Nonviolent Change helps to network the peace community: providing dialoguing, exchanges of ideas, articles, reviews, reports and announcements of the activities of peace related groups and meetings, reviews of world developments relating to nonviolent change and resource information concerning the development of human relations on the basis of mutual respect.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Comments ................................................................................................................................. p. 2
Nonviolent Change on the Web ................................................................................................................. p. 2
Upcoming Events ........................................................................................................................................ p. 3
Ongoing Activities ...................................................................................................................................... p. 13
World Developments ................................................................................................................................. p. 32

DIALOGUING:
Rene Wadlow, "World Humanitarian Summit: On the front lines for action" ........................................ p. 295
Alon Ben-Meir, "Defeating ISIS And Ending Sunni-Shiite War In Iraq" .................................................... p. 297
Alon Ben-Meir, "T351urkey’s Elected Dictator" ............................................................................................ p. 299
Alon Ben-Meir, "A Movement To End The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" .................................................. p. 302
Alon Ben-Meir, "Moving Beyond The Quartet" ............................................................................................ p. 304

David Palumbo-Liu, "We have a right to engage in non-violent action:' Christian leaders refuse to be silenced in struggle for Palestinian rights: As Gov. Andrew Cuomo continues his controversial crusade against BDS, church voices defend the movement" ........................................ p. 305
Alon Ben-Meir, "Bernie Sanders And The French Initiative" ...................................................................... p. 309
Pax Christi Michigan Statement on Gun Violence .................................................................................... p. 311
What We Readers Are About .................................................................................................................. p. 313

ARTICLES:
Alon Ben-Meir, "Deradicalization In Refugee Camps And Beyond" .......................................................... p. 313
Alon Ben-Meir, "How do we defeat Islamo-Nihilism?" ............................................................................ p. 317
Rene Wadlow, "Yemen negotiations move ahead slowly – post-war planning needed" ........................... p. 318
Stephen Zunes, "Turkey's Creeping Authoritarianism: Is the Resistance Enough?" ................................ p. 319
Stephen Zunes, "The Good News and the Bad News About Turkey's Attempted Coup" ........................... p. 321
Alon Ben-Meir, "The Afghanistn Quagmire: Time For An Exit Strategy" ................................................ p. 323
Alon Ben-Meir, "Incentives And Peace [Part 1]" ....................................................................................... p. 327
Alon Ben-Meir, "Incentives and Peace: [Part 2]" ....................................................................................... p. 329
Uri Avnery, "Just a Trick" ......................................................................................................................... p. 332
Uri Avnery, "The Shot Heard All Over the Country" .................................................................................. p. 335
Uri Avnery, "Hatred Unlimited" ................................................................................................................ p. 338
"From Adam Keller's Blog, 'Crazy County'" ............................................................................................... p. 341
Pedro Lange-Churion, "Venezuela and the Silence of the Left" ................................................................ p. 348
Robert W. Hotes, "Fear and Nonviolent Change: The Economics of Extreme Behavior" ....................... p. 351
Yossef Ben-Meyer, "Moroccan Decentralization – Challenges to Genuine Implementation" .................. p. 356
Rene Wadlow, "Destruction of cultural heritage condemned by the International Criminal Court" .......... p. 358

Media Notes .................................................................................................................................................. p. 359
Useful Web Sites ........................................................................................................................................ p. 360
NONVIOLENT CHANGE JOURNAL (NCJ) ON THE WEB

*Nonviolent Change* is on the web at: http://www.nonviolentchangejournal.org, along with several years of back issues. To be notified by E-mail when new issues are posted, send a request to be added to the NCJ notification E-mail list to Steve Sachs at: ssachs@earthlink.net. Issues are usually posted: Fall, in late August or early September; Winter, in January or early February; Spring in mid-March to end of April.

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**Nonviolent Change journal - ISODC Association Agreement**

The International Society for Organization Development and Change (ISODC) and the *Nonviolent Change* journal agreed May 2, 2016 to associate, making members aware of each other’s activities and announcing each other’s events. Readers of *Nonviolent Change* are offered reduced a membership fee in ISODC, which provides access to the *Organization Development Journal* (ODJ). ISODC is the successor to the Organization Development Institute, whose former President, Done Cole, initiated the Research/Action Team on Nonviolent Large Systems Change, which launched *NCJ*, as an interorganizational vehicle for behavioral scientists to do their part in moving toward peace.

