

# ZeroFox Intelligence

## Geopolitical Brief for September 2023



TLP: CLEAR

B-2023-09-01a

### Executive Summary

With global trade increasingly tied to geopolitical alliances, any new geopolitical groupings are worth tracking. After the highly impactful Group of Seven (G7) meeting in May 2023 solidified the alliance of Western states against expanding trade to Russia and China, the BRICS summit in late August countered by expanding its potential membership from five to 11 states. The expansion will impact supply chains as the new trading relationships require new supply chain infrastructure like roads, bridges, and ports. It also gives new members—including key commodities traders like Egypt and Argentina—access to the BRICS bank; this should allow them to avoid an economic collapse that would roil supply chains, as Argentina is a leading wheat and soybean exporter and Egypt has one of the fastest-growing populations worldwide, is the owner of the Suez Canal, and is a key oil and gas producer. However, the impact will be muted overall, with all BRICS members likely to pursue whatever trading relationships benefit them the most—which is just as likely to include members of the G20, a group of 20 of the world's largest economies that now includes the majority of BRICS and G7 states and will hold its annual summit from September 9–10 in New Delhi, India.

Fears that insecurity and military coups will spread further across Africa are growing. With the coup in Niger, the West lost its best ally in the fight against violent extremism in the region. With the coup leaders unambiguous about remaining in power, the insecurity that Niger was helping fight now looks set to spread further into West and Central Africa. Violent extremist groups will now have even less resistance, and the subsequent humanitarian crisis will worsen the refugee flow into Europe while making some of the larger West African states vulnerable to attacks. Well-established economic interests in former French colonies look to be the most vulnerable, as do leaders who have held onto power for decades.

Unfortunately, even outside of the francophone regions of Africa, insecurity remains prevalent. Violence in Sudan appears to be escalating into September, while inter-regional violence in Ethiopia has returned. Kenya could also be impacted if Somalia's aim to eradicate al-Shabaab proves unsuccessful, which looks likely.

A quiet summer in western Europe, focused mainly on transportation strikes and local politics, looks set to end with fall elections in Spain and the Netherlands. Poland, a key ally of Ukraine, will also hold consequential elections. Ukraine's counteroffensive may begin to see larger gains in September following significant progress in late August. However, an overall stalemate in the conflict with Russia remains likely.

Latin America is in a similar position as Western Europe, with important elections in Argentina, Colombia, and Ecuador forthcoming. However, the entire region is being impacted by violent crime, and local governments are busy implementing tough anti-crime policies that risk blowback in the form of human rights violations and mass casualties.

### Key Findings

- The G20 summit in India could have major implications for global trade, as it will host members from both the BRICS and G7.
- Another former French colony experienced a coup, a worrying trend of instability.
- Violence is likely to escalate in Niger and its neighbors after its coup leaders remained in power.
- After Niger, insecurity will likely worsen in Benin and Togo first before threatening Ghana and Ivory Coast.
- India will likely continue export bans for key food commodities, driving up food prices through 2024.
- Thailand's new government will be weak and possibly short-lived after the liberal leaders formed a coalition with the powerful military, angering progressive activists who voted for them.
- Protests and violence linked to Argentina's October elections are likely.
- BRICS enlargements show there is strong support for an alternative to the U.S.-led economic order, but expect few meaningful challenges to the system in the short term.
- Protests against Japan related to releasing water from the Fukushima nuclear plant are likely for years.
- Brazil may see pro-Bolsonaro acts of violence on Independence Day.
- Insecurity in Sudan and Ethiopia is likely to worsen in September.
- European countries are aiming to ban Quran burnings to avoid reprisal attacks and poor geopolitical relations with the Muslim world.
- By early September, the leading candidates for Mexico 2024 elections will be known and campaigning will begin.
- The tough-on-crime policies of El Salvador are being pushed elsewhere in Latin America but are unlikely to be as successful.
- Protests over Israel's judicial reform could recommence in mid-September.

### Key Threats and Developments



Jordan's cybercrime bill could inspire similar bills that limit free speech.



Mexico announces its presidential candidates in September.



India and Indonesia host key summits in September.



Protests are likely in Thailand after the status quo largely held onto power, despite elections.



