

Conflict Weekly

An initiative by NIAS-IPRI and KAS India Office

A brief review of conflict and peace processes across the world

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Violence in Baghdad and Renewed fighting in Ethiopia

Rashmi Ramesh and Anu Maria Joseph

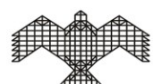


Violence broke out in Baghdad following an announcement from the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr on withdrawal from politics. (Image Source: BBC/EPA)

SPECIAL

Report Review

Drought in Europe, August 2022



Iraq: Al-Sadr Withdraws, Protests intensify

In the news

On 29 August, the Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr announced his withdrawal from politics and confirmed that all institutions linked to the Sadrist Movement would be shut down. The announcement resulted in Sadr's supporters storming the heavily fortified Green Zone and the Presidential Palace in Baghdad. The Sadrist Movement's military wing Saraya al-Salam (the Peace Brigade) reportedly fired rocket-propelled grenades and shot at the security forces and rival Shia groups using machine guns. Al-Sadr announced a hunger strike after his withdrawal and said that he would continue while the use of force by his supporters persisted.

On 30 August, al-Sadr addressed his supporters through a televised speech and asked them to end their protests. He said that the protest has "...lost its peaceful character...and the spilling of Iraqi blood is forbidden. There are uncontrolled militias, yes, but that does not mean the Sadrist Movement should also be uncontrolled." Following the 60-minute deadline given by al-Sadr, the protests subsided, and there was relative calm in Baghdad.

Issues at large

First, the Sadrist movement. Muqtada al-Sadr a Shia scholar, cleric, and militia leader founded the Sadrist Movement after Saddam Hussein's fall. He is a populist leader, drawing his support base from the working class and poorer sections of Baghdad and southern Iraq. A nationalist movement by origin, the Sadrist movement gained its popularity by offering to disentangle Iraq from American influence, from Iran's strong influence in political matters, and also separating Iran from the pro-Iran Shia factions.

Second, the political deadlock and instability. The Sadrist movement won 74 seats in the October 2021 elections, emerging as the largest faction in the 329-seat Parliament. He failed to secure a two-thirds majority and was unable to form the government, paving the way for a political deadlock. After nearly eight months of failing to form the government, al-Sadr made his 74 legislators resign but warned of political pressure through possible mass demonstrations in support of his candidature. The protests now have prevented the parliament from convening and choosing the Prime Minister and President.

Third, the political situation since the war. The post-2003 political landscape of Iraq has been dominated by sectarian competition and rivalry between the Shias and Sunnis, with the increasing Shia-centric rebuilding. Political instability has been a recurring problem in the country, given the presence of numerous factions and their militias, rendering the Parliament without a majority for one political entity. Clearly, the 2005 constitution failed to create a representative and functioning government. The 2010 political deadlock that lasted for 290 days was the longest prior to the current deadlock. It also cemented Shia dominance in Iraqi politics and paved the way for more Iranian influence, as the majority of Sunni leaders and voters boycotted the election process. The massive protests in 2019 also have roots in political instability and its consequences.

In perspective

First, withdrawal as a last resort and pressure tactic. The Sadrists' withdrawal from the Parliament, the threat of grouping the supporters against the rival Shia factions, the demonstrations and finally al-Sadr's withdrawal from politics are classic case of pressure tactics in place. The two-day deadly violence and subsequent end of protests following his televised address was a showcase of his command over the population that supports him.

His move paid off when the Iraqi President Barham Saleh in his speech on 30 August, favoured a fresh election to form a government.

Second, fallout of the crisis. The current crisis threatens some of the progress achieved after the war and the fight against the Islamic State. Despite the relative calm in Baghdad, the existing tensions can quickly escalate in case of failure to reach an acceptable decision through a dialogue. The intra-Shiite power struggle is at its peak in Iraq and has a profound impact on Iran, as a Shia majority state. The latter trains and supports militias and politically supports the Coordination Framework, the Sadrist Movements' rival Shia coalition.

