

# Conflict Weekly

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

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## Breaking from the past in Kenyan elections, and a year under the Taliban in Afghanistan

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(Image Source: HumanRightsWatch/AP Photo/Ebrahim Noroozi)

### COVER STORY

Europe: Heatwaves, wildfires, and droughts

## Kenya: William Ruto wins the elections amid scuffle over vote count

### In the news

On 15 August, the Kenyan Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) announced William Ruto's electoral victory to be the fifth President of Kenya. Ruto secured a narrow victory with 50.5 percent of the votes; his opponent Raila Odinga secured 48.85 percent. Even before the results were declared, four IEBC commissioners rejected the results alleging the "opaque nature" of the final outcome. Juliana Cheverea, Vice President of the IEBC distanced the Commission from the results saying: "We cannot take ownership of the results that will be announced because of the opaque nature of how the last phase has been handled". The enraged Odinga supporters protested shouting "No Raila, No Peace". In Kisumu, an Odinga stronghold region, his supporters reacted violently, burning tyres and blocking roads.

On 16 August, Odinga, calling the results "null and void" said: "What we saw yesterday was a travesty and a blatant disregard of the constitution of Kenya". The same day, the newly elected President William Ruto announced: "I want to commit to the people of Kenya that I will build on the foundation that President Kenyatta and I put together and take this country to the next level."

### Issues at large

First, major issues were at stake during the election. The elections were held amid a food and fuel crisis, rising cost of living, severe drought, and concerns over fair and peaceful elections. The election turnout was 64.6 percent, while in 2017 it was 79.51 per cent. According to IEBC, only 40 percent of voters were youth, though three-fourths of the Kenyan population is under 35 years of age. In recent months, inflation has gone up as high as 8.3 percent. Rising youth unemployment and inequalities have caused discontent with the political elites compelling many to abstain from voting. According to the Center for the Study of Democratic Citizenship, McGill University, Kenya has one of the highest rates of voter bribery in the continent. The worst drought in 40 years has devastated the northern region leaving 4.1 million people dependent on aid.

Second, is Kenya's history of electoral violence. Kenya has an established reputation for volatile electoral processes that threaten regional stability. For instance, during the 2007 elections, nearly 1300 people were killed and 600,000 were displaced after allegations of vote rigging led to widespread violence. Following that, Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto were indicted by the International Criminal Court for inciting ethnic violence. However, the charges were dropped later due to a lack of evidence. More recently, in 2017, the supreme court cancelled elections citing electoral irregularities following accusations of fraud by the National Super Alliance party led by Raila Odinga. At least 100 people were killed in the violence that broke out.

Third, is the state of politics in Kenya. The political landscape is marked by weak coalitions, ethnic politics, political interference in state institutions, corruption, and failure of electoral politics. Since independence, Kenyan politics has been dominated by Kenyatta and Odinga "dynasties". In 2018, an informal "handshake" between Kenyatta and Odinga, once major rivals, put an end to their standoff. And this year, Odinga entered the electoral contest with the support of the outgoing President Kenyatta. In contrast, William Ruto, Deputy President since 2013 and once running mate to Kenyatta, was sidelined, resulting in Kenyatta's ruling Jubilee party breaking up. Frustrated, Kenyans see politics as another way to get rich. In 2013,

Kenyatta had an estimated net worth of USD 500 million making him one of the richest people in the country. Not surprisingly, economic issues dominated this year's electoral campaign, a stark departure from the usual deeply polarised ethnic and tribal propaganda.

Four, Kenya in African politics. Despite its electoral politics and violence, the country is seen as an economic hub and anchor of stability in East Africa and is a key partner in the fight against terrorism in the continent. As the third-largest democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenyan elections have implications beyond the national boundaries. In October 2021, Kenya assumed the rotational presidency in UNSC and assumed responsibility to steer multiple peace and security issues in Africa. The country has led peace talks between Rwanda and Congo and has a critical diplomatic role in the conflict in Ethiopia and the issue over GERD.

#### In perspective

First, the scuffle over the results was due to three reasons: the narrow margin of victory, disagreements within the IEBC, and public dissatisfaction with IEBC caused by previous irregularities and poor electoral management.

Second, President William Ruto, on priority, will have to address the economic discontent after the COVID-19 pandemic and, more particularly, tackle the looming food and fuel crisis. Ruto being elected as President also signals a significant change and departure from the domination of Kenyan politics by the Kenyatta and Odinga families.

Three, if the post-election political environment in the country remains stable and trouble-free, it could resume its role as a peace mediator in Africa.

## Afghanistan: One year since the Taliban's takeover

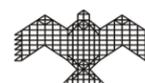
#### In the news

On 15 August, the Taliban's acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, while speaking at a ceremony to mark the one year of their takeover of Afghanistan, urged the international community to cooperate with their government. He said: "We should all work together to take advantage of this opportunity, and the international community should cooperate with Afghanistan and the new government. To prevent the misery that occurred during the past 40 years that no one could stop, so as not repeat it again. Here, every remedy has failed."

