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AFRICA

CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

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In the Central African Republic, AU Peacekeepers Carried Out an Egregious Crime
Le Monde/Human Rights Watch
By Lewis Mudge
At the beginning of a brutal civil war in the Central African Republic, in 2012, African Union (AU) peacekeepers were deployed to try to stop attacks on civilians and bring stability to the country, in a mission known as MISCA. Yet, not only were they powerless to stop the bloodshed, but in at least one gruesome case, the peacekeepers themselves carried out cold-blooded attacks, then tried to cover up the evidence.

On March 24, 2014, tensions flared between MISCA peacekeepers from Congo-Brazzaville and the anti-balaka, an armed group drawn predominantly from Christian communities, in Boali. After an escalation, the self-declared anti-balaka general, Maurice Konomo, ordered his men to "go to war" against the MISCA soldiers. One peacekeeper was killed. Enraged after the killing of one of their own, a group of about 20 Congolese MISCA soldiers went to Konomo's house and surrounded it, shooting dead one boy.

The Congolese peacekeepers then detained 12 people, including women and children. The detainees were taken to MISCA officers' residences near their base in Boali. The peacekeepers ordered all the civilians in the area into their homes. Residents reported hearing gunshots later that night and the next day found traces of blood in various locations, including at the water pump where peacekeepers had cleaned their vehicles.

The day after the attack, the peacekeepers issued a news release condemning the murder of the peacekeepers in Boali and saying that armed men killed him. They said that their troops returned fire, killing 12 assailants, whom they later identified as anti-balaka. Months later MISCA admitted to a team from the United Nations' international commission of inquiry that the news release did not reflect what had really happened and said that it had been released too quickly. While the AU promised investigations and said that an internal report had been drafted, it appears as though it was only stalling for time. In September 2014, the African Union peacekeeping role was to be handed over to a UN mission, and officials at the AU seemed to hope this case would go away.

On June 5, 2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published a report in which it found the MISCA troops had committed acts of enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings at Boali. Then in 2016, the remains of the 12 people the peacekeepers detained were found in an exhumed grave near the UN peacekeeping base.

Human Rights Watch carried out its own investigations from 2014 to 2016 and concluded that the peacekeepers committed the murders. In 2017, experts from the Columbia Law School Human Rights Clinic and the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team assisted Central African authorities in further investigating the murders and in November, a forensics report was handed to the Central African investigating judge.

The evidence, both from witnesses and from the exhumations is clear: AU peacekeepers carried out an egregious crime, murdering the very people they had been sent to protect.

Impunity is a key driver of conflict in the Central African Republic. Since the predominantly Muslim militia, the Seleka, started an offensive in 2012, very few people responsible for serious crimes have been held responsible. Authorities from Congo first denied allegations their men had committed murder, but the attention to the case seems to have prompted some action. In 2016, justice officials from the Congo requested information from Central African authorities on this case, and detained three of its peacekeepers, including the commanding officer in Boali, Bonaventure Abena.

The three peacekeepers were tried in Brazzaville in April 2018. It could have been a chance for Congolese authorities to set an example and show that international peacekeepers found guilty of serious crimes would be held accountable and punished appropriately. Instead, they shared little information with the public, their Central African counterparts, and the victims' families. The three men were found guilty of war crimes but given sentences of just three years. They are now free.

The lenient sentences send a deeply disappointing message on accountability for peacekeepers' crimes — as dozens of other peacekeepers, including from the UN, face allegations of murder and sexual exploitation and abuse. But beyond that, they deny justice to family members of the victims. In a letter addressed to the Congolese court published on August 9, an association of family members of Boali victims declared they were appalled by the short sentences and indignant at not having been invited to participate in the trial. The association asks for clarification about how such light sentences were given and, if the explanation is not sufficient, they ask the court to reconsider its decision.

The victims' families also want compensation. They are contemplating a civil trial against the convicted men, but this will be difficult to arrange in another country and jurisdiction, without support. Here is where the AU can salvage something positive from this situation. First, it should publish its 2014 report on these killings and outline how the institution can better hold its own peacekeepers accused of serious crimes to account. Second, it should support the families in their civil case against the
peacekeepers in Congo. Third, it should closely monitor the trial and issue public statements after the verdict.

The sentences handed down by the Congolese courts are a serious injustice, but the AU can still do some right by the victims' families.

**UN condemns rising incitement to hatred in central african republic**

Associated Press/Urban Faith

August 12, 2018

The U.N. Security Council on Friday strongly condemned "the rise of incitement to ethnic and religious hatred and violence" in the Central African Republic and attacks by Boko Haram and the Islamic State extremist groups in the broader region.

A presidential statement approved by the council's 15 members urged armed groups in CAR "to cease all forms of violence and destabilizing activities, lay down their arms immediately and unconditionally, and engage constructively in the peace process."

It also condemned "manipulated hostility" to the U.N. peacekeeping force and other international actors in the country, which has seen deadly interreligious and intercommunal fighting since 2013 when predominantly Muslim Seleka rebels seized power in the capital and mainly Christian anti-Balaka militias fought back.

The presidential statement, covering the Central Africa region, said the council remains concerned at the security and humanitarian situation in the Lake Chad Basin.

The council said terrorist attacks by Boko Haram and IS "have caused large-scale and devastating loss of life, have had a devastating humanitarian impact including through the displacement of a large number of civilians in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad and represent a threat to the stability and peace of West and Central Africa."

It noted "with particular concern the continuing use by Boko Haram of women and girls as suicide bombers" which it said "has created an atmosphere of suspicion towards them and made them targets of harassment and stigmatization in affected communities, and of arbitrary arrests by security forces."

The council urged countries being attacked to fight all forms of terrorism including the conditions that cause its spread.

The Security Council expressed concern that the Lord's Resistance Army continues to pose "a security risk to civilians," particularly in CAR and Congo.

It also expressed concern "at the link between illicit trafficking in wildlife and natural resources and financing of armed groups," including the LRA and Boko Haram.

**More questions than answers in murders of Russian journalists in Africa**

CNN

By Tim Lister, Clarissa Ward, Sebastian Shukla

August 14, 2018

The murders of three Russian journalists investigating the work of private military contractors in the Central African Republic are still shrouded in mystery.

But the exiled Russian billionaire who was funding their work says evidence gathered so far indicates they were not the victims of a random attack but a well-planned ambush.

The three journalists — Kirill Radchenko, Alexander Rastorguyev and Orkhan Dzhemal — were shot dead last month on a remote road in the north of the CAR. They'd gone to the country to investigate the presence of Russian military contractors linked to Wagner, a company close to the Kremlin that is also active in Syria and Sudan.

Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the exiled Russian billionaire whose foundation supported the investigation, told CNN that "some people who we know in Russia were approached by people connected with Russian mercenaries, and said they had warned the journalists not to go there, to keep themselves well away from the area." People who had been to the site said it looked like the assailants had been waiting there the whole day, Khodorkovsky said.

One man who might be able to cast light on what happened is the local driver — a former policeman — hired by the journalists. The Russian Foreign Ministry says that local authorities in CAR have interviewed him, and a Russian representative in CAR said the man was in custody in the capital.

Khodorkovsky accused CAR authorities of "hiding the driver, who is a key witness."
Alain Nzilo, a journalist in CAR who has followed the case, told CNN last week he found it strange that the assailants appeared to have let the driver go free.

"Often, the drivers are the first to be killed and not the foreigners," he said.

Also unknown: why did the journalists insist on continuing their journey after dark after being advised by local security forces not to? And why did they change their route at the last moment, after leaving the town of Sibut?

According to a Russian official in CAR, they "had a word with someone and then changed their route." Khodorkovsky says: "This is impossible to explain on the basis of information which we possess."

Mineral riches

In much less doubt is why the trio were so keen to get to CAR in the first place. According to the foundation sponsoring their reporting, they'd been investigating the activities of Wagner for months. They wanted to find out whether Wagner — or one of its proxies — was setting up shop in CAR, using military muscle to exploit the Republic's reputed mineral wealth.

The Russian presence in CAR expanded dramatically at the beginning of this year, after the UN Security Council agreed Moscow could send trainers and weapons to the country — one of the most volatile in Africa — to help train local forces.

At least nine cargo flights full of weapons and equipment, as well as one major shipment by sea and land, arrived in CAR, along with 175 military trainers. All but a handful of them were private contractors.

Wagner is a secretive company — with no known address, phone number or official records — that recruits hundreds of former Russian soldiers, many of them special forces or "spetsnaz." In the last few years, its contractors have appeared in a growing number of conflict zones, including Ukraine and Syria.

Both the company and its boss, Dmitry Utkin, have been sanctioned by the United States for their role in the pro-Russian separatist rebellion in Ukraine. Someone of the same name used to be a director at Concord Management, a St. Petersburg company run by Yevgeny Prigozhin that is close to the Kremlin.

Both Prigozhin and Concord have in the past denied being linked to Wagner. Concord said last year: "We do not have any information about this organization. But part of Wagner's role in Syria was to regain control of lucrative oil fields on behalf of the Syrian regime. And a company called Evro Polis had a deal with Damascus under which it would get 25% of oil revenues from fields that are recovered. Evro Polis "is owned or controlled by Yevgeny Prigozhin," according to the US Treasury Department.

Such complex relationships may also be at work in CAR, as CNN has previously reported.

Khodorkovsky, a prominent Russian businessman before being jailed in Russia for 10 years on tax evasion and fraud charges, certainly thinks so.

"The group of mercenaries which are working in the Central African Republic are indeed connected to Mr Prigozhin," he told CNN. "They train local government troops, they also hold negotiations with militants and they're involved in the work of structures involved in obtaining diamonds and gold." Russia more visible across continent

Journalist Nzilo said the Russians combine basic humanitarian works with military training and mining. He said they are visible at three major mines and appear to be most interested in extracting diamonds and gold. Another source in CAR told CNN that the Russians sometimes deploy mobile clinics for the local population at the same time as contractors and military hardware.

Across Africa, Russia is becoming a more visible and assertive player. It's refurbishing military bases in Egypt. Last year, Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Sochi and asked him for "protection from aggressive US actions."

Russian instructors have trained some CAR troops inside Sudan. Sergey Lavrov, Russia's veteran foreign minister, recently visited Angola, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia and Zimbabwe.

For Moscow, it seems, the goals of tapping into Africa's mineral wealth and challenging Western influence on the continent overlap. Sending contractors to CAR, a country in the heart of Africa that borders six other states, ticks both boxes.

Perhaps Alexander Rastorguyev, one of Russia's most accomplished documentary makers, and his team were on their way to finding out more. His friends at a memorial service in Moscow last week believed they would have done. But at the moment,
they just want to know what happened.

Kirill Kulagin, who was close to the film-maker, asked: "Was it a contract murder, a robbery, a targeted assassination?" "It could be anything," he said. "We still can't understand anything."

**In central Africa, a cathedral shelters Muslims amid sectarian violence**

Religious News Service

By Doreen Ajiambo

August 14, 2018

Hundreds of Muslims are trapped on the grounds of a Roman Catholic cathedral in the southern city of Bangassou, unable to leave the compound for fear of being attacked by a Christian militia.

Muslims have been attacked and murdered in the area around Bangassou, a small market city on the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as a nearly five-year-old civil war between the Christian majority and Muslims has divided the southeastern part of the country.

In July, a self-styled Church Defense Group for Christians called on all Christians in the country to carry out revenge attacks on Muslims for killing Christians. The leader of the group, François Nzapakéyé, said "priests and pastors are systematically assassinated." He cited Father Paul Emile Nzalé, murdered in an attack by 200 armed men in May at Notre Dame of Fatima in the capital, Bangui.

"We will avenge the killings of the many church leaders and men of God, killed in the exercise of their functions. Muslims or Christians, we shall see," Nzapakéyé said in his communique to followers.

Yet in Bangassou, St. Peter Claver Cathedral has opened its doors to some 2,000 Muslims. And three hours east, hundreds of students and residents have taken refuge in a local parish in Zemio. In both places, Muslims and their protectors live in constant fear of attack amid threats from Christian militia.

"There are armed men here waiting for Muslims to emerge out of the camp so that they can kill them," said Father Yovane Cox of Bangassou Diocese, who lives at the compound. "We need to help them as soon as possible to avoid confrontation and bloodbath."

"I can be killed any time," Aboubakar Abdoulaye, 22, told Religion News Service by phone from inside the cathedral compound. "We hear sounds of gunshots and explosives every night. You can't go outside the camp to look for food or firewood. They will kill you."

The ethnic and religious conflict dividing the Central African Republic, which is 80 percent Christian, began in 2013, when the primarily Muslim Seleka militia ousted President Faustin-Archange Touadéra. In response, Christian militias called the "anti-balaka" rose up to counter the Muslim rebels.

Thousands on both sides have been killed, and one-fifth of the country's population has fled abroad or internally.

The Christian militia, said Mohamadou Mana, who lives at the cathedral compound, is "determined to eliminate us." Mana, 28, lost his family in an attack in March 2017 when he ventured out for food.

"They have been telling us that they are going to completely eliminate the Muslim community in the country," said Mana. "We need help." Church leaders accused of protecting Muslim families are also being threatened.

"They call us traitors," said Jean-Alain Zembi, a priest in Zemio. "They will kill you if they discover you are protecting Muslims."

Bishop Juan José Aguirre of Bangassou told the BBC last year that, despite the protection of U.N. soldiers, sheltering Muslims in the Petit Séminaire St. Louis has provoked attacks on clerics.

"We have been attacked by Christians. They attacked my car," said Aguirre. "Our properties have completely been vandalized. We are targeted from both sides, Christian and Muslim."

"But we must help people when they need us — those who are vulnerable, including Muslims and children," said Aguirre.

Christian militia members, meanwhile, say they are only responding to attacks on Christians by Muslim militants in the north of the country.
"Seleka militants have been going door to door murdering Christians and destroying Bibles in the north of the country, and no one speaks about it," Francis Paguere, a militia leader in Bangui, told Religion News Service. "Who has been protecting Christians? Nobody, including even imams, has come out to condemn the killings."

The Muslim militants deserve punishment, he said.

"It is the war they started themselves and they must be ready to fight," he said. "They should not be protected by anyone, including church leaders, because they are killing our people."

Some imams have been calling for harmony, releasing a statement in June 2018 reminding their congregants that freedom of worship "was guaranteed by the Constitution."

"The acts of violence that have been happening for some time in Central Africa are aimed at turning the political crisis into a confessional crisis," the statement said.

Aguirre said that the crisis can be solved only by reducing the barriers between Islam and Christianity. "There is no such thing as a Muslim person or a Christian person," he told the BBC. "Everyone is a human being, and we need to protect everyone who is vulnerable."

Abdoulaye and others trapped at the Bangassou cathedral need a quicker solution.

"It's not safe here," he said. "The government should relocate us."

Still, Abdoulaye said, he was grateful for the aid he has received.

"We thank the church leaders (for) supporting us. We urge other Christians to be like them and stop attacking Muslims. We need to live in peace.

Driver of Russian Journalists Killed in Africa Combined to Jail-Embassy

Sputnik News
August 13, 2018

A driver of Russian journalists who were murdered in the Central African Republic (CAR) last month was imprisoned, the press service of the Russian Embassy in the CAR told Sputnik on Monday citing local investigators.

"He is in jail... in Bangui. We asked the investigators about his status and they said that the driver is currently treated as a witness and is in jail to ensure his accessibility on one hand... and his security, just in case, on the other," the press service said.

According to the press service, Russian investigators have not yet arrived in CAR, with the date of their arrival unknown.

On July 30, Russian nationals Kirill Radchenko, Alexander Rastorguev and Orkhan Dzhemal were killed near the CAR city of Sibut.

An investigative media outlet of Russian opposition figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky confirmed that it had sent the journalists to the CAR to work on a documentary film.

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As the world's newest nation collapses, the internationally-backed peace process risks making a bad situation worse

In its short, sad history as an independent country, South Sudan has known more years of war than peace. In the fight for independence, millions of lives were lost to civil war. Eventual freedom from Sudan came in 2011.

But only two and a half years after independence, a new civil war within South Sudan, sparked by competition among the country's venal elite, collapsed the state and precipitated the exodus of a third of the population. Despite billions of dollars per year in aid, millions more are starving. Investigations by the United Nations, the African Union and others have documented repeated war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Seven years after independence, South Sudan's warring political class finds itself back in Khartoum. Amidst its own ongoing economic crisis, the government of Sudan has seized the reins of a stuttering peace process, motivated by hopes its intervention would lead to greater oil revenue from South Sudan, which pays Khartoum to export its crude.

Through a mix of coercion and incentives, the Sudanese have overseen the signing of a series of vague, problematic and contradictory agreements. And now, Khartoum has set August 5 as the date for signature of a new peace agreement.

A year ago, I argued to a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee that the troubled regional mediation process deserved another chance to succeed, and even if talks were ineffectual, could be of value if they served to contain the conflict. But the mediation's potential has been largely wasted, and the conflict has instead metastasized.

While diplomats may argue that supporting even an imperfect mediation process is better than having no process at all, backing a flawed agreement that could incentivize the intensification of fighting is wrong: The proposed text returns power to the same discredited and corrupt politicians for another three-year term, without the necessary, viable reforms to resolve the country's humanitarian, economic, or security predicaments.

An already factionalized and corrupt military elite will likely loot what is left of the country's wealth, well aware that the proposed security and governance arrangements are likely to fail. And those left out of the deal may now see violent overthrow of the government as the only available recourse.

While the White House has rightly voiced concern about the direction of the current peace process, most of the international community, including African states, the UK, the European Union and China remain supportive of the Khartoum talks.

More must be done by the United States to convince its allies and other friends of South Sudan that any agreement, should, at minimum, not make things any worse. If not corrected, certain provisions in the agreement may directly spur new violence.

The deal sets up ambiguous security arrangements in the capital, Juba, where the conflict started in 2013 and where an earlier transitional government collapsed in 2016; calls for the prohibitively expensive, unrealistic cantonment of hundreds of thousands of men, which will be inevitably partial, selective and inequitable, becoming a cause for further rivalry and new militia recruitment; and, sets a false timetable for the unification of a badly fractured security sector, which could easily lead to military disintegration. Any of these factors could set off new rounds of conflict that could endure for years to come.

In the interests of a genuine peace and an end to the suffering of millions of South Sudanese, the United States should also urgently use its leverage with the government of Sudan. Khartoum desires normalization of its relationship with Washington and is therefore receptive to American concerns. But these concerns need to be explicitly conveyed, with alternative options advocated, particularly on the security arrangements. Acknowledging that the peace process needs a re-think and look beyond power-sharing to new models of governance, would be the next step.