Third, the political crisis in the region. Political deadlocks, inability to form stable governments and demand for reforms have been a persistent challenge in the Middle East. Israel is headed towards the fifth election in a span of four years after the Parliament was dissolved following the collapse of the coalition government headed by Prime Minister Neftali Bennett. Currently, Yair Lapid is the caretaker Prime Minister until the elections are scheduled to be held in October. Lebanon is in the midst of a serious political and economic crisis, with the government formation process still being a point of disagreement between Prime Minister Najib Mikati and President Michael Aoun. A section of the population in Palestine is rallying, demanding political reforms and a formation of a functioning cabinet, ending the one-man presidential rule by Mahmoud Abbas. With Iraq's crisis escalating, the region faces great challenges

Ethiopia: Renewed fighting in Tigray, ending five months of ceasefire

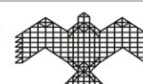
In the news

On 24 August, fighting between Tigray rebels and Ethiopian federal forces erupted around the town of Kobo, ending a months-long ceasefire. The rebel group, the TPLF, accused the government forces and their allies of launching a "large scale" offensive toward southern Tigray. A TPLF spokesperson said: "...they (the government forces) launched the offensive early this morning around 5 am local time. We are defending our positions." Whereas the government accused the TPLF of striking first. The Government Communication Service said in a statement: "...ignoring all of the peace alternatives presented by the government, the terrorist group TPLF armed group continued its recent provocations and launched an attack this morning at 5 am (00200 GMT)."

On 29 August, BBC reported, that the Tigrayan forces seized the Amhara town of Kobo on 27 August after pushing southwards near the border. UN chief Antonio Guterres said he was "deeply shocked" by the renewed fighting and called for an "immediate cessation of hostilities and for the resumption of peace talks." The head of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, appealed for a "de-escalation" and restoring "talks to seek a peaceful solution." A US State Department spokesperson said that the US has urged both sides "to redouble efforts to advance talks to achieve a durable ceasefire."

Issues at large

First, the failing ceasefire and peace process. In March, the Ethiopian government declared a unilateral humanitarian truce which eased the fighting. In June, the Ethiopian government called for a formal Tigray ceasefire agreement for the resumption of basic services reaching war-torn areas. However, the government wanted the African Union envoy to lead the peace talks, but the TPLF preferred former Kenyan president Uhuru Kenyatta as a mediator, which ended in no further developments. The new fight erupted and resumed hostilities, torpedoing a five-month ceasefire and peace efforts.



Second, a brief background to the conflict in Tigray. The roots of the conflict can be traced to September 2020, when the federal government postponed the elections, in which the Tigray leaders saw Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's attempt to centralize power and destroy Ethiopia's federal system. In September, TPLF defied the central government to hold its own regional elections. In October, the rift grew after Abiy's government suspended funding and cut ties with Tigray. In November, the central government launched a military offensive under "law enforcement operations" after the authorities accused Tigray forces of attacking a military camp and attempting to loot military assets. Eventually, the tensions evolved into a full-fledged conflict, spreading to neighbouring regions of Amhara, Oromo and Afar. Thousands were killed, nearly two million fled their homes, and seven million were facing "famine like conditions."

Third, major actors. The Tigray people's Liberation Front (TPLF) was a dominant force in the Ethiopian coalition government until 2018, though Tigrayans constituted only six per cent of the total population. The discontent among the majority ethnic groups, the Oromo and Amhara, led to a popular uprising and the elevation of an Oromia leader, Abiy Ahmed, who is the founder of the prosperity party. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, a Nobel Peace Prize winner failed in handling the Tigray rebels. Further, his regime launched a full-scale attack on Tigray and committed human rights atrocities on the Tigray people. Abiy and his policies gradually lost support from his own community leading to an alliance between TPLF and Oromo Liberation Army. The Ethiopian defence forces, Amhara Special Forces and allied militia on one side and the TPLF and Oromo Liberation Army on the other side engaged in the conflict. Also fighting on the government side were troops from Eritrea, whose leader Isaias Afwerki is close to Abiy Ahmed and a sworn enemy to TPLF.

