum seekers residing in the city of Tel Aviv. Consequently, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced plans to deport Eritrean asylum seekers in the country.

#### **Mali: Tuareg rebels launch attacks in army bases**

On 18 September, BBC Africa reported on the claims of Tuareg rebels from northern Mali on seizing control of two army bases. BBC quoted a Malian official who informed AFP news agency of fighting in the town of Léré in the Timbuktu region on 17 September. An alliance of the Tuareg group, Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA), re-launched a rebellion in August following the expulsion of the UN peacekeepers from the country. An unrecognised spokesman for the CMA stated: “We attacked and took control of the two military camps in the town of Léré this Sunday.” The renewed rebellion comes weeks after the al-Qaeda-linked jihadist group, Support Group for Islam and Muslims (GSIM), declared “war in the Timbuktu region.” The peace deal between Tuareg separatists in 2015 has floundered since the coup in 2020.

#### Europe and the Americas

##### **Sweden: Greta Thunberg faces second charge**

On 18 September, according to Euronews, climate activist Greta Thunberg was charged with disobeying a police order for the second time in Sweden. In July, she was fined KR 2,500 for a similar offence. Though Thunberg admitted to disobeying the police order, she claimed that it was necessary. She stated that it was “absurd that those who act in line with science should pay the price for it.” Thunberg and other activists returned to Malmo harbour in protest against fossil fuel use, shortly after the first verdict. They were forcibly removed, and prosecutors cited a lack of permission for the demonstration. Thunberg faces a second trial on 27 September, potentially receiving a six-month prison sentence. However, she stated that since “the climate crisis is already a matter of life and death for countless people,” she and other protestors are “definitely not going to back down.”

##### **Ukraine: Defence ministry claims advance in Bakhmut and Sea of Azov**

On 18 September, Ukraine’s Deputy Minister of Defence, Hanna Maliar, reported on the success of the counteroffensive by the Ukrainian forces on the eastern and southern front. The forces are reportedly asserting control in Bakhmut and advancing towards the Sea of Azov. Until now, more than 260 square kilometres have been captured by Ukrainian forces. On the same day, Ukraine’s General for ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskyi, claimed a breakthrough south of Bakhmut. On 17 September, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the recapture of Klishchiivka, a strategically important town south of Bakhmut. Klishchiivka’s recapture could facilitate the encirclement of Bakhmut, seized by Russian forces in May.

##### **Europe: Switzerland and US air forces to conduct a joint training exercise**

On 18 September, the Federal Council of Switzerland reported on Switzerland’s Air Force and the US Air Force joint training exercise. The exercise will take place between 18 and 21 September in the Swiss airspace, where the country's 17 and 18 Air Force Squadrons along



with the US Air Force's 510th Fighter Squadron will participate. Swiss aircraft will operate from the Payerne Air Base in the canton of Vaud; whereas the US aircraft will operate from the Aviano Air Base in Italy. This exercise aims to evaluate the planning, execution and debriefing of air defence exercises and share experiences. It aligns with Switzerland's strategy to bolster defence capabilities through international cooperation as outlined in the Federal Council's security policy report, "Switzerland's Security 2022," released in June.

### **The UK: Sunak's decision to ease UK's 2050 net zero target**

On 20 September, the UK's Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, announced a plan that would ease several measures that were part of the government's green commitments for 2050. According to his decision, the ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars will be shifted from 2030 to 2035 and the phasing out of gas boilers will be postponed to 2035. Sunak commented that this decision does not indicate "losing our ambition or abandoning our commitments," and is a "more proportionate way" of achieving the Conservative Party's net zero policy. Additionally, he stated that the country remains committed to international targets including the "promises in Paris and Glasgow to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees." The decision has triggered debates among the car industry players. The Chief Executive of KIA, Paul Philpott, called it a misstep as the company has already altered its supply chain and product planning, while Jaguar and Toyota termed it as a "pragmatic" approach.

### **Guatemala: Bernardo Arevalo leads protests to protect the country's democracy**

On 18 September, Guatemala's President elect Bernardo Arevalo, led a protest in Guatemala City after filing a legal challenge against what he describes as "coup mongers." Arevalo claimed that he aims to protect the democratic nature of elections by putting "a stop to that corrupt and coup-mongering minority that tries to deny the people of Guatemala the right to live in democracy." This protest stems from fears of potential illegitimate actions by individuals including Guatemala's attorney general, María Consuelo Porras, in derailing the election results. Porras' office attested to this fear by opening boxes containing ballots to ensure there is no voter fraud. This action has been criticised as it violates voter privacy, with US Ambassador to the Organization of American States Francisco O Mora terming it as "anti-democratic behaviour."

