



## IMPACT ANALYSIS

**JULY 20, 2022**

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## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

### United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson Resigns

On July 7, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson resigned as leader of the ruling Conservative party. His resignation was triggered by a scandal that led to the resignation of many senior politicians. Johnson will remain Prime Minister until a leadership contest is completed on September 5. The uncertainty arrives at a time when the UK is already experiencing high levels of government debt, high inflation, and a poor economic outlook. Additional challenges from the war in Ukraine and the COVID pandemic create further uncertainty. The UK is likely to see protests and unrest in the short term triggered by socio-economic conditions and other issues such as climate change. These will likely be accompanied by labor strikes and disruption in major urban centers.

### MI5 and FBI Warn of Chinese Threat to Intellectual Property

On July 6, MI5 Director General Ken McCallum and FBI Director Chris Wray gave a joint address to warn of the growing threat from the Chinese Communist party (CCP) to UK and U.S. assets. The briefing centered on the use of non-traditional espionage techniques such as scientific research partnerships, technology transfer, and cyber attacks to facilitate the theft of trade secrets. Businesses most at risk are those that China considers to be strategically important. These can be identified from Chinese five-year and other economic plans.

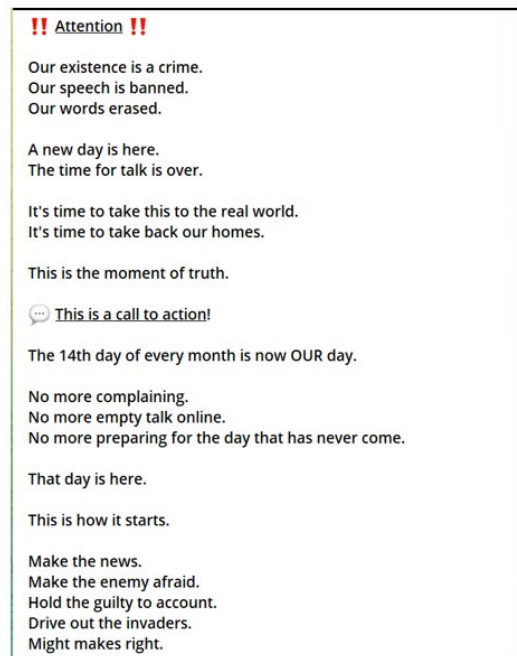
### Prison Break in Abuja, Nigeria

Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) claimed a July 6 raid on a prison in the Nigerian capital Abuja. Over 400 prisoners are still missing, many of which are thought to have been members of Boko Haram. ISWAP has reportedly been attempting to integrate Boko Haram members into the organization following the death of Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau, in May 2021. Islamic State and Al-Qaida affiliates continue to advance in West Africa.

## New White Supremacist Manual Released on July 14

White supremacist channels on Telegram promoted the July 14 release of the ebook “The Hard Reset: A Terrorgram Publication.” The book is very likely to encourage violent attacks against elected officials, political representatives, government facilities, law enforcement, religious communities, commercial facilities, and perceived ideologically opposed individuals. The same social media channels that promoted the book also celebrated attacks by individuals such as Payton Gendron, who killed ten people in a mass shooting attack in Buffalo, New York in June. They also called for the 14th of each month to be “our day”, likely increasing the risk of attacks around the middle of each month.

**Figure 1 — White Supremacist Manual Telegram**



**THE HARD RESET**

IS WHERE YOU'LL FIND THE *FINAL SOLUTION* TO EVERY PROBLEM WE FACE

**THE HARD RESET -- A TERRORGRAM PUBLICATION -- 07/14/22**

## Monkeypox Outbreak

The number of cases continues to increase as does the number of countries with confirmed cases. At a meeting on June 23, the World Health Organization (WHO) decided against declaring the outbreak a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). However, the World Health Network (WHN) on June 22 declared the outbreak a Pandemic Emergency and the WHO's decision is likely to be reviewed in the coming weeks based on information on the incubation period, and the role of sexual transmission and mass gatherings. Models indicate that the UK could see as many as 60,000 new cases a day by the end of the year with some assessments that there will be as many as 100,000 cases worldwide by August and 500,000 to 1 million cases by the end of September.

**Figure 2 — Monkeypox Global Case Map**  
[Source](#)



## Environmental Regulation Protests

Farmers in the Netherlands are protesting government plans to decrease nitrogen emissions. The plans would require farmers to use less fertilizer and decrease the amount of livestock they keep, which could have detrimental effects on smaller farms within the country, potentially forcing some to shut down. Protestors attempted to block a highway with their tractors, prompting police to fire on the protestors. Nobody was injured and a small number of protestors were arrested. In response, protestors have used tractors to block entrances to Groningen Airport Eelde.

Protests in solidarity with Dutch farmers have started in numerous other European countries, including Italy, Germany, and Poland. Italian farmers blocked roads with tractors and Polish farmers held a demonstration in central Warsaw. Protests are expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

Such protests are likely to occur in other countries as new environmental regulations are proposed; Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has proposed a similar policy to limit nitrogen emissions and the use of fertilizer, which would likely prompt farmer protests as well. Governments will have to adapt, balancing farmer incomes and production levels with environmental goals to prevent large scale protests.

