

Conflict Weekly

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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(On 28 July, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, Niger's new military leader speaking on national television after the coup. Image Source: AFP)

The Coup in Niger, Violent anti-government demonstrations in Kenya, and Protests in Israel over judicial reforms



An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

Gender | Environment | Ethnic Violence

External Interventions | Armed Conflicts | Peace Processes



Niger: Another Coup

Anu Maria Joseph

In the news

On 26 July, the Niger military, in a coup, removed President Mohamed Bazoum. In a national television broadcast, Colonel-Major Amadou Abramane stated: “The defence and security forces have decided to put an end to the regime you are familiar with.” He announced the dissolution of the constitution, suspension of all institutions and closure of national borders. He added: “This follows the continuous deterioration of the security situation, the bad social and economic management.” He warned: “All external partners are asked not to interfere.”

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned the coup describing it as an “effort to seize power by force and to undermine democratic governance, peace and stability in Niger”. The African Union condemned it and called the African population to “join their voices in unanimous condemnation of this coup attempt and for the immediate and unconditional return of the felon soldiers to their barracks.”

The ECOWAS stated: “It condemns in the strongest terms the attempt to seize power by force and calls on the coup plotters to free the democratically elected president of the republic immediately and without any condition.”

A statement from the US said: “We specifically urge elements of the presidential guard to release President Bazoum from detention and refrain from violence.”

Issues at large

First, Niger’s complicated past and a history of coups. After gaining independence from France in 1960, Niger experienced four coups and several attempted coups. The last coup was in February 2010, when the military overthrew then-President Mamadou Tandja. In 2011, it restored civilian rule with a new constitution and Mahamadou Issoufou as the President. In April 2021, when Mohamad Bazoum became the President, it was Niger’s first democratic power transfer since independence.

Second, prolonged instability. Two Islamist insurgencies have been plaguing Niger. The first one in the southwest emerged in Mali in 2015 and the second one in the southeast was led by jihadists based in northeastern Nigeria. Niger has also been facing the Boko Haram fighters in the south, near the Nigeria border. Groups linked to both al-Qaeda and Islamic State are active in the country. Since 2021, the insurgency in Niger has worsened with frequent attacks. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2023 by the Relief Web, in 2022, at least 198 people died in insurgent attacks, with Niger recording the sixth-highest civilian death toll.

Third, the failure of the government. Besides insurgency, Niger has also been facing a multidimensional crisis attributed to climate change, floods and droughts, increasing food insecurity, the rising cost of living, inflation and corruption. According to a Relief Web report in July, more than 4.4 million people in Niger require immediate humanitarian assistance. Mohamad Bazoum came to power prioritizing fighting against insurgency and corruption and promising to address the economic issues. Even after being a key ally to the Western countries, including the US, France and Germany, in fighting the insurgency in the region, the government was incompetent and ineffective in addressing any of the underlying issues

Fourth, West Africa as a “coup belt.” The coup in Niger marks the seventh coup in West and Central Africa since 2020. There have been four military coups in neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso since 2020. The increasing pattern of military takeovers in the region is predominantly over the failure of the governments in addressing rebel and jihadist insurgencies.

In perspective

First, despite the 2021 democratic transition under President Mohamed Bazoum implying a significant development toward democracy, Niger has always been vulnerable to a coup owing to its complicated past and the similar trajectories of the neighbouring countries.

Second, an unclear future. The coup outlines uncertainty regarding its relations with the Western countries so as the fight against insurgency. The US, France, and Italy have troops fighting insurgency in the country. The ties between the West and Mali and Burkina Faso deteriorated followed by the military takeovers. The concern is whether Niger opts similar path to Mali and Burkina Faso.



Kenya: Anti-government protests turn violent

Jerry Franklin A

In the News

On 25 July, Kenyan President Willam Ruto announced that he is ready to meet opposition leader Raila Odinga “anytime” after months of anti-government protests. However, the opposition party, Azimio la Umoja, leader, Raila Odinga, dismissed Ruto’s invitation describing it as “not serious.”