### **Guatemala: President Giammattei in response to concerns about Guatemala's democracy**

On 19 September, while addressing the United Nations General Assembly, Brazil's President Lula da Silva warned of the looming "risk of coup" in Guatemala, resulting in Guatemala's outgoing President Alejandro Giammattei denying this. In response to Lula, who said that the coup could "impede the inauguration of the winner of democratic elections," Giammattei later took to the podium to condemn the "unnecessary international involvement" in Guatemala's upcoming elections. Besides, there are increasing tensions and movements in the country by those who believe that election results may be tampered with, given the rise of anti-corruption President elect Bernardo Arevalo. However, Giammattei maintains that although their "democracy is not perfect," there is an adherence to a constitutional "peaceful handover of power."

### **Mexico: Ferromex suspends 60 train routes "to avoid accidents or loss of life" of migrants**

On 19 September, Mexico's biggest rail operator, Ferromex, suspended 60 routes due to an "unprecedented" number of migrants hitching a ride on freight trains to go from Mexico's south border to the north. According to the owner of Ferromex, as the wagons are filled with cargo, hundreds of migrants, including children, have no choice but to hang off the side,

which has led to “half a dozen cases of injuries or death in recent days.” Aside from the loss of life, there is also the threat of gangs robbing or raping these migrants. This step was also taken in light of international organisations, including UNICEF, stating that the number of migrants has been increasing since 2021 due to “gang violence, poverty, and climate change.”

#### Canada: “Sikh extremism” leads to worsening relations with India

On 18 September, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated in the Canadian parliament that the country was investigating “credible allegations potentially linking” India with the murder of Hardeep Singh Nijjar on 18 June 2023. Nijjar, who was shot outside a temple in Vancouver, Canada, had openly campaigned in support of the Khalistan movement and has thus been described as a terrorist by India for allegedly leading a militant separatist group. Now a “priority investigation,” Trudeau said to lawmakers: “Any involvement of a foreign government in the killing of a Canadian citizen on Canadian soil is an unacceptable violation of our sovereignty.” In response, India’s ministry of external affairs has “completely rejected” Trudeau’s “absurd” claims, in turn blaming Canada for providing shelter to “Khalistani terrorists and extremists.” The ministry stated that since this group is a threat to India’s security, Canada should “take prompt and effective legal action against all anti-India elements operating from their soil.” Although Trudeau maintains that he is not trying to “provoke” India, as both countries have expelled a diplomat each, diplomatic ties are currently at an impasse.

#### US: Joint military exercise in Armenia concluded

On 20 September, US soldiers completed their joint military exercise with Armenian forces, which began on 11 September in Armenia. These drills served the purpose of preparing Armenia for participating in international peacekeeping missions. The Armenian Ministry of Defence highlighted that it would “increase the level of interoperability of the unit participating in international peacekeeping missions within the framework of peacekeeping operations.” However, despite its small scale, it has elicited concerns from Russia, since Armenia had earlier refused Russian-led military drills by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

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#### About the authors

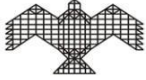
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### About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

National Institute of  
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The International Peace Research Initiative (IPRI), initiated in 2018 at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS), is a part of the Conflict Resolution and Peace Research Programme at the School of Conflict and Security Studies.

IPRI undertakes research on various issues relating to peace with special emphasis on radicalisation, sustainable peace, gender roles in peacebuilding and global protest movements. IPRI researches are published as briefs, reports and commentary.

### About Konrad Adenauer Stiftung



The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is a political foundation. Established in 1955 as “Society for Christian-Democratic Civic Education,” in 1964, the Foundation proudly took on the name of Konrad Adenauer, the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. KAS cooperates with governmental institutions, political parties and civil society organizations, building strong partnerships along the way. In particular, KAS seeks to intensify political cooperation in the area of development cooperation on the foundations of its objectives and values. Together with the partners, KAS makes a significant contribution to the creation of a global order that empowers every country to determine its own developmental priorities and destiny in an internationally responsible manner.

KAS has organized its program priorities in India into five working areas: Foreign and Security Policy; Economic, Climate, and Energy Policy; Rule of Law; Political Dialogue focused on Social and Political Change; and Media and Youth. The India Office of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation takes great pride in its cooperation with Indian partner institutions that implement jointly curated projects and programmes.

### About Conflict Weekly



The Conflict Weekly an academic endeavour to bring every Wednesday/Thursday a weekly analysis of the conflict and peace processes in the world; aiming to look at the larger peace picture. It is published by the NIAS-IPRI in collaboration with the KAS India Office.

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