The United States is right to be frustrated at the protracted intransigence of the South Sudanese elites who have continued this war, and at the limitations of the regional peace process. But frustration will not stop the grave risks of an irrevocably flawed agreement. Urgent action to change course is required.

No Amnesty for War Crimes

HRW

August 10, 2018

South Sudanese leaders should not undermine their efforts to bring an end to the country's devastating conflict with an amnesty for war crimes and crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch said.
The parties to the conflict signed a peace agreement on August 5, 2018, in Khartoum, agreeing to new power sharing arrangements and a timetable for further talks. On August 8, President Salva Kiir offered a "general amnesty" to heads of armed groups involved in the nation's five-year civil war as part of the agreement to end the fighting.

"Amnesty for atrocities not only conflicts with South Sudan's international obligations, but experience shows it is no way to build a lasting peace," said Elise Keppler, associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch. "While South Sudan's leaders may aim to provide assurances to opponents, they should make clear that the amnesty does not cover grave crimes by all parties since the conflict began."

International law requires prosecuting those responsible for serious crimes, such as crimes against humanity and war crimes, to ensure victims' rights to truth, justice, and an effective remedy, along with combating impunity. South Sudan has also ratified treaties such as the Convention against Torture, which provide for prosecution of people allegedly responsible for serious crimes. Because the United Nations takes the position that amnesties cannot be granted for serious crimes under international law, it will not endorse peace agreements that provide for such amnesties. The African Commission on Human and People's Rights has also rejected amnesty for serious crimes.

South Sudan's leaders have a history of providing de facto blanket amnesty to opponents as part of peace deals, even prior to the country's independence in 2011. The resulting lack of justice has contributed to the country's deepening social and ethnic divisions, and fueled violence and abuses. Human Rights Watch has previously urged mediators and South Sudanese leaders to ensure that peace deals did not include any amnesty for serious crimes.

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Since the new conflict started in December 2013, continued fighting and abuses by government and opposition forces, and their aligned militias have forced more than 2 million people to flee the country. The fighting has displaced more than another 2 million people within the country, with more than 200,000 still in UN sites established to protect civilians.

Despite provisions in the August 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (ARCSS) that envision a hybrid court to prosecute international crimes, South Sudan's transitional government has not made genuine progress toward setting up the court. A memorandum of understanding on the court with the African Union (AU) has yet to be signed, and domestic legislation is yet to be adopted.

Under that agreement, the AU Commission has the authority to establish the hybrid court with or without the engagement of the South Sudanese government. The AU should proceed with creating the court on its own, unless the memorandum of understanding is immediately signed, Human Rights Watch said.

"The lack of accountability for serious crimes is a cause of South Sudan's crisis, not a solution," Keppler said. "Survivors of atrocities in South Sudan are strongly demanding justice. Their leaders should take urgent steps to make the hybrid court a reality as efforts to end the conflict continue."

What next for Sudan after Bashir's nomination for a third term?
Aljazeera
By Ahmed Adam
August 14, 2018

It seems Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir has no intention of leaving the presidency in the near future — and his insistence on holding on to power will likely have grave consequences for his country.

On August 9, Sudan's ruling National Congress Party (NCP) announced that it would back Bashir as its candidate in the 2020 presidential election. The party's advisory council said it has endorsed the president for a third term after long consultations among the party's leadership, even though the party charter — and the country's constitution — allows only two five-year terms.

The party charter was swiftly amended on the day of the announcement but — at least on paper — there are two more hurdles that Bashir needs to overcome to be able to run for office in 2020.

First, Article 57 of Sudan's constitution, which states that the president can only hold office for a maximum of two terms, needs to be amended by the parliament. Second, the NCP advisory council's decision to endorse Bashir's candidacy and amend the party charter needs to be approved by delegates at the party's next convention.

Of course, both votes will be in name only — there is little doubt that the parliament and the NCP convention will endorse anything the totalitarian leader desires, and without much resistance.

Bashir is a scared man who still has near complete control over the ruling party, intelligence services and the country. Like any
dictator who has stayed in power for multiple decades, and ruled with an iron fist, he knows that he can not leave the presidency without facing serious consequences. Furthermore, he wants to avoid facing the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the alleged war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide he committed in Darfur. His inner circle is as scared to lose power as he is, and collectively they are ready to use any means necessary to guarantee the continuation of their corrupt and violent rule.

The opposition within the party I spoke to some NCP sources, on the condition of anonymity, about the advisory council's August 9 announcement. They told me that the entire process was manipulated by Bashir's inner circle and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). But while Bashir and his supporters clearly have a hold on the advisory council, there are some among the party cadres — especially in youth groups — that are vehemently against Bashir's re-election.

For example, former presidential adviser and leading NCP figure Amin Hassan Omer has openly expressed his opposition to the president's reelection. Moreover, it is believed that many more among the NCP leadership are also not supportive of Bashir's ambitions, but too scared to voice their concerns — such as former NISS director and Bashir's former senior assistant Nafie Ali Nafie (However, many believe Nafie and many other NCP figures who oppose Bashir are not genuine reformists and just want to increase their own power and wealth).

Furthermore, even though Bashir recently reshuffled the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF)'s General Command, to place his loyalists in positions of power, there are reports that most officers and foot soldiers do not support the president's decision to run for a third term. Bashir alienated many in military cadres back in 2013, when he created a personal army, known as Rapid Support Force (RSF) militia.

Bashir’s re-election and the war on corruption In April this year, Bashir declared war on corruption, in a bid to save the country's collapsing economy.

In a strongly worded address to parliament, Bashir claimed a nexus between foreign currency traders, bankers and smugglers had damaged the economy, already weakened by US sanctions, corruption, mismanagement, armed conflicts and loss of oil revenues since a north-south split in 2011.

"These few people are controlling everything and they have networks in the banking system," he told the lawmakers.

This was an unexpected move, as only two years earlier in 2016, when the parliament passed legislation that would have allowed anyone regardless of his/her official position to be prosecuted for corruption, Bashir refused to sign it. At the time, it was obvious to Sudan watchers that Bashir was reluctant to approve any anti-corruption legislation that may be used to target him and his inner circle.

So what to make of the president's ongoing anti-corruption operation against so-called "regime fat-cats?"

Since the start of the operation — under the direction of NISS director Salah Abdalla Goash — several government officials, military officers, former NISS executives and executives from leading banks and companies have been interrogated or arrested. But none of the accused, so far, has been brought before the courts.

Hence it is evident to many that Bashir’s war on corruption is largely political and it serves two main purposes: first, to silence, intimidate and remove the regime's top leaders who oppose Bashir's re-election; second, to divert Sudanese people' attention from the regime’s failures in addressing the country's deep political and economic crises.

Regional and international response

It is no secret that key Western countries would prefer Bashir to leave the presidency, as the ICC's two-arrest warrants against the president are restricting their ability to directly deal with Sudan. However, they don't appear to have a clear plan — or the political will — to force the veteran politician from power. On the contrary, the US and many of its European allies are still collaborating with Bashir on issues like counter-terrorism, regional security and curbing migration.

On the regional level, Bashir has played his cards well and managed to secure some support from some important players. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are using Bashir's regime to help their efforts to win the war in Yemen and increase their dominance on the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the ceasefire and power-sharing deals Bashir managed to broker between the warring parties in South Sudan also helped the Sudanese president increase his regional standing.

In this context, it is unlikely that many regional stakeholders or western powers are going to react much to the announcement of Bashir’s candidacy for the 2020 elections. The African Union High-Level Implementation Panel for Sudan (AUHIP), led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, is mandated to assist the stakeholders in Sudan to realise a comprehensive peace, but the panel has not been active recently and it is not expected to take any action regarding Bashir’s renewed political
ambitions.

What next?

Now that Bashir has made his intention to stay in power for life crystal clear, he has two options: He will either rig the upcoming election to guarantee a victory, or he will find a way to renew his tenure, without holding elections.

Whichever path he chooses to follow, the Sudanese people will be the ones to suffer. There is a nationwide opposition to Bashir's plans to stay in power. Many, including leading figures of Bashir's own party believe that he is a liability. As result of one man's insistence on holding on to power, and worsening political and economic crises, we may witness a nation-wide uprising, a coup or a violent power struggle between different groups within the regime in the near future.

Sudan needs urgent and meaningful help in order to evade total collapse and implosion. The international community needs to stop ignoring Sudan's crisis and take constructive action. No doubt, real change in Sudan can only be realised by the Sudanese people. However, Sudan's crisis has regional and international dimensions and it can only be solved with the help of the international community. The establishment of an international mechanism that has a clear mandate to assist the stakeholders to achieve an inclusive and meaningful democratic transition of power can save the country from a grim future.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Jean-Pierre Bemba registers as DRC presidential candidate
Al Jazeera
August 2, 2018

Jean-Pierre Bemba, an opposition leader and former rebel leader in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has officially launched his bid for the country’s presidency, putting forward his candidacy for the long-delayed election in December.

The move by Bemba on Thursday came a day after he arrived home following 11 years in exile and prison.

He lodged his documents at the electoral commission offices in the capital, Kinshasa, throwing down the gauntlet to his rival President Joseph Kabila, who has ruled for 17 years.

"I can confirm that I indeed had a voting card and I filed all the papers," Bemba said outside the electoral commission headquarters.

"Now it is up to the CENI [the national election board] to handle all the applications. For me, I have submitted the entire file, it is in order," added the 55-year-old, also a former DRC vice president.

Bemba was accompanied by his wife and members of the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC), a former rebel group-turned-political party that he founded.

"Bemba is the first strong contender to submit his papers to the electoral commission before registration closes next week," said Al Jazeera's Catherine Soi, reporting from the body's offices in Kinshasa.

"Now his political fate is in the hands of the commissioners who will either approve or deny his candidacy. He now has to wait a few weeks to know for sure if he'll be able on the ballot paper in December."

ICC acquittal

The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague acquitted Bemba of war-crimes charges in June.

Upon returning to the DRC on Wednesday, Bemba was greeted by thousands of enthusiastic supporters, many of whom
chanting anti-Kabila slogans.

A heavy contingent of police escorted the convoy of Bemba, who was not allowed to make any stops to address the large crowds who lined the streets of Kinshasa.

"I'm happy because Bemba has been vindicated by the same court that convicted him. Now he is here and we are just glad to see him," one of his supporters told Al Jazeera.

"We are suffering in this country. Children are not going to school, things are not moving. His return gives up hope," said another.

According to observers, Bemba's return has introduced even more uncertainty into an already volatile election process.

Kabila was scheduled to stand down at the end of 2016 after his second elected term, technically the last permitted under the constitution. But he has stayed in office, invoking a constitutional clause enabling him to remain in power until a successor is elected.

His time in charge has been widely criticised for rights abuses, corruption and incompetence.

Political crisis

Bemba lost presidential elections to Kabila in 2006 and was later accused of treason when his bodyguards clashed with the army in Kinshasa.

In 2007, he fled to Belgium, where he had spent part of his youth.

He was then arrested in Europe on a warrant by the ICC for war crimes committed by his private army in the neighbouring Central African Republic between 2002-03, when its then president, Ange-Felix Patasse, sought his help to repel a coup attempt.

He was sentenced in The Hague in 2016 to 18 years before the conviction was overturned in June on appeal.

The ICC declared Bemba could not be held responsible for crimes committed by his troops.

The court is due to issue a ruling in a separate case, in which Bemba was sentenced to jail and fined 300,000 euro ($350,000) in 2017 for bribing witnesses during his main trial.

But legal experts expect him to be released definitively if time spent behind bars is taken into account.

Still, Bemba faces some hurdles in his bid for presidency, said Al Jazeera's Soi.

"The law says a candidate has to be in the country for at least a year before contesting an election. The fact that Bemba has been away for more than 10 years and still has a pending witness-tampering case at the ICC could harm his chances," she said.

The DRC has never known a peaceful transition of power since it gained independence from Belgium in 1960 — and some experts fear the current crisis may spiral into bloodshed.

Two wars unfolded from 1996-97 and from 1998-2003 that sucked in other countries in central and Southern Africa.

Smaller, but still bloody, conflicts plague the centre and east of the vast country today.

DRC opposition leader barred from return

Times LIVE
August 3, 2018

The Democratic Republic of Congo has barred Moise Katumbi from returning home on Friday to file a bid to run in the volatile country's presidential elections.

Katumbi, a wealthy businessman and former governor of the province of Katanga, was forbidden to enter the DRC and charged with offences against state security, officials said.

The opposition leader who is 53, has been living in self-imposed exile in Belgium since May 2016 after falling out with President Joseph Kabila.

He had planned to fly by private jet from Johannesburg, South Africa to Lubumbashi, the capital of Katanga province, to
lodge his application to stand in long-delayed elections in December — a move that would heap pressure on Kabila.

But the city's mayor said on Thursday that Katumbi was refused entry, while the public prosecutor's office said Katumbi had been charged with "harming the state's domestic and external security" and would be immediately arrested if he returned.

Katumbi's spokesman Olivier Kamitatu said on Friday "authorisation to fly over and land had been refused by Kinshasa".

Katumbi said that he had arrived in the Zambian Copper Belt city of Ndola and was heading to the border post of Kasumbalesa.

A journalist with the French radio network RFI said he had arrived there. Videos posted online by his aides and others showed him on the Zambian side of the border, greeting hundreds of supporters from his car.

The DRC's border authorities in Kinshasa said they were unable to confirm whether the crossing had been closed.

At least two police checkpoints were set up to screen access to Lubumbashi's airport on Friday and the city's main road to Zambia was blocked by a truck.

Potential arrest

Katumbi already faced potential arrest after being handed a three-year jail term in absentia in June 2016 in a case of alleged property fraud.

He has also been accused of hiring mercenaries and for possessing an Italian passport — Congolese law does not allow dual nationality. He denies the charges in both of those cases.

Another rival of Kabila, former warlord and ex-vice president Jean-Pierre Bemba, 55, returned home this week. He officially launched his bid for the presidency on Thursday.

The DRC has never known a peaceful transition of power since it gained independence in 1960 — and some experts fear that the December 23 elections may trigger a bloody conflict.

Kabila, 47, has been at the helm since 2001, presiding over a vast mineral-rich country with a reputation for corruption, inequality and unrest.

He was scheduled to stand down at the end of 2016 after his second elected term, technically the last permitted under the constitution.

Kabila has refused to spell out whether he will seek a new term in the vote. Candidates must submit their applications by August 8 and physically be in the country to do so.

Congo Ebola outbreak compounds already dire humanitarian crisis

ReliefWeb

August 3, 2018

*A new Ebola outbreak in the conflict zone North Kivu, that already suffers from mass displacement, is a toxic cocktail that will exacerbate the virus and have fatal consequences. "This week's declaration of a new Ebola outbreak in North Kivu couldn't have hit at a worse time or place," warned Dr. Ulrika Blom, Country Director for Norwegian Refugee Council in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. "It's a lamentable setback in the overall humanitarian response, and will compound the massive challenges we already face helping the millions of people in crisis across the country."

Yesterday, Congo's Ministry of Health confirmed four cases of haemorrhagic fever, or Ebola, near North Kivu's third largest city, Beni. This is the tenth Ebola outbreak the country has faced in 42 years, and the second declared in 2018.

Resource-rich North Kivu has long been the epicentre of violent armed clashes and intercommunal conflict. It has consistently had the highest levels of internal displacement in the country. The northeastern provinces of North Kivu and Ituri have recently seen some of the worst fighting in years, causing nearly 750,000 people to flee their homes in the first eight months of this year alone.

Vulnerable families forced to flee because of violence do not feel safe. At least 1,000 protection incidents have been reported in North Kivu since January. These range from looting, extortion, maiming and burning of homes. In addition, families in Ituri
province are facing crisis levels of hunger. Communities in both provinces are turning to poor coping mechanisms to stay alive.

"Many people who fled to Beni for safety are struggling to find food," said Blom. "Many are farmers who cannot access their fields, for fear they will be attacked by armed groups lurking outside the city limits. This is the reality people are faced with before the Ebola outbreak."

Compounding the crisis is an anaemic funding of the humanitarian response. Only 21 per cent of the USD1.7 billion required to help some 13 million people in need has been received so far. The lack of funding has caused several aid agencies to close their operations in North Kivu. The result has been serious gaps in crucial sectors such as protection, shelter, water, sanitation, nutrition and education.

"Congo is the most neglected displacement crisis on the planet. Without adequate funding within the overall humanitarian response in North Kivu and the rest of the country, a multiplying of emergencies and fatalities is just around the corner," warned Blom.

About NRC

The Norwegian Refugee Council is an aid organization working in over 30 countries globally. It set up in DR Congo in 2001, and today helps communities in South Kivu, North Kivu, Ituri, Tanganyika and Kasai-Central. NRC is largest relief organization operating in Beni, North Kivu, and 30 km from the latest Ebola outbreak. We provide assistance in Education, land rights and civil documentation, food, household items and rapid response to people displaced and host communities in Beni and surrounding territories.

**DR Congo President Joseph Kabila not seeking third term**

*BBC News*

August 8, 2018

Democratic Republic of Congo's President Joseph Kabila will not be seeking a third term in December's election, his spokesperson has said.

The governing coalition has nominated former interior minister Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary to be its candidate.

Mr Kabila's second term ended in 2016, but elections have been delayed and there had been speculation that he would run again.

Eight other candidates have registered to run ahead of Wednesday's deadline.

Mr Shadary will face former Vice-President Jean Pierre Bemba, who returned to DR Congo last week after being acquitted of war crimes at the International Criminal Court.

Mr Bemba was greeted by a mammoth crowd on his return to the country after 11 years.

Felix Tshisekedi, who leads the largest opposition party, is also among the front-runners.

Mr Kabila's government has cracked down hard on protesters who are against his continued stay in power.

But another favourite, Moise Katumbi, the former governor of the mineral-rich Katanga province, who has been on a self-imposed exile, will not take part after being blocked by authorities from entering the country.

Mr Shadary has been a key supporter of Mr Kabila.

His tenure as interior minister was marked by a violent crackdown on opposition politicians and their supporters, and the arrest of activists, the BBC's Anne Soy reports from the capital, Kinshasa.

He is among eight senior DR Congo government officials targeted by European Union sanctions last year, our correspondent adds.

Mr Kabila became president when his father Laurent Kabila was assassinated in 2001. He was elected in 2006, and secured another term in controversial elections in 2011.

The 47-year-old leader refused to leave office when his term expired in December 2016.

The country's electoral commission said at the time that it could not organise elections until 2018 because violence in the
eastern Kasai region had impeded registration of voters.

Opposition groups however saw it as a ploy by Mr Kabila to extend his time in office.