Further, he said: "We pledged to the entire world that Afghan soil wouldn't be used against anyone. We have not seen any instances of Afghanistan's soil being used against anyone in the past 12 months. The perpetrators of the attempted launch of some missiles into Uzbekistan were detained. some of them have been killed and others had been put in jail."

#### Issues at large

First, is the deteriorating humanitarian situation. Following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, the humanitarian situation worsened in Afghanistan. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 24.4 million people require humanitarian assistance to survive due to severe drought and an increase in food prices. Meanwhile, over 25 million Afghans are living in abject poverty requiring immediate and urgent attention to address rising food prices. Additionally, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) cited that the conflict has forced more than 700,000 Afghans to leave their homes. The



healthcare system in the country has taken a hit as hospitals face a shortage of medicine and supplies with primary-care facilities being forced to close and medical staff being underpaid. Meanwhile, the Taliban government has been criticized for the imposition of strict rules for women and education policies.

Second, the dampened security situation. After the Taliban came to power, most of the largescale fighting and killings ceased in Afghanistan. However, the Taliban continue to face challenges from two insurgencies one led by the Islamic State's local branch, the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP), and the second comprising the National Resistance Front (NRF) and other groups aligned with the former government.

Third, is the deteriorating economic situation. According to the UN, Afghanistan's economy has contracted an estimated 30 to 40 percent since August 2021; output and incomes have reduced by 20 to 30 percent. Additionally, some prospective studies predict that the poverty rates may climb as high as 97 percent by the end of 2022. The economic situation worsened with the suspension of aid after the Taliban took over. This, along with the sanctions and the freezing of Afghanistan's central bank assets, has sent the economy into a downward spin.

Fourth, is the question of the Taliban's domestic legitimacy. Following the takeover, the Taliban announced a government consisting of hard-liners who were close to the former leader and founder, Mullah Mohammed Omar, while the cabinet was predominantly made up of Pashtun men. Thus, the promises of inclusivity in the government were not upheld, denting the chances of achieving domestic legitimacy. While there has not been any major resistance to the Taliban government, civilians have taken to the streets in protests. In most cases, these protests were held by women in Kabul where they protested against several issues.

Fifth, is the quest for international recognition. The main challenge for the Taliban has been the recognition of its rule. Over the past year, the Taliban has tried to seek international legitimacy at various forums; however, no country has officially recognized the Taliban government yet. While the international community remains hesitant and weary of the Taliban's assurances and promises, the lack of legitimacy has become a hindrance for the country that is grappling with an economic and humanitarian crisis.

#### In perspective

First, is the Taliban's inability to address the humanitarian situation. The humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is set to get worse due to the lack of funds, resources, and solutions to address major issues. Additionally, the Taliban cannot overcome the crisis by itself. With the international community's reluctance to engage, the situation is likely to aggravate.

Second, is the Taliban's capacity to address the threat of IS and other groups. The danger from the IS and other terrorist groups seeking to find operational space in Afghanistan poses a serious challenge for the Taliban. While most of these groups may not be a match for the Taliban, the possibility of Afghanistan becoming a terrorist hub again would place the Taliban under international pressure.

Third, is the Taliban's failure to access the country's frozen funds. The unfreezing of Afghan assets is the most effective way to address the economic crisis in Afghanistan. Although there have been several rounds of talks on unfreezing Afghan funds, it is unlikely that the funds would be released in the next few months. Thus, Afghanistan's economic situation is likely to worsen and slow down economic growth.

Fourth, securing legitimacy and recognition would be a slow process for the Taliban. Given the prevalent hesitancy and scepticism, domestically and internationally, in acknowledging the Taliban government, it is unlikely that they would be recognized as legitimate rulers of Afghanistan anytime soon.

Fifth, the Taliban is here to stay. After one year in power, there is no existential threat to the Taliban government. They have managed to secure their position in Kabul and are likely to continue to enjoy this position. However, the uncertainty lies in the agenda that the Taliban would choose next. Until now, the Taliban have projected themselves to be relatively liberal domestically and internationally. Whether this will change in the coming years remains to be seen.

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## Also, from around the world

By Avishka Ashok, Vijay Anand, Sai Pranav, Akriti Sharma, Abigail Miriam Fernandez, Joel Jacob, Rashmi BR, Anu Maria Joseph, Harini Madhusudan, Rishma Banerjee, Padmashree Anandhan, Sejal Sharma, and Ankit Singh

### East and Southeast Asia

#### Taiwan: China announced new drills after US congressional delegation met President Tsai Ing-wen

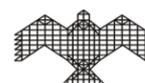
On 15 August, China announced new drills in the Taiwan straits after the US congressional delegation met with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen. The visit comes right after the US Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan and triggered a series of protests from China. In response to the latest protests, the Chinese government has sanctioned seven Taiwanese officials for supporting the secessionist movements and re-emphasized that Taiwan was a part of China. To counter military drills by China, Taiwan has been conducting small-scale annual exercises aimed at repelling an invasion. The Taiwanese Foreign Ministry also rejected the white paper published by China which stressed the “one country, two systems” model.