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**EDITORS COMMENTS**

Wishing you a fine fall. The world continues to go through many shifts producing a great many developments in areas of our concern.

Most of the reports in the Activities and Developments sections of *NCJ* are abbreviated or executive versions of longer reports that can be accessed at the web sites indicated. This is especially true of International Crisis Group (ICG) reports of which we only publish the executive summaries, which include the web addresses for accessing the full report.

**WE WELCOME YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT ALL THAT IS IN PROGRESS.** These pages serve as a networking and dialoguing vehicle. We strongly encourage you to contribute articles (up to 2500 words), news, announcements, comments, queries, responses and artwork. It would be very fine if we could develop ongoing discussion from issue to issue. **WE ESPECIALLY INVITE YOU TO SEND US A BRIEF NOTE ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING, YOUR CONCERNS AND QUERIES, RELATING TO NONVIOLENT CHANGE, FOR OUR "WHAT WE READERS ARE ABOUT" COLUMN."** Whenever possible, please make submissions on disk or via e-mail (ssachs@earthlink.net).

Please **SEND WRITINGS AND ART WORK FOR NONVIOLENT CHANGE** electronically to Steve Sachs (E-mail address top of p. 2). Steve puts together a draft of each issue, then undertakes e-mailing, while Ruby Quail posts the issue on the web. (Unsigned writings are Steve's). **We welcome additional editors and column writers to cover geographic or topic areas on an ongoing or one time basis. We would very much like to have additional people share in the compiling of information in each issue.**

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**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS December 8**

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UPCOMING EVENTS

The International Society for Organization Development Change (ISODC), (formerly the International Society for Organizational Development (ISOD)) upcoming conferences, are at http://www.isodc.org: The Power of Collaboration is October 5, 2016 (MDT), Hilton Hotel, Burlington VT. The ISODC 2016 International Conference may be in May 2017. The ISODC and Nexus4change put on occasional webinars, and the ISODC organizes occasional team interventions listed at: http://www.isodc.org

The UN DPU-NGO (Department of Public Information – Non-Governmental Organizations), United Nations, DPI/NGO Resource Centre, Room L-1B-31, (212)963-7233, 7234, 7078, Fax: (212)963-2819, dpingo@un.org, www.un.org/dpi/ngosection, publishes a provisional briefings and events calendars, usually taking place at the UN in New York City.

The United States Institute of Peace offers an ongoing series of short courses listed at: http://www.usip.org/academy/courses/date.

The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies in Notre Dame, IN puts on regular lectures and other events related to getting to peace. For information go to: http://kroc.nd.edu.

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2301 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC, puts on numerous events beyond those listed here. For details go to: http://www.usip.org/events.


Monthly meetings of the Circles of Nonviolence/Community Collaboratives and their adopted projects in Arizona into Texas: Circles of Nonviolence/Community Collaboratives in Southern Arizona can be found through: Moji Agha (moji.agha@gmail.com, (520)325-3545 http://mossadeghlegacyinstitute.blogspot.com/p/america-for-nonviolence-anv.html.

The 18th Annual Yoder Dialogues on Nonviolence, Religion and Peace may be in September 2016, at the Hesburgh Center for International Studies Auditorium, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information go to: http://kroc.nd.edu.


Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), Heat Advisory Speaking Tour: Heat Advisory: Protecting Health
on a Warming PlanetTentative Calendar of Events, with senior scientist Alan Lockwood, MD FAAN, is September 8-October 27; September 8-9, 2016, in Evansville, IN; September 20: Lancaster, PA; Sept. 22-23: Philadelphia, PA; September 26-28: Asheville, NC; October 4: Tallahassee, FL; October 5: Miami, FL; October 6: Tampa, FL; October 19-20: Madison, WI; October 27: Chicago, IL; Dates TBA: Columbus and Cleveland, OH. For more information visit: http://www.psr.org/news-events/events/heat-advisory-speaking-tour.html.