An anti-Kabila protest in September 2016 was violently repressed leaving dozens dead. The government then banned public demonstrations.

Amnesty International lead researcher in DR Congo, Jean-Mobert Senga, welcomed Mr Kabila's plan not to seek a third term but added that his government must now ensure that people can freely exercise their voting rights during the election period.

Riven by conflict

The rights body also called on the lifting of a ban on peaceful demonstrations.

The US and EU have been pushing for Mr Kabila to stand down.

DR Congo has been riven by conflicts as several militias fight for control of territory and mineral-rich areas. The situation has seen millions of Congolese forced to leave their homes and others fleeing to neighbouring countries.

The UN said in March that more than 13 million Congolese need humanitarian aid.

Burundi

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Investigation: Burundi

Burundi protagonists must meet to help end crisis
The Province
August 9, 2018

The U.N. envoy for Burundi urged the Security Council on Thursday to appeal to all protagonists to take part in a new dialogue aimed at helping end the country’s political crisis.

Michel Kafando told the council Thursday that President Pierre Nkurunziza’s announcement in June that he will not run for another term and will support the winner of presidential elections in 2020 “offer us an opportunity to make progress in reaching a final settlement of the Burundian question.”

Nkurunziza’s announcement followed a successful referendum on a new constitution that would allow him to stay in power until 2034.

Burundi had been plagued by political violence since April 2015, when Nkurunziza announced he would seek a disputed third term. Nkurunziza won re-election despite widespread protests and the country remained volatile.

A U.N. commission of inquiry said last September that crimes against humanity were being committed in Burundi including killings, torture, sexual violence, enforced disappearances and arbitrary arrests.

Burundi has been bedeviled by the same ethnic conflicts that saw Hutus and Tutsis turn on one another during the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda.

War in Burundi — which is overwhelmingly Hutu — started in 1993 when Tutsi paratroopers assassinated the country's first democratically elected president, a Hutu. Fighting mainly between Hutu rebels and the Tutsi-dominated army resulted in the deaths of more than 250,000 people. A cease-fire was declared in 2006, but it took several more years to end the fighting.

Since the recent referendum on the constitution and the president's announcement, Kafando said "the situation remains calm" with the exception of some protests from the opposition.
"We think that together the government and the Burundi political class should take the opportunity of these new developments to work together to create a new political environment, an environment that would allow for the consolidation of national unity and for peace," he said.

Kafando said Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and former Tanzanian president Benjamin Mkapa, the mediator and facilitator of Burundi negotiations, have committed to restarting a dialogue between the government and opposition "as quickly as possible."

He said Museveni, Mkapa and the African Union are trying to organize talks "very soon" either in Entebbe, Uganda or Arusha, Tanzania and he urged the Security Council to appeal to the protagonists "to take part sincerely in good faith in the forthcoming dialogues."

U.S. deputy ambassador Jonathan welcomed regional efforts to convene the next round of the East African Community-led inter-Burundian dialogue in September.

The United States, Britain and France also welcomed Nkurunziza's announcement but expressed serious concern about the human rights situation in the country.

They echoed Kafando in urging Burundi's government to complete negotiations on a memorandum with the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights to allow it to operate in the country.

Cohen said Nkurunziza's act of stepping down "would be a strong step forward for Burundian democracy and would set a positive example for other leaders in the region."

While welcoming this step, he said, the United States remains "deeply concerned about continuing human rights violations and abuses, including excessive restrictions on civic and political space in Burundi, media restrictions, arbitrary arrests, and unduly harsh sentences for human rights defenders."

The United States looks to Burundi's government to take steps to end violence and reopen "political space" for opposition members, independent media and civil society — and ensure that opposition political figures "are fully able to participate in future elections."

Burundi's U.N. ambassador, Albert Shingiro, appealed to the council "to have the courage to remove Burundi from its agenda."

"It's clear the political situation currently is calm and stable and fully under control. It's far from a threat to international peace and security which is a purview of the council," he said.

"This hounding of Burundi, a country which has returned to normalcy, must stop," Shingiro said.

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**WEST AFRICA**

**Lake Chad Region — Chad, Nigeria, Niger, and Cameroon**

**Nigeria Air Force strikes Boko Haram 'hideout' as attack on village kills five people**

_The Defense Post_
August 4, 2018

_The Nigerian Air Force struck a Boko Haram "hideout" in the northern Borno state, while at least five people were killed and a village razed in an attack blamed on the group._

Boko Haram fighters in 10 trucks stormed Gasarwa village near the garrison town of Monguno late on Friday, August 3, setting homes on fire.

"Five people were killed in the arson, they included two elderly men and three children," Babakura Kolo, a militia leader in the
Borno state capital Maiduguri told AFP.

Militia defending the village said they were outnumbered and outgunned.

Militia member Ibrahim Liman said the Boko Haram attackers watched food supplies and livestock burn in the fire but made no attempt to loot.

It was not clear which Boko Haram faction was behind the attacks, but jihadists loyal to Islamic State-affiliated Abu Mus'ab Al-Barnawi are known to operate in the area.

Boko Haram is divided into two factions that have competing goals and operational methods. One, led by Barnawi, is apparently in talks with the Nigerian government. The other, led by Abubakar Shekau, is notorious for suicide bombings.

Nigerian Air Force strikes Boko Haram in Borno state: Meanwhile, the Nigerian Air Force said it had struck a Boko Haram "hideout" at Daban Masara in Borno state, also on August 3, as part of Operation Lafiya Dole.

The air force said that the strikes were conducted on the basis of intelligence that indicated Boko Haram militants were in settlements near the southern shores of Lake Chad, including Daban Masara.

An Alpha Jet struck two buildings in the town where the Air Force said Boko Haram members were meeting, resulting in the destruction of the target buildings and the "neutralization of several" militants.

Boko Haram has intensified its armed campaign in recent weeks, especially against military targets in which dozens of troops were believed to have been killed or gone missing.

At the end of July, a group of jihadists in five trucks sacked a military post in nearby Bunari village, with a military source claiming 11 troops were killed.

Recent attacks underline the threat posed despite repeated government and military claims that Boko Haram, whose insurgency has killed at least 20,000 people since 2009, is a spent force and on the verge of defeat.

The government is now encouraging thousands of people displaced by the conflict to return to their homes from makeshift camps in the Borno state capital, Maiduguri.

But international aid agencies working in the remote region say conditions are not right for mass returns, particularly in terms of security.

**Boko Haram constructs buildings on Lake Chad, holds meetings**

**Punch**  
By Olaleye Aluko  
August 5, 2018

The Nigerian Air Force has said that its intelligence revealed that the Boko Haram terrorists erected buildings in the Daban Masara area on the Lake Chad in Borno State, holding regular meetings.

The air force however said on Saturday that its Alpha Jet aircraft and an Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance platform have bombed the two buildings sighted, and killed two terrorists sighted.

Our correspondent learnt that the Alpha Jet was deployed by the Air Task Force of Operation Lafiya Dole on Friday when the terrorists were sighted holding a meeting in green-roofed buildings at Daban Masara area.

It was gathered that the fighter aircraft dropped bombs on the Boko Haram structures with scores of the terrorists believed to have been killed in the operation.

The NAF Director of Public Relations and Information, Air Commodore Ibikunle Daramola, who confirmed the air attacks, said Daban Masara was one of the identified terrorist flashpoints on the Lake Chad.

He said, "The Air Task Force on August 3 conducted an attack on a Boko Haram hideout in Daban Masara, Borno State. The strikes were conducted after credible intelligence indicated that remnants of terrorists on the Lake Chad islands hid in settlements at the lake.

**New video shows more brutal killings by armed forces**

**Amnesty International**
A horrifying video obtained by Amnesty International shows Cameroonian security forces shooting at least a dozen unarmed people during a military operation in the village of Achigaya in the Far North region of the country, the organization said today.

Using advanced digital analysis tools, Amnesty International experts were able to confirm that the video, shot at an unknown date but prior to May 2016, corroborates previous accounts of extrajudicial executions which the Cameroonian authorities have denied.

"This shocking video shows armed men lining people up face down or sitting against a wall and shooting them with automatic weapons. A second round of shooting ensures no survivors. Here is yet more credible evidence to support the allegations that Cameroon's armed forces have committed grave crimes against civilians, and we are calling for an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation. Those suspected to be responsible for these abhorrent acts must be brought to justice," said Ilaria Allegrozzi, Amnesty International's Lake Chad Researcher.

"Last month we analyzed footage from another location which showed two women and two young children being killed by soldiers who were clearly members of Cameroon's armed forces. What further evidence do they need before they act on these atrocities?"

Amnesty International has documented multiple extrajudicial killings, as well as the widespread use of torture by Cameroonian security forces who are fighting against the armed group Boko Haram in the Far North region of the country.

Amnesty International researchers analyzed the weapons, dialogue and uniforms visible in the latest video, as well as testimony and satellite imagery, to conclude the approximate timing and exact location of the executions, and determined the suspected perpetrators to be members of the Cameroonian security forces.

The footage shows a group of soldiers in their distinctive "lizard stripe" camouflage uniforms, patrolling the village of Achigachiya. Some are armed with Zastava M21 rifles, and others are mounted on a pick-up truck with a ZPU-2 anti-aircraft gun.

The video, apparently recorded by a member of the security forces, shows soldiers burning structures which are likely to be homes, and then focuses on a group of 12 people lined against a wall, all sitting or lying down. At 01:40 minute into the video, numerous soldiers using automatic weapons fire into the group for an extended period, from several meters away. A soldier then walks forward and fires again at close range at several persons in the group, presumably to ensure there are no survivors.

Speaking in French, the soldiers describe themselves as carrying out a "kamikaze" operation.

The footage supports evidence of extrajudicial executions previously documented by Amnesty International in a July 2016 report. The report documented the unlawful killings and extrajudicial executions of over 30 people, including several elderly, in Achigachiya following an operation by the security forces seeking to recover the bodies of the soldiers killed by Boko Haram on 28 December 2014, which were abandoned in front of the military base destroyed by the insurgents. This operation by the army was also done as a collective punishment against the population perceived as supporting Boko Haram.

The Cameroonian government announced an investigation following the release of the video in July, but their rapid dismissal of the video as "fake news" casts serious doubt on whether this investigation would be genuinely impartial and effective.

"In failing to hold suspected perpetrators to account for the horrific crimes documented by Amnesty International and others, the Cameroonian authorities have created a climate of impunity in which the armed forces have free reign to kill and torture," said Ilaria Allegrozzi.

"There must be accountability for these brutal killings. In the face of reams of hard evidence, the blanket denials of the Cameroonian authorities amount to complicity and the tacit endorsement of these crimes."

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Mali security forces accused of killing civilians
News 24
August 10, 2018

Mali's security forces are facing allegations of killing civilians, dozens of whom were summarily executed during recent operations against Islamist militias, according to a UN report seen by AFP on Thursday.

The government has acknowledged that its forces were implicated in the killings after several mass graves were discovered in central Mali between February and July.

In the report sent to the Security Council, a UN panel of experts said it had reviewed information "that suggests a worrying pattern of human rights violations against civilians by the security forces during counter-terrorist operations."

The report lists three incidents during which Mali's forces allegedly targeted civilians, one of which left 12 Malians dead in a cattle market.

The government initially described that attack as the work of terrorists but retracted the statement following an uproar from the victims' relatives.

By late April, the UN peacekeeping force in Mali, MINUSMA, was looking into "allegations of 44 summary executions and three enforced disappearances," said the report sent to the council on Wednesday.

Since then, there was the attack on the cattle market in May and the discovery in June of three separate mass graves with the bodies of 25 civilians arrested during a house-to-house sweep, the report added.

While the government has launched investigations of the summary executions of the civilians, there has been no information on actions taken against the soldiers that were implicated.

The report also said that "a large number of civilians have been killed in terrorist attacks since February" in northern Mali, where armed jihadists have their strongholds.

A flurry of attacks by the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara and affiliated militia has killed at least 143 civilians between February and early June in the area bordering Niger, it said quoting MINUSMA.

Islamic extremists linked to Al-Qaeda took control of the desert north of Mali in early 2012, but were largely driven out in a French-led military operation launched in January 2013.

A peace deal between the government and armed groups was signed in 2015, but implementation has been slow and attacks have continued in the centre and north of the country.

The panel said it had identified individuals and groups involved in attacks against Malian forces who could be put on a UN sanctions blacklist.

Quebec provincial police could join Mali peacekeeping
CBC
By Angelica Montgomery
August 5, 2018

A contingent of officers from the Sureté du Québec could soon be heading to the West African country of Mali as part of Canada’s peacekeeping efforts.

The provincial police officers would help train Malian police in specialized techniques such as crime scene or major crime investigations, including homicide, said SQ Lt. Sophie Gougeon.

Gougeon spent a week in Mali's capital of Bamako last June with the RCMP, to assess whether a police contingent should go to the country.

"Are there any hospitals? What can they provide to our people if they are hurt or sick?"

"We just wanted to be sure that our people will be well taken care of if anything happens to them," she said.

CBC News reported last month that Canada plans to deploy up to 20 civilian police officers to the civil war-torn country, which
has been one of the deadliest United Nations peacekeeping missions in recent years.

Gougeon contributed to the RCMP's report to the federal government, which the government will consult before issuing a final decision about dispatching police officers, likely this fall.

The first Canadian military team arrived in Mali at the end of June.

Canada hopes bringing in female officers such as Gougeon will help focus its peacekeeping efforts on the plight of women. Authorities are also interested in recruiting police from Quebec, since the mission is in a French-speaking country.

However, Quebec police involvement in another peacekeeping mission — this one in Haiti — only a handful of years ago led to reports of sexual misconduct against both provincial police and Montreal city police officers.

Gougeon, who took part in the mission to Haiti, says steps will be taken to prevent a repeat of past incidents.

Participants will be warned about proper behaviour during their training. They will have to sign documents pledging to conduct themselves appropriately, and they will be reminded of the existence of an employee support line that provides for advice and counselling.

Officers will also be asked to keep an eye on each other's behaviour.

"UN personnel are meeting with them, and they are constantly talking about it," Gougeon said. "We are doing everything we can to make sure no one is crossing the line on that subject."

While Gougeon says she cannot predict whether Quebec provincial police officers will eventually end up in Mali, she says her team felt perfectly comfortable in the country.

"We felt safe. People, when they saw us, we were welcome. We didn’t see anything that made us believe we were not welcome there."

EUROPE

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]
Bosnian Serb Law to Promote Cyrillic Sparks Controversy (Balkan Insight)
By Danijel Kovacevic
August 9, 2018

A draft law will soon be launched that will declare Cyrillic to be the main script in the Republika Srpska entity, with the legislation expected to make Cyrillic obligatory for usage in the official correspondence of all Republika Srpska’s institutions, public and scientific institutions, local government bodies and companies, as well as in all media that are majority-owned by the entity.

“The draft law is in the final stages. The text of the bill will not be significantly different from a similar law that is being prepared in Serbia,” a source in the Republika Srpska Education Ministry told BIRN.

Republika Srpska Prime Minister Zeljka Cvijanovic confirmed on Tuesday that her cabinet is preparing legal changes to push for wider use of Cyrillic.

“A working group has been formed, the Republika Srpska Ministry of Education and Culture will be the
formal proposer of this law, many experts have been gathered to contribute to the drafting of such an important law,” Cvijanovic told media.

According to Bosnian media, the draft law will include harsh sanctions for non-compliance with the law. Anyone in an official position who does not use Cyrillic script, could be punished with fines ranging from 45 to 850 euros.

But political representatives of Bosniaks and Croats in Republika Srpska - both ethnic groups who use Latin script rather than Cyrillic - warned that the law would be unconstitutional since the Latin and Cyrillic scripts are constitutionally equal in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“The culmination of all of this would be the negation of the Latin script as a constitutionally equal script in the Republika Srpska. That would be the last straw. Such a rush into illegality is incomprehensible," the head of the Bosniak caucus in the Republika Srpska House of Peoples, Mujo Hadzimerovic, told Bosnian media on Monday.

“Briefly speaking, it is unconstitutional. We have three equal languages and two equal scripts. I have not seen any such bill yet, but in any case, based on constitutional provisions, it is in contravention of the constitution,” Tomislav Tomljanovic, the head of the Croat caucus in the House of Peoples, told Bosnian media.

The former mayor of Srebrenica, Camil Durakovic, argued meanwhile that Cvijanovic was using the Cyrillic bill “to draw attention away from the defective economic policy and economic collapse in Republika Srpska”.

In addition to the Cyrillic bill, Serbia and the Republika Srpska have announced that the same curriculum for the so-called ‘national’ set of subjects - language, history, geography and knowledge of nature and society - will be applied in schools in both places from September.

The ‘national’ subjects are taught differently in Bosnian schools according to pupils’ ethnicity.

Bosnian Serb MPs Annul Report Acknowledging Srebrenica (Balkan Insight)
By Danijel Kovacevic
August 14, 2018

At a special session on Tuesday, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska annulled a report on the 1995 Srebrenica massacres and ordered the Serb-dominated entity’s government to draw up a new one, sparking anger among Bosniak politicians.

The report, which the entity government and a special commission for Srebrenica put together 14 years ago, acknowledged that Bosnian Serb forces killed thousands of Bosniaks from the eastern Bosnian town in July 1995, and said the executions represented a serious violation of humanitarian law.

But Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik, who initiated the special parliamentary session, said that the document contained “false data” and was created under pressure from the international community’s High Representative in Bosnia at the time, Paddy Ashdown.

“The Srebrenica crime is an agreed-on tragedy, with the intention of satanising Serbs,” Dodik said in a one-hour introductory address to the assembly.

But the former vice-president of the Srebrenica Commission, Smail Cekic, said it was not true that Ashdown put pressure on its members.

“It is clear that Dodik’s destructive policy is directed against the state of Bosnia with the intention of joining Republika Srpska to Serbia, and this is not possible if the Republika Srpska government itself acknowledged that genocide was committed by adopting the report of the Srebrenica Commission,” Cekic told Deutsche Welle.

Dodik said that his intention was to have an objective approach to the Srebrenica events, bearing in mind that the 2004 commission report did not include crimes against Serbs.

“We have no intention of denying the killings and the crimes that had happened, but it is impossible to accept wrongful behaviour,” he said.

“By launching an initiative with the Republika Srpska parliament, we do not intend to hide any information
about the suffering of Bosniaks,” he added.

The move will contribute to reconciliation in Bosnia, he insisted.

The assembly ordered the Republika Srpska government to form a new, international and impartial commission, which should produce a new report within a year on the crimes in Srebrenica from 1992-95, and “illuminate all the uncertainties from the first report, but also include in the report the suffering of Serbs in and around Srebrenica”.