#### China: Homebuyers boycott mortgage payments as property developers fail to deliver on projects

On 12 August, the Strait Times reported that Chinese homebuyers in cities across the country had boycotted mortgage payments as property developers fail to deliver on projects being cash-strapped and debt-ridden. Homebuyers are unsure about the completion of the properties and if they will be able to move into their property any time soon. According to the report, the issue is acute in almost 100 cities across China and involves over 300 housing projects which have failed to deliver on their promises to the homebuyers.

#### North Korea: To form a deeper tie in bilateral relations with Russia

On 15 August, Putin and North Korea’s supreme leader Kim Jong-un discussed ways to strengthen their bilateral relations on the National Liberation Day of Korea from Japan. To enhance the security and stability of the Korean peninsula, North Korea agreed to send its workers to help with construction activities in the two Russia-supported regions in eastern Ukraine. Russia promised to supply new military technologies as North Korea still has Soviet-era weaponry.



### **Myanmar: Aung San Suu Kyi sentenced to six more years in prison**

On 16 August, Myanmar's court sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi to six more years in prison after convicting her on four extra counts of corruption. The latest verdict in the series of secretive trials against the Nobel laureate takes her total jail term to 17 years and comes as the UN's Special Envoy on Myanmar travelled to the country on 15 August to address the "deteriorating (rights) situation." Suu Kyi was sentenced for charges of misusing funds from a charity to build a house and leasing government-owned land. She was held in solitary confinement at a prison in the capital Naypyitaw and has denied all charges against her.

### **South Asia**

#### **Bangladesh: IMF support talks to begin in October**

On 17 August, the IMF declared Bangladesh "not in crisis." It announced the rollout of support packages to begin after its 2022 annual meetings with the World Bank Group. Hence, the talks are expected to kick off late in October. The IMF also ruled out the possibility of any relations between Bangladesh's record fuel hike to bring parity with global prices and the financial support talks. Bangladesh is preparing for the fight against climate change in a structural manner and is therefore seeking financial support from the IMF through the Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST).

#### **Bangladesh: UN Human Rights chief kept from visiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts**

On 17 August, massive protests took place in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region against the covering up of the true face of the humanitarian condition by the Bangladesh authorities. People and civil society organizations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts claimed that the UN Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet visited Bangladesh but was not allowed by the government to check the human rights violations in their region. The hilly region bordering India and Myanmar allegedly witnesses atrocities like extrajudicial killings, abductions, and torture of women, but the government has turned a blind eye towards them. The UN Chief visited the Cox Bazaar Rohingya refugee camps, but there are no records of her visiting the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

#### **India: Kolkata and New Delhi are among the world's most polluted cities**

On 17 August, a report by the Health Effects Institute's (HEI) State of Global Air Initiative raised concerns as it declared that Delhi and Kolkata are the two most polluted cities when assessed based on particulate matter (PM2.5). The Air Quality and Health in Cities report used data spanning around ten years to determine the global exposure to pollutants in more than 700 cities around the world. The report also emphasized the absence of complete data on low and middle-income countries. While assessing based on exposure to Nitrogen dioxide in the air, Shanghai and Russia assumed the top spots.

#### **Maldives: Largest marine industry expo concluded by NBAM**

On 17 August, the National Boating Association of the Maldives (NBAM) successfully concluded the largest ever marine industry exhibition. With over 35 signatories and 67 participants, the 7th edition of the Maldives Marine Expo was held from 11-13 August 2022 at the Hulhumale Central Park. The expo awards the best goods and services in the industry while also emphasizing capacity-building processes and marine safety training. Starting in 2007, the Maldives Marine Expo is the country's longest-running exhibition related to this industry which aims to promote sustainable growth and unite all stakeholders. It also establishes a standardized platform for marine businesses and stakeholders.

#### **India: Targeted killing in Jammu and Kashmir**

On 16 August, a Kashmiri Pandit man was shot dead by terrorists in Shopian and another man was injured in an apple orchard in the same area. This marks the third killing of a Kashmiri Pandit since October 2021. The police confirmed: “Preliminary investigation revealed that terrorists had fired upon two civilians in an apple orchard at Chotipora area of Shopian district.” Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and political parties condemned the killing.

### **Pakistan: 130 villages submerged after the rise in the Indus River**

On 11 August, about 130 villages came under water and standing crops worth millions of Pakistani rupees were destroyed in the riverine area after the Indus river swelled up across many districts of Sindh. The district administration and irrigation department had made joint efforts and started patrolling along the dyke while flood-fighting material and machinery were made available. Officials said that water would start receding in the river in the districts within two or three days and it did not pose any harm to embankments.