Military coups continue to threaten mainly francophone Africa.



Violence looks likely to continue in Ecuador ahead of October elections.



Ukraine has a limited amount of time to make military gains against Russia ahead of cold weather.



Peru and Ecuador are facing pressure to adopt tough-on-crime legislation.

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## Russia-Ukraine Conflict

As of early August, Ukraine has now committed its decisive reserve forces to the ongoing counteroffensive.[1] Gains remain slow, as Ukrainian troops face entrenched Russian defenses; however, the additional troops have afforded Ukraine some successes in the past several weeks. Ukrainian forces have advanced slowly on all three axes of the front: Western Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Bakhmut.

Notably, Ukrainian troops breached the initial line of Russian defenses and liberated the city of Robotnye in Zaporizhzhia Oblast on August 28.[2] This victory now places Ukraine within striking distance of the second line of Russian defenses. Robotnye is also located close to the strategic city of Tokmak, a major Russian stronghold that contains important ground lines of communications. Ukraine may now attempt to capture Tokmak; however, any advance will be slow going, as Russian forces have encircled the city with heavy fortifications.

Ukraine will then likely attempt to drive south from Robotnye through the remaining Russian defenses towards Melitopol and the Sea of Azov. In this push, Ukraine hopes to sever critical Russian ground lines of communication located near Melitopol that provide logistical support between Russian troops in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

### Forward Look:

- Ukrainian forces will likely attempt to capitalize on their recent victories and drive south towards the Sea of Azov from both the Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk axes.
- ZeroFox continues to assess it remains too early to deem Ukraine's offensive a success or a failure. Counteroffensive operations will likely continue at least until October, allowing Ukraine time to maneuver in support of key objectives.
- Ukraine has increasingly struck targets in occupied Crimea and Russia itself since May 2023, a strategy it will likely continue over the next several months. These strikes have successfully destroyed numerous Russian aircraft and important logistical hubs. Several of these strikes involved sabotage networks within Russia that operated at the behest of Ukrainian intelligence.[3]

## Wagner Developments

Wagner group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin and other senior Wagner commanders were killed in a plane crash in Russia on August 23.[4] This incident was likely carried out at the behest of the Russian government as retaliation for Prigozhin's armed uprising in June.

Since Prigozhin's rebellion, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Ministry of Defense (MoD) have sought to gain greater control over Wagner and its fighters. The swift decapitation of Wagner leadership will now likely allow Putin and the MoD to incorporate Wagner into more traditional Russian defense structures. On August 25, Putin signed an executive order requiring all paramilitary forces to pledge an oath of allegiance to Russia's flag.[5]

### Forward Look:

- The elimination of Wagner leadership will lead to significant transformations of the organization. While it remains too early to predict specific changes, it is highly likely the MoD will exert greater control over Wagner.
- Wagner operations in Africa and the Middle East afforded Russia much influence in these regions. While Putin will likely seek to maintain this influence under traditional Russian force structures, Russia may lose some of its clout.

## European Politics

- **Spain:** Socialist government formation possible but new elections most likely in fall 2023
- Efforts to ban Quran desecrations in Europe progressing but more insecurity likely
- **Turkey** criticizes UN's **Cyprus** approach; seeks fair treatment
- **Italy:** Transportation strikes throughout September 2023