The decision - which was not backed by Bosniak and Croat members of the Republika Srpska Assembly - sparked negative reactions from Bosniak politicians who condemned the move as a populist gesture intended to boost Dodik’s campaign for upcoming elections in October.

“Milorad Dodik cannot cancel the truth about Srebrenica,” the head of the Bosniak caucus in the Republika Srpska House of Peoples, Mujo Hadzimerovic, told Bosnian media.

Bosnian state-level parliament MP Sadik Ahmetovic meanwhile called on the Office of the High Representative, Bosnia's representatives to the Council of Europe and the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina to react to the Republika Srpska Assembly's decision.

“This is the final phase of the genocide. It is your duty and obligation to do everything in your power to do something for Srebrenica now, when genocide enters its final phase - complete denial,” Ahmetovic told Bosnian media.

Verdicts handed down by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and Bosnia’s state court have confirmed that Bosnian Serb forces killed more than 7,000 men and boys from Srebrenica in July 1995, classifying the slaughter as genocide.

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changed the course of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, leading to the Dayton Peace Agreement.

Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic said that Croatia’s Homeland War and war veterans should not be forgotten, while the value of “homeland unity” should be promoted to younger generations.

The leader of the Bosnian Croats, Dragan Covic, also attended the ceremony, standing with the most senior Croatian officials.

During Operation Storm, Croatian forces regained territory controlled since late 1991 by rebel Croatian Serbs, who had been helped by the Yugoslav People’s Army and Serbian paramilitaries.

As well as committing large-scale crimes against Croats, the rebel Serb authorities expelled between 200,000 and 250,000 non-Serbs from their unrecognised wartime statelet, the Republic of Serbian Krajina.

After peace talks failed, Croatian special police units and army troops moved in to crush the rebel Serb fighters between August 4 and 7, 1995 and retook all of their territories except ones in eastern Croatia.

On August 5, Croatia marks its Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day and the Day of Croatian Defenders with a traditional celebration event in the southern town of Knin.

The town of Knin carries strong symbolic relevance as on that day in 1995, Croatian soldiers and President Franjo Tudjman raised the Croatian flag on Knin fortress and because it was the capital of the non-recognised state of rebelled Croatian Serbs – the Republic of Serbian Krajina.

Croatian Helsinki Committee reported that 677 civilians were killed during and after Operation Storm, although the Croatian judiciary has convicted only one person for war crimes.

The operation led to a humanitarian crisis, as up to 200,000 Serb civilians left Croatia during and after the operation.

Serbia held a ceremony on Saturday to mourn the victims, and Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic described the operation as a crime.

Croatia’s official programme began in the early morning in Knin with an army orchestra playing patriotic songs. This was followed by the lighting of candles and the paying of respects to fallen Croatian soldiers at the monument dedicated to the Storm victory on Knin’s central square.

Afterwards, the Croatian flag was raised on Knin fortress overlooking the town, and the names of the Croatian soldiers who died during the operation were read out.

During the ceremony, planes and helicopters made acrobatic flights over the town.

From the fortress, the ceremony again moved to the town, with an official parade to the central Catholic church, where a sermon was held for killed soldiers.

The official ceremony will end with a concert of Croatian singers Miroslav Skoro and Lidija Bacic on Knin’s central square.

While last year commemoration in Knin went ahead without incident, the ones in 2015 and 2016 saw the public singing of songs from the Croatian World War II fascist Ustasa movement and anti-Serb chants at a concert by the nationalist singer Marko Perkovic Thompson.

Ahead of the anniversary, President Grabar Kitarovic gave medals on Friday to generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac, who were involved in the operation.

In 2012, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia acquitted Gotovina and Markac of crimes committed during and after Storm, overturning their conviction a year earlier.

While last year commemoration in Knin went ahead without incident, the ones in 2015 and 2016 saw the public singing of songs from the Croatian World War II fascist Ustasa movement and anti-Serb chants at a concert by the nationalist singer Marko Perkovic ‘Thompson’.

Bosnian Serbs Vote to Overturn Srebrenica Massacre Report (U.S. News and World Report)
By Gordana Katana
Lawmakers in Bosnia's autonomous Serb-dominated region asked the regional government on Tuesday to revoke a 2004 report which concluded that Bosnian Serb forces killed about 8,000 Muslims in and around Srebrenica during the country's 1992-95 war.

The vote was initiated by Serb Republic nationalist President Milorad Dodik, and some analysts say it is the latest issue used by Serb ruling parties to mobilize voters around the nationalist agenda ahead of elections in October.

Dodik, an advocate of the Serb region's secession from Bosnia, has always rejected rulings by two war crimes courts, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and The International Court of Justice, that the atrocity qualified as genocide.

Though acknowledging a crime occurred, Dodik says the numbers of those killed had been exaggerated in the 2004 report.

"The report is irrelevant, extremely selective, incorrect and tendentious," Dodik told the parliament, saying it should have included Serb victims in Srebrenica.

The parliament concluded that a new independent international commission should be formed to determine the damages suffered by all peoples in the Srebrenica region.

The Bosniaks dismissed the motion. "No revision of this report can change the evidence proven in courts about this and other cases of grave war crimes," said Ramiz Salkic, the Bosniak vice-president of the Serb Republic.

The EU delegation in Bosnia said in a statement: "The European Union rejects any denial, relativisation or misinterpretation of the genocide in Srebrenica. We also condemn the use of inflammatory ethno-political rhetoric and actions."

A joint statement from three other bodies including the U.S. Embassy to Bosnia was also critical, saying they "strongly condemn the cynical utilization of the Srebrenica Commission's Report of 2004 for political purposes in the run-up to the elections."

Radovan Karadzic's Final Verdict Expected in December (Balkan Insight)
By Radosa Milutinovic
August 15, 2018

At a status conference in the Radovan Karadzic case at the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals in The Hague on Wednesday, presiding judge Theodor Meron said the plan was that the final verdict will be handed down in December.

The first-instance verdict in 2016 – against which both Karadzic and the Hague prosecutors have appealed – sentenced the former Bosnian Serb political leader to 40 years in prison for genocide in Srebrenica in 1995, the persecution of Bosniaks and Croats, terrorising the population of Sarajevo and taking UN peacekeepers hostage.

Karadzic was acquitted of committing genocide in 1992 in seven other Bosnian municipalities, however.

In his appeal, Karadzic requested a new trial, claiming procedural flaws in the first-instance trial and arguing that incorrect conclusions were made by the judges.

The prosecutors' appeal asks for Karadzic to be sentenced to life in prison, and convicted of the 1992 genocide charges.

Karadzic's lawyer Peter Robinson asked at Wednesday's status conference if judge Meron could give a bit more information about the date of the final verdict, to which the judge replied that he could not, but said there was “a plan” for it to be handed down in December.

Karadzic told the status conference that he felt well and that his back was no longer causing him problems, and thanked judge Meron for the provision of a laptop which meant he no longer had to sit “uncomfortably,
using a desktop computer”.

Meron said that Karadzic’s request to use Skype to communicate with his family will soon be granted.

According to Meron, the UN detention centre in Scheveningen where Karadzic and other Hague defendants are held will also soon solve its problem with allowing “Balkan specialties”.

Karadzic said the food issue was problematic because “almost nobody in prison eats the main meal because of cultural differences”.

The former Bosnian Serb political leader was arrested in Serbia and transferred to The Hague in 2008.

Bosnian Serb Leader Denies Scope Of Srebrenica Massacre, Calls For Investigation (RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty)
August 14, 2018

Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik has disputed whether the 1995 Srebrenica massacre was a genocide committed against Muslim Bosniaks, and called for the forming of an "unbiased" international investigation into the tragedy.

"The Srebrenica crime is a staged tragedy with an aim to satanize the Serbs," Dodik told the National Assembly in Bosnia-Herzegovina’s predominantly Serbian entity, Republika Srpska.

Dodik on August 14 demanded that the legislature revoke the 2004 report compiled by a previous Republika Srpska government, when Dodik was in the opposition. He also called for a new investigation into the events that occurred in the Podrinje region, where Srebrenica is located, during the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

Dodik’s call was seen as an attempt to secure the support of hard-line Bosnian Serbs ahead of general elections in October.

Sehida Abdurahmanovic, a member of the Mothers of Srebrenica rights association, called Dodik's move "shameful and inhumane toward the victims."

Some 8,000 Muslim men and boys were massacred by Bosnian Serb forces who overran the town of Srebrenica in July 1995, during the Bosnian war. It was the worst mass killing in Europe since the end of World War II.

In 2007, the UN International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, ruled that the killings were genocide.

But Dodik disputed that, alleging that the number of those killed was manipulated.

"Many of those buried were killed in fighting and on that list [of buried victims] there are people still alive," he added.

The UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which is also based in The Hague, has sentenced Bosnian Serb wartime leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander, Ratko Mladic, over the Srebrenica massacre and other atrocities during the war.

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killed journalists to include murders and other crimes against media workers committed during the 1990s wars.

The chairman of the commission, Veran Matic, said on Thursday that the decision to expand the body’s mandate came in response to the information gathered by the Journalists’ Association of Serbia on over 40 journalists who have been killed or have gone missing in Kosovo.

Matic said that despite international agreements on cooperation in investigating murders and disappearances, former Yugoslav countries have made no progress in cases of journalists and media workers.

“There has been no progress in cooperation between prosecutors, police forces... There has been no focus on the cases of killed and kidnapped journalists,” Matic said in a written reply to BIRN.

A Serbian government statement said that the commission's task will be to cooperate with similar institutions across the region and with journalists in order to “fight against impunity for the killings of journalists”.

The commission was also expanded to include representatives of the Serbian war crime prosecutor’s office and the Serbian Interior Ministry’s department for war crimes.

“I expect that the first progress will be made in talks about the possibility of investigating five missing Serbian journalists in Kosovo and the murder of ten. We will also talk to colleagues and authorities in Croatia about investigations that were or weren't led in the cases of our colleagues killed during war operations,” Matic said.

Kosovo Indicts Serb Ex-Policeman for Village Killings (Balkan Insight)
By Serbeze Haxhiaj
August 7, 2018

A former Serb policeman was indicted for allegedly taking part in killing of two people - one of them with disabilities - and for forcing ethnic Albanian civilians out of a village in 1998 during the war in Kosovo.

Kosovo’s Special Prosecution on Tuesday presented an indictment to Peje/Pec Basic Court charging the former Serb policeman, identified only by the initials M.Z., with war crimes over his alleged role in the killing of two Albanian civilians.

According to the indictment, during June and July 1998, the suspect took an active part in organised attacks on the ethnic Albanian population by Serb forces in the village of Dush near Klina, a town around 60 kilometres west of Pristina.

The prosecution said that the suspect took part in the attacks in his capacity as “a member of Serb police, army and paramilitary [units]”, together with other unnamed Serbs.

He is accused also of putting his house at the disposal of Serb forces.

“On 19 June 1998, around noon, in Dush village, dressed in military uniform and civilian trousers... [M.Z.] unloaded weapons of different calibres,” the prosecution said.

“On the evening of the same day, from the balcony of his house, the defendant fired with automatic weapons in the direction of the unprotected civilian population, which fearing attacks, threats and uninterrupted attacks, was forced to flee the village,” it added.

As a result of these attacks, two people who couldn’t flee - one of whom was paralysed - were burned to death in a house, while two others were wounded, the prosecution said.

Kosovo Prosecutor Resigns After Alleged Threats (Balkan Insight)
By Perparim Isufi
August 15, 2018

A special prosecutor who was dealing with sensitive cases involving terrorism charges and Kosovo Liberation Army war veterans has resigned after allegedly being threatened.
The unexpected resignation after alleged threats of Elez Blakaj, a special prosecutor who was investigating the abuse of Kosovo Liberation Army war veterans’ lists, sparked consternation in Kosovo on Wednesday.

Blakaj worked for the Kosovo Special Prosecution on several sensitive cases, and State Prosecutor Aleksander Lumezi confirmed that he had been the subject of intimidation “while he was investigating the case about KLA war veterans”.

Lumezi said that police were investigating the alleged threat.

He also said that Blakaj allegedly received threats on Facebook because of his work investigating cases related to terrorism.

A message that said “Condemn criminals, not imams” pushed Blakaj to ask for police protection for his children on their way to school and back, according to Lumezi.

Justice Minister Abelard Tahiri expressed concern about the resignation.

“It is unacceptable for a state prosecutor to come under pressure from threats and chose resignation as an alternative,” Tahiri said.

The US ambassador to Kosovo, Greg Delawie, wrote on Twitter that it was a “sad day for rule of law in Kosovo”.

Kosovo President Hashim Thaci also condemned the alleged threats that caused the prosecutor to quit.

“The rule of law is the foundation of a democratic state and society and one of the most important links in strengthening the European perspective of our country,” Thaci wrote on Facebook.

The verification as war veterans of former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters - a status which gives access to benefit payments - was controversial process that took several years.

Allegations have been made that the final list of veterans has more names on it than there were KLA fighters during the conflict with Serbian forces.

In April this year, prosecutors charged three people with fraud and falsifying documents to gain KLA war veteran status.

Radovan Karadzic's Final Verdict Expected in December (Balkan Insight)
By Radosa Milutinovic
August 15, 2018

The UN court in The Hague said it plans to hand down the final verdict in December this year in the trial of former Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadzic, who is appealing against his initial conviction for genocide and other wartime crimes.

At a status conference in the Radovan Karadzic case at the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals in The Hague on Wednesday, presiding judge Theodor Meron said the plan was that the final verdict will be handed down in December.

The first-instance verdict in 2016 – against which both Karadzic and the Hague prosecutors have appealed – sentenced the former Bosnian Serb political leader to 40 years in prison for genocide in Srebrenica in 1995, the persecution of Bosniaks and Croats, terrorising the population of Sarajevo and taking UN peacekeepers hostage.

Karadzic was acquitted of committing genocide in 1992 in seven other Bosnian municipalities, however.

In his appeal, Karadzic requested a new trial, claiming procedural flaws in the first-instance trial and arguing that incorrect conclusions were made by the judges.

The prosecutors’ appeal asks for Karadzic to be sentenced to life in prison, and convicted of the 1992 genocide charges.

Karadzic’s lawyer Peter Robinson asked at Wednesday’s status conference if judge Meron could give a bit
more information about the date of the final verdict, to which the judge replied that he could not, but said there was “a plan” for it to be handed down in December.

Karadzic told the status conference that he felt well and that his back was no longer causing him problems, and thanked judge Meron for the provision of a laptop which meant he no longer had to sit “uncomfortably, using a desktop computer”.

Meron said that Karadzic's request to use Skype to communicate with his family will soon be granted.

According to Meron, the UN detention centre in Scheveningen where Karadzic and other Hague defendants are held will also soon solve its problem with allowing “Balkan specialties”.

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The former Bosnian Serb political leader was arrested in Serbia and transferred to The Hague in 2008.

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MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA

Afghanistan

Afghan officials investigating 14 civilian deaths after battle that involved U.S. airstrikes (Washington Post)
By Sayed Sahaluddin and Antonio Olivo
July 20, 2018

Afghan officials Friday were investigating the cause of at least 14 civilian deaths in northern Kunduz province after a battle with the Taliban that involved U.S. airstrikes.

Mohammad Radmanish, a spokesman with the Afghan Defense Ministry, said joint Afghan and U.S. airstrikes occurred in the Chahar Dara district of Kunduz during a battle with Taliban forces Thursday.

“The Ministry of Defense is deeply saddened,” Radmanish said, adding that high-ranking officials within his department were traveling from Kabul to investigate.

Lt. Col. Martin O’Donnell, a NATO spokesman, said in an email that the United States carried out airstrikes in the area in support of Afghan troops.

But “on-the-ground assessment of those strikes reveals no indications they caused civilian casualties,” O’Donnell said.

Mohammad Yusuf Ayubi, a member of the Kunduz provincial council, said the people killed — including women and children — belonged to three families who lived less than 100 yards from a government base.

“I do not know who carried out the airstrikes, but these people were killed in the aerial attack,” Ayubi said.

Kunduz, where Taliban forces have a strong presence, has been the site of civilian deaths caused by airstrikes in the past.

In April, Afghan airstrikes killed 36 civilians — most of them children — at an all-male religious ceremony in the Dasht-e-Archi district, according to a United Nations report. The report contradicted initial government claims that the attack targeted a Taliban stronghold.
In 2015, a U.S. gunship plane fired on a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz city, killing at least 30 people, including doctors and patients.

U.S. officials later said that those involved did not realize the buildings they targeted were a hospital. Sixteen people were disciplined in that incident, but the Pentagon found that it did not amount to a war crime because it was not intentional.

So far, 2018 has been a record year for civilian deaths in Afghanistan.

A recent report by the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan found that 1,692 Afghan civilians were killed in the first six months of the year, more than in any comparable period during the past decade.

The Latest: Afghan vice president escapes suicide attack (The Washington Post)
July 22, 2018

The Latest on developments in Afghanistan (all times local):

8:15 p.m.

An Afghan interior ministry spokesman says that 14 people, including both civilians and military forces, have been killed in the suicide attack near Kabul’s airport shortly after the country’s controversial first vice president landed on his return from abroad.

Spokesman Najib Danish added that 50 other people were wounded in the attack.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack through its Aamaq News Agency.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani strongly condemned the attack in a statement released by the presidential palace.

7:15 p.m.

Hashmat Stanekzai, spokesman for the Kabul police chief, said that 11 people, including both civilians and military forces, have been killed in the suicide attack near Kabul’s airport shortly after the country’s controversial first vice president landed on his return from abroad.

Mohib Zeer, an official form the public health ministry, also confirmed that 11 people were killed in the attack and 48 others wounded.

Vice President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, the likely the target of the attack, escaped unharmed.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion, but both Taliban and the Islamic State group are active in the Afghan capital.

5:20 p.m.

An Afghan spokesman says there has been a large explosion near the Kabul airport shortly after the country’s controversial first vice president landed on his return from abroad.

Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum and members of his entourage were unharmed in the explosion on Sunday, which took place as his convoy had already left the airport.

The Interior Ministry’s spokesman, Najib Danish, says the explosion took place outside of the airport. It was unclear what had caused it.

Danish says that Dostum was likely the target of the attack.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion, but both Taliban and the Islamic State group are active in the Afghan capital.

11:40 a.m.

An Afghan spokesman says the country’s first vice president, a former Uzbek warlord, is returning home after more than a year of living in Turkey.
Presidential spokesman Haroon Chakhansuri says Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum is expected to return to Kabul on Sunday afternoon.

He says Dostum had been undergoing medical treatment in Turkey, was now well and would resume work.

