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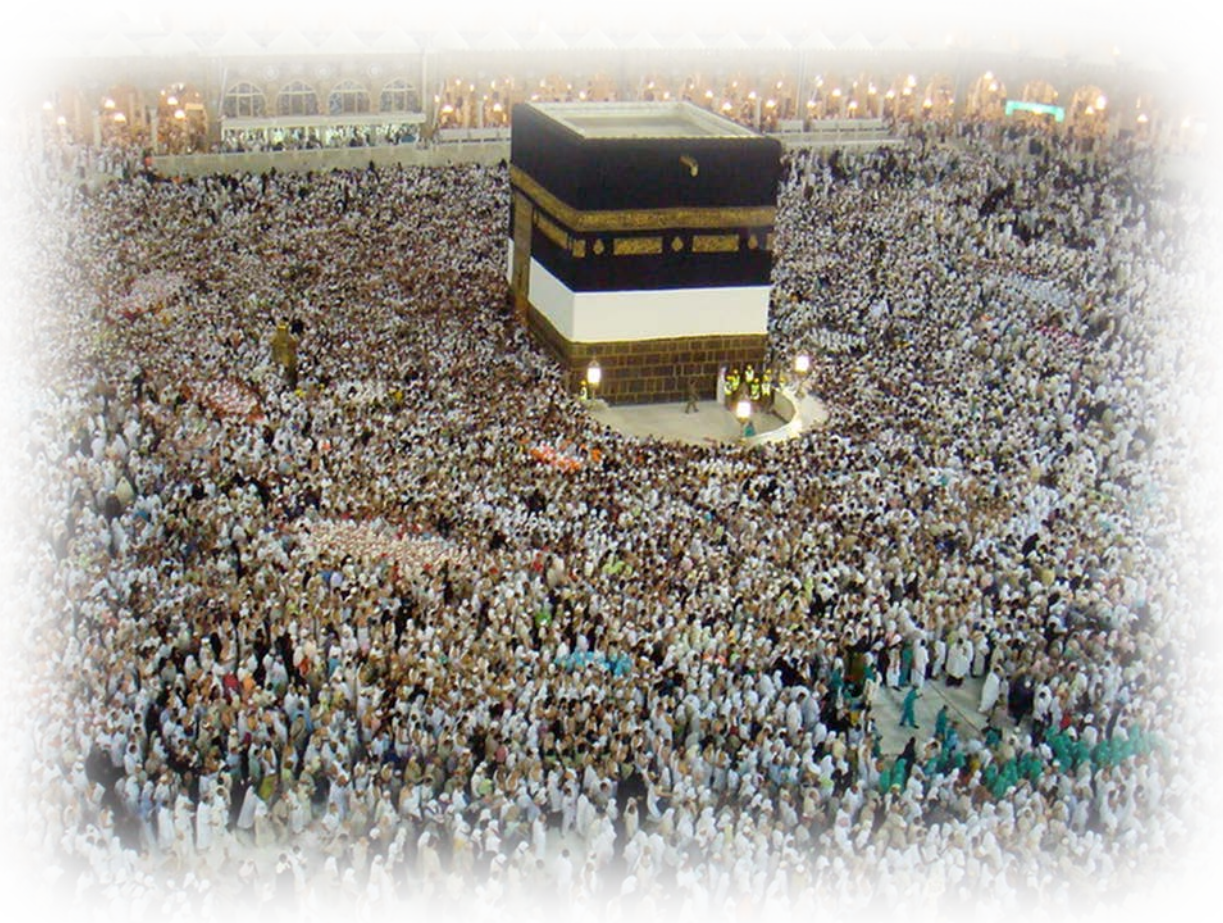
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This newsletter aims to chronicle the major events and developments in the societies of the emerging nations with the potential of impacting their future. This publication offers snippets of news analysis that might be advantageous to the academics, policymakers, social and political workers, students and various organisations.