### Forward Look:

- On July 23, 2023, Spain held a general election. Although the center-right People's Party (PP) won the most votes, it did not gain enough seats in Parliament to reach the 176-vote threshold needed to assemble a majority and install a new government—even with the support of the far-right Vox Party. On August 22, King Felipe VI of Spain nominated PP leader Alberto Nunez Feijoo to establish a governing coalition and become the country's new prime minister. Most analysts believe that he will not be able to do so, given the lack of support for the PP from any of the other parties in the legislature.[6] Instead, it appears that acting Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has a better chance of forming a new government. A left-wing alliance led by his Socialist Party (PSOE) currently has the support of 171 lawmakers. In addition, PSOE candidate Francina Armengol was elected as Speaker of Parliament on August 17, largely thanks to the backing of two Catalan parties. This indicates that smaller regional parties may be more inclined to support the Socialists in the ongoing political contest. However, if neither party leader is able to successfully form a governing coalition, a new general election will need to be held later in the fall.
- After protests broke out in several Middle Eastern countries—including Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon—over Quran desecrations in Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, security in these countries was ramped up, with Sweden raising its terror risk level to "high." These incidents may also have broader implications, with Sweden's NATO membership being of particular focus. Turkey has expressed significant concern over the events and the security of the country.[7] Meanwhile, efforts to ban the desecrations are continuing, but free speech laws are slowing them down. Over the coming months, Islamic extremist groups may attempt to target organizations and individuals associated with these countries, even if they have played no part in the desecrations.
- Tensions between Turkey and United Nation (UN) peacekeepers in Cyprus are escalating. Turkey's criticism is centered on UN opposition to the construction of the Pyla-Arsus Road, which runs through Turkish-controlled Northern Cyprus (TRNC), but is a manifestation of deeper territorial and sovereignty claims. Turkey's staunch support for this project reflects its anger over perceived UN bias towards Cypriot independence. Turkey argues the road is a humanitarian corridor, a commonly-used tactic.
- On September 8, 2023, unionized aviation workers in Italy will stage a 24-hour strike over pay. Expect major travel disruptions and delays. Further strike action is planned for September 16 and 29. Rail workers are also planning strike action on September 15 and 17, and there will be a nationwide public transportation workers strike on September 18 that mainly impacts buses and trains.

## FOOTNOTES

[1] [hXXps://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-updates](https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-updates)

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] [hXXps://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/24/world/europe/prigozhin-plane-crash-russia-wagner.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/24/world/europe/prigozhin-plane-crash-russia-wagner.html)

[5] [hXXps://publication.pravo.ru/document/0001202308250004?index=1](https://publication.pravo.ru/document/0001202308250004?index=1)

[6] [hXXps://www.political.eu/article/spain-king-alberto-nunez-feijoo-form-government/](https://www.political.eu/article/spain-king-alberto-nunez-feijoo-form-government/)

[7] [hXXps://apnews.com/article/turkey-sweden-quran-burning-nato-membership-003896df4d11aad027676ec029535ed6](https://apnews.com/article/turkey-sweden-quran-burning-nato-membership-003896df4d11aad027676ec029535ed6)



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## Latin America Updates

- **El Salvador:** Entire region blocked in security operation that could be replicated elsewhere
- **Brazil:** Violent protests likely during Independence Day on September 7, 2023
- **Bolivia:** Nationwide roadblock protests on September 4, 2023
- **Mexico:** Presidential candidates for 2024 elections announced by September 6, 2023

### Forward Look:

- President Nayib Bukele announced a security operation encircling the entire Cabanas region in central El Salvador. The indefinite operation aims to prevent gang members from leaving Cabanas. Cabanas is a largely agricultural region on the border with Honduras, but Bukele said it is home to the most gang members, who hide in the rural areas. Bukele's order is an extension of the March 2022 state of emergency that severely limits the activities of suspected gang members and has coincided with 70,000 arrests, which invariably include non-gang members. There has been a significant drop in murders and other crimes during the state of emergency, but it has led to accusations of human rights violations.[8]
- The popularity of the tough-on-crime measures has led to other parts of Latin America adopting some of the same policies, as the entire region is experiencing a crime wave. El Salvador's neighbors, Honduras and Guatemala, face a similar gang problem; however, with a much less homogenous population, it will be difficult to fully replicate the mass arrests. There have been calls to adopt a similar approach even as far away as Colombia and Ecuador. Ecuador, in particular, has become one of the most violent countries in the region due to drug-related crime. Peru's President Dina Boluarte is also facing calls to follow a Bukele-style approach but has rejected them. El Salvador's largely homogenous population and small geographic size make such an approach easier to institute than in places like Ecuador and Peru, which have much larger indigenous populations and more ethnic groups.
- Brazil will celebrate its independence day on September 7, 2023, which is normally observed with military and patriotic parades. However, in the current political climate, different ideological groups have declared their intentions to hold protests that could turn violent.[9] The left-wing Central de Movimento Populares has announced they will hold a nationwide protest in the streets, demanding that former president Jair Bolsonaro be arrested. Some pro-Bolsonaro groups have encouraged Bolsonaro supporters to protest the parades in opposition; others have encouraged supporters to stay home and boycott the Independence Day events. During his term in office, Bolsonaro often used Independence Day events as a show of force, and the 2022 Independence Day events featured massive military exercises widely perceived as a demonstration that Bolsonaro would not leave office peacefully if he lost re-election later that year. Bolsonaro supporters then attempted a coup during the inauguration of current President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.
- On September 4, 2023, protesters from the powerful Confederación Sindical Unica de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB) will hold nationwide roadblock demonstrations against the election of a new leader.[10] CSUTCB is a battle-hardened protest group capable of causing lengthy protests that disrupt travel and supply chains. Leaders of CSUTCB are pleading with protesters to cancel the indefinite roadblocks, and local politicians are seeking to enact laws to prevent roadblocks, which frequently cause lengthy supply chain disruptions across the country. Efforts to avoid the protests without acknowledging the protesters' demands will likely worsen the roadblocks in the short term.