Dostum left the country under controversial circumstances in 2017, after the attorney-general’s office opened an investigation into allegations that his followers had tortured and sexually abused a former ally turned political rival.

Dostum had since reportedly been prevented by the government from returning to Afghanistan.

Dostum, accused of war crimes committed after the collapse of the Taliban in 2001, has been criticized by the United States for human rights abuses.

Exiled Afghan Vice President accused of war crimes leaves Turkey (Hurriyet Daily News)
July 22, 2018

Afghanistan’s first vice president, a former Uzbek warlord, has returned home after more than a year of living in Turkey, a Kabul government official said on July 22.

Dostum had been undergoing medical treatment in Turkey, was now well and would resume work, the spokesman added.

Dostum left the country under controversial circumstances in 2017, after the attorney-general’s office opened an investigation into allegations that his followers had tortured and sexually abused a former ally turned political rival. He had since reportedly been prevented by the government from returning to Afghanistan.

It was not immediately clear whether Dostum will face any charges once home.

“The judiciary in Afghanistan is an independent body and would carry out its duties and responsibilities as it deems appropriate,” said an official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to comment on the issue.

Dostum, accused of war crimes committed after the collapse of the Taliban in 2001, has also been criticized by the United States for human rights abuses.

Bomb attack upon return: 11 killed

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Vice President Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, the likely target of the attack, escaped unharmed.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the explosion, but both Taliban and the Islamic State group are active in the Afghan capital.

Unrest on the streets

Dostum’s return, which has been the subject of much speculation, comes amid violent protests in several provinces across northern Afghanistan -- his traditional power base.

Thousands of Dostum’s supporters have taken to the streets in recent weeks, shuttering election and government offices and blocking sections of highways, demanding the release of a pro-government militia leader and calling for Dostum’s return.
Expectations for Dostum’s arrival have done little to quell the unrest, though, with protesters vowing Sunday to continue demonstrating until the burly leader of the Uzbek minority tells them otherwise.

“We don’t trust the government. We will continue our protests unless General Dostum tells us to stop,” Ehsanullah Qowanch, a protest leader in Faryab province, told AFP.

Qowanch also repeated calls for the release of Nezamuddin Qaisari -- a district police chief and Dostum’s provincial representative in Faryab -- whose arrest earlier this month ignited the protests.

Suspected suicide bomber shot by police

Afghan police on July 16 shot a suspected suicide bomber as he approached a demonstration in the center of the capital Kabul, officials said.

The man was shot following a challenge by police as he approached a gathering in the Shar-e Naw park in Kabul’s main business area, police spokesman Hashmat Stanekzai said, adding that the man was apprehended but died of his wounds.

His apparent target was a demonstration urging that exiled Dostum be allowed to return to Afghanistan from Turkey.

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Yemen

Officials Say Fighting in Yemen’s Hodeida Kills 30 Civilians (Haaretz)
July 17, 2018

Yemeni officials say fighting in the al-Tuhyta district, south of the key port city of Hodeida, has left 57 civilians wounded since the beginning of July.

Yemeni officials and witnesses say heavy fighting between pro-government forces and Shiite rebels has killed more than 30 civilians, including women and children, in the last two weeks.

Government forces have been trying to seize rebel-held areas along the western coast, while an allied Saudi-led coalition has been targeting the rebels, known as Houthis, with airstrikes.

Yemeni officials say fighting in the al-Tuhyta district, south of the key port city of Hodeida, has left 57 civilians wounded since the beginning of July. Many of them were wounded by land mines, they said.

The officials spoke Tuesday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media. Witnesses spoke anonymously for fear of reprisals.

The coalition has been battling the Iran-allied Houthis since March 2015.

Unidentified assailants kill well-known cleric in Yemen (The Seattle Times)
By Ahmed Al-Haj
July 22, 2018

Yemeni officials say unidentified armed men have killed a Muslim preacher in the southern city of Aden, base of Yemen’s internationally recognized government backed by a Saudi-led coalition.

They said on Sunday that the slain Mohammed Ragheb was known to be close to the Islah party, a local affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood group that is allied with Yemen’s self-exiled President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.
Muslim clerics and preachers have often been targeted, mostly in Aden, prompting some imams to quit, abandon their mosques or flee the war-torn country.

The coalition has been backing Hadi’s government in a three-year war against the Iran-aligned Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, aiming to restore him to power.

Suspected US airstrike kills 4 Al Qaeda operatives in Yemen (Boston Globe)  
July 22, 2018

Yemeni tribal leaders say a suspected US drone strike has killed four alleged Al Qaeda militants in the central province of Marib.

The tribal leaders said on Sunday that the alleged operatives’ bodies were later found after the unmanned aircraft targeted a house the operatives were occupying in the district of al-Rawda. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, as the Yemeni affiliate is known, has long been considered the global network’s most dangerous branch and has attempted to carry out attacks on the US mainland.

Saudi-led coalition renewes strikes on Yemen's main port city (Reuters)  
July 27, 2018

A Saudi-led coalition launched heavy air strikes on Yemen’s main port city of Hodeidah on Friday, in an apparent resumption of military operations on the city after the Iranian-aligned Houthi movement attacked two Saudi oil tankers, residents said.

The coalition on July 1 halted an attack on the Houthi-held city to aid U.N. efforts at a political solution that would avert an all-out assault on the Red Sea port, which the United Nations fears could trigger a famine throughout the country.

Residents said coalition warplanes had begun their bombardment after midnight, attacking a Houthi military police camp in the city center, a plastics factory north of the city, and the districts of Zubaid and al-Tahita to the south.

The Houthi’s al-Masirah TV said on Twitter that the coalition hit a radio station in the city and a fishing pier.

“Coalition warplanes conducted two strikes on a fishing dock and market in Hodeidah, and the yard of the Hodeidah radio building which was damaged by the shrapnel,” one resident said.

There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Saudi Arabia said on Thursday that it was suspending oil shipments through the Red Sea’s Bab al-Mandeb strait until maritime transit through the waterway is safe, following an attack on two Saudi oil tankers on Wednesday.

The Western-backed alliance of Sunni Muslim Arab states intervened in Yemen’s war in 2015 to restore the internationally recognized government of President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi, ousted from the capital Sanaa by the Houthis.

Coalition forces quickly retook the southern city of Aden and smaller coastal towns, but since then neither side has made much progress in the war, widely seen as a proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The alliance says capturing Hodeidah would cut off the main supply line of the Houthis and force the group to the negotiating table, but it has made no major gains since it launched the offensive on June 12.

U.N. special envoy to Yemen, Martin Griffiths, on Friday left Sanaa after another round of talks with the Houthis as part of weeks of shuttle diplomacy between the warring parties.

The United Nations fears that cutting off Hodeidah port, a lifeline for millions, may trigger a famine in Yemen where around 8.4 million people are believed to be facing starvation.
The Houthis have offered to hand over management of the port to the world body, according to the United Nations, but the coalition says that the group must quit the western coast.

Witnesses: Heavy fighting near Yemen's Hodeida kills dozens (Tampa Bay Times)
July 29, 2018

Heavy fighting along Yemen's west coast between pro-government forces and Shiite rebels in recent days has left dozens dead from both sides, Yemeni officials and witnesses said Sunday.

Government forces, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, have been advancing in the area in recent weeks as they battle Iran-allied rebels known as Houthis. The fighting has escalated as government forces try to retake the port city of Hodeida, the main entry point for food in a country teetering on the brink of famine.

The government has been waging an offensive to seize the rebel-held district of Zabid south of Hodeida, the officials said. The offensive is being waged by ground troops carrying sophisticated weapons, including shoulder-fired missiles, with air cover from the Saudi-led coalition, they said.

The fighting to capture Zabid, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, killed dozens from both sides of Yemen's conflict, now in its fourth year.

The coalition on Sunday targeted rebels in the district of ad-Durayhimi south of Hodeida with airstrikes, killing at least 18 people, the officials said. The rebels, known as the Houthis, were trying to break into ad-Durayhimi, about 20 kilometers (12.5 miles) south of Hodeida International Airport, they said.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media, while the witnesses did so for fear of reprisals.

United Nations Human Coordinator for Yemen Lise Grande said airstrikes hit and damaged a sanitation facility in Zabid and a water station that supplies the majority of the water to the city of Hodeida.

"These airstrikes are putting innocent civilians at extreme risk," she said. "Damage to sanitation, water and health facilities jeopardizes everything we are trying to do. We could be one airstrike away from an unstoppable epidemic."

Also on Sunday, the coalition said it destroyed missile launch sites in the rebels' northern home base of Saada province, according to a statement carried by the Saudi state-run al-Ekhbariya TV channel.

The Saudi-led coalition launched the campaign to retake Hodeida in June, with Emirati troops leading the force of government soldiers and irregular militia fighters backing Yemen's exiled government. Saudi Arabia has provided air support, with targeting guidance and refueling from the United States.

Hodeida, home to 600,000 people, is some 150 kilometers (90 miles) southwest of the capital Sanaa. The campaign to take Hodeida threatens to worsen Yemen's humanitarian situation as it is the main entry point for food, humanitarian aid and fuel supplies to the country.

Aid groups fear a protracted fight could force a shutdown of the port and potentially tip millions into starvation. Some 70 percent of Yemen's food enters via the port, as well as the bulk of humanitarian aid and fuel supplies. Around two-thirds of the country's population of 27 million relies on aid and 8.4 million are at risk of starving.

The Houthis seized control of Sanaa in September 2014, and later pushed south toward the port city of Aden. The Saudi-led coalition entered the conflict in March 2015 and has faced criticism for a campaign of airstrikes that has killed civilians and destroyed hospitals and markets.

The Houthis, meanwhile, have laid land mines, killing and wounding civilians. They have also targeted religious minorities and imprisoned opponents. The stalemate war has killed more than 10,000 people.

Impoverished Yemen has been devastated by the stalemated three-year civil war that has left around two-thirds of Yemen's population of 27 million relying on aid, and over 8 million at risk of starving.

By Ahmed El-Haj
Yemeni officials say a roadside bombing in the southern city of Aden has wounded a prominent politician, his son and two other people.

The officials say the attack took place on Tuesday and targeted Aref Ahmed Ali of the Islah party, which is Yemen's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, in the district of Maala.

They say the wounded have been taken to hospitals for treatment. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to talk to reporters.

No group has claimed the responsibility for the attack.

Since March 2015, the government, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, has been waging a war against Yemen's Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, who control the capital, Sanaa, and much of northern Yemen.

The stalemated war has killed more than 10,000 people.

Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)

Official Website of the Extraordinary Chambers
Official Website of the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT)
Cambodia Tribunal Monitor

Khmer Rouge genocide in the minds of Cambodian youth (Deutsche Welle)
July 20, 2018

It is estimated that between 1.7 and 2 million Cambodians died at the hands of the Khmer Rouge regime during its nearly four-year reign of terror, from 1975 to 1979, with little outcry from the international community.

The Khmer Rouge, formally the Communist Party of Kampuchea, was headed by a communist revolutionary, Pol Pot, and took control of the Cambodian government in 1975.

Their goal was to turn the nation into a communist agrarian utopia. In reality, however, during the regime's three years, eight months and 20 days in power, millions of people were forced into labor camps where they were starved and abused.

The Pol Pot's government emptied the cities and enslaved the population in rural gulags, where people worked to death and were executed for minor infractions. It not only targeted intellectuals and educated professionals like doctors, teachers and journalists, but also executed old and infirm people, among others.

Nearly four decades after the collapse of the brutal regime, the atrocities committed during this era still scar the collective consciousness of Cambodians. But many in the country are still not comfortable talking about the Khmer Rouge and their experiences.

'Nothing will change'

Rithy Odom, a student at the Royal University of Phnom Penh, said that his parents do not talk about it very often. "Only if I ask them, they would tell me how they managed to survive during the regime; how they migrated and what they ate during that period," the 20-year-old student told DW.

Odom added that it's important to be well aware of one's history, as it helps people to avoid repeating the mistakes made in the past. "Sometimes, I can't help but think about all the unimaginable horrors that can happen to people. It is so painful just to think about it."
When asked about his view on the Khmer Rouge regime, Odom said, "their leaders were overpowered by their own ego and ambition; they were big fans of extreme socialism which eventually led them to their own demise."

Unlike Odom, not everyone is open to talk about the Khmer Rouge. Sin Sovannleakhena, a multimedia design student in Phnom Penh, says she isn't interested in the topic.

"I am aware of our tragic and painful history, the conditions that people had to face back then. No matter how much we speak about it now, nothing will change anyway," she said.

Lack of awareness

As it struggles to leave its past behind, Cambodia appears to be facing a generational gap when it comes societal awareness about the Khmer Rouge.

A survey of 1,000 Cambodians aged 18 and above, conducted in 2011 by the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, concluded that many young Cambodians were not sufficiently aware of the brutal crimes committed by the regime.

It revealed that a third of the respondents who did not live under the Khmer Rouge lack knowledge about the war crimes court that was subsequently set up to investigate the atrocities and bring the perpetrators to justice. The court is known formally as the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC).

Youk Chhang, director of the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam), an NGO, says young Cambodians know little about the history of the Khmer Rouge.

To raise awareness, DC-Cam, with support from the education ministry, is implementing a book project, which aims to ensure that students all over the country gain knowledge and understanding of this regime. "There are over 1,700 high schools in Cambodia. We have managed to send the textbooks to all the schools, roughly about half a million copies," Chhang said.

Royal University student Odom said, "I think youth must be informed about the history in order to avoid taking the wrong path that our seniors took. We are the only hope Cambodia has."

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

Official Website of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon
In Focus: Special Tribunal for Lebanon (UN)

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

Bangladesh Court Sentences 4 to Death Involved in Crimes in 1970 War (Albawaba)
July 18, 2018

A Bangladeshi court on Tuesday sentenced four people to death for committing crimes against humanity during the 1971 war, which marked the country's secession from Pakistan.
“...They were convicted and condemned to the sentence of death and they will be hanged by the neck till they are dead,” said Justice Shahinur Islam, chairman of the three-member tribunal, state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) reported.

The convicts, Akmal Ali Talukder, 79, Abdun Nur Talukder, 66, Anis Miah, 80, and Abdul Mosabbir Miah, 67 committed genocide, murder, abduction and torture from May 7-Nov. 24, 1971 in Panchgoan and Paschimbhag villages of Moulvipazar district, the International Crime Tribunal (ICT) said.

Only Talukder was present at the hearing.

The court instructed authorities to arrest the absconding convicts.

The ICT is a domestic war crimes tribunal in Bangladesh set up in 2009 in order to investigate and prosecute suspects for war crimes in 1971 allegedly by the Pakistani military and their local collaborators in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh court sentences four to death for crimes against humanity during 1971 war (Jurist)
By Kenneth Hall
July 19, 2018

The International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh (ICTB) [official website] sentenced [judgment, PDF] four people to death on Tuesday for crimes against humanity during the country’s 1971 war of independence [BBC backgrounder] from Pakistan.

The convicts, all over the age of 65 at the time the judgment was passed, were charged with committing genocide, murder, abduction and torture from May 7 through November 24, 1971, in the Moulvipazar district villages of Panchgoan and Paschimbhag.

The three-judge tribunal rendered a unanimous decision, stating that the convicts “had acted as the members of an ‘auxiliary force’ under control of Pakistani occupation army for their operational and other purposes” during which time they were found to have murdered 61 villagers, raped six Hindu women, looted 136 houses and set them on fire in the villages of Panchgoan and Paschimbhag.

The ICTB, established in 2009 under the International Crimes Act [text], is charged with detaining, prosecuting and punishing persons responsible for committing genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other crimes under international law committed during the 1971 conflict. Rights groups such as criticized [JURIST report] death sentences imposed by the ICTB, stating that trials of war criminals have, in the past, “failed to meet international standards.” This is the thirty-third verdict since the ICTB began the trial of suspects for their roles in crimes against humanity during the 1971 Liberation War.

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War Crimes Investigation in Burma

Surviving war: The women of Burma (Independent Australia)
By Johanna Higgs
July 29, 2018

In Mae Tao hospital, on the dusty border town of Mae Sot, a young woman called Aye Moon from Myawaddy in Burma sits on a hospital bed with a small baby in her arms. She, like many women, snuck over the border to Thailand illegally to give birth to her child, saying the conditions in Burma were not good enough. She is a rice farmer and didn’t make it past grade two, as there wasn’t enough money to go to school. When asked if she is facing any difficulties in Thailand, she looks away shyly. She doesn’t want to say.
However, the reality for many of the Burmese women crossing into Thailand is that they are facing tremendous difficulties.

Mae Sot has been one of the entry points for many of Burma’s fleeing refugees and migrants into Thailand. Throughout the town, Burmese women can be seen walking through the dusty streets in sparkling, colourful headscarves and in small, makeshift restaurants, selling Burmese food line the sidewalks.

Many Burmese have come to Thailand to either escape ethnic violence or the widespread poverty throughout the country.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that there has been around 250,000 people displaced by the violence inside Burma. Hundreds of thousands of refugees have also fled to neighbouring countries and, according to OCHA, it is estimated that there are currently around 100,000 Burmese living in refugee camps in Thailand. Neighbouring China and Bangladesh have also received high numbers of refugees.

However, for many women and girls, aside from violence and poverty, it is also the threat of sexual violence that has sent them fleeing.

The Information Reporting Director from the Free Burma Rangers, an NGO based in Chiang Mai, which conducts humanitarian missions into conflict-stricken areas in Burma, reported that sexual violence is a serious problem in conflict areas.

In an interview, he said:

“The Burmese army have always used rape as a weapon of war. It happens today, even with children.”

In their war crimes report, Giving birth on the run: Kachin flee as Burma Army attacks, they have documented numerous cases of rape at the hands of the Burmese Army, including the gang rape of a 40-year-old woman and two girls, aged 12 and 14, who were raped when going back to a school.

However, for many women and girls, arrival to refugee camps doesn’t necessarily mean an end to the violence.

Rebeca Cenalmor-Rejas, a protection officer at UNHCR in Mae Sot, said that women and girls in the refugee camps often face the same problems inside the camps as they do back home:

There are problems with domestic violence and different types of sexual based violence, including with children. It is mostly the other refugees who are doing the sexual abuse. Sometimes, there are girls as young as seven years old being abused, but often they are 10 or 11 years.”

There have also been cases of child marriages, where girls have been married as young as 15 years old. There have been numerous cases of girls dropping out of school and it is all linked to gender equality. You see it everywhere in their communities and it is underreported everywhere.