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Muslims worldwide celebrate Eid-ul-Adha after Hajj

The Hajj pilgrimage is the largest annual religious gathering of Muslims. It takes place in and around Mecca, Saudi Arabia, during the Islamic month of Dhul-Hijja. Exceeding even pre-pandemic levels, more than 2.6 million pilgrims are expected to have participated in this year's Hajj, which began on Monday, 26 June, following the sighting of the moon in Saudi Arabia. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim pilgrims braved the scorching heat while performing various pilgrimage rituals. Temperatures were reported to have climbed beyond 45 degrees Celsius on Tuesday, as Muslims marked the spiritual high point of their journey by spending the day worshipping at Mount Arafat, where there was no breeze and almost no shade.

The final three days of the Hajj coincide with Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, a joyous celebration in which Muslims all around the world sacrifice sheep or animals and distribute some of the meat to the poor. The event honours the prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son Ishmael on God's command. In accordance with this, Eid al-Adha was observed globally three days later, on 28 June. The annual Hajj pilgrimage is one of Islam's five pillars, and all Muslims are expected to go at least once in their lives if they are physically and financially capable.

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Erdogan unveils new cabinet signalling changes forward for Turkiye

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced new finance, foreign, and defence ministries less than a week after winning a closely contested runoff election. Erdogan named internationally renowned ex-banker Mehmet Simsek as treasury and finance minister in a highly anticipated nomination, marking a partial return to more free-market policies after years of increasing state control of forex, credit and debt markets. Simsek, an advocate of conventional economics, is well regarded by financial markets after serving as finance minister and deputy prime minister from 2009 to 2018. His nomination is intended to address Turkiye's cost-of-living crisis and might pave the way for interest rate hikes in the coming months, reversing Erdogan's long-standing policy of cutting rates despite rising inflation.

Cevdet Yilmaz, another orthodox economic manager, was appointed vice president as part of the cabinet adjustments. Meanwhile, Hakan Fidan, Erdogan's intelligence chief, was appointed as the country's next foreign minister. Fidan has commanded the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) since 2010 and previously worked as an adviser in Erdogan's office. Meanwhile, Fidan's position at MIT was replaced by Ibrahim Kalin, another of Erdogan's trusted advisors. Fidan succeeded long-serving diplomat Mevlut Cavusoglu, who had held the position since 2014, and his appointment implies a potential shift in Turkiye's foreign policy. Meanwhile, Yasar Guler, the Turkish armed forces' chief of general staff, has been named defence minister, succeeding Hulusi Akar. The 69-year-old oversaw Turkiye's military operations in Syria in 2019 and 2020, as well as subsequent military operations there and in Iraq. The appointments reflect Turkiye's desire to strengthen its international role and take a proactive stance in global affairs, driven by national interests and changing geopolitical landscape.

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Failed Wagner coup in Russia

In a short-lived mutiny that is sure to have repercussions on the Russian military operations in Ukraine, the Wagner Group, a Russian state-backed private military company led by Yevgeny Prigozhin, rebelled against the government of Russia. The mutiny, which began on 23 June 2023, saw Wagner forces taking control of military sites in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, the military headquarters in the city overseeing the fighting in Ukraine. Later on, a Wagner convoy headed on towards Moscow in a 'march for justice' that threatened the removal of the country's top military leadership and the toppling of its government before the crisis was averted by a last-minute deal brokered by Belarusian President Lukashenko, which saw Prigozhin go into exile in Belarus. According to CNN, the 24-hour confrontation has seemingly weakened Putin's reputation and sowed further discord and infighting in Russia's military ranks.

In an address afterwards, Putin said Wagner fighters made the "right decision" by halting their advance, stating that the armed rebellion would have been suppressed anyway. He also said that the Wagner fighters had the opportunity to sign contracts with Russia's Ministry of Defense, and other law enforcement agencies, return to their family or friends, or opt to join Wagner in Belarus. Prigozhin, on the other hand, claimed the cancelled uprising was a protest, not an attempt to topple the government – it aimed to prevent the dissolution of PMC Wagner and to bring to justice those who made major blunders in the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Western leaders, from their end, lost no time in expressing their glee at the turn of events. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Putin was "weakened" by the mutiny, while the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that it was indicative of Putin's failure "across the board" in Ukraine, stating that Russia was worse off economically, militarily, and globally. While the future of the Wagner group has become uncertain with the exile of Prigozhin, another issue is the operation of the Wagner group outside Russia, in areas such as Syria, North Africa and other countries in Africa such as Mali and the Central African Republic, where the Wagner group provides essential security services. Russia's foreign ministry has advised African leaders to decide for themselves whether to continue working with the Wagner Group.