## Sri Lankan President Flees Following Mass Protests

Sri Lanka has faced months of protests due to an ongoing economic crisis that has included shortages of many essential goods, including food and medicine. Many protesters have blamed these economic issues on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and his family, who have held numerous powerful positions in Sri Lanka in recent history.

Particularly violent unrest took place on July 9, prompting Rajapaksa to submit his resignation and flee the country. The country's parliament is expected to establish a unity government and move to focus on repairing economic damage. However, even following the establishment of a unity government, divisions within the government increase the risk of a return to total instability.

Similar mass protests are possible in other countries, as many parts of the world face related economic challenges including inflation, energy shortages, and general cost of living crises.

## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

### Food Supply and Unrest

Food supply around the world has been under extreme strain in recent months and is driven by multiple external factors. Russia's invasion of Ukraine and climate change have pushed the global food supply chain to its limits and has the potential to fuel unrest in every corner of the world.

Ukraine is a significant player in world grain production, supplying many countries around the world with their wheat supplies. Egypt, for example, imports about 85% of its wheat from Ukraine and Russia, while Tunisia imports around 50% of its wheat from Ukraine. The Middle East and North Africa region (MENA) region heavily relies on Ukrainian agricultural production due to its relative proximity, but all grain exports have ceased since the start of the Russian invasion. The majority of Ukraine's great exports flow through the port of Odesa on the Black Sea, which has been blockaded by Russia. Without this supply of grain, many countries in the MENA region face food insecurity as their supplies of grain deplete over the coming months. For some countries, this grain crisis has already begun. Lebanon's national wheat supplies were destroyed in the Beirut port explosion in 2020, and without imports from Ukraine, the situation will only worsen. International organizations are also suffering from the lack of grain; forty percent of the World Food Program's wheat is bought from Ukraine. Without the assistance of the World Food Program, groups already suffering from food insecurity are those being impact most directly.

Without the vital grain imports from Eastern Europe, other countries can step in and supplement the grain supply – albeit at higher costs. India announced a program to increase wheat exports in the wake of Russia's invasion, and this program had the potential to help alleviate food insecurity. Unfortunately, this program was cancelled less than 24 hours after it was announced. A combination of high inflation and climate data prompted the Indian government to ban all wheat exports. Other countries have already followed India's action to protect their own wheat supplies, with Argentina also banning wheat exports to ensure there will be enough supply domestically. Bread prices in Argentina have risen 69% in the past year as a result of decreased grain supply, but other food products are also rising in cost. Meat and vegetables have also risen in price 64% and 66%, respectively, highlighting a trend of price increases which is occurring in countries all around the world.

A joint report by numerous United Nations agencies recorded rising food prices on every continent, and protests have sprouted up in Chile, Kenya, and Iran, among others. Protest activities and general unrest threaten the stability of countries and are closely linked with changes in standards of living. Governments have attempted to address the issues of food security, but with little to no success. If these issues continue, the likelihood of large-scale civil unrest will only increase as governments lose popular support. Protests in one country may spill into others, decreasing regional stability, as was seen in the Arab Spring; starting in Tunisia and spread across the region.

With wealthier countries still being able to purchase products at higher prices, Sub-Saharan Africa is suffering the most as currencies drop to record low values and governments cannot compete to buy goods. Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana are preparing for further declines in currency prices. With food and fuel prices skyrocketing, protestors are taking to the streets across the continent. Ghana has turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance, but it is unclear whether or not this will mitigate the current crisis.

The combination of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and disruptions in grain production due to climate change are having disastrous ripple effects around the world, and there are no signs of this crisis ending in the near future. All countries are being affected negatively, though civil responses vary widely. Protests and unrest have the potential to spiral into armed civil conflicts and should be monitored carefully as the situation develops.

### **Decline in Government and Media Trust Will Increase Pressure on Businesses**

According to a recent Gallup poll, American's trust in institutions has reached a new low. In particular, confidence in the federal government and media is very low. In a separate poll, almost one in two people thought that the government and media were "divisive forces in society", with corporations now serving as one of the more trusted institutions. The Edelman Trust Barometer found 80% of people want CEOs to be personally visible when discussing public policy. There is a growing expectation that businesses take responsibility for policy and communication on issues where traditional institutions are perceived as failing.

All stakeholders (shareholders, employees, and customers) expect companies to share their own values and act and say more on important social and political issues. Recent examples include the CEOs of more than 220 companies signing a letter calling for stricter gun control. The letter was released on June 9 after the mass shooting in Uvalde, Texas. Also, companies such as Amazon, Apple, Citigroup, and Microsoft said they are willing to reimburse employees who travel out of state to legally access abortion services. Their announcement followed the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which allowed for the constitutional right to an abortion.