### **Pakistan: Search for militants still on in Swat**

On 10 August, police said that a search operation was being conducted in different areas to arrest militants who opened fire at a police party two days ago in the mountainous area bordering Swat and Dir districts. Following the incident, the district police counterterrorism department and Elite Force reached the spot and extended the search operation to adjoining areas. A video circulating on social media purportedly shows a man claiming to be a Taliban militant interviewing DSP Khan and two officers, who as per unverified claims, belonged to Pakistan Army.

### **Pakistan: Two police officers on polio duty killed in Tank**

On 16 August, two police officers providing security to polio workers were killed after “unknown terrorists” opened fire on them in Tank, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Following the incident, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said, “Police force has been rendering unmatched sacrifices against terrorism,” the report quoted the Prime minister as saying, adding that he expressed the commitment to eliminate the “menace of terrorism.”

### **Central Asia, Middle East and Africa**

#### **Azerbaijan- Armenia: No tangible results in relations so far, says President Aliyev**

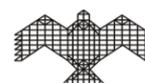
On 15 August, Azerbaijan’s President Ilham Aliyev said, “Even though certain steps towards the normalization of Azerbaijan-Armenia relations were taken in the first six months of this year, unfortunately, there are no tangible results yet. Although a year and eight months have passed since the Patriotic War, unfortunately, Armenia has yet to fulfil the obligations it was forced to take upon itself.” Further, he said that the first meeting of working groups on delimitation was a positive development, however, adding this was only possible because of Azerbaijan’s efforts.

#### **Yemen: UN Envoy briefs the UNSC**

On 15 August, the UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg briefed the UN Security Council on the war and the current situation in the country. He said that the Taiz blockade by the Houthis was a matter of concern and the opening of the roads to the city will be at the forefront of his efforts. He reiterated that despite the “several proposals with different sets of roads and sequencing options” presented to the parties of the conflict, there was no progress.

#### **Syria: Turkish air strikes kill at least 25**

On 16 August, Turkey launched air strikes and artillery bombardment of the Kurdish-controlled Kobane town in northern Syria. It is estimated that at least 25 people were killed in the incident, however, it is unknown if the targets were the Assad regime forces or the Kurdish YPG militia.



It is also unknown if all the 25 killed were soldiers. The YPG retaliated with a mortar attack on a Turkish military border post in the Sanliurfa province that killed one soldier and injured four more. This retaliation prompted more firing from the Turkish side in Kobane.

### Syria: Israeli strikes near Damascus

On 14 August, Israel carried out multiple missile attacks near the capital Damascus and the coastal city Tartous. The Syrian air defence forces responded and counter-targeted some incoming missiles, in which three Syrian soldiers died. The missiles striking near Damascus used Lebanese air space and were condemned by the Lebanese Foreign Ministry in a statement they issued: “(the) consequences of this aggressive behaviour and the continuous violation of Lebanese sovereignty is a flagrant breach of international law and treaties” which would force Lebanon to file a complaint with the UN Security Council.

### Sierra Leone: Anti-government protests; dozens including six police officers killed

On 11 August, dozens of civilians including six police officers were killed in anti-government protests. Following the violence, a nationwide curfew was imposed. About 130 people have been arrested. The protesters were blocking roads, throwing rocks, and burning tyres perpetuating violence. Armed officers patrolled the streets using tear gas to contain the violence. Popular demonstrations were taking place in Freetown, Makeni, and Kamakwie regions. Longstanding tensions with the ruling government were exacerbated by the rising cost of living, corruption, and police brutality. The protesters demanded the removal of President Julius Maada Bio. The President responded: “Of course what happened was definitely not a protest, it was terrorism at the highest. We have a few Sierra Leoneans who live in the diaspora who have threatened to unleash terror in Sierra Leone.” Vice President Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh said: “lives of both policemen and civilians were lost,” without giving further details. Meanwhile, ECOWAS condemned the violence and called for “all to obey law and order and for the perpetrators of the violence to be identified and brought before the law.”

### Mali: France ends nine-year deployment

On 16 August, France announced the final exit of its troops from Operation Barkhane in Mali, ending a nine-year bilateral military cooperation. In a statement by the French military: “Today at 1 pm Paris time [11:00 GMT] the final contingent of the Barkhane forces still on Malian territory crossed the border between Mali and Niger.” On 15 August French Presidency said: “France remains engaged in the (wider) Sahel (region), in the Gulf of Guinea, and the Lake Chad region with all partners committed to stability and the fight against terrorism.” In 2013, France initially intervened in the country at the request of Malian authorities under Operation Serval, to fight Tuareg separatists. The withdrawal comes after failed relations between Paris and Bamako, which currently maintains close relations with Russia.

### Mali: Germany suspends its operations

On 12 August, Germany suspended its operations in Mali after the military government denied flyover rights to a United Nations peacekeeping mission. A German defence ministry spokesperson said: “The Malian government has once again refused to give flyover rights to a flight planned for today.” Germany has decided to “suspend until further notice the operations of our reconnaissance forces and CH-53 transport flights,” he added. In response, the deputy chairman of the transitional government’s defence committee said: “I applaud this decision! We have long wished that the security of our territory in the air would be guaranteed exclusively by the Malian armed forces! We’ve always said that, and that’s what we wanted.” However Malian civil society groups expressed disappointment over the decision. Germany has been engaging with the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), a peacekeeping force deployed after the Tuareg rebellion of 2012. Mali, which

has experienced three military coups since 2012, is considered extremely unstable. Since the May 2021 coup, the transitional military government maintains close relations with Russia.