In perspective

First, the Tigray rebels and the government forces have disagreed continuously and blamed each other for instigating the conflict. This led to a lack of progress toward peace negotiations and a volatile truce finally led to the resumption of fighting.

Second, the UN World Food Programme said the previous week that about half the population of Tigray that suffers from lack of food and rate of malnutrition "skyrocketed". As the humanitarian truce appears to be at an end, the relapse into fighting is likely to have a severe impact on the humanitarian situation and the reach of aid in Tigray.

Third, a joint mediation under multiple external actors including the African Union, Kenya's government, the UN and other international bodies and powers, is important to discuss their disagreements and avoid further escalation of tensions.

Also, from around the world

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

East and Southeast Asia

China: Police authorities arrest 234 people over the banking scandal

On 29 August, the police authorities of Xuchang village announced that they had arrested 234 people for their involvement in the banking scandal which restricted thousands from withdrawing their deposits and led to mass protests. The police further explained that the authorities were making significant progress in the investigation and the recovery of stolen funds was ongoing. According to the statement by the village's police, "A criminal gang illegally controlled four village and town banks and was suspected of committing a series of serious crimes." On the same day, the Henan Banking and Insurance Regulator announced that it would start repaying individuals who had deposited 4,00,000 and 5,00,000 yuan.

China: Hong Kong Senior Justice rejects Jimmy Lai's journalistic privilege

On 30 August, senior Justice Wilson Chan involved in cases relating to the National Security Law announced that Apple Daily's former chief Jimmy Lai's phones would be searched on the grounds of national security and he would not be protected by journalistic privilege. Lai's team of lawyers had initially said that the phones would not be subject to investigation under the journalistic privilege, which is recognized by case law in Hong Kong. However, the police applied for a search warrant in July under the National Security Law. Justice Chan allowed the search and said: "Press freedom simply does not equate (to) any blanket prohibition against the seizure, production or disclosure of journalistic materials."

China: Extreme temperatures result in the drying of river beds and basins

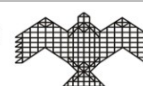
On 29 August, the Asahi Shimbun reported that China is battling the hottest ever heat wave and that the temperatures in the country had crossed 40 degrees Celsius in the middle and downstream areas of the Yangtze River. The extreme heat had resulted in serious drying up of river beds and basins while also affecting the hydropower generation in the country. According to the locals, the country had previously witnessed high temperatures. However, the high temperatures would last for two or three days, unlike this year when it has lasted for more than a month.

Taiwan: China rejects drone harassment complaints

On 29 August, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian responded to Taiwan's complaints of repeated harassment by Chinese drones and said that China was flying them in its own territory. China is also being accused of erasing the imaginary median line that separates Taiwan and China in the Taiwan Strait. The People's Republic of China never recognized the line but unofficially maintained it by not crossing the line. However, since US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, China has increased the pressure on Taiwan by repeated military drills around the island. Taiwan's Foreign Ministry also responded to China's rejection of the complaints and said: "There is an ancient Chinese teaching that 'uninvited people are called thieves'. Whether it is breaking through the door or peeping from the air, the people of Taiwan do not welcome such thieves."

Taiwan: Warning shots fired at a Chinese drone

On 30th August, the Taiwan military fired at a Chinese drone hovering around Erdan islet, an offshore islet, to warn China. The President of the Republic of China, Tsai Ing-wen said: "We



will not provoke disputes, and we will exercise self-restraint, but it does not mean that we will not counter.” This is the first instance that Taiwan responded, and after the warning shots were fired, the drone flew back to China. China rejected Taiwan’s remarks as “nothing to make a fuss about.” Previously, Taiwan has repeatedly protested about China’s military exercises around the Kinmen islands, a Taiwanese territory.