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Hundreds die in Mediterranean refugee boat sinking tragedy – it's time the world cared

In what authorities are calling the biggest-ever migrant tragedy near the Greek coastline, at least 78 people have died and up to 500 people are still missing after a fishing boat smuggling migrants sank in international waters in the Ionian Sea off the coast of Pylos, Messenia, Greece on 14 June 2023. As of 15 June 2023, rescuers saved 104 people and recovered 79 bodies. Survivors suggest up to 750 people may have been packed on the boat, with 100 children in the hold - the boat was overcrowded and many of the passengers were refugees and migrants trying to reach Europe. Greek authorities are accused of failing to rescue hundreds of refugees and migrants onboard the vessel, despite being alerted to its presence earlier in the day. Frontex, the E.U.'s border agency, said it detected the boat early Tuesday afternoon and immediately notified Greek and Italian officials. The boat reported being in trouble, according to Alarm Phone, a self-organised hotline for refugees in distress in the Mediterranean Sea, but Greek authorities say it repeatedly declined offers of assistance. The Greek coastguard later stated that no one on board wore life jackets.

Experts blame the lack of a solid E.U. immigration policy or legal route that would have allowed victims of war, persecution or climate change to safely apply and travel to Europe, forcing them to opt instead to travel through dangerous and treacherous routes that have led to the death of thousands of migrants over the years. Many have also noted and called out the hypocrisy in responses to the Greek migrant boat tragedy versus that of OceanGate's Titan submersible incident. The lack of media coverage of the shocking loss of human life, and the halfhearted and lacklustre rescue efforts by Greek and E.U. authorities in the case of the migrant boat, despite having notice of the scale of disaster which was about to happen beforehand, could not have been more different when compared to the frantic minute-by-minute media coverage and massive rescue efforts going into the search for the lost submersible that went missing while on a pleasure trip to watch the wreckage of the sunken Titanic with 5 people on board, highlighting shocking inequality in media coverage, and a heightened sense of de-sensitisation to the death of hundreds of unnamed migrants in especially Western public space.

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Did China-US ties improve after Blinken visit?

In the aftermath of U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's long-awaited visit to Beijing, China and the United States agreed to work towards stabilising relations in order to avert a conflict, although no big advances in terms of relations were announced. Antony Blinken's visit was the highest-level U.S. visit by a senior diplomat to China in five years. He met with several prominent Chinese diplomats on his two-day visit, including Chinese President Xi Jinping. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the progress made during the two days of talks without pointing to specific areas of agreement beyond a mutual decision to return to a broad agenda for cooperation and competition endorsed last year by Xi and President Joe Biden at a summit in Bali. However, although both sides expressed a willingness to hold more talks, there was little indication that either side was willing to compromise on issues such as trade, Taiwan, human rights conditions in China and Hong Kong, Chinese military assertiveness in the South China Sea, and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Among the key objectives of Blinken's visit that had not been met was military-to-military exchanges between the countries. Following his discussion with Xi, Blinken stated that China is not ready to restore military-to-military communication lines, which the U.S. regards as critical to avoiding miscalculation and conflict, particularly over Taiwan. It is notable that Blinken was scheduled to visit China back in February, but he cancelled his trip after Washington accused Beijing of flying a spy balloon over the United States. China had stated that the aircraft, which U.S. soldiers shot down after flying over the U.S., was a research balloon that had unintentionally veered off track.

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Protests against Quran burning in Sweden

On the first day of Eid-al-Adha, the festival of sacrifice holy to all Muslims, Salwan Momika, a 37-year-old Iraqi who fled to Sweden several years ago, tore up and burned a Quran outside Stockholm's central mosque. Like in previous cases of Quran burning, Swedish authorities granted permission for the act. Some 200 onlookers witnessed one of the two protesters tearing up pages of a copy of the Quran and wiping his shoes with it before putting bacon in it and setting the book on fire while the other spoke into a megaphone. However, Momika was later detained and charged with agitation against an ethnic or national group by police. It is notable that while Swedish police have recently rejected multiple petitions for anti-Quran demonstrations, courts have overturned those judgments, claiming they violated free expression.