#### **Sudan: 80 civilians killed in ethnic violence**

On 16 August, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) expressed concern that in July alone at least 80 civilians were killed in Eastern Equatoria in South Sudan due to ethnic clashes in Kapoeta, though it is not clear what triggered the clashes. The OCHA says more than 17,500 people were displaced due to the violence. Rising food insecurity, inter-communal violence, conflict, and disease outbreaks worsened the situation.

#### **DRC and Rwanda: Blinken visit raises concerns over M23 rebels**

On 10 August, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking at Kinshasa, the Congolese capital, raised concerns over the reports of Rwanda providing support to the rebels in DRC. He said: “All countries have to respect their neighbours’ territorial integrity. Any entry of foreign forces into the DRC must be done transparently and with the consent of the DRC.” The following day, Blinken arrived in Rwanda for talks on alleged cooperation with the M23 rebels operating in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo. He is also expected to put pressure on the authorities for the release of Paul Rusesabagina, Oscar-nominated for the film *Hotel Rwanda*, whom the US government says is “wrongfully detained in Rwanda.” He was sentenced to 25 years in prison on terrorism charges last year. The US State Department said: “Blinken will meet Rwandan leaders and civil society members on a range of key issues.” After talks with President Paul Kagame, Blinken expressed concerns over the human rights issues in the country. President Kagame replied: “No worries...there are things that just don't work like that here!!” The M23 rebels are controlling parts of North Kivu province in eastern DRC.

#### Europe and the Americas

##### **Russia: Zelensky aide wants to destroy Europe’s longest bridge against Moscow’s war efforts**

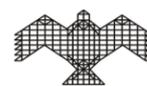
On 16 August, Mikhail Podolyak, an aide to Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky, demanded the destruction of Russia’s Crimean Bridge. He said, “It’s an illegal construction and the main gateway to supply the Russian army in Crimea.” The bridge forms a direct road and rail connection with the region that could previously be reached only by sea or air from Russia and is predominantly used for civilian traffic. It was constructed after Crimea broke away from Ukraine. Podolyak is the third Ukrainian official to mention Kyiv’s intention to attack infrastructures as part of their counterstrategy and hints at the possibility of a series of acts of sabotage being planned in Crimea.

##### **Russia: Citizens scramble for visas in fear of EU bans**

On 16 August, Finland announced that it would reduce the number of visas issued to Russians by 90 percent starting September 2022. Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia have recently announced restrictions on tourist visas for Russians. The four countries share land borders with Russia and have reported a steep increase in the numbers of Russians using their airports to transit further into the EU as a workaround to the EU ban on Russian airlines. This is also in the context of the Ukrainian leader Zelensky’s statement to restrict the Russian citizens from travelling regardless of their stance on the War.

##### **Ukraine: Attacks on bridges to Kherson cut off replenishments to Russian troops**

On 16 August, Kyiv Post reported that Ukraine’s forces had attacked the Antonovsky bridge for the second time with HIMARS. They also attacked two other bridges that connect the Russia-occupied Kherson to the west of the Dnieper river. Russia’s bridge-repair tools were also destroyed in the strike. These bridges, especially the Antonovsky bridge, are the main routes that Russia had been using to transport supplies, arms, and ammunition to its troops in



Kherson. Because of the destabilization of the bridge, thousands of Russia's troops have been trapped and cut off in the occupied parts of Kherson.

### Europe: Germany against visa ban for Russian tourists

On 16 August, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz refused the EU-wide call to ban the issuance of tourist visas to Russians. He said: "This is not the war of the Russian people. It is Putin's war and we have to be very clear on that topic." Scholz also mentioned that such a move will be unfair to the people in Russia who are against the current regime and the invasion of Ukraine. However, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland, and the Czech Republic supported the ban and have begun the process of cutting down the number of visas issued to Russians. They claim that Russian tourists are using their countries as transit points to travel to the rest of Europe.

### Greece: Lost Syrian migrants on the Evros river located on an unnamed island

On 17 August, The Guardian reported that the group of missing migrants who had previously been denied by both Greece and Turkey have finally been located on an unnamed islet between the two countries. They have been granted temporary accommodation by Greece. The migrants are from Syria and said that they arrived on the island on 14 July. EU policy director at the International Rescue Committee, Niamh Nic Carthaigh said that the "political game of gross irresponsibility" between Turkey and Greece was costing people their lives. While Turkey has not commented on the issue, Greece claimed that they could not help as the islet was out of their jurisdiction and in Turkish waters.