Governing extractives at the local level is at Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ, England, and streamed online, September 9, 2016. For details visit: https://www.odi.org.

Fifteen Years After the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks: Reassessing the Nature of the Threat and Response to Global Terrorism is at the Krock Institute of Peace, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, IN, September 11-15, 2016. For details go to: https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-puzzle-of-peace-9780199301034?cc=us&lang=en

Sustainable Wisdom: Integrating Indigenous Knowhow for Global Flourishing: How can we integrate the best of modern technology and capacities with the wisdom of first nations? is at the Krock Institute of Peace, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, IN, September 11-15, 2016. For details go to: http://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/2016/09/11/1873.


Afghanistan on the brink is at Overseas Development Institute (ODI), 203 Blackfriars Road, London SE1 8NJ, England, and streamed online, September 14, 2016. For details visit: https://www.odi.org.


PSR Webinar, The Fight for Solar is Thursday, September 15, 2016, 8:30 - 9:30 p.m. eastern time, on "So why are some utility companies trying to stifle the spread of rooftop solar? They are -- from cutting the amount they pay for the electricity that solar owners put back into the electrical grid, to actually trying to scrap compensation for that electricity and adding charges to the bills of customers getting credited for their solar power. For more information go to: https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/438594465660321538.

United Network of Young Peacebuilders: Young Peacebuilders Forum is at The Hague September 20-24, 2016. For information, visit: http://ncdd.org/events.

International Day of Peace is September 21st

The Peace and Justice Studies Association 2016 annual conference: "Obstructing the Old or Constructing the New? Embracing the Tension to Build the World We Want" is September 22-24, 2016 at Selkirk College, Nelson and Castlegar, British Columbia, Canada. For details go to: https://www.peacejusticestudies.org/conference/2016.
PSR Harrisburg Public Meeting Dr. John Reuwer will speak on "How to Prevent Gun Violence," is September 22, 2016 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. For details visit: http://www.psr.org/news-events/events/.

PSR Climate Nuclear Nexus is September 24, 2016 in Des Moines, Iowa. For details visit: http://www.psr.org/news-events/events/.

The 12th Annual Association for conflict Resolution (ACR) Conference is in Baltimore, MD, September 28-October 1, 2016. For details go to: http://www.acrnet.org/.


13th Culture of Peace Festival – Peace Network of San Carlos and Fundación CEPPA may be at San Carlos, Costa Rica in September and/or October, 2016. For information visit: http://ceppacr.org/html/evento.html.

The 2016 Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association Conference may be in October 2016. For details contact: appra2013@gmail.com, http://appra.net/.


Peacebuilding Workshops for faculty and Students are October 4, at Hood College, Frederick, MS. For details go to: https://davidjsmithconsulting.com/media-and-presentations-on-peacebuilding-in-community-colleges-a-teaching-resource/.

The International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), in partnership with Rutgers University's International Institute for Peace, is now accepting applications for the online course, "People Power: The Study of Strategic Nonviolent Resistance." This online course will take place from October 6 to November 17, 2016. For further information visit: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/call-applicants-icnc-rutgers-online-seminar/.

Transforming Higher Education: Fostering Contemplative Inquiry, Community, and Social Action is October 7–9, 2016, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA 01003/ For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/event/transf

UNESCO and the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS-France), in partnership with Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee and Tebtebba, will organize an international conference on indigenous knowledge and climate change. 2-4 November 2016, Marrakesh, in conjunction with the UN Climate Conference (COP-22). For go to www.indigenous2016.org.

2016 MLA Conference Arts and Sciences, Peace Studies and Pedagogy Panel, Topic: “Border States” is in St. Louis, MO November 10-13, 2016. For details contact Dr. Laura Ng (laura.ng@ung.edu), University of North Georgia.

International Day for Tolerance is November 16, 2016 (Resolution 5.61 of the 28th session of the UNESCO General Conference) (A/RES/51/95) In 1996, the UN General Assembly (by resolution 51/95) invited UN Member States to observe the International Day for Tolerance (http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/).

The Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (in suburban Los Angeles) seventh biannual conference: Giving and Forgiving is on campus, November 18-20, 2016. For details visit: http://www.cpp.edu/~ahimsacenter/conference/conference_16_CallForProposals.shtml.