## Argentina Violence and Economic Instability Ahead of October Elections

- Argentina will hold the first round of general elections on October 22 ahead of a likely run-off presidential election in November.
- On August 13, 2023, Argentina held primary elections to determine the candidates for the presidential elections. Following a 70 percent turnout, the primaries concluded with controversial candidate Javier Milei of La Libertad Avanza receiving around 30 percent of the vote. Patricia Bullrich of the center-right party Juntos por el Cambio followed behind with 28 percent, and Sergio Massa of the ruling coalition Unión por la Patria was at 27 percent. Historically, the primaries determine who the next president is; however, with all three candidates polling closely and the likelihood of a second-round vote between just the top two candidates, there is a chance of either Bullrich or Massa winning the presidency despite Milei remaining the front-runner.
- The leading candidate, Javier Milei, has provoked controversy for his economically libertarian and socially conservative views, which include dollarizing the economy and rolling back abortion access. Milei is an outsider candidate with few political allies; even if he were to win the presidency, he would have little backing in Congress to push reforms. The next stage of the election will be October 22, 2023; in the event of a further runoff, the third stage will be November 19, 2023. Political tensions are high in Argentina as economic conditions worsen. Protests and acts of violence, particularly against retail outlets where the impacts of inflation are most evident, are likely in the coming months.[11]

### Forward Look:

## Ecuador

- Ecuador: Presidential election to go to second run-off on October 15, 2023

### Forward Look:

- On October 15, 2023, Ecuador will hold its second and final round of presidential elections between upset candidate Daniel Noboa of the centrist Acción Democrática Nacional alliance and Luisa González of the left-wing Movimiento Revolución Ciudadana party. The events leading into the election were marked by violence—most notably, the assassination of anti-corruption candidate Fernando Villavicencio. While the election day itself did not see any physical violence, Ecuador suffered a spike in cyberattacks originating from multiple countries during the first run-off.
- Luisa González is widely seen as the successor to exiled former president Rafael Correa, a left-wing populist who was in office from 2007 to 2017, and González has promised to reinstate Correa's social welfare policies. Noboa's campaign focused on issues of tax incentives, countermeasures against tax evasion, and job creation. However, the key campaign issue until October will likely be crime, as Ecuador has seen a violent drug-related crime wave in the last few years. Ecuador, a key transit country for drugs from Peru and Colombia, has become one of the most violent countries in the region. Candidates will likely propose tough anti-crime policies. Considering the controversy that has surrounded former President Correa, it is likely that anti-Correa elements within Ecuador will coalesce around Daniel Noboa. However, neither candidate is likely to influence much change, as this election is to finish the remaining 18 months of President Guillermo Lasso's term, after which there will be new elections again. Whatever the outcome of the October run-off, there remains a high likelihood of further violence and disruptions.