The development comes after Odinga called for three days of anti-government demonstrations in Kenya on 19 July. The protests turned violent. According to Amnesty International, at least 27 people were killed and dozens were injured during the clashes between police and demonstrators over the five days of protest. Nearly, 100 demonstrators clashed with police in Kibera, Nairobi, during the protests.

The new wave of protests is against the financial bill, which introduced a 1.5 per cent housing levy, a 16 per cent tax on petroleum products and a 16 per cent value-added tax (VAT). On 26 June, the bill was signed into law.

On 18 July, the United Nations Human Rights Office spokesperson stated: “The UN is very concerned by the widespread violence and allegations of disproportionate use of force, including the use of firearms by the police during protests in Kenya.”

On 25 July, the Kenyan Ministry of Interior stated: “Extrajudicial executions and/or excessive use of force... are malicious, false and intended to distort public opinion.

Issues at Large

First, the economic crisis. Kenya, the second largest economy in East Africa, suffers from a public debt of 9.4 trillion shillings (USD 67 billion) and is categorised by the World Bank as at significant risk of financial distress. Additionally, between 2013 and 2022, Kenya took three loans worth USD 5.3 billion from China Export-Import (EXIM) Bank for the development of a Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) project linking the port of Mombasa with the capital Nairobi. According to the Department of National Treasury, the loans from China represent over 64 per cent of Kenya's current foreign debt as of March 2023.

Second, continuous anti-government protests since the elections. Since the August 2022 presidential elections, Odinga has been organising frequent demonstrations against the government, alleging irregular elections and vote rigging. Through his constant protests, Odinga continuously criticized the rising expense of living, election fraud, the alleged plundering of Kenya's resources, and the introduction of Genetically Modified (GMO) Corn. Since 20 March, Odinga started organising bi-weekly demonstrations on Mondays and Thursdays, known as “the mother of all marches.” After Ruto agreed to negotiate, the opposition leader postponed rallies in April and May. However, as the negotiations stalled, Odinga’s Azimio alliance started staging current rounds of demonstrations. Odinga has been accused by President Ruto of trying to utilize economic dissatisfaction to further his political ambitions.

Third, violent crackdown. On 14 July, Ruto declared that the government would not let scheduled opposition demonstrations citing that the protests were illegal. Human rights groups criticized the clampdown imposed by the police, who occasionally used lethal gunfire. The police used tear gas and water cannons to disperse the protesters in Nairobi. Additionally, many opposition leaders were arrested. Shops and schools were closed due to the protests.

Fourth, increasing mistrust in William Ruto's government. William Ruto portrayed himself as a champion of the oppressed during the election campaign in August 2022, promising to make life better for ordinary citizens. Ruto campaigned to lower the living expenses of the people. After coming to power, Ruto eliminated fuel subsidies, which caused a rise in the price of essential goods like bread and maize flour. The Kenyan population began to develop a mistrust in the economic policies of Ruto which are negatively impacting the public.

In perspective

First, the government's inability to address the grievances. The Kenyan government is using lethal force to suppress protests without addressing the demands of the people. The peaceful demonstrations turned violent following the use of tear gas by the police to disperse protesters stating that the protests were unlawful. The government is struggling to manage the debt crisis. The taxes have been increased abruptly, which affects the common population, already facing challenges in affording essential commodities.

Second, the demonstrations are being used by Raila Odinga to advance his political objectives. The opposition leader, Raila Odinga, had contested five presidential elections and consistently failed. Odinga tries to mobilize the people on various issues, including the high cost of living, rigged elections, and even allegations of ethnic bias. The passing of the financial bill gave an advantage for Odinga to capitalize the popular anger to the call for a series of demonstrations.



Protests over Judicial Reforms in Israel

Sandra D Costa

In the News

On 24 July, the “reasonableness” bill was passed, securing 64-0 votes at the Knesset. Following the parliament’s ratification of the bill, Netanyahu acknowledged the same as a “necessary democratic step.” The opposition party, Yesh Atid, stormed out of the parliament chanting “shame,” after boycotting the voting. On 25 July, Reuters quoted opposition leader Yair Lapid commenting: “This government can win the battle, but not the war.”

