



Updated September 23, 2022

Pakistan's 2022 Floods and Implications for U.S. Interests

Overview

In mid-June 2022, at the beginning of monsoon season, heavy rains began flooding areas of Pakistan. Estimates range from double to several times the normal monsoon rainfall. By late August, flooding had worsened to historic and catastrophic levels, reportedly affecting more than 33 million people, injuring nearly 13,000 and killing more than 1,600. With more than one-third of the country reportedly submerged, housing, infrastructure, and livelihoods are negatively affected, and agricultural losses appear to be extensive. Pakistan's government has estimated the cost of flood damage at \$30 billion and cut its projected annual economic growth for its fiscal year ending June 2023.

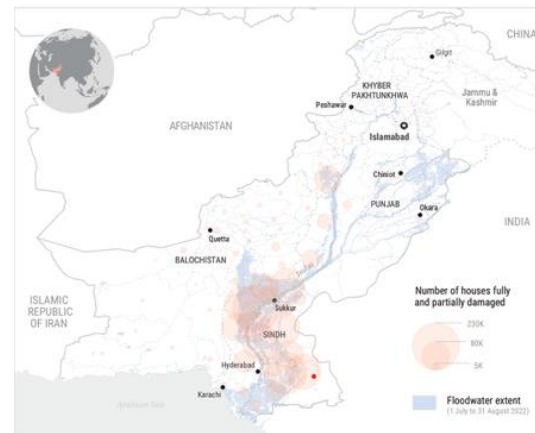
Successive U.S. Administrations have described a stable, democratic, and prosperous Pakistan as critical to U.S. interests. This situation may have U.S. security implications. Responding to this disaster is taxing a Pakistani government already struggling with political upheaval, worsening economic and debt crises, unsettled civil-military relations, and rising public discontent. Regional stability and efforts to counter militancy and terrorism are among U.S. concerns; both may face negative impacts from the current situation. For example, following 2010 flooding, some banned Pakistani terrorist groups reportedly were at the forefront of rural relief efforts and may gain popular support through such activities; Pakistan's government denies any banned groups are involved in flood relief in 2022. Congress may consider whether or not U.S. assistance in response to the catastrophic floods would serve U.S. interests, including economic and security objectives.

Flood Damage—Initial Assessments

Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the lead federal agency for disaster relief coordination, including relief operations supported by Pakistan's army, navy, and air force. The provinces of Sindh and Balochistan appear most affected (see **Figure 1**). As of September 23, 2022, the NDMA is reporting the following damage due to flooding since June 14, 2022:

- 1,606 persons killed (45% Sindh, 19% Balochistan, 19% Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or KP, 12% Punjab) and 12,863 injured;
- Affected population: more than 33 million (44% Sindh, 28% Balochistan, 13% KP, 15% Punjab);
- Livestock deaths: more than 1 million (50+% Balochistan, 32% Sindh);
- Damaged homes: more than 2 million (88% Sindh);
- Damaged roads: more than 8,100 miles (64% Sindh); damaged bridges: 392 (42% Sindh, 27% KP).

Figure 1. Homes Damaged in Pakistan's 2022 Flooding
(as of September 15, 2022)



Source: U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Humanitarian Needs

Pakistan's affected populations are in need of relief supplies, including shelter, food, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Experts say that floods are likely to exacerbate food availability across the country, particularly for those already experiencing food insecurity. The United Nations (U.N.) estimates that 7.6 million people have been displaced, some of whom have taken refuge in official Government of Pakistan displacement sites. The United Nations also reports that, of those displaced, many are staying as close to their homes and the affected areas as possible due to concerns that lack of land ownership documentation could prevent future returns. In many affected areas the humanitarian response has been hampered by damaged roads and bridges. Humanitarian organizations assert that maternal health and protection from gender-based violence are also of concern, as well as an increased risk of vector-borne disease (such as malaria) and water-borne disease (including diarrhea and cholera) along with threats from venomous wildlife such as poisonous snakes. The floods also may exacerbate preexisting outbreaks of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and other medical conditions, particularly as vaccine campaigns are suspended and access to care is limited.

National and International Responses

Government of Pakistan. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif established a National Flood Response and Coordination Center to facilitate a multiagency response in coordination with the NDMA. The government established camps for populations displaced by the floods. Pakistan is providing cash assistance to those affected, while provincial governments may redirect development funds to flood

relief. It also has verified several fund-raising agencies on the GoFundMe website.