Myanmar: Junta troops retaliated

On 25 August, the Myanmar troops set ablaze hundreds of houses and took 60 villagers as hostages in Kyunhla Township, Kantbalu District of Sagaing Region. This comes as a response to resistance forces’ killing of 30 junta soldiers when 67 troops burnt down villages located across the border of Kantbalu and Kawlin townships. Earlier, the troops torched the entire Einche village, also launching surprise attacks and burning down the Inyashae village.

Taiwan: Plan to boost defence spending

On 25 August, the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan), Tsai Ing-wen disclosed plans to enhance the country’s defence budget spending to 13.9 per cent, a drastic increase in spending compared to past years amounting to only three to four per cent. The budget will be spent on financing fighter jets and other military equipment. Previously, Taiwan had claimed that it would spend about USD 8.69 billion by 2026 to enhance its “naval capabilities”. Tsai claimed that threats or pressures would not deter the country’s resolve to uphold its sovereignty. However, the President, Tsai Ing-wen also stated: “At the same time, as a responsible member of the international community, Taiwan will not provoke incidents nor escalate conflicts.”

Vietnam: Coordinates with Cambodia to protect Vietnamese civilians from human trafficking

On 25 August, in the wake of a shocking incident where 40 Vietnamese citizens working in Cambodia escaped from exploitative working conditions and swam to Vietnam, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Việt Nam, Lê Thị Thu Hằng claimed that the Cambodian officials and Vietnamese domestic officials were directed by the Foreign Ministry to assist Vietnamese nationals stranded in Cambodia. The spokesperson claimed that about 500 Vietnamese citizens were rescued, while others were assisted in documentation procedures. The chief obstacle was identity verification of Vietnamese, the latter lacking identification documents as they illegally crossed the borders for work. The Cambodian authorities have extended support in the repatriation of Vietnamese civilians and in arresting the perpetrators.

Philippines: Typhoon Hinnamnor

On 31 August, the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) spotted a tropical depression and super typhoon changing its designation to a hurricane on Wednesday also taking into account that it is unlikely to hit the country directly. The tropical depression hovers over the Philippine Sea. Pagasa said Hinnamnor continues to stay outside the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR). Pagasa said the typhoon was estimated some 1,130 kilometres east of extreme Northern Luzon while moving north-eastward at 10 kilometers per hour.

Indonesia: Strong earthquake shakes western Indonesia, causes panic

On 29 August, a strong earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia’s Sumatra Island, causing residents to panic, but there were no immediate reports of casualties or serious damage. Indonesia’s meteorology and geophysics agency (BMKG) recorded the magnitude 6.5 earthquake off the Mentawai islands and said it did not trigger a tsunami warning. It was the third earthquake felt in the area on the same day. A magnitude 5.2 earthquake was recorded before dawn, followed by a magnitude 5.4 quake less than an hour later. The magnitude 6.5

earthquake was felt for several seconds in the provincial capital of Padang and in the surrounding mountainous area of Bukit Tinggi. The agency said there were no reports of casualties, but there was minor damage to buildings on Siberut Island.

South Asia

Sri Lanka: Indian fishermen arrested

On 28 August, six Indian fishermen were arrested by Sri Lankan Navy in Rameswaram for fishing in their waters and crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line. The boat was seized by the Navy. On 22 August, 10 Indian fishermen were arrested by the Navy in Talaimannar and were handed over to the Mannar authorities for further investigation.

Pakistan: Government declares 'national emergency' amid rain-induced floods

On 25 August, the government declared a 'national emergency' amid the rain-induced floods terming it a "climate-induced humanitarian crisis of epic proportions." As of 29 August, the death toll from the floods reached 1,033, including 343 children, and at least 30 million without shelter. According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), Sindh reported the highest number of deaths as 306 people lost their lives due to floods and rain-related incidents on 14 June, while Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab recorded 234, 185 and 165 deaths, respectively.

