

Catering by Wasser

FOR ALL YOUR EVENTS

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Continued from page 6

Which Countries Are Most at Risk?

ISciences aggregated its subnational data and ranked all the countries in the world in terms of both the share of their population and the proportion of their territory that experienced water deficits between October 2017 and September 2018, as well as a similar list including projected water deficits until June 2019. The firm identified countries suffering a ten-year deficit, or a drought rare enough to occur on average once every ten years, and those with a more extreme 30-year deficit, which occurs on average once every 30 years.

Among the countries with both high agricultural dependence and a recent history of conflict, a few stood out in ISciences' historical data for the twelve-month period from October 2017 to September 2018. In Afghanistan, 64 percent of the population had been exposed to a thirty-year drought; in Yemen, the figure was 43 percent, and in Somalia, 34 percent. Looking only at a share of the population, however, could mask the problems in less densely populated rural areas. Eighty percent of Afghanistan's territory and 38 percent of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's territory had undergone a ten-year drought, while 36 percent of Sudan's territory suffered a 30-year drought. India was not among the top 25 percent of states in terms of exposed share of population or territory, but about 95 million Indians, or 7.2 percent of the population, had weathered a 30-year drought over the past year.

ISciences projects that Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen will continue to face water deficits through June 2019. But an additional six countries not included in the top 25 percent for ten-year or 30-year deficits in the 2017-2018 list—Chad, Cameroon, the

Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Mali, and Niger—are projected to rise into the top quartile by June 2019.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Promising efforts are under way to further increase our ability to forecast political violence and food crises. The World Bank recently rolled out a pilot of its Famine Action Mechanism, which tries to anticipate famine locations using machine learning. And the Uppsala University's Violence Early-Warning System (ViEWS) Project has been developing subnational conflict forecasts for Africa. Before such systems reach their full potential, however, our list can help detect which countries are likely to become hot spots of climate instability and humanitarian crises. What should policymakers do with this information? In countries enduring large-scale violence, such as Yemen or South Sudan, the key priority clearly must be dampening armed conflict. Countries where violence has ceased, however, can benefit from building their capacities to detect and respond to crises, and from improving job opportunities. Here the kinds of interventions that food policy experts have developed to prevent famines—including food and income support and crop insurance—can be of help. When a major drought hit Ethiopia in 2015, its government was able to use similar policies to ward off famine, although even this success did not fully insulate it from protests. And given the particular susceptibility of agriculture to changes in the climate, governments and international institutions need to urgently consider how agricultural practices can be adapted to meet these changes and prevent large declines in crop yields.

Continued from page 9

How to Stand Up to the Kremlin

must stand firm and impose costs on Russia for its violations of international law and other countries' sovereignty—those it has already committed and those it is likely planning. Maintaining the sanctions that the United States and the EU levied on Russia in response to its invasion of Ukraine has been important not only in pressuring Moscow to resolve the conflict in the near term but also as a signal to the Kremlin that the costs of such behavior will eventually outweigh any perceived benefits. Having suffered few lasting consequences for its 2007 cyberattack on Estonia and only a short financial decline following its 2008 invasion of Georgia, the Kremlin erroneously concluded that it could act with relative impunity. It did so in spite of the clear marker that the Obama administration laid down from the very start. As one of us, Joe Biden, noted in a speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2009, "We will not recognize any nation having a sphere of influence. It will remain our view that sovereign states have the right to make their own decisions and choose their own alliances." So when Russia invaded Ukraine, the United States led the way by imposing tough sanctions. Fortunately, the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, a bill that Congress passed last August, codified the sanctions on Russia that were put in place by the Obama administration and gave the current administration enhanced authorities to impose lasting consequences on Russia for its interference in the 2016 election.

Even while defending U.S. interests and safeguarding liberal democracy elsewhere, Washington must keep the channels of communication open with Moscow. At the height of the Cold War, American and Soviet leaders recognized that, whatever their differences, they could not afford a miscalculation that might lead to war. They had to keep talking. The same is true today: as two nuclear superpowers with military assets deployed in close proximity in many different parts of the globe, the United States and Russia have a mutual obligation to maintain strategic stability. That means not only regulating the development and deployment of strategic weapons but also communicating clearly to avoid misunderstandings about what each side perceives as a strategic threat. For its part, Washington needs to spell out clear consequences for interfering in the U.S. democratic process or tampering with critical U.S. infrastructure. And finally, as more news breaks each day about the extent of Russia's disinformation campaign and the tactics that Moscow used to manipulate public opinion and exploit the fault lines within U.S. society, it falls on all Americans to be aware and informed citizens. We must collectively reject foreign influence over our democratic institutions and do more to address the challenges within our own communities, rather than allowing demagogues at home and tyrants abroad to drive us apart. Putin and his cronies do not understand that the greatest strength of American democracy is an engaged citizenry. Even if the president refuses to act, we can.

