



# THE FUTURE

SEPTEMBER 2022



The Future is a newsletter periodically published by The Future Institute. This newsletter aims to chronicle the significant events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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## Israel renews aggression on Gaza

At least 45 people, including 16 children, were killed after Israel launched air strikes on the Gaza Strip in the occupied territories early in August. The Gaza health ministry reported that 360 people were injured in the attacks. The latest round of Israel-Gaza violence was sparked by the arrest of a senior Islamic Jihad commander in the occupied West Bank. On Friday, August 5, the Israeli army declared operation "Breaking Dawn," killing one Palestinian member of the Islamic Jihad armed faction and 11 other Palestinians, including a five-year-old girl.

Before the operation, Israel had closed all borders in and out of Gaza, after which it launched a host of indiscriminate air strikes, killing many civilians, including women and children. A ceasefire brokered by Egypt came into force on Sunday night, wherein Israel and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine agreed to cease attacks and improve humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip.

As in previous instances, the Israeli aggression was faced with silence and even support from some of its allies while drawing condemnations from various regional and international actors. Many countries, including Russia, Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Algeria, Syria, Turkiye, Iran and Ireland, alongside the Arab League, condemned Israel for the aggression, while the UN envoy for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, had expressed his deep concern at the escalating violence. The US National Security Council's strategic communications coordinator, John Kirby, defended Israel's attack on Gaza and urged both sides to de-escalate the situation, while British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss expressed her country's support for Israel. On the other hand, while the European Union did not condemn Israel's attacks, far-right politicians such as Geert Wilders praised Tel Aviv for completing "a very successful week against Islamic terrorists and jihadists."





An issue absent from the Israeli-Palestine conflict discourse is the role of the Western media in perpetuating and aiding Israeli aggression while belittling and muffling Palestinian voices. In this regard, Western audiences rarely see the true face of Israel's bombing in Gaza due to Western media shying away from publishing graphic photos of Palestinian victims, a policy encouraged by social media guidelines that tend to blur or take down graphic/distressing/gory images. The Intercept notes that exceptions were made in publishing photos of Ukrainian victims of Russian aggression in recent times, which points to double standards in showcasing victimhood and humanity on the part of major American and Western news media.

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## Salman Rushdie, author of *The Satanic Verses* attacked

Salman Rushdie, a controversial Indian-born American novelist, was stabbed in the neck and torso onstage at a lecture in New York state on August 12, 2022, and was rushed to the hospital for treatment, where he was put on the ventilator and unable to speak. The attacker, a 24-year-old man from Fairview, New Jersey, was apprehended by police at the scene.

At the time of the attack, Rushdie was being introduced to a large audience of hundreds at the Chautauqua Institution in western New York. A few days later, Rushdie's son confirmed that despite recuperating and off the ventilator, the author had several sustained life-changing injuries from the attack.

Rushdie, 75, rose to prominence with his fourth novel *The Satanic Verses* (1988), which gained notoriety for passages considered blasphemous to Muslims. When it was published in 1988, it was banned in many countries with large Muslim populations. In 1989, a year after the publication of his novel, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for his assassination and set a \$3 million bounty for his death. Rushdie lived in hiding for years, employing strict security measures that gradually became more relaxed after the Iranian government attempted to distance itself from the fatwa in 1998.



The attack was publicly condemned by a spokesperson for the Biden administration in the United States. Moreover, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, French President Emmanuel Macron, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz condemned the attack and expressed their condolences to Rushdie.

The tone of some of these condemnations, however, tended to implicate Islam and Muslims as a whole, as in the case of French President Macron, who in a Twitter post said: "[Salman Rushdie] has just been the victim of a cowardly attack by the forces of hatred and barbarism."