A young woman who grew up in Mae La camp along the Thai-Burma border, who asked not to be named, recalled how there were many cases of sexual harassment and rape in the refugee camp when she was growing up:

I remember when women wanted to leave the camps to go and find something to eat, they would have to go past the Thai police. Sometimes the police would force them to have sex. It happened to my friends, they were only 15 or 16 years old. They had to accept it so that they could go out and find food.

If you were a refugee in a camp then you couldn’t do anything, you couldn’t get any justice.

Human trafficking is also a serious problem for those fleeing war, with women and children often being the most vulnerable.

Peter Trotter, the Senior Field Coordinator at UNHCR in Mae Sot, explained that trafficking is endemic in the region:

“Thailand has just changed to Tier 2, but people don’t really want to talk about it. It’s not just refugees who are subject to trafficking, in fact refugees might be more protected. It’s everywhere.”
Burmese are often tricked by traffickers who tell them that they are taking them to Thailand to work. They are then, instead, sold into forced labour or sex trafficking networks. Women and children are mostly sold into sex trafficking and, in some cases, are taken to China to be sold into forced marriages to Chinese men.

Aung So, the director of the Committee for the Promotion and Protection of Child Rights in Mae Sot, said that there are also many cases where family members sell their children into trafficking networks.

“There are cases where parents go to Bangkok to work and leave their children with the grandmother. If she can’t afford to feed them then she’ll sell them, mostly for labour exploitation. The child could be as young as 10 years old.”

Aung So says that much needs to be done to bring a stop to this abuse against women and girls. Reducing poverty and improving women’s economic situations would be a big step in this direction by making women and girls less vulnerable to abuse.

“If there were more jobs for women and girls then there would be less trafficking and less abuse. If there was a better economic situation, then they would have a better situation.”

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**Israel and Palestine**

Israel passes controversial 'Jewish nation-state' law (Aljazeera)  
July 19, 2018

Israel's parliament on Thursday adopted a law defining the country as the nation-state of the Jewish people, provoking fears it will lead to blatant discrimination against its Palestinian citizens.

The legislation, adopted by 62 votes to 55, makes Hebrew the country's national language and defines the establishment of Jewish communities as being in the national interest.

The bill also strips Arabic of its designation as an official language, downgrading it to a "special status" that enables its continued use within Israeli institutions.

It stipulates that “Israel is the historic homeland of the Jewish people and they have an exclusive right to national self-determination in it”. It also states that an undivided Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.

"This is a defining moment in the annals of Zionism and the history of the state of Israel," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the Knesset after the vote.

Palestinian members of the Knesset have condemned the bill.

"It has passed a law of Jewish supremacy and told us that we will always be second-class citizens," Ayman Odeh, the head of the Arab Joint List - an alliance of four predominantly Arab parties - said in a statement following the law's passage.

Ahmed Tibi, one of the legislators, said: "I announce with shock and sorrow the death of democracy."

Al Jazeera's Stefanie Dekker, reporting from Jerusalem, said the bill entrenches into Israeli law what has already long been an active policy of segregation and discrimination by Israeli authorities.

"It's symbolic but it is actively putting it into law ... in Israel's constitution, highlighting that this is the way forward for this country. The message is not an inclusive or democratic one."

'Key elements of apartheid'
Adalah, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, called the law a bid to advance "ethnic superiority by promoting racist policies".

"The Jewish nation-state law features key elements of apartheid, which is not only immoral but also absolutely prohibited under international law," said Hassan Jabareen, general director of Adalah.

"By defining sovereignty and democratic self-rule as belonging solely to the Jewish people - wherever they live around the world - Israel has made discrimination a constitutional value and has professed its commitment to favouring Jewish supremacy as the bedrock of institutions."

According to Adalah, there are currently over 65 Israeli laws that discriminate against Palestinian citizens in Israel and Palestinian residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) on the basis of their national belonging.

In Ma'alot-Tarshiha, a municipality in northern Israel which was created by linking the Jewish town of Ma'alot and the Palestinian town of Tarshiha, there was anger among Palestinian residents.

"I think this is racist legislation by a radical right-wing government that is creating radical laws and is planting the seeds to create an apartheid state," said physician Bassam Bisharah, 71.

"The purpose of this law is discrimination. They want to get rid of the Arabs totally," said Yousef Faraj, 53, from the nearby Druze village of Yanuh.

"The Israelis want to destroy all the religions of the Arabs."

Palestinian citizens of Israel number some 1.8 million, about 20 percent of the nine million population.

Early drafts of the legislation went further in what critics at home and abroad saw as discrimination towards Palestinian citizens of Israel, who have long said they are treated as second-class citizens.

Clauses that were dropped in last-minute political wrangling - and after objections by Israel's president and attorney general - would have enshrined in law the establishment of Jewish-only communities, and instructed courts to rule according to Jewish ritual law when there were no relevant legal precedents.

‘Deepen a sense of alienation’

Instead, a more vaguely-worded version was approved, which says: "The state views the development of Jewish settlement as a national value and will act to encourage and promote its establishment."

Even after the changes, critics said the new law will deepen a sense of alienation within the Palestinian Arab minority.

Benny Begin, son of former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the founder of Netanyahu's ruling Likud party, abstained from voting, warning of the party's growing disconnect from human rights.

"This is not a decision I expected from the Likud leadership," he said.

The American Jewish Committee, a group representing the Jewish diaspora, said it was "deeply disappointed," saying the law "put at risk the commitment of Israel's founders to build a country that is both Jewish and democratic".

Vanishing Palestine: Animated map of Israel taking over historical Palestine

Netanyahu has defended the law. "We will keep ensuring civil rights in Israel's democracy but the majority also has rights and the majority decides," he said last week.

"An absolute majority wants to ensure our state's Jewish character for generations to come."

Israel's Palestinian population comprises mainly the descendants of those who remained on their land since 1948, the time of the establishment of the modern state of Israel.

The fledgeling state consolidated its control over Palestinian lands on the back of an ethnic cleansing campaign where hundreds of thousands were forced to leave their homes.
Those who remained have full equal rights under the law but say they face constant discrimination, citing inferior services and unfair allocations for education, health and housing.

Israeli army kills Palestinian teen in Bethlehem raid (Aljazeera)
July 23, 2018

**Israeli soldiers have shot dead a Palestinian teenager and rounded up at least 11 others during an overnight raid in the occupied West Bank.**

Arkan Thaer Mizhar, 15, was shot in the chest in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem, in the southern West Bank, the Palestinian health ministry said on Monday.

His funeral is due to take place later on Monday.

A security source told WAFA news agency that Israeli forces stormed the camp and conducted house raids. The soldiers fired live ammunition as well as tear gas and stun grenades.

According to WAFA, two young Palestinian men were wounded and another two were arrested.

A medical source at Beit Jala Hospital confirmed that two young men were wounded by live ammunition in the foot, describing their condition as stable.

There are around 6,500 Palestinians in Israeli jails; 500 of whom are detained without charges under the administrative detention policy which allows Israel to detain a prisoner for up to six months, renewable indefinitely.

Six prisoners are currently on hunger strike, including Hasan Shokeh, in protest against the administrative detention.

The Israeli army said its forces had entered the camp and arrested two people suspected of "terror activity".

"During the operation, a violent riot was instigated in which Palestinians hurled rocks and threw firebombs and grenades at [Israeli] soldiers," the army said in a statement.

Soldiers fired live rounds at the protesters, the statement added.

The camp is in a part of the West Bank supposedly under full Palestinian control but the Israeli army regularly carries out raids in such areas.

It says the operations are necessary to arrest suspects, but they often spark protests among young Palestinians, many of whom are killed or injured during such raids.

While tensions have flared over recent weeks between Israel and Hamas in besieged Gaza, the West Bank has been relatively calm during that time.

According to Defence for Children International - Palestine, Israeli forces have so far killed at least 30 Palestinian children in 2018 in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, whereas in 2017, 15 children were killed.

Israeli forces arrest Palestinian female journalist in Hebron (Aljazeera)
By Shatha Hamma
July 24, 2018

**Two-year-old Yahya followed his mother Lama Khater to the front door of their house in the occupied West Bank city of Hebron, trying to leave with her as she was arrested by at least 25 Israeli soldiers.**

Khater paused, then knelt down to hug and kiss her toddler, before she was forcefully pulled by the soldiers who put her in an Israeli army jeep waiting in the dark outside.

Yahya began to cry as his mother walked away without him, and was picked up by his older sister Beesan who tried to comfort him, before being passed to his other sister Yaman - all to no avail.
"Around 1:30am on Tuesday, we heard a loud noise just outside our home," Beesan, 18, told Al Jazeera.

Their home was then stormed by a large number of Israeli soldiers, who immediately informed the family of their intention to arrest Lama Khater. Most of the family was rounded up in a single room and only Yaman, 14, was allowed to help her mother pack her bag.

"My mother kissed each one of us goodbye, and advised us to take care of each other," Beesan said. "She told us she would be back soon."

Lama Khater, the 42-year-old mother of five, is a writer known for her articles published on the independent Noon Post website on crimes and violations committed by the Israeli occupation.

She was arrested two years ago, barely a month after giving birth to Yahya, and was subjected to long hours of interrogation regarding her writings before she was released on the same day.

Her husband, Hazem al-Fakhouri, told Al Jazeera on Tuesday that he was summoned by Israeli forces five days ago for interrogation, who warned him that Khater would be arrested unless he pressured his wife to stop writing.

"I did not expect the occupation to follow through on their threats," he said. "My children and I were surprised to see the Israelis raiding our house in the middle of the night to arrest Lama without giving a reason."

"She is the very foundation of this household, our family, and we all rely on her," he added. "We don't know how we will continue with our lives now."

Hazem said his wife suffers from anaemia and has to take an assortment of medicines and supplements.

"We are very concerned about Lama; we do not know if the Israelis will permit her to keep her medicines and take them regularly," he said.

Beesan, who completed high school this year and had enrolled at Birzeit University near Ramallah, two hours north of Hebron, is now considering postponing her studies - where she had planned on majoring in nursing - and staying at home to take care of her siblings.

"I will not be able to stay away from home as long as my mother is not there," she said. "I'll have to stay at home and take care of my brothers and sisters. It's all my responsibility now."

Khater is not the only female journalist in Hebron to have been detained in recent weeks. Last month, freelance journalist Suzanne Oweiwi, 39, was taken from her home in Hebron after a raid by Israeli forces.

The case of freelance journalist Suzanne

The four Oweiwi children did not expect their mother, Suzanne, to be absent from their lives for this long, since she was arrested from her home on June 5.

Suzanne, a freelance journalist and member of the Hebron municipality, was subjected to intensive interrogation, sleep deprivation, and solitary confinement in an Israeli prison for an entire month.

She was eventually accused of charges related to her work, which mainly deals with documenting Israeli violations against Palestinians, such as settler attacks - which typically occur under the protection of the army - in Hebron.

Hossam al-Oweiwi, Suzanne's husband, told Al Jazeera that the Israeli courts extended her detention again on July 4 until next month, when a new hearing is scheduled.

On that day, Suzanne, who suffers from kidney pains, was in a state of near-fainting in the courtroom. She told her lawyer Munther Abu Ahmed that she was subjected to considerable pressure and harsh interrogation in Ashkelon prison.

Because of her work as a journalist, Suzanne travelled regularly but has never been away from her family for more than a week. Her detention has been the longest period of time away from her children.
Hossam says he has not been allowed to visit his wife, which requires special permits for first-degree relatives of prisoners. Two of his sons attempted to visit their mother, but upon arrival at the prison, one of them was turned away by the Israeli Prison Service.

"I could not visit my mother yet, and only saw her in court, where she looked exhausted," Wa'd, Suzanne's 18-year-old daughter, told Al Jazeera.

"All the responsibility is now on me; I sometimes prepare food for my brothers, but my father brings us takeaway food most of the time," said Wa'd. "We miss the food my mother prepares for us."

63 female Palestinian prisoners

Since the beginning of June, Israeli forces have arrested four women from the Hebron governorate, bringing the number of Palestinian female prisoners in Israeli jails to 63, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club said in a statement on Tuesday.

The club added that Israeli forces had arrested Safaa Abu Sneineh, 36-year-old mother of four on June 17, who remains under interrogation at the Ashkelon detention centre.

Dunya Sa'id, 39, who was arrested on July 4, also remains jailed at the Ashkelon detention centre. She is the mother of one child.

Two Gazans, including 12-year-old, said killed in border riots (The Times of Israel)
July 27, 2018

Two Palestinians were shot dead Friday as thousands participated in violent protests at the Gaza-Israel border, the Hamas-run health ministry in Gaza said in a statement.

Some time after protests ended gunmen fired at IDF soldiers near the border, causing no casualties. In response the military launched a strike on a nearby Hamas observation post.

The IDF said around 7,000 Palestinians participated in violent riots in several locations along the border. Protesters hurled rocks and burned tires, and attacked troops with pipe bombs, a Molotov cocktail and a grenade — all of which did not manage to clear the fence and fell in Gazan territory. In another incident the army said troops identified several suspects approach the fence, sabotage it and move back.

The military said soldiers responded to the violence with less-lethal means as well as live fire in certain instances.

The Gaza ministry said the deceased were a 43-year-old man and a 12-year-old boy. It named the adult as Ghazi Abu Mustafa, and said he was shot in the head near the border fence, east of Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip. The teen was identified as Majdi Al-Satra, shot in the head during confrontations east of Rafah.

Eyewitness Hassan Najjar told The Associated Press he witnessed the shooting of Abu Mustafa. He claimed soldiers shot at a group of Palestinians who rushed to the border and a bullet hit the man, who was sitting about 250 meters away.

The Gaza health ministry reported that at least 240 people were injured, while 90 suffered wounds from live fire.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassim said: “The occupation purposefully killed the child Majdi al-Satra today. The leaders of the occupation’s army must be prosecuted as war criminals for this crime. Our people’s response is to continue its resistance and struggle until the occupation is expelled from all of our Palestinian land.”

Earlier the Israeli military carried out an airstrike on a squad of Palestinians in northern Gaza as they flew incendiary balloons towards Israel, the army said. Palestinians said there were no casualties in the attack.

A senior Israeli official told Hadashot news: “Hamas is playing with fire and it will get a conflagration.”

Since March 30, southern Israel has experienced many fires as a result of incendiary devices attached to
balloons or kites launched from Gaza across the border into Israeli territory.

Israeli soldiers perched in defensive positions on an embankment near the Gaza border during a violent Palestinian protest, July 27, 2018 (Courtesy IDF)

Over 7,000 acres of land have been burned, causing millions of shekels in damages, according to Israeli officials. The attacks have continued almost daily, although there has been a marked reduction in numbers since the weekend when the Hamas terror group, which rules Gaza, said it agreed to a ceasefire.

Despite the drop, violence flared Wednesday and early Thursday after a Hamas sniper shot and injured an IDF officer. Israel responded with tank fire and airstrikes on Hamas targets, and rockets were fired from the Palestinian territory at communities in southern Israel.

The military has also bolstered troop presence in the West Bank after a Palestinian assailant sneaked into a West Bank settlement and stabbed three people Thursday, killing one.

An Israel Defense Forces spokesperson said late Thursday it was sending two more brigades to the West Bank following the deadly terrorist attack in Adam. The move comes as Israel has also raised its military alert level in the Golan amid flare-ups there.

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**AMERICAS**

**North & Central America**

Ten years after allegations, inquiry into 'non criminal' Afghan war issues with Canadian special forces still not public (National Post)
By David Pugliese
August 6, 2018

*It was called Project Sand Trap. In 2008, Canada’s special forces unit Joint Task Force 2 faced allegations from one of its own soldiers that during the Afghan war one of its members gunned down an Afghan man who had raised his hands in surrender and that Canadian officers had failed to report an Afghan’s execution at the hands of U.S.-aligned forces. Military police launched an investigation that summer, a project that involved about a hundred interviews and the collection of evidence in both Canada and Afghanistan.*

The investigation concluded in 2011, with military police announcing it found “no evidence that criminal acts were committed by any Canadian Forces members.” At the time police made few details public, instead handing the information it collected over to a board of inquiry, which was charged with addressing certain “non-criminal” issues that came to light during the investigation. It has now been a decade since the launch of Project Sand Trap, and though the reckoning over the Afghan war continues — with Australia and New Zealand recently launching investigations into war crimes allegations against their own special forces — the board of inquiry’s report on problems with Canada’s commando unit has still not been released.

The board of inquiry process provides recommendations to the military on policies and practices that might need to be changed. According to the Department of National Defence, the board that stemmed from Project Sand Trap submitted its final report at least two years ago. “The board of inquiry into allegations of possible wrongdoing in Afghanistan was convened in February 2009, returned to its convening authority in 2013 and subsequently reviewed, signed off and approved by the chief of the
Defence staff in June 2016,” said DND spokesman Dan Le Bouthillier.

Paul Champ, an Ottawa human rights lawyer previously involved in legal efforts to protect Afghan detainees from torture, said some military boards of inquiry can be complex — in the past, those have taken around three years. “But you have to ask the question about this board of inquiry — what’s the point when it takes 10 years to come up with recommendations?”

What’s more, Champ said, the reports of boards of inquiry into controversial subjects tend to be held back by the Canadian military, feeding cynicism about the value of the overall process and whether the issues were even properly examined.

Military sources told Postmedia the inquiry’s report could be released later this year or next year as a member of the public has made a request for the document under the Access to Information Act. But it is unclear how much information will actually be released, as Canadian Forces legal officials have spent the past two years reviewing and removing sensitive material. While the reports of most boards of inquiry are not usually released to the public, the military has made exceptions in high-profile investigations such as the 2004 fire on board the submarine HMCS Chicoutimi, the circumstances surrounding the handling of an Afghan detainee in 2006 and the death of Canadian officer Maj. Paeta Hess-von Kruedener while serving as a United Nations military observer during the 2006 conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

But the circumstances surrounding the Hess-von Kruedener board of inquiry illustrate how sensitive the Canadian Forces can be about putting such information into the public domain. In early 2008, DND posted on its website the 67-page report from the board of inquiry, which found Hess-von Kruedener’s death was caused by the Israeli military, and had been preventable. But less than a year later, the report was removed from the DND website. It was later republished on the site after investigative journalist Adam Day published a copy of the report and Hess-von Kruedener’s widow, Cynthia, accused DND and the Conservative government of the day of removing the report from the public domain to protect Israel’s reputation.

The allegations about Canadian special forces were originally reported by the CBC’s James Cudmore, who later left journalism to work for Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan and is now on another minister’s staff. A member of JTF2 had come forward with allegations that during a mission targeting a Taliban doctor one of the unit’s commandos had killed an Afghan who was trying to surrender.