## FOOTNOTES

- [8] <https://radiopanama.com.pa/bukele-despliega-cerco-militar-en-el-departamento-de-cabanas/>
- [9] <https://www.fohna.uol.com.br/poder/2023/08/exercito-e-seguranca-monitoram-ida-de-bolsonaristas-ao-7-de-setembro-de-lula.shtml>
- [10] <https://www.opinion.com.bo/articulo/cochabamba/anuncio-bloqueo-caminos-csutcb-evista-manfred-sugiere-ley-que-prohibe-cierre-vias/20230830124413919107.html>



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## BRICS Summit

- BRICS summit ends with six potential new members and greater control of key commodities

### Forward Look:

- On August 24, 2023, the BRICS grouping of emerging markets announced it had extended invitations to six more states: Argentina, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Ethiopia, Iran, and Egypt, bringing the grouping to 11 states.<sup>[12]</sup> There are a number of implications for the expansion, with the grouping possibly becoming more of less Western by adding either Argentina or Iran, reducing the use of the dollar, and serving as a counterweight to the G7. The one metric by which this expansion does matter is the consolidation of key commodity sectors. By adding Saudi Arabia, the BRICS grouping now has, along with Russia, the two largest oil-producing states in the world and the biggest customer in China. BRICS also has the UAE and Brazil, which are large energy producers, and Argentina will likely have a large natural gas industry before the end of 2023. They could use this dominance to influence energy prices or slow the transition to clean energy. The group will increase its control of rare-earth metals.

## African Political Developments

- Sudan:** Fighting to re-escalate around Khartoum
- Mozambique:** Key Islamic State leader killed, likely weakening the insurgency<sup>[13]</sup>

### Forward Look:

- Fighting between the Sudanese army and its former ally, the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, will continue around the capital of Khartoum. The RSF is reportedly gaining ground around a key military base in the Al-Shajara area, south of Khartoum, although the army disputes this. Fighting between the two sides will also increase in the nearby sister cities of Omdurman and Bahri, as well as in parts of the western region of Darfur. Fighting began in mid-April over plans by the army to absorb the RSF. In late 2021, the army, backed by the RSF, staged a coup just ahead of a transition to a civilian government. The months of fighting between the two sides have created a massive refugee crisis, which risks destabilizing the entire region as Sudan is a growing nation strategically located near the large economic powers of Egypt, Kenya, and Ethiopia.
- Mozambique claimed to have killed Ibn Omar, the leader of Islamic State-Mozambique (IS-M), in the northern province of Cabo Delgado. The killing comes amid an uptick in clashes between the military, led by soldiers from the more sophisticated Rwandan military, and IS-M. While the insurgents have been fighting for years and have made the natural gas-rich province too dangerous for multinationals, Ibn Omar has led the group since 2020 and will likely be a key loss for the insurgency.<sup>[13]</sup>
- IS-M has been losing ground for two years after Rwandan forces entered the conflict. Security has largely improved, and French energy company Total is preparing to return to Cabo Delgado. However, IS-M have shown an ability to regroup and have used guerrilla tactics to target the poorly-trained and unmotivated Mozambican forces, and a resurgence in violence is not improbable—especially if the Rwandan forces depart.

## Niger and Gabon Coup

- Like **Niger** and most of the other nations recently affected by military coups, **Gabon**, is a former French colony.
- Unlike those nations, Gabon is relatively secure with a stable, yet unequal economy.

### Forward Look:

- Since the coup in Niger on July 26, the coup leaders have remained steadfast in their desire to remain in power. They have kept the former president in prison while releasing a three-year transitional plan with them in power until new elections. Coup leaders in Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Guinea have used similar tactics to consolidate power, which likely means a prolonged period of autocracy.
- A possible military intervention from the neighboring Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is still being proposed but faces logistical hurdles.
- Insecurity in the Sahel region is likely to spread further, particularly into the southern neighbors of Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Ivory Coast, whose northern regions share demographic similarities to the recent coup-afflicted nations. Nigeria will also likely see some spillover. The humanitarian crisis will spill over into neighboring states as well, but also into Europe, where the migration crisis will worsen.
- Gabon's military leaders used similar tactics to overthrow recently re-elected President Ali Bongo, who, along with his father, has ruled the country consecutively for 55 years.<sup>[14]</sup> Bongo's ill health, undemocratic hold on power, and role in Gabonese inequality likely instigated the coup. Gabon has well-established oil wealth and recently attracted international investment to protect its rainforests in exchange for carbon credits. However, the wealth has remained consolidated with the Bongo family.
- Anti-French sentiment is an important factor; the French have been accused of backing corrupt and undemocratic leaders for decades in order to secure continued profits from their former colonies. Therefore, the fear among ECOWAS states of other states experiencing military coups is well founded, especially in Cameroon, which has had a jihadist insurgency and the same president for over 40 years.