Afghanistan: Six million Afghans are at risk of famine as crises grow, says UN Humanitarian Chief

On 29 August, the United Nations humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths told the UN Security Council that Afghanistan faces multiple crises including a humanitarian, economic, climate, hunger and financial. He claimed that the current situation is critical due to the halting of the large-scale development aid since the Taliban takeover a year ago. Further, he warned that six million people were at risk of famine and added that the donors should immediately provide USD 770 million to help Afghans survive the upcoming winters.

Pakistan: IMF grants bailout funds of over USD 1.1 billion

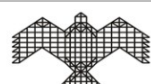
On 29 August, the government of Pakistan reported the release of bailout money by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) worth USD 1.1 billion. The IMF agreed to release funds to the cash-strapped economy after clearing the seventh and eighth reviews of the program. Pakistan is suffering from the devastating losses incurred due to the continuous floods and rains and has been in an economic slump for a long time. This bailout package could prove to be a lifesaver in such a situation. Although the criteria were unfulfilled to receive the funding, the IMF allowed Pakistan's request for waivers for the same.

Sri Lanka: President presents an interim budget to cope with the crisis

On 29 August, Sri Lankan president Ranil Wickremesinghe set out to present an interim budget to manoeuvre through the difficulties being faced by the country. The budget aims to cut spending by a few hundred billion rupees to settle outstanding loan interests and save up for welfare schemes for the citizens. Being a finance minister of the country, Ranil plans to improve the conditions of the worst hit and introduce new taxes to settle deficits. The government also hopes to introduce a full-year budget by November that would include a better and broader recovery plan.

India: Argentina receives support on the Falklands issue

On 26 August, the External Affairs Minister (EAM), Jaishankar of India extended support to Argentina on the issue of the contested Falklands Islands. India pushed for international dialogue between Argentina and the United Kingdom on the Falklands issue that has been



simmering for the past four decades. During his meeting with the Argentinian president Alberto Fernández, discussed future military and defence strategic ties and payments through local currencies, along with the more highlighted Falklands matter. Later, Argentina lauded India's support on the issue, stating their commonalities involving a colonial past.

Central Asia, Middle East and Africa

Azerbaijan-Armenia: Azeri forces take over key town of Lachin

On 26 August, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev claimed that his country's armed forces have taken control over the key town of Lachin, which links Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. Further, he claimed that they had also taken control of the villages of Zabux and Sus in the Lachin district. Under the peace agreement signed in 2020 by Yerevan, Baku, and Moscow, the five-kilometer-wide Lachin corridor, including the town of Lachin, would remain under Russian peacekeeping control until the construction of a new route connecting Armenia with Nagorno-Karabakh is planned.

Syria: US raids against Iran-linked fighters

On 24 August, US Central Command launched raids against Iran-backed militants in the northeastern part of Syria. The attacks killed two militants and wounded US soldiers. The CENTCOM (United States Central Command) said that the raid was carried out in accordance with the orders from President Joe Biden and was in direct response to the 15 August attack on the al-Tanf Garrison housing US troops. The Under Secretary of Defence for Policy, Colin Kahl, said: "The United States will not hesitate to defend itself against Iranian and Iran-backed aggression when it occurs."

Europe and the Americas

Russia: Gazprom profits soar by 30 percent following promises of profits and dividend

On 31 August, the Gazprom Board recommended paying dividends on reported record net profits in the first half of 2022. The company claims it has been seeing a rise in its profits despite the sanctions against Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. On 29 August, the company announced that it made 2.5 trillion Rubles (USD 41.36 billion) in net profit in the first six months of 2022 hence they recommend paying 1.2 trillion Rubles at 51.03 Rubles (\$0.85) per ordinary share in interim dividends. This announcement triggered an apparent 30 percent increase in the value after the Moscow stock market opened on 31 August.