Peacebuilding Conference is November 18-19, at St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN. For information visit: https://davidjsmithconsulting.com/media-and-presentations-on-peacebuilding-in-community-colleges-a-teaching-resource/.

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is November 25, 2016 (A/RES/54/134) In February 2000, the UN designated 25 November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women; inviting as appropriate, Governments, the relevant agencies, bodies, funds... (http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/event/fletcher-summer-institute-advanced-study-nonviolent-conflict-fsi/?instance_id=799).

26th International Peace Research Association (IPRA) Conference: “Agenda for Peace and Development” is November 27-December 1, 2016 at University of Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone. For information go to: www.ipra2016.org/.

7th International Human Rights Education Conference, “Addressing the Challenges of the Civil Society” is December 12th - 15th, 2016, at the Faculty of Law, Universidad de Chile (Pio Nono 1, Providencia - Santiago, Chile). For details visit: http://www.cdh.uchile.cl/media/home/Subject_Matters_Paper_Proposals_IHREC_2016.pdf.


The 13th International Conference on Environmental, Cultural, Economic, and Social Sustainability is January 19-21, 2017 at Niterói, Greater Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The On Sustainability knowledge community is brought together by a common concern for sustainability in a holistic perspective, where environmental, cultural, economic, and social concerns intersect. For details visit: http://onsustainability.com/.

The 8th Annual Earth Care Summit, “Breath of Life: Earth’s Atmosphere” may be in January 2017. For details visit: http://www.psr.org/news-events/events/.


The 6th World Sustainability Forum WSF2017 will be held in Cape Town, South Africa, on 27 and 28 January 2017. For information visit: http://sciforum.net/conference/wsf-5.

The 8th Annual Earth Care Summit: Renewing Creation from the Ground Up may be in January or February 2017, at the University of Portland. For more information go to: http://www.emoregon.org/emo_events.php.

IIPT may have a World Symposium in February 2017. For more information go to: http://www.iipt.org.

Institute for Peace and Dialogue, IPD International Winter Academy in Peacebuilding, Mediation, Conflict Resolution, Security and Intercultural Dialogue is in Baar, Switzerland February 17-27, 2017 (with research period duration is till the 16 May, 2017). For details go to: http://www.ipdinstitute.ch/Winter-Academy-2017/

2017 Jewish Voice for Peace National Membership Meeting may be in March 2017. For details visit: http://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/campaigns/2015-national-membership-meeting.


Conference “Peace and Conflict Studies from the Margins to the Center - Rethinking Europe in an Unequal World” will be jointly held by EuPRA and AFK (German Association for Peace and Conflict Studies) is at the Evangelische Akademie Villigst, Schwerte (nearby Dortmund), Germany, between 16-18 March 2017. For details visit: http://euprapeace.org/eupra/.


77th Annual Meeting, Society for Applied Anthropology may be in March or April 2017 For information go to: www.sfaa.net.

2017 Gandhi-King Conference may be in 2017, at The University of Memphis, 3720 Alumni Ave, Memphis, TN, for details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.

22nd Annual Hesburgh Lecture in Ethics & Public Policy may be is at the Kroc Institute for International Peace, Studies University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, in April 2017. For information go to: http://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events.
The 9th International Conference on Climate: Impacts and Responses is at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK April 21-22, 2017. The Climate Change Conference is for any person with an interest in, and concern for, scientific, policy and strategic perspectives in climate change. It will address a range of critically important themes relating to the vexing question of climate change. Plenary speakers will include some of the world’s leading thinkers in the fields of climatology and environmental science, as well as numerous paper, workshop and colloquium presentations by researchers and practitioners. For details go to: http://on-climate.com/the-conference.

Summit Series: Cultivating the Globally Sustainable Self is April 27-30, 2016, at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA. For details visit: www.jmu.edu/summitseries.

The 7th International Conference on "Livelihoods, Sustainability and Conflict: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation," may be in March 2017, hosted by Kennesaw State University Conflict Management Program at Kennesaw State University Center for Continuing Education 3333 Busbee Drive Kennesaw, GA 30144. For more information go to: http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs/.