The White House responded to the bill restricting the powers of the Supreme Court as “unfortunate,” calling for “consensus.” The US Press Secretary stated: “As a lifelong friend of Israel, President Biden has publicly and privately expressed his views that major democratic changes to be enduring must have as broad a consensus as possible.”

The same day, protests ensued. Thousands of people marched from Tel Aviv to West Jerusalem to demonstrate their opposition to the bill. Al Jazeera reported clashes between police and demonstrators in several towns. On 25 July, BBC reported that at least 24 protesters were arrested.

Issues at Large

First, the long-standing protests against judicial reforms. The protests began on 7 January when Justice Minister Yariv Lenir announced the draft judicial reform bill. The bill was formulated to restrict the Supreme Court’s checks and balances role in Israel. Hundreds of protesters belonging to different sections of society, including the labour unions and the Israel Medical Association, have been protesting against the bill across Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. The anti-government protestors claim that the bill puts Israel’s democracy and the rule of law at stake. The protestors suspect that Netanyahu would take advantage of the bill to override the trials over corruption charges.

Second, controversial judicial reforms. According to the new judicial reform, the Knesset will have the upper hand to override the judgments by the Supreme Court by receiving a majority of 61 votes out of 120 in the Knesset. It is believed that this bill will give the government leverage to be involved more freely in corruption, human rights violations and further introduction of far-right policies. It will also lead to convenient appointments of judges in the Supreme Court. Additionally, the government can change the polarization and partisan issues within the Knesset. Besides, they can control the police and financial institutions.

Third, the government’s response. In March, Netanyahu initially recalled the new judicial reforms following unprecedented general strikes that shut down transportation, universities, restaurants and retailers which began to impact Israel’s economy. However, he did not completely give up; instead, he delayed it until another Knesset session. Since then, there have been widespread protests across the country.

Fourth, the international response. The EU rooted for an inclusive process and voiced out that they are observing “closely and with concern.” The Executive Council of Australian Jewry and the Zionist Federation of Australia issued statements expressing their concerns with the bill. The UK had also raised its apprehensions over the bill. The US has been vary of distressing relations with Netanyahu.

In perspective

First, the dangers ahead for Israel. A democracy is steady when there is separation of powers; executive, legislative and judiciary. With a constitutional crisis, Netanyahu and his far-right government is likely to take an authoritarian route devoid of democratic checks and balances.

Second, the return of political instability. Israel has been going through political instability, followed by repeated elections during the past two years. Since the beginning of 2023, there has been a lull in political instability in the country. However, the new judicial reform is likely to trigger the emergence of a new series of political instability.



Issues in Peace and Conflict This Week: Regional Roundups

Rishika Yadav, Sneha Surendran, Jerry Franklin, Ryan Marcus, Femy Francis, Rashmi Ramesh, Harini Madhusudan, Padmashree Anandan and Akriti Sharma

East and Southeast Asia

North Korea: Russian and Chinese delegations at Pyongyang

On 25 July, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Lavrov, with his delegation, arrived in North Korea to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Victory Day and the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean War. Additionally, the Chinese Communist Party group headed by Politburo member Li Hongzhong joined the visit. The Russian Ministry of Defence stated: "This visit will help strengthen Russian-North Korean military ties and will be an important stage in the development of cooperation between the two countries."

South Korea: Second US submarine arrives in Seoul

On 24 July, a US nuclear-powered submarine, USS Annapolis, arrived in South Korea. This comes after the visit of a nuclear-armed submarine to Busan on 16 July. The submarine's visit follows the "Washington Declaration" signed between the US and South Korea to deter North Korean aggression and narrow the arms gap between the two countries. The South Korean navy stated: "The two countries' navies plan to strengthen the combined defence posture with the arrival of the USS Annapolis, and conduct exchange activities to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the alliance."

Myanmar: Fighting between Rohingya militants and Arakan Army

On 22 July, the Irrawaddy reported a fight between the Arakan Army (AA) and Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) in the Buthidaung Township in the state of Rakhine, resulting in casualties for both sides. The conflict began when ARSA troops entered Mayu Mountains, which fall under the AA territory. The AA stated: "Five ARSA fighters were killed and an outpost was seized. The AA seized weapons. I heard one AA member was killed and two injured."