### Poland: 100 tonnes of dead fish, cause unknown

On 12 August, Poland deployed police, firefighters, and soldiers to tackle the growing numbers of dead fish in the Oder River. So far, 100 tonnes of fish hauled after an unknown substance have been triggering their death since the end of July. A water sample from the Oder has been tested for Mesitylene, Mercury, heavy metals, and other toxins, but other than high levels of salinity and oxygen, nothing conclusive has been revealed so far. The polluted water has reached the Lower Oder, and unless managed at the earliest, will have grave ecological implications on the biodiversity of the river. Poland's government has been criticized for its delay in responding to multiple early warnings.

### The US: President Biden signs climate bill into law

On 16 August, President Joe Biden approved a USD 700 billion package, called the Inflation Reduction Act, to fight the consequences of climate change, and rising healthcare costs. An investment of USD 375 billion from the package to climate change is projected to lower emissions by up to 44 percent by 2030. However, climate spending will not be facilitated for two more years. Furthermore, the bill allows the government to put a cap on some prescription medicines under its Medicare health insurance programme for the elderly. The bill also sets aside USD 46 billion for recruiting tax agents. This bill caused an uproar between the Democrats and the Republicans, as the former called it a "historic" moment while the latter debated about the dysfunctionality of the bill as it would lead to higher taxes.

### The US: NASA prepares a new rocket for its first launch on the moon

On 17 August, the Space Launch System (SLS) was moved to the Kennedy Space Centre ahead of the tentative lift-off on 29 August. The SLS is a part of NASA's new three-part Artemis program which plans to make a crewed launch in 2024 and the first landing in 2025. The first test of the SLS will be without a crew on board, while the agency plans to send a woman to space in its third mission. The primary scope of the first mission is to check the viability of the crew capsule, Orion, and monitor its entry back into the Earth's atmosphere. Along with NASA, the European Space Agency has contributed to the development of the SLS.

### **The US: Salman Rushdie's attacker charged with attempted murder**

On 14 August, Hadi Matar, the man suspected of stabbing writer Salman Rushdie, was remanded to custody without bail after pleading not guilty. Matar is accused of attacking Rushdie and an interviewer on stage at an event held by a local educational centre. The attack left Rushdie in a critical condition while the interviewer, Henry Reese, suffered a minor head injury. Rushdie was stabbed at least ten times, causing immense internal injury and on a ventilator, unable to speak, and at risk of losing an eye. The motive of the attack is yet to be confirmed by the police.

### **Mexico: New security policy in the fight against drugs brings 'terrorist attacks in cities**

On 14 August, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, current President of Mexico tried to bypass the Mexican congress in handing over the control of the national guard to the army as the country witnessed chaos across cities. Armed men belonging to various drug cartels carried out attacks against convenience stores and gas stations, resulting in several civilian deaths. Recently, many drug lords had been arrested following the security policy on the war on drugs in Mexico. Obrador, in his election manifesto, promised to keep off the army from internal security issues. The arrest of various drug lords through the latest police action has however fired back leading to drug cartels trying to terrorize the masses and imposing their control in major cities.

### **Ecuador: Deadly explosion claims civilian lives; declaration of war against the state**

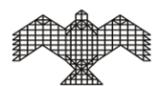
On 15 August, a deadly blast took place in Guayaquil, Ecuador's most populous city and an important trade hub. Eight houses and two cars were destroyed in the early morning blast, according to the National Risk and Emergency Management Service. The Andean country, which is used as a cocaine smuggling route from neighbouring Peru and Colombia, has seen a sharp rise in murders and gang-related crime recently. A state of emergency has been declared in Guayaquil, the fourth emergency since October last year because of inter-gang violence. Tensions between rival drug gangs have reached into Ecuador's prisons, where clashes and massacres have resulted in at least 400 deaths since February 2021.

### **Nicaragua: Catholics participate in large-scale 'mass' celebration**

On 15 August, a Nicaraguan Catholic priest from a northern parish was detained after celebrating Mass. The incident happened after Nicaraguan Catholics gathered for a large-scale mass in the capital, Managua, under heavy police presence after a religious procession was prohibited by the government. In early August, Ortega's government closed seven radio stations owned by the church and announced an investigation into Bishop Rolando Alvarez, who has been a vocal critic of Ortega and promoting hate and inciting violence. Ortega has maintained the movement was a coup attempt carried out with foreign backing and support from the Catholic church. Nicaragua's Catholic Church has previously acted as a mediator between the government and the opponents, but relations have deteriorated since a violent crackdown against anti-Ortega protests in 2018.

### **About the authors**

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## COVER STORY

# Europe: Heatwaves, wildfires, and droughts

Padmashree Anandhan

### **Recent developments**

On 13 August, UK's Environmental Agency issued an "amber heat warning" expecting the extreme temperature and heatwaves to continue in Southern UK and a draught warning till next year. As per the Meteorological office report, the temperatures ranged from 34°C to 40°C and drought was declared in eight zones of England.