Russia: Mikhail Gorbachev Dies

On 30 August, after battling a serious and long illness, Mikhail Gorbachev was declared dead at the age of 91 by the Moscow Central Clinical Hospital. Gorbachev, as the last General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, played a prominent role in bringing the Cold War to a halt. Starting his era in the year 1985, with perestroika or the reform of the Soviet System, he played a massive role in global politics until 1991, when his era ended with the coup which resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Born to a family of Russian-Ukrainian peasants, he was admired in the West for his role in ending the Cold War but was seen as a divisive figure in Russia for instituting policies that led to the loss of superpower status. He is popularly known for his policies of perestroika and glasnost, in an attempt to reform the already declining social, political, and economic status of the USSR.

Poland: European Judges groups sue European Council over Poland's recovery plan

On 28 August, a lawsuit was filed against the European Council regarding Poland's recovery and resilience plan at the EU's General Court by four associations representing judges in Europe. Poland's access to EUR 35 billion from the COVID-19 recovery fund was authorised by the European Council in June. However, the associations challenged this move saying that

Poland's replacement of the controversial disciplinary chamber for judges falls short of the rule of law "milestones" that the EU requires. The Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ), the European Association of Judges (EAJ), Rechten Voor Rechten and Magistrates Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés (MEDEL) are the groups behind the lawsuit. The associations said that since their legal action does not invalidate the Council's decision, they would seek suspension of the disbursement of funds via interim measures.

Canada: Invokes treaty to keep Line-5 pipeline open

On 30 August, The Guardian reported on Canada's need to keep the Line 5 gas pipeline open to avoid economic damages. The pipeline operated by a Calgary-based company Enbridge was built in 1953, is 645 miles long through Michigan and the Great Lakes area, satisfying the oil needs of Quebec and Ontario as well as propane, needed for heating homes in Michigan. The pipeline is in dispute as indigenous tribes in Wisconsin argue that the pipeline can no longer pass through their territory after the easement period expires. However, Canada has used a treaty signed and ratified by the US Congress in 1977 that allows the free flow of oil and gas between the two countries. In its defence, it has invoked the treaty multiple times to preserve the flow of fuel for its country.

The US: US Secret Service official involved in capitol riots retires

On 30 August, The Guardian reported that Tony Ornato, deemed as a person of interest by the Congressional Committee on the Capitol Riots hearing, has stepped down. Ornato was the deputy chief of the Secret Service and had oversight over its operations. A White House aide, Cassidy Hutchinson testified that Ornato had given her an account of the incident which involved Trump becoming irritated at his Security detail. Where Trump allegedly attacked his security detail when he refused to drive him to Capitol that morning and lunged to grab his throat. Ornato, however, denied this account. He was also alleged to have briefed the White House aides that weapons were going to be carried on the day of the riots.

The US: Biden determined to ban assault weapons

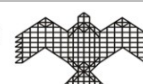
On 31 August, Biden in his address stated he is "determined" to ban assault weapons in the US as part of his Safer America plan. He presented statistics where 48,000 Americans died of gunshot wounds in 2021 and 26,000 to suicide. He also targeted the National Rifle Association (NRA) stating: "we beat the NRA" referencing the bipartisan gun control law he signed this year. Other areas of interest Biden addressed in his speech include policy push for monkey pox vaccination, equality of LGBTQ+ rights, tightened election rules by the Department of Justice barring election officials from attending and rebuffing funding of the police.

Argentina: Clashes between police and civilians over judgement on Vice President

On 28 August, thousands of people took to the streets in support of Vice President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner after a federal prosecutor requested a 12-year sentence for her in an alleged corruption scandal. The allegations suggested that between 2007 and 2015, Fernandez was the leader of an illegal association involving high-ranking public officials and also recommended banning her from holding public office. Demonstrations broke out after local authorities erected barricades near the Vice President's house. This led to violent clashes between the police and the protestors resulting in attacks on police vehicles and the use of a hydrant truck to disperse the crowd.