South Asia

Afghanistan: Increase in casualties due to devastating floods

On 23 July, TOLO News, reported on the statement by the Taliban-led Ministry of State for Natural Disaster Management, Shafiullah Rahimi, on casualties caused due to floods. He stated that the floods in Afghanistan have caused at least 31 fatalities, with 74 people injured and 41 still missing from the last 72 hours in 11 provinces including Maidan Wardak, Kabul, Kunar, Pakista, Khost, Nuristan, Nangarhar, Ghazni, Paktika and Helmand. A resident of Maidan Wardak reported to TOLO News: "12 hours have passed but we don't see anything. The provincial governor arrived but a very weak team was with them. The incident is big but it has not been addressed accordingly."

Bhutan: Seventeen missing after flash floods

On 22 July, Kuensel, a Bhutan-based media, reported that a sudden flash flood in Ungar village resulted in significant loss of lives and property. The disaster struck during heavy rainfall, sweeping away camps, vehicles, and homes of workers and families of Druk Hydro Energy Limited. As of now, six bodies have been recovered; 17 people are still missing. The cause of the flash flood remains unknown. Rescue efforts involving various personnel and

hydropower plant workers are underway.

Central Asia, The Middle East, and Africa

Iraq: Quran desecration in Denmark raises concerns

On 24 July, in Denmark, Anti-Islam protestors stamped on the Quran and set it alight next to an Iraqi flag on the ground. The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that such acts allowed “the virus of extremism and hate.” They also iterated that it poses a real threat to the peaceful coexistence of societies. Additionally, the ministry has asked the EU to “quickly reconsider so-called freedom of expression and right to demonstrate.” Meanwhile, Denmark’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the government wants to “explore” addressing situations where “other countries, cultures and religions are being insulted, and where this could have significant negative consequences for Denmark, not least with regard to security”

Middle East: UK foreign secretary visits Qatar, Jordan and Kuwait

On 26 July, UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly began a three-day visit to Qatar, Jordan and Kuwait. UK hopes that this will emphasize UK’s growing partnership in the region. The visit comes after the UK announced a new Electronic Travel Authorisation Scheme (ETAS) that would benefit the Gulf countries and Jordan. Cleverly also is expected to meet representatives from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Food Programme (WFP) and announce GBP 30 million over three years to assist the refugees.

Sudan: Darfur governor urges the civilians to take up arms

On 21 July, BBC Africa quoted the Al Arabiya report on a renewed call by the Darfur Governor, Minni Arko Minnawi, who has urged the civilians to take hold of arms to defend themselves. The conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese army has reached its fourth month. The conflict has spread across regions that include Khartoum, Omdurman and Bahri. Minnawi addressed the falling administration’s efforts to end the conflict and raised fears about the probability of an all-out civil war amid the ethnic tensions. Heavy airstrikes and the death of 18 RSF fighters were reported in Omdurman and Khartoum.

Mali: US sanctions top military officials

On 24 July, Al Jazeera reported that the US sanctioned Malian Defence Minister Colonel Sadio Camara, Air Force Chief Colonel Alou Boi Diarra, and Deputy Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel Adama Bagaoyoka for the Wagner Group’s activities in the country. Al Jazeera quoted US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stating that the expansion of the Wagner Group in Mali has resulted in a 278 per cent increase in civilian deaths in Mali. Blinken commented: “We’re imposing sanctions on three Malian officials who have coordinated with the Wagner Group to facilitate and expand Wagner’s presence in Mali. Civilian fatalities have surged more than threefold since Wagner forces deployed to Mali in December 2021.”

East African countries: Black Sea Grain Initiative suspension causes food insecurity

On 21 July, Al Jazeera reported that Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative 2022 which permitted the export of Ukrainian agricultural products, has caused speculations on rising consumer prices. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, signed in July 2022, permitted ships carrying fertilisers and agricultural products from three Ukrainian ports to traverse past Russian warships in the Bosphorus Strait. More than 32.8 million tonnes of Ukrainian grains



have been exported following the agreement in 2022. Human rights groups have raised concerns regarding food shortage in East Africa following the Russian withdrawal from the agreement.