International reactions to the Quran-burning incident were swift and furious, ranging from large protests in Iraq to the summoning of Swedish ambassadors to several countries in the Middle East. The 57-member Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) released a statement that called for international law and other collective steps to avoid future cases of Quran desecration. Iran stated that it would not be sending a new ambassador to Sweden in protest, while the Iranian foreign ministry summoned Sweden's charge d'affaires, condemning the act as unacceptable. The U.S. State Department criticised burning religious texts as disrespectful and hurtful, stating that even though legal, such actions were not always appropriate. In light of this global condemnation, the Swedish foreign ministry itself denounced the incident as 'Islamophobic' and said it was not reflective of the government's views. In a tweet, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan criticised the incident, saying it was wrong to allow such anti-Islam protests in the guise of free expression. Experts have opined that the Turkish condemnation is likely to further jeopardise Sweden's bid to join NATO.

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Widespread riots after the police killing of a Muslim teen in France

A wave of protests has rocked France after police shot 17-year-old Nahel, who was of Algerian heritage, during a traffic stop in the Paris suburb of Nanterre on 27 June 2023. Footage online showed a police officer shooting the teenager at point-blank range while he was in the car, causing the vehicle to crash into a post. He died shortly afterwards from bullet wounds to the chest. The 38-year-old police officer accused of shooting Nahel has since been detained on homicide charges.

The public indignation and outrage over Nahel's shooting erupted into protests and riots, beginning in Nanterre when locals began protesting outside the police headquarters on 27 June, which developed into rioting. Demonstrators set cars on fire, vandalised bus stations, and fired fireworks at police. Over the next few days, rioting spread to many cities in France, including Amiens, Annecy, Bordeaux, Dijon, Grenoble, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Nantes, Pau, Roubaix, Saint-Etienne, Toulouse, Tourcoing, prompting French officials to launch a crackdown mobilising more than 40,000 police officers across the country - more than 2,000 people have been detained and more than 500 police officers and gendarmes have been injured since the riots began, according to CNN.

French President Emmanuel Macron, in a thinly veiled criticism of police action, declared the incident "inexcusable and unforgivable", adding that it "moved the entire nation". However, in the same speech, Macron also called for protesters to be peaceful and criticised sharing videos of the riots on social media and complained of violence in video games which he said had "intoxicated" some teenagers. Experts have pointed out that the incident forms part of a complex, deep-rooted problem in France - unchecked police brutality, urban poverty, widespread Islamophobia and racial discrimination against African-origin French citizens, and a general tendency of successive French administrations to even acknowledge the existence of a problem means there is seems no end in sight yet for further incidents like this.

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Arab-Israeli arms trade booms in the aftermath of normalisation