On 14 August, the European union's fire monitoring service reported the persisting heatwaves and absence of rainfall as a result of climate change that has led to the spread of wildfires across Europe. France, the UK, Spain, Romania, and Portugal have recorded the highest incidences of wildfires, drought, and flooding. According to the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) spokesperson: "The situation in terms of drought and extremely high temperatures has affected all of Europe this year and the overall situation in the region is worrying, while we are still in the middle of the fire season."

On 16 August, Spain's ministry for the Ecological Transition reported record-high temperatures in Spain since 1961; the temperature was more than 44°C while the average was 25.6°C, an increase of 2.7°C from 1981 to 2010. In response, the government installed climate shelters in libraries, sports centres, museums, and schools mainly to help the old, children, and people with chronic diseases. In terms of forest fires, close to 265,000 hectares have been destroyed, for which the government signed a decree to propose plans to control such fires.

The continuing heatwaves, wildfires, and extreme temperatures have led to drought conditions in many places including drying of major river basins such as the Po River in Italy, the Rhine River in Germany, and water shortages in Spain, Italy, France, and the Netherlands. It has disrupted ship movements and affected the livelihoods of close to 30 percent of the population living in the Po River. According to European Commission, the drying up of the Po River has severely damaged agriculture, coastal zones, and livestock.

On 18 August, The Washington Post reported on the melting of European glaciers. The Alps, which is a source of many rivers, providing 90 percent of water to lowland Europe was observed to be declining. According to the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research, spokesperson: "The combined heat and lack of precipitation have put the glaciers in a state that is unprecedented." As per satellite data, during the heatwaves in June the temperature rose to 10°C shrinking several glaciers and thinning snow cover.

### **How have weather anomalies continued in Europe?**

When it comes to 20th-century Europe, extreme weather conditions are nothing new. It started in 1920 with dry autumn and winter which affected the water supply, agriculture, and livestock farming. It later developed into wildfires, severe drought, and dry hazards in England, the Czech Republic, and parts of central Europe. This phenomenon continued through the summers of 2003, 2010, and 2015. Later, the rise in global temperatures, soil moisture deficit, and increase in greenhouse gases (GHGs) turned hot summers a regular feature in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2022. The first severe heatwave which began in 2003 recorded 35°C to 40°C according to the UNEP data. The anticyclone weather in western Europe blocked the "rain-bearing depressions" that enter the Atlantic Ocean resulting in hot air across the Mediterranean, western, central, and parts of southern Europe. It impacted agricultural production, melted the Alpine glaciers by up to 10 percent, and increased energy

demands. After 2003, the temperature peaked again in 2015, when the range increased from 35°C to 36.7°C, with 39.7°C marking the highest in Paris. According to the American Meteorological Society report, UK's cold winters, extreme sun, cyclone movement, tidal flooding, and drought impacted the snow accumulation in the US, Arctic Sea, and wildfires in Alaska. It found that such weather conditions were not just due to climate change, but a result of internal climate variations and cyclone activity that is human-induced. After 2015, this year has been a landmark year for continued heatwaves, rising temperatures, increased wildfires, and droughts.

### **How widespread are the anomalies?**

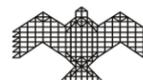
First, extreme heat temperatures have prevailed across Europe without exemption. Since 2003, the heatwaves have occurred between July and August. The hottest recorded temperature of 41.5°C on 11 August in 2003 was felt across western Europe (France, Spain, Germany, and Italy), extending into central Europe (western Czech Republic, Hungary, and southern Romania) and a high concentration in the Mediterranean region. In 2015, the heatwaves extended all the way to eastern Europe, with high temperatures recorded in Spain, France, Germany, and Switzerland between 40°C- 44°C. Central Europe has continued to experience temperature extremities due to internal variability factors as noted in the American Met report. Currently, according to the Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Service, the heatwave is concentrated in the western region of the Mediterranean and is expected to move further towards France reflecting high levels of temperature and ozone pollution.

Second, forests, similar to oceans, are crucial for rejuvenating the atmosphere and keeping a check on the levels of toxic substances. When the amount of GHGs increase, unchecked human activities, and climate variations lead to forest fires. The EU strategy on adaptation to climate change recognized climate variations as the risk factor for forest fires in Europe. According to EEAs data, the fires in southern Europe (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) except Portugal show a decreased trend. Coinciding with the heatwaves, extreme weather, and drought, more wildfires were recorded in 2018 in central and northern Europe, especially Sweden. The Canadian Fire Weather Index (FWI) found in its assessment an increased "meteorological fire danger" for western-central European countries with less risk for north-eastern and northern European countries. Portugal, Spain, France, and Turkey remain in the "highest absolute fire danger" category; principally, Spain and France have been experiencing the highest record of wildfires since 2005. Modelling studies show that the EUMED5 (Europe Mediterranean) countries are likely to see their wildfires double when the global temperature increases by another 3°C.