Mexico: Commission on missing students states military involvement in the scandal

On 27 August, the Truth Commission set up to investigate the 2014 case of 43 missing students claimed military ties to the mysterious disappearances. The report revealed that six of those students were held hostage in a warehouse for days before being handed over to the local army



commander, who ordered them to be killed. Furthermore, an anonymous emergency call was registered by the army four days after the students' abduction which alluded to the collusion between the state and the criminal group Guerreros Unidos. The motive behind the military's participation remains unidentified. Aggrieved parents carried out a march demanding answers and reinstating their claim of the incident being a state crime.

Mexico: Eight found dead with gunshot wounds

On 25 August, eight people were found dead in the township of Tuzantla, in Michoacan near a butterfly reserve. The bodies were found with gunshot wounds and state prosecutors found shell casings at the scene. Michoacan has been a centre for violent wars among drug cartels for years, however, the circumstances of the killings are still under investigation. No arrests have been made so far.

Conflict Weekly Exclusive, 1 September 2022

Report Review: *Drought in Europe, August 2022*

Drought in Europe, August 2022: Four Takeaways

By Rishma Banerjee

On 22 August, the Global Drought Observatory (EDO), under the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) released an analytical report titled "Drought in Europe, August 2022" on the drought conditions across Europe in August. The report maps the geographical extent of the 2022 drought in the continent. So far, drought hazard is increasing in Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Romania, Hungary, northern Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, Ireland and the United Kingdom. The rest of Europe does face drought, and the dry conditions are maintained. While sporadic rains have brought relief to some regions, the associated thunderstorms and flash floods have caused damage. The report warns that warmer and drier than usual conditions are likely to occur in the western Euro-Mediterranean region till November 2022. Experts at the JRC stated that the 2022 drought could be the worst drought Europe experienced in the last 500 years

Four takeaways

First, the geographic spread. As per the Combined Drought Indicator (CDI) report, 64 per cent of Europe is under drought warning, 47 per cent is under 'warning' conditions, and 17 per cent is under 'alert' conditions. In GDO's July report, only nine per cent of Europe was under "alert" conditions, and 53 per cent had drought warnings. Whereas in August, the severe-to-extreme, broad, meteorological drought covered almost two-thirds of Europe, across Italy, France, Germany, southern Norway, the Balkans and Eastern Europe.

Second, worsening drought conditions. The major rivers across Europe such as the Po River in Italy, the Rhine River in Germany and Netherlands, and the Loire River in France continue to remain dried, which is impacting the water distribution, water transport and the ecosystems of the river basins. Apart from the geographic impact, all the markers determining the severity of a drought show negative values. This includes standardized precipitation index, soil moisture anomaly, and the fraction of solar radiation absorbed by plants for photosynthesis.

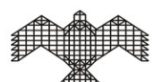
Third, the widespread impact. Water restrictions and rationing have been introduced in many areas across Spain, France and Italy, hampering civilian life. The droughts have also affected the energy and agriculture sectors. Reduced storage of water has impacted the energy sector for both hydropower generation and cooling systems of other power plants. Low water levels have reduced inland shipping loads further affecting coal and oil transport. In agriculture, water and heat stresses and low soil moisture have substantially reduced summer crop yields. The

most affected crops are grains like maize, soyabean and sunflowers. Thus, given Europe's impending energy crisis and the global food security crisis, these industries getting affected, hamper the broader security of the continent.

Fourth, the triggers. Europe's continuing heatwaves, wildfires, along with dry conditions are prolonging the recovery time of the droughts. Dry air is getting heated up more easily, creating high-pressure 'heat domes.' These 'heat domes' deflect precipitation to enhance the severity of droughts. Moreover, high mid-tropospheric pressure anomalies, associated with both heatwaves and droughts, have been noticed over most of the continent. These are steering away continental weather systems that bring moist and cool air. Additionally, the atypical splitting of the jet stream into two streams has also brought in hot weather from North Africa into Europe instead of the moisture-laden winds, thus contributing to the drought condition.

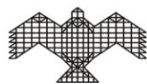
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National Institute of
Advanced Studies



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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