Dr Mahmudul Hasan, a Malaysia-based academic, condemned the above statement, noting that associating Islam with fearful concepts and the one-sided caricaturing of Muslims as mired in fanaticism had now become clichés, a tendency which had gained further traction with the attack on Rushdie. He noted that it was pertinent that one realises that the attack on Rushdie was by a rascal and not by Islam or Muslims.

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## Freedom at a cost – One year of Afghanistan under the Taliban

Few events can claim to have had a lasting impact as the scenes of American withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Since then, Afghanistan has been under the rule of the Taliban for the past year. It has been featured on the news for most of the usual reasons – hunger, poverty, women's rights, terrorism, and the Taliban. But the biggest reason for Afghanistan's media presence over the past two decades is absent: war. The absence of war, however, is not the same as having peace, and the people of Afghanistan have been through a challenging year politically, economically, and socially, the United States and the West being just as responsible as the Taliban for their predicament.



The last year has been a year of many gains and undeniable losses for the Taliban. The relationship between the Taliban and the US has been shaped by their commitment to the 2020 Doha Agreement, which neither party is keen on breaking despite outward appearances suggesting otherwise – the US killing of Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri was a violation of Afghan sovereignty, while the fact that the Taliban harboured him in a safe house in Kabul was a violation of the Taliban's "no support to terrorism" commitment. This is because both parties are keen to protect their alignment around the strategic goal of preventing Afghanistan from becoming a failed state that could serve as a haven for "terror" organisations such as the ISIL (ISIS) group and a base for the distribution of narcotics to the rest of the world.

In terms of successes, firstly, the security situation in Afghanistan has significantly improved since the Taliban's takeover, thanks to a general amnesty for opposition and nationwide decommissioning of weapons. The Taliban reduced the influence of local warlords who had been acting above the law and terrorising locals by bringing the country under the control of a single authority for the first time in more than 40 years. Second, except for some tensions with Pakistan, the Taliban has maintained positive relationships with all of Afghanistan's neighbours. Third, the Taliban were able to safeguard Afghanistan's public institutions and infrastructure, including its security apparatus. Most public institutions kept their employees and continued to provide adequate services. Finally, after losing international budget support, the Taliban were able to present a national budget based solely on national income, raising state revenue to an unprecedented level of \$100 million per month in just a year.

On the negative side of matters, however, due to a sudden drop in international humanitarian aid and the Americans seizing \$7 billion in assets from Afghanistan's central bank, the first year under Taliban rule has been defined by increased levels of poverty, unemployment (more than one million people lost their jobs), brain drain, uncertainty, and loss of confidence in the future for the majority of Afghans. The catch is that although the Taliban have had little control in this regard, the results of such policies are being used to characterise Taliban rule by Western observers. On the other hand, however, confused and regressive social policies such as preventing girls' access to intermediate and higher education in many places, combined with the crackdown on liberties, including press freedom, cultural expression and political activism, have resulted in the alienation of Afghan nationals from the Taliban and becoming wary of its rule.

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## Legacy of 1947 Partition: A 75-year-old tragedy?

The end of British rule in the Indian subcontinent in mid-August 1947 was a defining moment in twentieth-century world history, releasing millions of people from the clutches of colonial mastery and giving them a choice to lead independent lives. The politics of the time dictated the drawing of new borders, the carving of new nations and the birth of national identities, which turned out to be as confusing as it was bloody. There was euphoria and celebration in the beginning, starting from the night of August 13, 1947, fueled by immense hope for new beginnings. Within hours, however, the long-awaited transfer of power—and the partition of India into two nations, majority-Hindu India and majority-Muslim Pakistan—had devolved into a nightmare as simmering secular tensions fueled by divisive colonial rule erupted.

The unfolding of the 1947 Partition is today remembered as a violent and bloody affair in which an estimated 15 million people were uprooted and between 500,000 and 2 million died in the exodus. More importantly, this partition and its legacy dictate tensions between India and Pakistan, and to an extent, Bangladesh as well. While the human experience, suffering and toll of the partition have been the subject of a significant oral history project, the Partition Archives, the legacy of the event had also played out in the weaponisation of ideology, particularly in the rise of the Hindutva ideology, which thrives on anti-Muslim rhetoric harking back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Muslims were consistently vilified as a fifth column of the Indian society, in writings, speeches and politics.