## Somalia and Ethiopia Military Operations Risk Spreading

### Forward Look:

- In the Amhara region of Ethiopia, clashes between Fano militants and security personnel are likely to continue amid a security operation to integrate local and regional security forces into Ethiopia's federal structure.<sup>[15]</sup> Hundreds of people have been arrested nationwide (particularly ethnic Amharas) since the state of emergency was imposed on August 4, including in the capital Addis Ababa. Expect further disruptions and government restrictions in the Amhara region; however, the violence will likely have collateral effects nationwide, as the Amhara are Ethiopia's largest ethnic group. Bringing the powerful ethnic regions under the federal structure is a continuing source of conflict and one of the primary instigators in the recent conflict in the Tigray region. However, it is a key initiative of Ethiopia's president.
- In late August, Somali forces launched a major military operation to remove the remaining strongholds of the al-Qaeda Somali affiliate of al-Shabaab (AS). Despite losing ground in recent years, AS still holds considerable territory and routinely inflicts mass casualties on security forces and civilians. Initial results have proven mixed, with retaliatory and guerilla AS attacks inflicting hundreds of casualties. A prolonged conflict is likely and could see violence spread to the Kenyan border, where attacks are common.

## FOOTNOTES

[12] [hXXps://www.voanews.com/a/more-countries-want-to-join-brics-says-south-africa-/7190526.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/more-countries-want-to-join-brics-says-south-africa-/7190526.html)

[13] [hXXps://www.zitamar.com/insurgent-leader-ibn-omar-killed-in-mozambique-says-fadm/](https://www.zitamar.com/insurgent-leader-ibn-omar-killed-in-mozambique-says-fadm/)

[14] [hXXps://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20230830-gabonese-soldiers-claim-power-suspend-elections-after-bongo-victory](https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20230830-gabonese-soldiers-claim-power-suspend-elections-after-bongo-victory)

[15] [hXXps://www.africanews.com/2023/08/14/ethiopian-police-arrest-hundreds-during-state-of-emergency/](https://www.africanews.com/2023/08/14/ethiopian-police-arrest-hundreds-during-state-of-emergency/)



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## Asia-Pacific Updates

- **Thailand:** New PM assumes office, protests expected in September 2023[16]
- **Pakistan:** Nationwide protests over International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed price hikes through September 2023
- **Japan:** Long-term regional protests over Fukushima water release
- **Singapore:** Presidential election on September 1, 2023

### Forward Look:

- On August 22, 2023, Pheu Thai's Srettha Thavisin garnered enough votes in parliament to become prime minister. Srettha secured well above the 375-vote majority, which comes from the 500 elected lower house members and 250 senators appointed by the outgoing military government. The Senate in particular was blocking any new governments until it received assurances that the next one would maintain the political and military status quo. Pheu Thai, a reformist party, came in second in the May elections behind the more progressive Move Forward Party (MFP). The Senate blocked MFP from forming a coalition, and MFP has been controversially excluded from the current coalition government that Pheu Thai has formed with more conservative parties. This will likely prompt protests from MFP supporters, who are younger and more radical than their Pheu Thai allies. MFP supporters staged disruptive protests in 2020 and 2021, which could now resume. The new government will either be weak due to the constraints imposed by the Senate or because of protests, which will hamper efforts to improve the economy.
- Pakistan produces little energy and imports food, so price hikes are largely unaffordable. Pakistan recently secured a loan from the IMF, which likely requires concessions like tax increases and removing subsidies. The price hikes will likely worsen demand for traders' products amid the cost-of-living crisis. Expect further protests in the coming weeks, especially by the transportation and trade sectors, which are particularly affected by the price hikes. Pakistan is due to hold new elections by November, which could be delayed—especially if anti-government unrest becomes more intense. The first nationwide event is being led by the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party on September 2.[17]
- On August 24, 2023, Japan began releasing treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, a project that could take several decades. Activists inside Japan are leading protests while neighboring states like China have enacted trade bans, particularly for fish. South Korean citizens have led rallies against the project, which are expected to continue in September 2023. International hacker group Anonymous launched cyberattacks against nuclear power-linked groups in Japan; further cyber threats against Japanese organizations are likely.[18]
- Singapore will hold presidential elections on September 1, 2023, with three candidates running for the largely-ceremonial position. Former Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam, former Chief Investment Officer at Sovereign Wealth GIC Ng Kog Song, and former Chief Executive of insurer NTUC Income Tan Kim Lian Tharman are competing to take over from Singapore's first female president, Halimah Yacob; Shanmugaratnam is the frontrunner. Protests are possible due to rising living costs, political scandals, and displeasure with the status quo.