Third, droughts are ranked the second most life-threatening disaster after floods. For Europe, which is experiencing heatwaves, wildfires, and flash floods, droughts are more damaging and have cost the economy 621 million euros between 1950 and 2014. Two decades earlier, the Mediterranean and the Carpathian regions were regarded as drought-prone. However, with similar heatwaves in central Europe since 2015 and particularly in 2019, drought conditions have been prevalent in Poland, eastern Germany, and the Czech Republic and covering all of central Europe. The impact of the droughts can be seen across southern and central Europe. High temperatures and evapotranspiration have turned the "rainfall deficit" regions dry, crippling them with "temperature dominated drought risks" over two decades.

### **What causes the extreme heat waves?**

Heatwaves and rising temperatures are a result of increased human activities and rising global temperatures. However, high concentrations of carbon dioxide gases, flow of jet streams



where the hot air from Africa, circulation of the atmosphere and the ocean is attributed to Europe.

No two heatwaves are the same and they also differ in temperatures due to “upper-level low-pressure air” called the “cutoff low” caused by the cut-off from the westerly winds of the mid-latitude jet stream that circles the planet at high altitudes. Low-pressure zones tend to draw air toward them. In this case, the low-pressure zone has been steadily drawing air from North Africa toward it and pumping hot air northward into Europe. A study published in *Nature* keeping Europe as the centre of heatwave hotspots found increased occurrences of double jet streams since 2003, the same year when the heatwaves began. Observational and model-based studies have discovered the cause behind the rise in temperatures to be “blocking anticyclones,” which act as a high-pressure system creating a double-jet stream. Such flows of double jets streams are expected to become more common when zonal flows are weakened under Arctic amplification.

Offering another view, a recent study by the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute and the Ocean and Earth Science, University of Southampton (UK), using a “high-resolution climate model,” found that anomalies in the ocean temperature along with atmospheric variation and disturbances in the sea ice resulted in the 2015 heatwaves in Europe.

### **What lies ahead for Europe?**

Central and southern parts of Europe are highly vulnerable to heatwaves, wildfires, and drought, while northern and northeastern parts are prone to wildfires. The Mediterranean region, especially the EUMED5 countries, is like to be the most impacted by reviewing the data of the last two decades. Hence more efforts are required to maintain the temperatures in the Mediterranean region to keep the weather, wind pressure, and cyclonic activities in check. The focus needs to be on shifting conservatory measures and climate actions toward the oceans and marine biodiversity for countries that are prone to immediate weather anomalies.

# Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

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

11 August 2022, Vol.3, No.19

**Precarious ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh, fresh rounds of violence in Gaza, and the new US bill supporting climate change**

Abigail Miriam Fernandez, Lavanya Ravi, and Vijay Anand Panigrahi



Map indicating the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Image Source: Shutterstock/Nemanja Cosovic)

**COVER STORY**  
**Crisis in Sri Lanka:**  
**100 Days of People's Protest: What's Next**

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4 August 2022, Vol.3, No.18

**Zawahiri's killing, Pope's apology to the indigenous people in Canada, Iraq's political crisis, and Senegal's disputed elections**

Abigail Miriam Fernandez, Avishka Ashok, Rashmi Ramesh and Anu Maria Joseph



Al Qaeda leader and Osama bin Laden's successor Ayman al-Zawahiri was killed in a US drone strike in Kabul, Afghanistan. (Image Source: Reuters/BBC)

**COVER STORY**  
**Myanmar Military: Annihilation as a Domination Strategy**

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**Ukraine grain deal, the Monkeypox emergency, and the US wildfires**

Padmashree Anandhan, Emmanuel Royan, and Rashmi Ramesh



The EU will require to speed its clean energy transition to phase out from Russian fossil fuels. (Image Source: cc.europa.eu)

**COVER STORY**  
**Killing Roe will hurt the US Soft Power**

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# Conflict Weekly

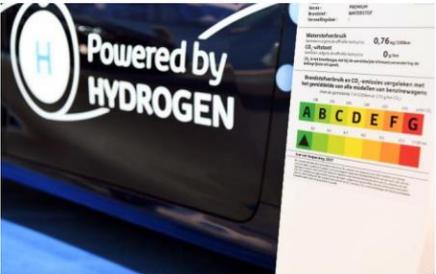
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**Russia's gas warning to Europe, and Sudan's intra-tribal clashes**

Sourina Bej and Apoorva Sudhakar



The EU will require to speed its clean energy transition to phase out from Russian fossil fuels. (Image Source: cc.europa.eu)

**Europe: Amid fears of more cuts, Russia's Nord Stream I resumes gas supplies**

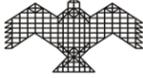
*In the news*  
 On 21 July, the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline resumed its gas supplies early morning after being closed for maintenance work for ten days, reported the Deutsche Welle. On 20 July, the European Commission published its emergency plans to reduce gas dependency on Russia to avoid a shortage during the winter months. The EU Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said that Russia was "using energy as a weapon" and that all members should voluntarily seek to reduce demand by 15 per cent between August 2022 and April 2023.

On 19 July, Russian President Vladimir Putin said: "the flow of Russian natural gas to European customers has dwindled due to the West's own fault and warned that it could

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

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 research 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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