The 1947 Partition is said to cast a long shadow over the region, in particular, due to its profoundly violent character. However, attributing its origins to ideas of communalism and religious tensions is rather misplaced since this strengthens the notion that equally rabid Hindu and Muslim communalists were responsible for the violence. This also gives credence to the theory that Muslim communalism and the two-nation theory were to blame for events leading to the partition. A much more nuanced and complex reading of historical context, however, challenges such contentions, as done by a new generation of scholars such as Joya Chatterjee and Neilesh Bose, which look at the emergence of ideas of separatism amongst Muslims in Bengal out of a sustained engagement with local Bengali intellectual and literary traditions, pertaining to the largely Hindu Bengali *bhadrolok* (Lit. gentleman), which tended to vilify and otherise Muslims. In retrospect, a proper historical understanding is essential to go beyond nationalist and ideological interpretations of the partition, on the one hand, and its reduction to an apolitical event of mere human suffering devoid of any political significance on the other.

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## Former US President Trump's Mar-a-Lago home raided

In a move that has shocked supporters of former US President Donald Trump, the FBI executed a search warrant Monday at Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Florida, as part of an investigation into the handling of presidential documents, including classified documents, that may have been brought there and not returned to the National archives, which could amount to a punishable offence. According to sources, the search of Mar-a-Lago was related to the 15 boxes of documents that Trump took with him when he left the White House, some of which were labelled classified by the National Archives. Trump turned over the documents to the National Archives in January, and his attorneys said they were looking for any additional records.

Since the FBI raided former President Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate on August 8, a growing number of Republicans have spoken out against it. Several Republican senators used the operation to slam President Joe Biden's massive climate, health-care, and tax legislation, which Senate Democrats passed on Sunday. Other Republicans, including potential presidential candidates in 2024, continued to criticise the Justice Department and the FBI. The backlash contrasted with Republicans' criticism of Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign when she was under FBI investigation for handling classified information.

According to the Justice Department, classified documents were "likely concealed and removed" from a storage room at former President Donald Trump's Florida estate to obstruct the federal investigation into the discovery of the government records. According to a filing on August 30, the FBI seized boxes and containers containing more than 100 classified records during its August 8 search of Mar-a-Lago and discovered classified documents stashed in Trump's office. The extraordinary move to search a former president's home comes as Trump's legal problems persist on multiple fronts, and he is expected to announce his Presidential bid to run again in 2024 in the coming months.

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## Turkiye's role lauded as Ukrainian grain leaves for global destinations

Since August 1, more than 27 ships loaded with grain have left Ukraine's Black Sea ports under an export agreement brokered by the UN and Turkiye, which has laid "the groundwork for a permanent peace environment," according to Turkey's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar. He was speaking on the occasion of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' visit to the Istanbul-based Joint Coordination Center (JCC). Akar also stated that since August 1, a total of 53 vessels have sailed for grain shipments, 27 of which have departed from Ukrainian ports. The JCC is made up of Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish, and UN officials who oversee Ukrainian grain and fertiliser exports to the Black Sea.



The breakthrough agreement, brokered by the UN and Turkiye and signed in July by representatives from Russia and Ukraine, promised to unblock Black Sea ports to allow safe passage of grain and oilseeds while

following routes identified by Ukrainian maritime pilots to avoid mines and with stops in Istanbul to ensure weapons are not smuggled back into the country. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres thanked Türkiye for its "pivotal role" in the Black Sea Grain Initiative during a joint press conference with Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar during his visit to the JCC.