Businesses that are slow to respond to socio-political concerns or are inconsistent with their responses now face various reputational and physical risks. Many companies were criticized for their slow withdrawal from Ukraine, while other companies have experienced protests because of sourcing cotton from China linked to forced labor of the Uyghur population in China. Additionally, PayPal CEO Dan Schulman reportedly received death threats after the company closed the accounts of groups that allegedly sent money to those involved in the January 6, 2021 attack on the Capitol in Washington D.C.

The scrutiny of company and executive behaviour is likely to continue to increase. This will elevate risks from insiders, direct protests, attacks by ideologically opposed individuals, and increase the vulnerability of companies to mis- and dis-information campaigns.



## Russian Risk to Critical Infrastructure

The U.S.' response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has further increased tensions between Washington, D.C. and Moscow, leading to an increased risk of cyberattacks.

One of the U.S.' weaknesses in the cyber domain is the decentralized structure of many critical infrastructure sectors. With some exceptions, infrastructure is controlled by private corporations as opposed to government organizations, blurring the line between civilian and military targets.

A key aspect of military policy is responding to attacks. In more conventional warfare, if one country bombs a military base, the other is likely to respond similarly. However, attribution of cyberattacks is often difficult, which can lead to improper escalation. The Russo-Ukrainian war has many players, including both state and non-state actors, making it difficult to map out a course for any retaliatory attacks.

One industry facing particularly elevated risk is the energy sector. The Russian government has a history of attacking these industries. From 2011 to 2018, the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) conducted a campaign to remotely gain access to U.S. and international energy sector networks and deploy control system focused malware. In 2017, a Russian Federation Central Scientific Research Institute of Chemistry and Mechanics employee was caught leveraging malware to manipulate an oil refinery's controllers. In this case, the company was able to patch and mitigate risk. However, the risk of similar actions remains high. Additionally, as countries move to reduce reliance on Russian oil, the Russian government may feel compelled to counter with cyber attacks on corresponding sectors.

In the past two years, Russian state-sponsored cyber actors have also targeted U.S. defense and intelligence community contractors. These attacks have included credential harvesting and brute force password techniques. The war in Ukraine has only increased motive, leading to a high cybersecurity risk for defense contractors.

Russian backed hackers would likely try to take down or disrupt critical infrastructure in a significant way through various forms of cyberattack. This may include attacks to fuel sources and potential explosive material, including:

- Lithium batteries
- Fuel for boilers
- Machinery energy
- Hazardous materials
- Kinetic vehicles
- Remotely powered vehicles
- Pipeline energy sources

In addition to government personnel, Russian aligned cybercrime groups have also been involved. Groups like Killnet, which executed a distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attack against a U.S. airport for supporting Ukraine, have been attacking Ukrainian sites with malware and DDoS attacks. These groups are still financially motivated and will most likely only attack U.S. sites for financial gain but may use ransomware for both financial and strategic gain.

### **Russian Reduction in Natural Gas Exports**

Germany typically receives more than 50% of its natural gas supplies via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline. On July 11, the pipeline shut down completely for planned maintenance. The maintenance is set to last ten days, however, some in Germany fear that Gazprom, the Russian state-owned oil company, could opt to not restart natural gas supply through the pipeline. These fears come on the heels of Gazprom already moving to reduce supplies to 40% of normal capacity.

Much of Europe faces a heightened recession risk in the near-term, with much of the rest of the world also experiencing massive cost of living increases and other economic challenges. In some cases, these increases are resulting in widespread civil unrest. In Sri Lanka, for example, mass protest resulted in the overthrowing of the government. Large-scale protests have also taken place in the EU and in the UK and are likely to increase as the risk of recession grows.

It is possible Russia will exploit natural gas supplies in order to drive EU countries to at least a more moderate level of support for Ukraine. Additional reductions or a discontinuation of Russian natural gas supplies would undoubtedly exacerbate the ongoing cost of living crisis. Though economic difficulties are likely to continue whether Russia reduces its supply or not, large reductions would potentially expedite the crisis leading to an increased risk of widespread social unrest, an outcome Russia believes the EU may try and avoid by taking a more favorable approach to the war in Ukraine.

Any mass reductions or cut-offs in supply are likely to take place in the near-term. Russia would hope to prevent EU countries from sufficiently filling natural gas reserves ahead of winter in order to cause the most drastic increases in price. Given EU plans to significantly reduce reliance on Russian natural gas by the end of 2022 and through 2023, Russia would likely need to move quickly in order to outpace reduction in demand.

Scheduled maintenance is set to end on July 21, at which time there will likely be more information on Russian plans. Announcements of prolonged maintenance or a reduction or cessation of natural gas supplies is likely to have a negative effect on natural gas prices. In turn, the risk of social unrest would grow across the EU, particularly in countries most dependent on Russian natural gas supplies.



## IMPACT ANALYSIS

AT-RISK International is a global protection agency specializing in security services for individuals and organizations. Our team of experts creates and maintains secure environments by providing threat analysis, protection, investigations, consulting, intelligence and security training services. Since 2003, our mission has been to discretely mitigate security threats before they occur. Through advanced research, analysis and preparations, we protect companies and individuals throughout the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, the Caribbean and Asia Pacific.