Canadian military police also investigated a second incident in which U.S.-aligned forces, accompanying JTF2 during a Canadian-led raid, had executed an Afghan. The JTF2 soldier complained to Canadian officers about the execution but was sent home to Canada the next day.

Police investigated the allegations of negligence, assault and murder, but found that no criminal acts were committed by Canadians, who “acted within the rules of engagement in all instances.” But in a 2011 statement they added that “Information collected during the course of the investigation pertaining to non-CF members was brought to the attention of the appropriate foreign investigative authorities.”

“Information has also been passed to the board of inquiry which is addressing broader administrative aspects of allegations raised in the original criminal complaint,” police said.

Information about U.S.-aligned forces’ alleged execution of an Afghan was passed on to U.S. authorities, military sources told Postmedia, but it is not known whether the U.S. investigated the claims further.

Other nations are now dealing with allegations involving their special forces in Afghanistan. Australia is investigating recent accusations from some special forces troops that a group of rogue soldiers in the Special Air Service Regiment executed an elderly Afghan prisoner and kept a running tally of the number of Afghans they killed. Members of Australian special forces are also alleged to have kept the prosthetic leg of a dead Afghan as a trophy and later used it as a beer tankard.

New Zealand’s government also launched an inquiry earlier this year into allegations its special forces killed six civilians and injured 15 during what has been described as a “revenge attack” on two Afghan villages.

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Venezuelan opposition leaders warn of government crackdown after blast targets Maduro (CBS)
August 5, 2018

Opposition leaders in Venezuela warn that the government might use an apparent assassination attempt against President Nicolas Maduro as an excuse to crack down on those who legitimately oppose his policies.

Maduro was delivering a televised speech Saturday evening to hundreds of soldiers when he and his wife, Cilia Flores, looked up at the sky and winced after hearing the sound of an explosion.

Nearby residents said Sunday they saw a drone crash into a building and explode about two blocks away from where Maduro was speaking.

"This was an attempt to kill me," he said later in an impassioned retelling of the event. "Today, they attempted to assassinate me."

Maduro said the "far right" working in coordination with detractors in Bogota and Miami, including Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, were responsible. Some of the "material authors" of the apparent attack have been detained, he said.

"The investigation will get to the bottom of this," he said, "no matter who falls."

A Colombian official with the president's office described Maduro's accusation that Santos was involved as baseless.

The Broad Front opposition alliance issued a statement accusing the government of leaping to the assumption the explosions were an assassination attempt and of making "irresponsible" accusations without any proof.

"We warn that this confused event could be used as an excuse to repress the constitutional rights of the people to continue protesting for the defense of their rights," the statement said late Saturday.

Venezuela's government routinely accuses opposition activists of plotting to attack and overthrow Maduro, a deeply unpopular leader who was recently elected to a new term in office in a vote decried by dozens of nations. Maduro has steadily moved to concentrate power as the nation reels from a crippling economic crisis.

Information Minister Jorge Rodriguez said the incident took place shortly after 5:30 p.m. Saturday as Maduro was celebrating the National Guard's 81st anniversary. The visibly shaken head of state said he saw a "flying device" that exploded before his eyes. He thought it might be a pyrotechnics display in honor of the event.

Within seconds, Maduro said he heard a second explosion and pandemonium broke out. Bodyguards escorted Maduro from the event and TV footage showed uniformed soldiers in formation quickly scattering from the scene.

Witnesses interviewed Sunday by The Associated Press confirmed seeing at least one drone that appeared to be linked to an explosion.

One showed a cellphone video of a drone hovering over a residential street two blocks away and then crashing into a building. While the video doesn't show an explosion, the witness said it fell and then exploded, starting a fire in the building.

Police arrested the drone pilot, the witness said. Crime scene investigators combed the building for evidence.

Another resident apparently saw the same drone. Mairum Gonzalez said she heard a thundering
explosion and ran in terror to her fifth-floor balcony.

"It was so strong the building shook," she said. "I said 'Oh, my God, what happened?' It terrified me."

Gonzalez said she next saw a drone hit the same building mentioned by the other witness and then fall. Moments later, she heard a second blast and saw black smoke. People screamed as they ran in the street below, she said.

An earlier account by firefighters at the scene of the blast hand linked the explosion to a gas leak.

President Trump's national security adviser John Bolton told "Fox News Sunday" that he can state "unequivocally" that "there was no U.S. government involvement in this at all."

At one point Saturday, Maduro asked Mr. Trump to arrest the "terrorists."

Apparently in response, Bolton said, "If the government of Venezuela has hard information that they want to present to us that would show a potential violation of U.S. criminal law, we'll take a serious look at it."

In the midst of near-daily protests last year, a rogue police officer flew a stolen helicopter over the capital and launched grenades at several government buildings. Oscar Perez was later killed in a deadly gun battle after over six months on the lam.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab said the attempted assassination targeted not only Maduro, but the military's entire high command on stage with the president.

Prosecutors have already launched their investigation and obtained critical details from the suspects in custody, said Saab, adding that he would give more details Monday.

"We are in the midst of a wave of civil war in Venezuela," Saab said.

Adding to the confusion, a little known group calling itself Soldiers in T-shirts claimed responsibility, saying it planned to fly two drones loaded with explosives at the president, but government soldiers shot them down before reaching its target. The AP could not independently verify the authenticity of the message.

"We showed that they are vulnerable," the group said in a tweet. "It was not successful today, but it is just a matter of time."

The organization did not respond to a message from the AP.

David Smilde, a senior fellow at the Washington Office on Latin America who has spent decades researching Venezuela, said the incident did not appear to be a staged attack by Maduro's government for political gain.

The "amateurish" attack prompted embarrassing images of Maduro cut off midsentence with droves of soldiers running away in fear, making the president appear vulnerable, Smilde noted. Despite the optics, Smilde said he suspected that Maduro would nonetheless find a way to take advantage of it.

"He will use it to concentrate power," Smilde said. "Whoever did this, he'll use it to further restrict liberty and purge the government and armed forces."

The event had been just one more of many Maduro routinely holds with members of the military, a key faction of Venezuelan society whose loyalty he has clung to as the nation struggles with crippling hyperinflation and shortages of food and medicine.

"We are going to bet for the good of our country," Maduro declared triumphantly moments before the explosion. "The hour of the economy recovery has come."

Images on social media showed officers surrounding Maduro with what appeared to be a black bulletproof shields as they escorted him from the site. Maduro said at no point did he panic, confident the military would protect him.

"That drone came after me," he said. "But there was a shield of love that always protects us. I'm sure I'll
Colombia gives 440,000 Venezuelan migrants permission to stay (Reuters)
Reporting by Julia Symmes Cobb; Editing by Helen Murphy and Phil Berlowitz
August 2, 2018

Colombia on Thursday temporarily granted more than 440,000 migrants from Venezuela permission to stay in the country for two years and access social services, as hundreds of thousands flee a devastating economic crisis in neighbouring Venezuela.

The decree, signed by President Juan Manuel Santos, is directed at 442,462 Venezuelans without visas, stamped passports or other permission to live in Colombia who registered in a recent two-month survey.

Colombia has borne the brunt of the migration from Venezuela, where hyperinflation, food and medicine shortages, and crime have forced many to leave their homes.

Estimates of how many Venezuelans have left their home country during the tenures of former President Hugo Chavez and current leader Nicolas Maduro vary widely, with some opponents and academics putting the figure at 4 million. Maduro insists that is an exaggeration.

Maduro has said his country is the victim of an “economic war” led by opposition leaders with the help of Washington, but his critics say the problems are the result of the government’s currency and price controls as well as declining production of oil.

Colombia had asked Venezuelans to register in the survey if they did not have work or tourism visas, dual citizenship, or some other type of formal permission to remain, so it could assess the need for social services.

Many Venezuelan migrants arrive in Colombia with little money with which to begin new lives.

Some 250,000 Colombians who had been living in Venezuela have also returned home recently.

“We will continue to support the Venezuelans and the returning Colombians, just as we have been doing up to this moment,” Santos said in a statement. “This is an international milestone in migration issues.”

All the Venezuelans will have access to emergency medical care and be able to participate in the social security system, while pregnant women will have prenatal care, the statement said.

Venezuelan children will continue to be enrolled at public schools, while adults will have help looking for work via the same job centres used by Colombians.

The government will spend 20 billion pesos ($6.9 million) to repay hospitals that have treated migrants including women in labour and those suffering from cancer and diabetes, the statement said.

Santos, who leaves office on Tuesday, reiterated his criticism of Maduro’s government.

“The whole world is ever more terrified by what is happening in Venezuela,” Santos said. “Such a rich country, a country with the largest oil reserves in the whole world, with a population that is dying of hunger and dying of disease for lack of medicine.”

President-elect Ivan Duque has heartily criticized Maduro’s policies and his treatment of the Venezuelan opposition.

($1 = 2,892.62 Colombian pesos)
Truth and Reconciliation Commission

United Nations Human Rights Committee calls on Liberia to Prosecute Perpetrators of Civil War Atrocities (Amnesty International)
By Hassan Bility
August 7, 2018

The United Nations Human Rights Committee (the Committee), a body of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) by its State parties, has issued strong concluding observations on Liberia’s continued impunity for past crimes and human rights violations and calls upon the Liberian government to establish, as a matter of priority, a process of accountability for war crimes.

On 26 July 2018, following the first ever review of the human rights situation by the Committee, which included a dialogue with the Liberian government, the Committee concluded that it “regrets the very few steps taken to implement the bulk of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations of 2009.” It also expressed “concern that none of the alleged perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes mentioned in the TRC report, has been brought to justice, and that some of those individuals are or have been holding official executive positions, including in the government.”

In advance of this historic meeting, a coalition of 76 organizations—including 56 Liberian NGOs and 20 international organizations—issued a submission to the Committee highlighting the “failure of the Government of Liberia to undertake fair and credible prosecutions of international crimes committed in Liberia during armed conflicts between 1989 and 2003, and to end impunity for civil war-era crimes.”

Liberia’s back to back civil wars resulted in numerous crimes under international law, including the killing of tens of thousands of civilians, the displacement of half the population, summary executions and numerous large-scale massacres; widespread and systematic rape; mutilation and torture; and large-scale forced conscription and use of child combatants. Despite a Truth and Reconciliation Commission report identifying crimes committed by all sides of the conflict, and recommending reparations for victims as well as justice in the form of a special international-national hybrid court, Liberia has yet to take steps to implement such recommendations. According to the Committee’s assessment “such a situation fosters a climate of impunity and fails to achieve transitional justice.”

During the review, Liberian government representatives pledged to issue a public statement on plans to implement the TRC report. Since assuming office, President George Weah has yet to publically share his opinion on accountability for grave crimes committed during the country’s two civil wars, despite his earlier support while serving as a Goodwill Ambassador to UNICEF. This comes in a context where calls for justice by Liberian civil society and ordinary citizens, in addition to international organizations, continue to grow. Moreover, prosecutions of former rebel commanders and military leaders are taking place in the U.S. and Europe while not a single person has been prosecuted in Liberia for civil war-era crimes.

At a well-attended press conference in Monrovia on August 1, Adama Dempster, Secretary General of the Civil Society Human Rights Advocacy Platform of Liberia noted that the government representatives assured the UN Committee that their position on accountability would be made clear upon their return to Liberia and called on the government to issue a statement without further delay.

Impunity for past crimes in Liberia is now one of three priority issues before the Committee, making accountability for civil war era abuses one of the most pressing matters that Liberia faces under its ICCPR review. Liberia is now tasked with responding to the UN’s calls to implement measures to provide justice, truth, and reparations for civil war victims, including: “ensure that all alleged perpetrators of gross human rights violations and war crimes are impartially prosecuted and, if found guilty, convicted and punished in accordance with the gravity of the acts committed”; “remove any persons who have been proven to be involved in gross human rights violations and war crimes from official positions”; take “all measures necessary to implement the TRC recommendations”; and develop and implement reparations
for war time victims. Liberia will now need to provide a follow-up report on these matters by 2020 (two years prior to the regularly scheduled periodic report).

13 Years of Peace Without Justice or Truth in Aceh (The Diplomat)
By Usman Hamid
August 15, 2018

**Today marks 13 years since the government of Indonesia and the armed pro-independence movement, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), signed a peace agreement in Helsinki. The peace deal ended 29 years of conflict that killed between 10,000 and 30,000 people, including many civilians.**

While the agreement may have brought an end to the conflict in Aceh, the failure of the authorities to establish the truth about what happened has left countless families whose lives were torn apart by the violence still struggling to find justice, truth, and reparation.

In a discussion with Amnesty International, an Acehnese recently said that “what people in Aceh want is at least the government could establish the truth about what happened during the conflict so that no one is born in Aceh not knowing that happened to their grandfathers in the past.”

During those 29 years of conflict, Indonesian security forces and their auxiliaries committed serious human rights violations, including unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, and torture as part of a policy to suppress the independence movement. These crimes appear to have formed part of a widespread or systematic attack and may amount to crimes against humanity. Meanwhile, human rights abuses by GAM included hostage taking and the targeted killings of those suspected of having ties to the government.

For more than nine years, from early 1990 to August 1998, Aceh was classified as an Area of Military Operation (DOM). This DOM status was used to justify and intensify counterinsurgency operations against GAM, which saw large-scale human rights violations including extrajudicial executions, “disappearances,” torture, rape, imprisonment of peaceful activists, and unfair trials of suspected GAM members and supporters.

The situation was exacerbated by a climate of fear in which those seeking to challenge the authorities were subjected to threats. During the DOM, many Acehnese civilians with no connection to armed separatist activities were arrested, tried in proceedings that contravened international fair trial standards, and imprisoned for their alleged links with GAM. The restrictions imposed by the authorities on access to Aceh for human rights monitors and the media, together with the intimidation of human rights lawyers and the lack of an independent judiciary, meant that it was not possible for those accused of involvement with GAM to challenge these accusations.

Hope that the truth about the past may come to light rose when the Aceh House of People’s Representative (DPRA) — independently of the Indonesian government — appointed seven commissioners for the for the Aceh Truth and Reconciliation Commission, known locally as KKR Aceh, in July 2016 for the 2016-2021 period.

The establishment and the implementation of the Commission went through a long and winding road. The 2005 Helsinki Agreement mandated that a commission be established no later than one year after the peace agreement. However, the Indonesian government has so far failed to act on it and it took the DPRA eight years to pass a bylaw for its establishment in December 2013.

A further delay of three years in establishing the KKR and lack of funds, which prompted some commissioners to threaten to resign in May 2017, has subsequently called into question the Aceh government’s support for the KKR.

The reluctance of the national government to acknowledge the legitimacy of the KKR further complicates the problems faced by the Commission. The central government claims that KKR Aceh can only be established once Indonesia has its own National Truth and Reconciliation Commission. That process has, however, been stalled since 2006 when the Constitutional Court annulled the 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Law on the basis that a provision requiring that amnesty be granted to perpetrators of gross human rights abuses before victims can receive compensation and rehabilitation was unconstitutional.
The KKR Aceh is tasked to establish the truth about human rights violations that took place during the conflict and to initiate reconciliation to strengthen the unity of people in Aceh. With its findings, it will issue a recommendation to the Aceh government and the central administration to provide reparation in the forms of restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation for the victims and their families.

The central government must not let the Aceh government work alone to support the Commission. The decision to impose DOM that resulted in massive human rights violations was made at the national level. It was a state policy. In leaving the local government alone to remedy violations committed by national authorities, the central government is trying to evade any responsibility for what happened in Aceh.

The central government should not distance itself from the efforts to seek justice, truth, and reparation for victims and their family members in Aceh. President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo must take the initiative to issue a presidential decree that will serve as a legal basis for the central government to acknowledge and support KKR Aceh. Such a regulation will strengthen the legitimacy of KKR Aceh’s recommendation in the future. State bodies such as the National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) must also proactively support the work of KKR Aceh.

The government of Aceh must also strengthen KKR Aceh by ensuring that local authorities in the region provide full support and cooperation to the KKR, including access to records and documents related to the Aceh conflict.

Victims and their family members will continue to fight for the government to remember what happened in Aceh. Peace is not enough if no truth is established about the past and victims are left to suffer without reparation.

Rivers’ truth and reconciliation commission was to destroy Odili’s career (The Guardian)
By Kelvin Ebiri and Port Harcourt
August 15, 2018

A cleric has claimed that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established by ex-Governor Rotimi Amaechi was to destroy the political life of former Governor Peter Odili. The Chaplain of Our Lady of Holy Chaplaincy of Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA), Port Harcourt, Rev Monsignor Pius Kii, made the allegation during a special mass to mark Odili's 70th birthday.

Kii said the lowest point in the 70 years of Odili was when the administration of his estranged political godson and former governor Amaechi, attempted to use the commission to destroy his political life. He said: “The aim was to prevent him from holding political offices. But, despite these betrayals, we are grateful to God that some have remained loyal sons, particularly Governor Nyesom Ezenwo Wike and countless others in and out of the state.

“Having the love of one like Wike is having the love of many. One with Wike is in majority, as in him; God put 10 men in one man.” The cleric told Odili to be rest assured that those who are for him are more than those who have abandoned him. He stressed that Wike has taken over from Odili in developing the Christian faith and embarking on massive developmental projects.

Odili, while addressing the congregation, urged all Rivers people, irrespective of political affiliation, to support Wike to consolidate on his achievements. He said: “Let me use this opportunity to request our people, all Rivers men and women, our chiefs and the entire political class, everybody that is proud to be identified and called a Rivers man or woman, to give total support to this governor.

“I am not saying it from a political position. I am talking from the position of an elder statesman. This is because with his leadership, we can achieve total cohesion and unity of our people.” He described Wike as a loyal politician, who is outstanding in his commitment to the development of the state. “I have been a governor, I have worked under governors and I have seen governors after me. But, this man is unique,” he said.

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For the second consecutive quarter in 2018, the global maritime report on piracy has put Nigeria on the spot, occupying number one position in the number of recorded attacks against vessels in the second quarter 2018, Q2’18.

The first six months of 2018 saw a significant rise in the number of recorded piracy and armed robbery incidents in the Gulf of Guinea region compared to the same period in 2017.

The Q1'18 report from the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) shows an increase in global piracy, with 107 incidents recorded in the first six months of 2018 compared to 87 in the same period in 2017.

Most alarming is the increase in the number of incidents recorded in the Gulf of Guinea region, which has gone from 16 in the first half of 2017 to 46 in 2018, with 31 incidents recorded in Nigeria’s territorial waters alone.

The report also says Nigeria, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Venezuela and Benin Republic led the table in the number of attempted attacks, number of vessels boarded by pirates, number of vessels fired upon, number of hijacked vessels and number of suspicious boats operated by pirates.