After the Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports pushed grain commodity prices to record highs this year, as more than 20 million metric tonnes of Ukraine's wheat and corn remained trapped in Odesa, the deal sparked hope around the world. Prior to the Russia-Ukraine war, Russia and Ukraine accounted for roughly one-third of global wheat exports, Russia also being a major fertiliser exporter. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), global hunger has increased dramatically, from 135 million acutely food insecure people in 2019 to 345 million in 2022, with 50 million people in 45 countries facing crippling famine.

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## Bangladesh seeks loan from IMF amidst economic and human rights woes

Economies in South Asia have been showing signs of struggle emerging from the pandemic, but some, like Sri Lanka, have been harder hit than others. There are signs that others may also need external interventions to help on the road to recovery. In the latest instance, according to its Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, Bangladesh is seeking a total of \$4.5 billion in IMF loans, including for climate change resilience projects, to shore up the government's budget. It is also seeking \$4 billion from the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The country's efforts to secure external funding have coincided with the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic and a rise in fuel and food prices due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

Many countries, including Sri Lanka and Pakistan, are negotiating IMF emergency funding. Sri Lanka is still negotiating, while Pakistan reached an initial agreement with the IMF in July to release \$1.3 billion of a \$7 billion assistance package. Bangladesh is facing a steep and rising energy import bill, and fuel shortages have forced the government to implement nationwide power outages, raise fuel prices, and impose fuel sales restrictions. Petrol and diesel prices have recently increased by more than 50%, sparking nationwide demonstrations and protests. Experts opined that the increase in fuel prices could result from Bangladesh's declining foreign exchange reserves, as the country requires funds to meet its import requirements.

These developments come at a time when the Bangladesh government, led by Sheikh Hasina and her party, the Awami League, faces serious and credible allegations of human rights violations from within and abroad. A recent whistleblower investigative report corroborated by accounts of victims and witnesses published by a Sweden-based news portal focusing on Bangladesh has revealed the possible location of a secret prison in Bangladesh where victims of enforced disappearances are held. The revelations built upon previous allegations of extensive human rights violations reported by Amnesty and Human Rights Watch came on the eve of United Nations Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet's four-day visit to Bangladesh. She has met with



several ministers about widespread allegations of state-sanctioned disappearances and is expected to file a report on the findings.

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## Nancy Pelosi's Taiwan visit stirs regional tensions

Tensions between the United States and China rose in early August when Nancy Pelosi, the United States House of Representatives Speaker, paid an unofficial two-day visit to Taiwan on August 2-3, 2022, accompanied by a delegation of five Democratic House members. Taiwan was part of a two-day tour of Asia that also included stops in Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan. In the light of official Chinese objections beforehand, President Joe Biden discouraged but did not prevent Pelosi from visiting Taiwan; the White House later affirmed her right to do so.

Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu welcomed Pelosi and her delegation. Pelosi stated shortly after her arrival that her visit demonstrated the US' "unwavering commitment to supporting Taiwan's vibrant democracy." Before departing for South Korea, Pelosi paid a visit to the Legislative Yuan and met with

President Tsai Ing-wen. The People's Republic of China (PRC) condemned the visit and issued warnings to the US government through diplomatic channels. Following Pelosi's departure, the PRC began military exercises encircling Taiwan until August 10. A US Speaker's last visit to Taiwan was in April 1997, by Republican politician Newt Gingrich at the time of President Bill Clinton.

The two-day visit, meant to affirm US support for Taiwan despite its official commitment to the "One-China" policy, has been touted by most media as reckless, controversial and rather unnecessary. It comes at a time when Washington isn't really keen on escalating military tensions with China. On the other hand, the visit is seen as a personal affront to President Xi Jinping of China, running the risk of making him appear politically weak when he is seeking re-election for a third time. The Chinese military drills drew condemnation from most long-term US allies, including Japan and Australia, who quickly joined the US in condemning these drills. Other regional security partners, such as ASEAN nations and India, maintained a neutral or quiet tone in response to China's military response.

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