Europe and the Americas

Ukraine: Battle continues in Bakhmut

On 24 July, Ukrinform reported on heavy battles continuing in Bakhmut, in the settlements of Klishchiiivka, Andriivka, and Kurdiiumivka. According to Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar, Bakhmut is the “main theatre of action in the east.” She added that Ukrainian forces had advanced in the south up to four square kilometres in the previous week. She stated that in Bakhmut, Russian forces had been trapped with limited manoeuvrability due to Ukrainian forces. According to a Reuters report, Russian troops still hold sizable territory in southern and eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine: Warnings issued over mines in Zaporizhzhia

On 24 July, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that directional anti-personnel mines were observed near Ukraine's Zaporizhzhya Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP) on the outer periphery. The IAEA expressed concern over the presence of explosives on the site, although it clarified that the initial assessment indicated no impact on nuclear safety and security systems.

Belarus: Lukashenko meets Putin

On 24 June, Eurasia Review reported on Russian President Vladimir Putin’s meeting with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. According to the report, Lukashenko was quoted saying that the Wagner group engaged in training Belarus troops were keen to push into Poland across the border. Poland has been moving extra troops towards its border with Belarus since Wagner fighters arrived in Minsk. The meeting comes after Moscow warned that an attack on Belarus would be considered an attack on Russia and that it would use all means to retaliate against the hostility.

Greece: Wildfires and high temperatures continue

On 23 July, firefighters worked all night to put out 82 flames across Greece without the assistance of night-time firefighting planes and helicopters. The most serious fire occurred on the Greek Island of Rhodes. As wildfires raged for the sixth day on the island, 19,000 people were evacuated from various sites. According to the Ministry of Climate Change and Civil Protection, this was “the largest evacuation from a wildfire in the country.” A support station has been set up at Rhodes International Airport for travellers who have misplaced their travel documents. The Meteorological Service predicted that temperatures could be between the low to mid 30 degree Celsius. On 22 July, meteorologists warned Greece about the soaring temperatures that could climb as high as 45 degrees Celsius. Warnings of extremely high new blazes across the country have been issued by emergency and civil protection officials, and people were advised to stay home. The worst-hit areas include Western Attica, along with the Island of Rhodes. Various firefighting planes from neighbouring Turkey, France, and Italy, and more than 200 firefighters from Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria, have been sent in for help.

Russia: Naval exercises in the Black Sea

On 21 July, the Washington Post reported that Russia conducted naval exercises in the Black Sea and attacked an agricultural facility in the port of Odessa, destroying stored grains. The

UN Security Council convened on 21 July to deliberate on Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative. The US ambassador to the UN stated: "The United States has information that the Russian military may expand its targeting of Ukrainian grain facilities to include attacks against civilian shipping," and raised an alert on possible mines in the Black Sea.

Brazil: Lula signs decree against gun ownership

On 21 July, the Brazilian president tightened access to guns by cutting the number of firearms one could own from four to two, complemented by a stricter documentation process. The validity period for gun ownership permits was also shortened to three to five years, from the previous duration of ten years. According to reports, gun ownership boomed during the previous regime of Jair Bolsonaro, with gun manufacturers gaining influence across the country.

About the authors

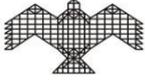
Akriti Sharma and Ankit Singh are PhD Scholars at NIAS. Anu Maria Joseph, Femy Francis and Rishika Yadav are Research Assistants at NIAS. Padmashree Anandhan is a Research Associate at NIAS. Jerry Franklin is a Postgraduate Scholar at Madras Christian College, Chennai. Sandra D Costa is a Postgraduate from Loyola College, Chennai.





About NIAS-International Peace Research Initiative(IPRI)

National Institute of
Advanced Studies



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.

Editor: D. Suba Chandran

Assistant Editor: Anu Maria Joseph

Editorial Team: Dhriti Mukherjee, Ankit Singh, Femy Francis, Akriti Sharma, Rishika Yadad, Padmashree Anandan and Sandra D Costa.