International Responses. On August 30, 2022, the United Nations issued a Flash Humanitarian Appeal for \$160 million to support an Islamabad-led “Pakistan 2022 Floods Response,” of which 37% has been funded to date. The appeal identifies 5.2 million people particularly in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including “food, water, sanitation, emergency education, protection and health support.” On a recent visit to Pakistan, the U.N. Secretary-General called for “massive” international support. International relief agencies have launched separate funding appeals. International financial institutions reportedly have pledged funds for Pakistan disaster relief and development, with the majority coming from the World Bank.

U.S. Response to Pakistan's Floods

In mid-August 2022, the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan issued a disaster declaration and, on September 2, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team to Pakistan to assess the impact of the floods. A Response Management Team based in Washington, DC, is coordinating U.S. government flood response efforts. As of September 22, the U.S. government had provided more than \$48 million in humanitarian assistance for “food support, safe water, sanitation and hygiene improvements, financial help, and shelter assistance” (\$20 million of which was announced by USAID Administrator Power in Islamabad on September 9). Earlier in FY2022, USAID also provided \$3 million in Early Recovery, Risk Reduction, and Resilience funding. On September 8, the Department of Defense U.S. Central Command began air operations to transport USAID relief supplies from USAID's Dubai warehouse to Pakistan to support USAID-led humanitarian response operations.

In addition to humanitarian assistance, bilateral U.S. development aid to Pakistan—estimated at \$71 million for FY2022, with \$84 million requested for FY2023—is expected to continue, including over \$1 million in grants and project support provided earlier in August, and with programs adapting, in part, to address the long-term impact of the 2022 floods.

Environmental and Governance Issues

Pakistan suffers from environmental and governance challenges that potentially worsen natural disasters, including flooding. A World Bank *Vulnerability Assessment* found that “Pakistan faces some of the highest disaster risk levels in the world.” In mid-2010, the country experienced the most catastrophic flooding in its history until then, a disaster that officially killed more than 1,700 persons, affected more than 20% of the land area and 20 million people, and caused billions of dollars in damage. According to a *Scientific American* assessment later that year, the scale of that flooding was “made worse by a history of deforestation and land-use changes in the affected areas.” Analysts estimate that Pakistan's tree cover has decreased by at least 80% since its 1947 independence. The annual rate of forest loss in Pakistan in the last three decades is one of the highest in Asia, according data compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization.

Poor governance and planning, and lack of political will, also might contribute to Pakistan's vulnerability to floods. Inadequate water management likely played a role. Following the 2010 floods, the government reportedly failed to implement plans that would have reduced the consequences of future floods by preventing rebuilding in and repopulating of flood-prone areas. Laws barring construction too close to river banks apparently were widely violated. Current political divisions in Pakistan may complicate federal-provincial coordination.

In his September 21 address to the U.N. General Assembly, President Joe Biden singled out Pakistan's disaster as an example of the “human cost of climate change.” The U.N. Secretary-General and Pakistan's prime minister are among those positing a causal link between climate change and recent flooding. Some analyses see Pakistan as especially vulnerable to climate-related extreme weather events. A 2021 report by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank identified as a major concern the uncertainty of a warming climate's changes to glacial melt and extreme precipitation. A rapid, non-peer-reviewed September 2022 “attribution” study suggested that “climate change could have increased the rainfall intensity” in Pakistan in recent months, among several factors that experts identify as contributing to the event. A June 2022 U.N. report on “Pathways to Adaptation and Resilience” projects that, in a “worst-case climate change scenario,” Pakistan could realize average annual economic losses equal to more than 9% of its GDP. Yale University's 2022 *Environmental Performance Index* gave Pakistan an overall ranking of 176th of 180 countries, including 175th in “climate change mitigation” (reduction of greenhouse gas emissions). Going forward, Pakistan may join other developing nations in pushing to establish international funding for natural disasters that they say are caused by climate change.

Issues for Congress

For over a decade, Congress annually has enacted security- and human rights-related conditions on bilateral aid to Pakistan. Congress may consider whether and if so, how to address the crisis in Pakistan through humanitarian or more strategic long-term assistance amid unprecedented global humanitarian need and competing priorities. Congress could consider whether the United States should provide humanitarian assistance through multilateral channels such as the United Nations or nongovernmental implementing partners, and also monitor how the executive branch allocates such assistance. Bilateral development activities could be aligned more closely with U.S. objectives in Pakistan and also channeled through the government. For all U.S. support, Congress could conduct oversight of the delivery challenges encountered, including access and security conditions in Pakistan, which could undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian operations and development aid; and/or assess the flood disaster responses of the Islamabad government and international donors so as to improve disaster preparedness and prevention activities, and to reduce the harm caused by future flood events.

K. Alan Kronstadt, Specialist in South Asian Affairs
Rhoda Margesson, Specialist in International Humanitarian Policy

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.