Continued from page 1

How Iran Spreads Disinformation Around the World

parent, Alphabet, after FireEye found them. The social media companies have closed hundreds of accounts that promoted the sites or pushed Iranian messaging. Facebook said last month it had taken down 82 pages, groups and accounts linked to the Iranian campaign; these had gathered more than one million followers in the United States and Britain.

But the sites uncovered have a much wider scope. They have published in 16 different languages, from Azerbaijani to Urdu, targeting Internet users in less-developed countries. That they reached readers in tightly controlled societies such as Egypt, which has blocked hundreds of news websites since 2017, highlights the campaign's reach.

The Iranian sites include:

A news site called Another Western Dawn which says its focus is on "unspoken truth." It fooled the Pakistani defence minister into issuing a nuclear threat against Israel;

Ten outlets targeting readers in Yemen, where Iran and US ally Saudi Arabia have been fighting a proxy conflict since civil war broke out in 2015;

The news on the sites is not all fake. Authentic stories sit alongside pirated cartoons, as well as speeches from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The sites clearly support Iran's government and amplify antagonism to countries opposed to Tehran - particularly Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States. Nile Net's "laughing stock" piece was copied from an Iranian state TV network article published earlier the same day.

The identity or location of the past owners of some of the websites is visible in historical Internet registration records: 17 of 71 sites have in the past listed their locations as Iran or Tehran, or given an Iranian telephone or fax number. But who owns them now is often hidden, and none of the Iranian-linked operators could be reached. More than 50 of the sites use American web service providers Cloudflare and OnlineNIC - firms that provide website owners with tools to shield themselves from spam and hackers. Frequently, such services also effectively conceal who owns the sites or where they are hosted. The companies declined to disclose who operates the sites.

Another western dawn

The Kremlin is widely seen as the superpower in modern information warfare. From what is known so far, Russia's influence operation - which Moscow denies - dwarfs Iran's. According to Twitter, nearly 4,000 accounts connected to the Russian campaign posted over 9 million tweets between 2013 and 2018, against over 1 million tweets from fewer than 1,000 accounts believed to originate in Iran.

AWDnews publishes in English, French, Spanish and German and, according to data from web analytics company SimilarWeb, receives around 12,000 unique visitors a month.

Demolished home

One of IUVM's most popular users is a site called Sudan Today, which SimilarWeb data shows receives almost 150,000 unique visitors each month. On Facebook, it tells its 57,000 followers that it operates without political bias. Its 18,000 followers on Twitter have included the Italian Embassy in Sudan, and its work has been cited in a report by the Egyptian Electricity Ministry. The office address registered for Sudan Today in 2016 covers a whole city district in north Khartoum, according to archived website registration details provided by WhoisAPI Inc and Domain-Tools LLC. The phone number listed in those records does not work.

Sudan used to be an Iranian ally but has changed sides to align itself with Saudi Arabia, costing

Tehran a foothold in the Horn of Africa just as it becomes more isolated by the West. In that environment, Iran sees itself as competing with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United States for international support, and is taking the fight online, said Ariane Tabatabai, a senior associate and Iran expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

The site also draws attention to Saudi Arabia's military actions in Yemen. Since Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir ended his allegiance with Iran he has sent troops and jets to join Saudi-led forces in the Yemeni conflict.

Turkish cartoonist Mikail Çiftçi drew the original. He said he did not give Sudan Today permission to use it.

Alnagi Albashra, a 28-year-old software developer in Khartoum, said he likes to read articles on Sudan Today in the evenings when waiting for his baby to fall asleep. But he and three other Sudan Today readers reached by Reuters had no idea who was behind the site.

It is unclear who globally is tasked with responding to online disinformation campaigns like Iran's, or what if any action they should take, said David Conrad, chief technology officer at ICANN, a non-profit which helps manage global web addresses.

Social media accounts can be deleted in bulk by the firms that provide the platforms. But the Iranian campaign's backbone of websites makes it harder to dismantle than social media, because taking down a website often requires the cooperation of law enforcement, Internet service providers and web infrastructure companies.

Shortly after being contacted, Twitter suspended the accounts for Nile Net Online and Sudan Today. "Clear attribution is very difficult," a spokeswoman said, but added that the company would continue to update a public database of tweets and accounts linked to state-backed information operations when it had new information.

Google did not respond directly to questions about the websites found. The company has said it identified and closed 99 accounts which it says are linked to Iranian state media. "We've invested in robust systems to identify influence operations launched by foreign governments," a spokeswoman said.

Facebook said it was aware of the websites and had removed five more Facebook pages. But a spokesman said that based on Facebook user data, the company was not yet able to link all the websites' accounts to the Iranian activity found earlier. "In the past several months, we have removed hundreds of Pages, Groups, and accounts linked to Iranian actors engaging in coordinated inauthentic behaviour. We continue to remove accounts across our services and in all relevant languages," he said.

Accounts linked to the Iranian sites remain active online, especially in languages other than English. On Nov. 30, 16 of the Iranian sites were still posting daily updates on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or YouTube - including Sudan Today and Nile Net Online. Between them, the social media accounts had more than 700,000 followers.