A breakdown of the report further revealed that Nigeria recorded 31 attacks, closely followed by Indonesia with 25, while Bangladesh and Venezuela recorded 7 attacks each.

Others are Republic of Benin and Ghana with 5 attacks each.

According to the report, Bulk carriers suffered the most in the attacks against vessels as 39 of such vessels were attacked since the beginning of the year.

Tanker vessels also recorded 30 attacks in the first six months of the year while passenger vessels recorded only one attack so far this year.

On the number of attacks on vessels on anchorage, Nigeria led other countries with 14 of such attacks, followed by Indonesia with 11 and Bangladesh with 7 recorded attacks.

Speaking on the development, Captain Jacob, Ovweghre, self acclaimed Director General of the proposed Maritime Security Agency, MASECA, said that the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency, NIMASA are already over burdened with the problem of checkmating armed robbery at sea.

Ovweghre disclosed that some of the pirates are not Nigerians adding that sometimes they are nationals of Cameroon, Ghana and criminals from other neighbouring countries.

But in defence of the figure, Chairman of the Port Facility Security Officers, PFSO, Forum, Dr. Ignatius Uche, said that the measures put in place by the relevant authorities to checkmate the spate of attacks are yielding positive results as, according to him, “there has been a downward trend in attacks on vessels”.

He said despite the fact that Nigeria still leads the chart on piracy, the figure over the last three months has gone down.

Former Senior Special Assistant to former President Goodluck Jonathan, Mr. Leke Oyewole, commended the maritime authorities for the measures put in place to reduce the activities of the marine criminals.

Oyewole stated: “Whatever they are doing to reduce pirates attacks in Nigeria means that the measures are good and they must improve on them to further reduce the figure being quoted by the International Maritime Bureau, IMB.”

Pirates and robbers were armed with guns in almost half of the Nigerian incidents and vessels were fired upon in eight of them.

This current report is a confirmation of Vanguard Maritime Report recently on the trend in incidence of piracy in Nigerian maritime space.
Worldwide, in the first three months of 2018, 100 crew were taken hostage and 14 kidnapped from their vessels. A total of 39 vessels were boarded, 11 fired upon and four vessels hijacked. IMB received a further 12 reports of attempted attacks.

On the positive side, the IMB reports that the number of crew kidnappings has decreased globally from 41 in Q2’17 to 25 in Q2’18.

However, all 25 crew kidnappings reported this year are from six incidents in the Gulf of Guinea, off the coast of Nigeria, emphasizing even further the higher maritime risks in this region.

Another positive development, however, is the IMB reports of fewer piracy and armed robbery incidents in piracy hotspots other than the Gulf of Guinea. For instance, no incident was recorded off the coast of Somalia in Q2’18 and while the number of incidents reported by vessels at berth/anchorage in Indonesia and Bangladesh remains high, the situation in the Philippines has improved.

According to the report, abductions of crew from vessels in the Sulu-Celebes Seas and waters off Eastern Sabah have also improved, with no such successful incidents recorded in the first half of 2018.

According to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), the first six months of 2018 saw the lowest number of piracy and armed robbery incidents in Asia at that time of the year for the past ten years.

S. African navy completes anti-piracy mission in Mazambique (Xinhua)
By Mu Xuequan
August 8, 2018

Two South African navy vessels have completed patrol of the Northern Mozambican Channel as part of the anti-piracy Operation Copper, South African authorities said Wednesday.

The two vessels, SAS Protea and SAS Galeshewe, will return to their naval base in Durban on Friday, the South African Navy said.

"Despite the fact that no arrests were made, this operation does send a warning to any criminal element that the SA Navy is ready to protect its territorial waters, as well as those of its neighbors," said the navy.

During the mission, the two vessels sailed more than 3,000 km to Pemba in Northern Mozambique, according to the navy.

This was the first time in many years that the South African Navy deployed two ships to the Operation Copper.

Deploying the vessels was in fulfillment of South Africa's international obligations towards the Southern African Development Community (SADC) maritime security.

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has provided a permanent presence in the Mozambique Channel since January 2011 on Operation Copper, which is primarily an anti-piracy operation.

The mandate of the South African Navy during Operation Copper was to combat drug, arms and human trafficking, as well as illegal fishing.

Both ships had members of the Mozambican Defence Force onboard during the patrols in order to conduct these measures, said the navy.

A unique feature of the deployment was that the two ships operated completely independent from foreign support and did not enter any harbor during the three-week deployment. The ships used Pemba bay as a base from which to conduct their patrols, according to the navy.

The likelihood of a piracy incident taking place in the Mozambique Channel is probably at its highest level since 2010, the SANDF said earlier.

South Africa got involved in anti-piracy operations following a call for assistance from Mozambique.
Two armed robberies against ships in Asia reported last week (Safety4Sea)
August 9, 2018

In its weekly piracy report for 31 July- 6 August, ReCAAP ISC informed of two armed robberies against ships in Asia: Both incidents involved ships at anchor, in the Philippines and in Indonesia. Included are two more armed robberies against ships occurred in Africa: at Lagos in Nigeria and in Georgetown, Guyana.

The first incident was reported at Mabini Batangas Anchorage Area, Philippines, on 28 July, and involved the Marshall Islands-registered bulk carrier 'Mykonos'. While at anchor, an unknown number of perpetrators boarded the ship, stole two pieces of fire nozzle cover and escaped. The crew was not injured.

The second incident occurred about 2.6 nm north of Tanjung Priok Port, Indonesia, on 3 August, involving the Hong Kong-flagged bulk carrier 'SFL Tyne'. While at anchor, an unknown number of perpetrators boarded the ship and proceeded to the engine room. They stole some engine spares and escaped. The crew was not injured.

While the bulk carrier 'Asia Ruby 1' was at anchor in Lagos Apapa, ENL Terminal, Berth No. 8, Nigeria, four perpetrators armed with knives boarded the forward part of the ship from a skiff. The crew suspected that the perpetrators came on board with assistance of stevedores who opened the razor wire and attached line to the ship's railing by lowering it down to waterline to allow the perpetrators to climb onto deck.

The perpetrators were not able to steal ship stores as all compartments were locked and secured. They approached the duty watchman in hold No. 1 and threatened him with knife. They took his mobile phone and VHF radio and then ran away from the port side using the rope hanging down to a boat.

When the last perpetrator was on the rope, the AB shouted at the stevedores and called the crew for assistance. The Master notified the APAPA Port Facility Security Officer (PFSO) about the incident by radio and phone. The agent was also informed.

While the container ship 'Toronto Trader' was at berth at JFTL terminal in Georgetown, Guyana, and prior to departure, it was discovered that the paint store and the bosun store were broken. Some paint, a mooring rope and some rubber gasket material were found missing. The local authorities were informed, however, the vessel was required to sail prior to their boarding.

Piracy

By Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura
August 14, 2018

A car struck and injured several pedestrians and cyclists, then crashed into a security barrier just outside the Houses of Parliament in London early Tuesday, in what the police said they were treating as a terrorist attack.

About a dozen armed police officers swarmed a silver Ford Fiesta and pointed their weapons at it, before handcuffing the driver, who was arrested on suspicion of terrorist offenses. The police said that the driver, in his late 20s, was the only person in the car, and that no weapons had yet been found in the vehicle.

Neil Basu, the counterterrorism chief of the Metropolitan Police, said the department was treating the episode as one of terrorism, “given that this appears to be a deliberate act,” the sensitive location and the method used. Parliament has been attacked before, and past terrorist attacks have involved cars driving into pedestrians.

The Counter-Terrorism Command is leading the investigation, the Metropolitan Police said in a
“Our priority now is to formally establish the identity of the suspect and establish his motivation,” Mr. Basu said. “He is not currently cooperating.”

“We don’t believe this person was known to MI5 or to counterterrorism policing,” he added, referring to Britain’s domestic intelligence service.

As part of the investigation, the Metropolitan Police said they were searching three addresses in the Midlands region of England — two in Birmingham, and one in Nottingham.

Officers set up a security cordon around Parliament Square, with around a dozen police cars and ambulances parked at the site, while helicopters circled above. Armed officers stood guard, and video footage on Twitter showed them urging people to leave the area.

Westminster Bridge was closed to vehicles, pedestrians were directed to alternative routes, and the nearby, heavily used Westminster subway station was closed. None of those injured were believed to be in life-threatening condition, the police said.

Westminster, the locus of British politics, has been under tight security since March 2017, when an assailant driving a sport utility vehicle mowed down pedestrians on Westminster Bridge and stabbed a police officer, prompting the evacuation of the prime minister. At least four people, including the assailant, were killed, and at least 40 others wounded.

The Parliament building, also called the Palace of Westminster, is bounded by some of the city’s busiest streets, with traffic passing much closer than it does to the White House or the United States Capitol, for example, making security a challenge.

Witnesses told television stations that the episode seemed deliberate; the car was traveling too fast, they said, and did not try to avoid striking people or the security barrier.

One witness, Jason Williams, told ITV’s “Good Morning Britain”: “Basically, I’ve seen a man driving a vehicle, and he’s gone into one of the bollards. There was a loud bang. Straight away I thought, ‘Oh no, this is another terrorist attack.’ So I just started to run, and the police were saying, ‘Get out, get out of the area.’ ”

Another witness, Barry Williams, told the BBC that the car had accelerated after hitting a group of cyclists, rather than trying to slow down.

A security camera recording broadcast by the BBC showed the car making a sharp turn to go the wrong way onto a one-way set of traffic lanes, then driving over an island in the middle of the street, before entering a side lane where it hit the barrier.

George Pascal, 31, a maintenance worker at the Parliament building, said that “there was big smoke and everyone was sent to safe places,” and that the building, had been locked down. “It felt quite claustrophobic because you couldn’t move anywhere.”

“Everything happened so quickly,” he said. “Police were running around with guns and everyone was mobilizing.”

Declaring the episode a “terrorist incident” allows the police to detain the driver for up to 28 days without charging him, rather than the usual limit of three days. Under some circumstances, the designation can also allow the police to restrict the man’s access to legal advice.

According to a police statement, “At 7.37 a.m. today, a car was in collision with barriers outside the Houses of Parliament.” The statement said that the male driver of the car had been detained by officers at the scene. “A number of pedestrians have been injured,” it continued.

Prime Minister Theresa May said on Twitter, “My thoughts are with those injured,” and she thanked “the emergency services for their immediate and courageous response.”

President Trump, who has previously criticized Mayor Sadiq Khan of London for what he called “a very bad job on terrorism” — the mayor’s supporters have noted that Mr. Khan is a local politician, and that terrorism is an international issue — was quick to weigh in.
“Another terrorist attack in London,” he wrote on Twitter. “These animals are crazy and must be dealt with through toughness and strength!”

A month after the Westminster attack last year, a 27-year-old man carrying knives was arrested near Parliament by the police, who charged him with planning a terrorist attack. No one was hurt.

And in June that year, three men killed six civilians near London Bridge and the nearby Borough Market, and wounded dozens more.

Parliament was already surrounded by lines of crash bollards, balustrades and steel barricades, put in place after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States and the bombings on July 7, 2005, in London. Terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels in 2016 led to even tighter security.

Israel arrests Belgian national on suspicion of PFLP terror activity (The Jerusalem Post)
August 15, 2018

Security authorities arrested Awad on July 19 at the Allenby Crossing when he tried to enter Israel.

Belgian-Palestinian Mustafa Khaled Awad was arrested last month on suspicion of terrorist activity as a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Israel Police and Shin Bet (Israel Security Agency) said in a joint statement Wednesday.

Security authorities arrested Awad on July 19 at the Allenby crossing as he tried to enter Israel. A gag order on his arrest was lifted on Wednesday.

Awad, 36, is originally from a Palestinian refugee camp in southern Lebanon, and immigrated to Belgium where he received citizenship.

A joint investigation of the Shin Bet and the Lahav 433 National Crime Unit revealed that Mustafa joined the PFLP and has been active in it since 2010. It was also revealed that Mustafa was a member of a cell of PFLP terrorist operatives living and working in Europe, and was in contact with terrorists from Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the West Bank.

As part of these activities, Awad underwent military training in Lebanon in 2015, which was led by Hezbollah operatives, according to findings of the investigation.

The investigation also revealed that Awad helped transfer funds from the PFLP terrorist organization in Syria and Lebanon to European activists.

The Central District Attorney’s Office is expected to file an indictment against Awad for terrorist offenses.

The joint statement by the Israel Police and Shin Bet highlighted that “The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is a Palestinian terrorist organization that advocates armed struggle against the State of Israel.” The group is responsible for dozens of terrorist attacks against Israelis at home and abroad, including the murder of the late minister Rehavam Ze’evi in 2001.

“The findings of the investigation attest to the increasing proximity between Palestinian terrorist organizations to the Shi’ite axis in general and to Hezbollah in particular,” the statement said. “This includes the allocation of Hezbollah’s resources and facilities for the training of Palestinian terrorist operatives trained in Lebanon and sent to advance terrorism. The investigation illustrates the threat posed by terrorist organizations that recruit activists with foreign documentation that allows them to enter Israel.”

Jordan court charges attack suspects with ‘terrorism’ (World Bulletin)
August 15, 2018

Jordan’s State Security Court on Wednesday charged suspected members of a terrorist cell with murder and illegal weapons possession. Last Friday, a policeman was killed -- and six others injured -- when a bomb rocked the town of Fuheis west of capital Amman.
The following day, security forces raided a suspected militant hideout in the nearby town of Salt, leading to a gunfight in which four security personnel -- and three militants -- were killed.

Jordan’s official Petra news agency quoted an unnamed source as saying that the suspects were formally charged on Wednesday with committing “terrorist acts” and “possessing weapons for use in illegal acts”.

“Once investigations are completed, public proceedings will begin at the State Security Court,” the source added.

According to Jordan’s 2006 Prevention of Terrorism Act, the suspects -- if convicted -- could face the death penalty.

On Monday, Jordan’s Interior Minister said the suspects did not belong to a particular group but supported the notorious Daesh terrorist organization.

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**WORTH READING**

**Investigations in Armed Conflict: Understanding the Interaction between International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law**  
By Vito Todeschini  
August 1, 2018

The present contribution examines the interaction between international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law (HRL) in relation to the duty to investigate in armed conflict. The analysis looks into how IHL and HRL respectively regulate this duty, showing that whereas the latter prescribes in detail the standards an investigation must follow in order to be deemed effective, the former does not. Accordingly, the research question is whether and how HRL may complement IHL and fill what is here considered a gap in the law.

In order to determine how HRL may complement IHL, the study looks at how the two bodies of law interact both as legal regimes and at the level of specific norms. It accordingly delineates a theoretical framework based on a perspective of complementarity between the two, operationalised at the micro level through the principle of systemic integration.

With specific regard to the obligation to investigate in armed conflict, the analysis considers two scenarios: concurrent applicability of IHL and HRL, and exclusive applicability of IHL. It shows that the standards of effectiveness may be applied to war crimes investigations in both scenarios. This is possible by means of the ‘all reasonable steps’/‘all feasible measures’ test, an interpretive trend that is emerging in human rights jurisprudence.

Clarifying the impact of HRL on war crimes investigations serves the purpose of shedding light on how States are expected to fulfil their relevant legal obligations. This is important at the normative level, for it brings more clarity within international law. At the practical level, it may be of assistance to those who carry out investigations in armed conflict as well as to those who scrutinise the conduct of investigators.

**Conflict Constitution-Making in Libya and Yemen**  
By Darin Johnson  
39 University of Pennsylvania Journal of International Law 293  
July 31, 2018

In Libya and Yemen, the political transitions heralded by the Arab Spring
devolved into civil wars. As a consequence of these devastating civil wars, constitutional reform processes which were intended to cement political transitions from authoritarianism to democracy were instead held hostage by the armed perpetrators of the protracted civil conflicts. As the political transitions in Libya and Yemen devolved into civil war, the constitution-making processes also devolved into conflict over the same outcomes that armed elites sought on the battlefield by force. These armed actors discovered a new battlefront in Yemen and Libya’s constituent debates. Comparative constitutional scholarship has emphasized the importance of participatory constitution-making as a post-conflict tool for political transition. However, ongoing violent conflict frustrates open, transparent, inclusive and participatory processes—the hallmarks of participatory constitution-making. The violent intensity of the civil conflicts in Yemen and Libya undermined the conciliatory objectives of participatory constitution-making in both countries. The undermining of conciliatory processes, in turn, imperiled the creation of consensus constitutional texts and risked the creation of “conflict constitutions” that would prolong, rather than remedy, the sources of conflict.

In this article, the author develops a conceptual theory of “conflict constitution-making” that assesses the impact of civil war on constitution-making processes and the resultant constitutions, and applies that theory to the events in Libya and Yemen. The author’s theory of conflict constitution-making draws from comparative constitutional scholarship and posits that civil war transforms constitution-making processes from zones of conciliation into zones of conflict. During civil war, unless a political détente can be reached that commits armed actors to a consensual and participatory constitution-making process, armed power brokers exploit the process and drive constitution-makers away from accommodation and into conflict. Such a conflict constitution-making process produces a “conflict constitution” that enshrines rather than ameliorates the sources of conflict. An exploration of the impact of violent civil conflict on constitution-making is critical because, although best practice calls for the creation of a constitution only after the cessation of hostilities, political transitions are often fluid and constitution-making processes undertaken during periods of relative peace may continue during periods of extreme violence (as seen in Libya and Yemen). A better understanding of the impact of violence on constitution-making processes will better enable citizens, scholars and practitioners to assess, and if necessary, reform those processes as well as the constitutions created by them. While participatory constitution-making is the aspirational ideal, conflict constitution-making may increasingly become the reality in transitioning states. Accordingly, an understanding of how to best remedy a “conflict constitution-making” process is one of the goals of this piece.

Historical Background of the International Crimes Tribunal Bangladesh, Unveiling the Truth
By Muhammad Abdullah Fazi, Pardis Moslemzadeh Tehrani, Bin Sharom Azmi, & Maryam Khan
JPUHS, Vol.31, No.1, January - June, 2018

After forty years of the 1971 Indo-Pak war, the government of Bangladesh established a special tribunal to prosecute war crimes allegedly committed in 1971 that led to the creation of a new country. Therefore, in 2009, the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act, 1973, was enacted by the Bangladeshi parliament to prosecute the alleged executers of genocide, crimes against humanity and other war crimes under the international law by a domestic tribunal. In context to the on-going war crimes tribunal, study seeks to explore the historical roots of the tribunal. The critical analysis of the historical developments suggest that the said tribunal is falling short of international standards and also lacking the jurisdiction in present scenario which has been initiated with political motives in violation of international treaties and agreements between the parties.

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