## Middle East

- **Jordan:** Cybercrime bill to come into effect on September 12, 2023[19]
- **Israel:** Protests continue into Knesset summer recess, expected to intensify surrounding Supreme Court case on September 12, 2023

### Forward Look:

- In Jordan, a controversial cybercrime law is set to enter into effect on September 12, 2023. Critics of the legislation, including Human Rights Watch, have warned that its vague wording will have a chilling effect on free speech—particularly provisions that criminalize online content that is deemed to be "promoting, instigating, aiding, or inciting immorality," or demonstrating "contempt for religion" and subverting "national unity." [19]
- The bill also restricts virtual private network (VPN) usage by mandating at least six months in prison for those obscuring their "IP address by using a fictitious address or an address belonging to a third party, or by any other means, with the intent of committing a crime or preventing its discovery." [20]
- In response to concerns from the public and international observers, Jordanian officials asserted that these new measures are not intended to diminish "fundamental freedoms" or limit criticism of the government but to tackle increasing online crime. [21]
- After the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) broke for summer recess on July 31, 2023, anti-government protests continued, but attendance has been lower than earlier in the summer. However, this is expected to change as the Supreme Court begins to hear arguments related to the "Reasonableness Law" on September 12, 2023. This piece of legislation laid out the largest portion of the government's judicial reform to date, and its passage in July 2023 triggered mass unrest nationwide.
- The Reasonableness Law limits the power of the Supreme Court to strike down laws or ministerial decisions that it was previously able to dismiss as "unreasonable" or unworkable. If the court were to rule against the government, a constitutional crisis could arise, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused on several recent occasions to confirm that he would abide by a court ruling against the overhaul. [22]
- Although the Israeli Supreme Court often takes over a year to rule on a typical case [23], this challenge is expected to move faster due to Chief Justice Esther Hayut and Justice Anat Baron's impending retirements in October 2023, after which they will only be able to issue rulings on ongoing cases for a number of months. [24]

## FOOTNOTES

[16] <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/thailand-srettha-to-become-pm-after-securing-endorsement-of-parliament>

[17] <https://mmnews.tv/traders-announce-countrywide-strike-against-inflated-electricity-bills-on-sep-1/>

[18] [https://news.tv-asahi.co.jp/news\\_politics/articles/000312470.html](https://news.tv-asahi.co.jp/news_politics/articles/000312470.html)

[19] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/07/24/jordan-scrap-draconian-cybercrimes-bill>

[20] <https://cpj.org/2023/08/new-jordanian-cybercrime-law-criminalizes-fake-news-online/>

[21] <https://www.newarab.com/news/jordans-parliament-passes-controversial-cybercrime-law>

[22] <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-08-01/ty-article/premium/netanyahu-refuses-to-say-hell-honor-high-court-ruling-on-judicial-coup-law-for-third-time/00000189-a7e-db2e-adfd-af7131760000>

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# ZeroFox Intelligence Geopolitical Brief for September 2023



TLP: CLEAR

B-2023-09-01a

## G20 Summit

India will host the eighteenth G20 summit in its capital, New Delhi, from September 9-10. The G20, composed of 19 of the world's largest economies and the European Union, generally focuses on global economic issues but has recently been beset by geopolitical divisions. As rotating president of the forum, India hopes to use the summit to encourage economic development in the Global South through enhanced manufacturing and trade. Mounting geopolitical tensions between Western-leaning countries and those more aligned with Russia and China may make it difficult for members to reach agreements, however.