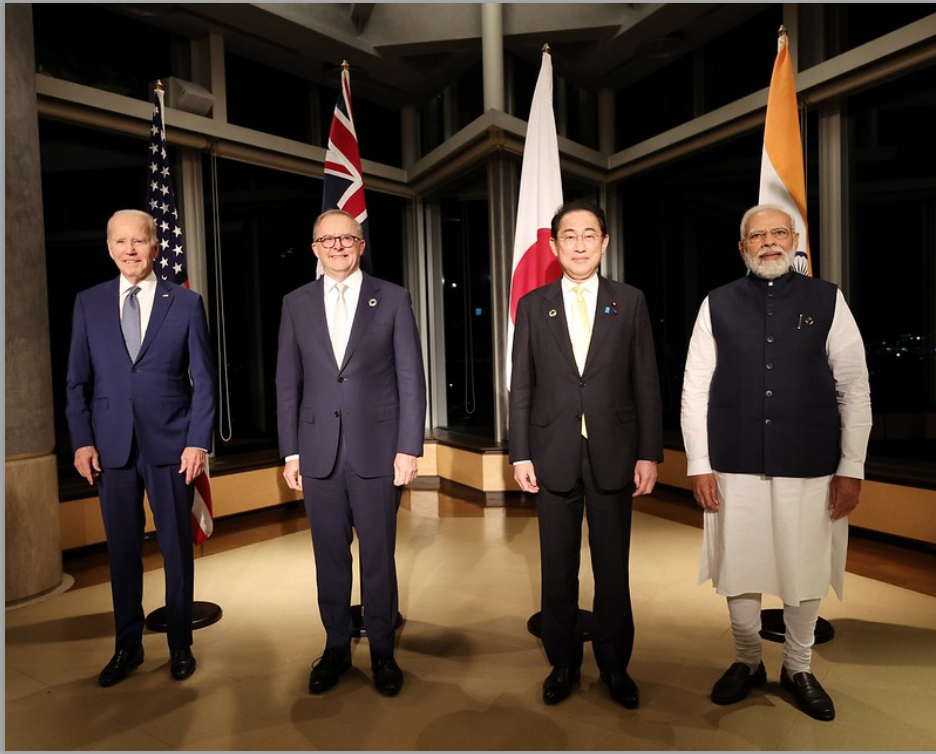
As part of the US-backed Abraham Accords, the UAE, Morocco, and Bahrain established diplomatic relations with Israel in 2020. Since then, the nations have worked to strengthen their defence ties with Israel. Together, these countries accounted for roughly 25% of Israel's record \$12.5 billion in defence exports last year, indicating growing economic and defence connections between the countries. According to Israel's defence ministry, sales in 2022 saw a 50% increase over the previous three years and a doubling in volume over the preceding decade. Drones accounted for 25% of 2022 exports, with missiles, rockets, or air defence systems accounting for about 19% of the sales.

Following a report that Israel is considering acknowledging Morocco's sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara territory, Israel's senior ambassador to Morocco said that Elbit Systems, one of Israel's major defence technology companies, wanted to open two installations in Morocco. Despite recent tensions in the occupied West Bank and Arab states' reluctance to join a US-Israel-backed defence bloc called the "Middle East Nato," the growth in arms sales demonstrates how Israel and Arab states' defence and commercial ties have advanced. Moreover, Gulf governments such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia are wary of overt military connections with Israel, fearing the possibility of antagonising their regional rival Iran, which could escalate into a large-scale regional conflict.

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Arab states purchased nearly a quarter of Israel's record \$12.5bn in arms exports. (2023, 13 June). Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/arab-states-purchased-nearly-quarter-israel-record-12bn-arms-exports>

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Washington strengthens ties with Modi, at a price

That the United States conducts its foreign policy based on pursuing its interests and not based on democracy and human rights, records were evident in the recent visit by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the United States, where the BJP leader received nothing less than a red-carpet treatment. As the most populous country in the world, and its largest democracy, India and its leader Modi represent a lynchpin in Biden's strategy in Asia and is seen as a key U.S. ally in the region. This strategy, centred on countering China's expanding influence on the one hand and checking Russian influence on the other, couched in Biden's "autocracy-vs-democracy" narrative, has often been subject to criticism for overlooking curbing freedoms and human rights violations by authoritarian regimes who are allies of the U.S. In this vein, the U.S. administration welcomed Modi with open arms, refusing to take him to task on worrying issues of populism-fueled violence against Muslims and other minorities conducted by BJP Hindutva gangs, policy discrimination against Muslims, cracking down on dissent, and the targeting of journalists. Instead, Modi was given the opportunity to address the U.S. Congress and attend a lavish state dinner hosted by the Bidens.

As a sign of deepening military ties between the two nations amidst the perceived backdrop of an increasingly bellicose China, India committed to purchasing MQ-9B SeaGuardian drones, while Biden and Modi proposed a collaboration between G.E. and the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics to construct F414 jet engines in India. Other announcements included India's participation in the US-led Artemis Accords, an international cooperative agreement for space exploration, a joint mission to the International Space Station with NASA in 2024, and a commitment from US-based semiconductor producer Micron Technology to begin construction on a \$2.75 billion new semiconductor assembly and test facility in India. The two leaders also discussed improving educational exchanges, new moves forward on visas and diplomatic presence in each nation, and agenda items for the forthcoming G20 conference, which India will host in September.

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