Security will be high in New Delhi in the run-up to the summit. Beginning on September 8, travel into and out of the city will be heavily restricted, with most travelers diverted to the congested highways that ring the capital.[25]

### Forward Look:

- While geopolitical divisions do not often play a major role in G20 meetings, members have had a harder time seeing eye-to-eye at recent summits. These divisions may be on display during the summit.
- Prior G20 summits have thus far ended with members issuing a joint statement conveying agreement on most issues. After members had difficulty arriving at a statement last year, it is possible that this year will be the first in the G20's history that no statement is issued.
- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi likely sees the summit as a chance to show off India's rising status as an economic power not strongly aligned to either the United States, Russia, or China. Modi has sought to make India the voice of the Global South, which is often overlooked in economic matters.
- The Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit (ASEAN) will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia, from September 2-7, featuring attendance by the United States, Russia, and China, among others. This will likely cause security disruptions in Jakarta as well.[26]

## ABOUT ZEROFOX

ZeroFox (Nasdaq: ZFOX), an enterprise software-as-a-service leader in external cybersecurity, has redefined security outside the corporate perimeter on the internet, where businesses operate and threat actors thrive. The ZeroFox platform combines advanced AI analytics, digital risk and privacy protection, full-spectrum threat intelligence, and a robust portfolio of breach, incident, and takedown response capabilities to expose and disrupt phishing and fraud campaigns, botnet exposures, credential theft, impersonations, data breaches, and physical threats that target your brands, domains, people, and assets. Join thousands of customers—including some of the largest public-sector organizations as well as finance, media, technology, and retail companies—to stay ahead of adversaries and address the entire lifecycle of external cyber risks.

### See ZeroFox in action

[zerofox.com/demo](https://zerofox.com/demo) | [zerofox.com](https://zerofox.com)

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## APPENDIX A: ZeroFox Intelligence Probability Scale

All ZeroFox Intelligence products leverage probabilistic assessment language in analytic judgments. Qualitative statements used in these judgments refer to associated probability ranges, which state the likelihood of the occurrence of an event or development. Ranges are used to avoid a false impression of accuracy. This scale is a standard that aligns how readers should interpret such terms.

Almost No Chance	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Roughly Even Chance	Likely	Very Likely	Almost Certain
1-5%	5-20%	20-45%	45-55%	55-80%	80-95%	95-99%

## APPENDIX B: Traffic Light Protocol for Information Dissemination

### TLP: RED

#### HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: RED when information cannot be effectively acted upon by additional parties and could lead to impacts on a party's privacy, reputation, or operations if misused.

#### HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may NOT share TLP: RED with any parties outside of the specific exchange, meeting, or conversation in which it is originally disclosed.

### TLP: AMBER

#### HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: AMBER when information requires support to be effectively acted upon but carries risks to privacy, reputation, or operations if shared outside of the organizations involved.

#### HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may ONLY share TLP: AMBER information with members of their own organization and its clients, but only on a need-to-know basis to protect their organization and its clients and prevent further harm.

#### Note that

TLP: AMBER+STRICT restricts sharing to the organization only.

### TLP: GREEN

#### HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: GREEN when information is useful for the awareness of all participating organizations, as well as with peers within the broader community or sector.

#### HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may share TLP: GREEN information with peers and partner organizations within their sector or community but not via publicly accessible channels.

### TLP: CLEAR

#### HOW IT IS USED

Sources may use TLP: CLEAR when information carries minimal or no risk of misuse in accordance with applicable rules and procedures for public release.

#### HOW IT IS SHARED

Recipients may share TLP: CLEAR information without restriction, subject to copyright controls.

## FOOTNOTES

[25] <https://www.cntraveller.in/story/g20-summit-in-delhi-what-will-be-open-and-closed-from-8-10-september-hotels-flights-roads/>

[26] <https://www.thejakartapost.com/world/2023/08/31/challenges-ahead-ahead-of-asean-summit-in-jakarta.html>