The 9th International Conference of Museums for Peace, is April 10-13, 2017, possibly in Belfast, Northern Ireland. Details are at: http://inmp.net.

Earth Day is April 22, 2017.

The Krock Institute for International Peace Studies at Notre Dame, in Notre Dame, IN may hold the Carnegie Council of Ethics in International Affairs, session in, May 2017. For details go to: http://kroc.nd.edu/.

The Women Deliver conference, 2017 may be in May 2017. For more information go to: http://www.womendeliver.org/conferences/2016-conference/.

IIRP Europe Conference: Conflict in Europe, Meeting the Challenge, is May 9-10, 2017, in Dublin, Ireland (Citywest Hotel). For details visit: http://www.iirp.eu/2016/08/01/iirp-europe-conference/.

Fletcher Summer Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict at The Fletcher School, Tufts University, Boston, MA, may be in June 2017. For information go to: http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/learning-and-resources/educational-initiatives/fletcher-summer-institute/.

National Conference for Dialogue & Deliberation 5th International Conference on Participatory Budgeting in North America, may be in May 2017, in Boston, MA. For information visit: http://ncdd.org.

The annual (DPI)/Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Conference in May or June 2017. For details go to: http://www.un.org.

Kennesaw State University Conflict Management Program at Kennesaw State University Center for Continuing Education 3333 Busbee Drive Kennesaw, GA 30144, Summer Institute on Conflict Management in Higher Education may be in June 2017. For details visit: http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs/.

Conflict Transformation Across Borders, 3 week graduate-level training in conflict and peacebuilding in
border regions of Latin America, including host-migrant and refugee-related conflict, border disputes, transnational environmental conflicts, intergroup dialogue, and more, summer institute may be in June 2017. More details and applications are available online at http://www.umb.edu/academics/caps/international/conflict_transformation.

Summer Institute on Conflict Transformation Across Borders may be in June 2017, at FLACSO Ecuador, Ave Diego de Almagro, Quito 170517, Ecuador. For information visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/event/summer-institute-conflict-transformation-across-borders/?instance_id=868.

IIRP Latinoamérica is hosting the 21st World Conference of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), Restoring Connections: Justice, Education, Community, may be in June 2017. Details can be found at: http://www.iirp.edu.


11th Int’l Conflict Resolution Education Conference may be in June 2017. For details go to: www.CREducation.org/cre/goto/creconf .


2017 Canadian School of Peacebuilding (CSOP) is at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, MB, Canada, June, 12-16 and 19-23, 2017. Details are available at: http://csop.cmu.ca/.


Teaching Peace in the 21st Century: 9th Annual Summer Institute for Faculty" may be in June 2017, at The University of Notre Dame, presented by the University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). For details, visit: http://kroc.nd.edu.

INCORE Summer School 2017 on the dynamic and constantly changing field of conflict resolution and peacebuilding may be at INCORE University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, UK, may be in June 2017. Details can be found at: http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/courses/ss/.

Fletcher Summer Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict (FSI) may be in June 2017, at Tufts University, 419 Boston Ave, Medford, MA 02155. For information go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.

The 12th Annual Global Solutions Lab may be in June 2017, at the United Nations in New York and Chestnut Hill College in Philadelphia, PA. Participants, from around the world, will be briefed by, interact with and question UN experts (from the UN Development Program, UN Environmental Program, UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, FAO and other UN agencies) and then, working collaboratively in small teams, develop designs, programs and strategies that deal with one of the critical problems facing our world. The participants present their work to a group of UN, corporate and foundation leaders. After this their work is published in a book. This year’s theme is Eliminating Extreme Poverty by 2030. The Global Solutions Lab is a structured learning experience that fosters creativity, disruptive innovations, global perspectives and local solutions. It is intense, fast-paced, and for many, transformative.
For information visit: Global Solutions Lab:  www.designsciencelab.com.

4th International Summer School Learning from the past – Exploring the Role of Transitional Justice in Rebuilding Trust in a Post-conflict Society may be in June and/or July 2017, at International University of Sarajevo, Hrasnička cesta 15, Ilidža, Bosnia and Herzegovina. For details go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.


National Conference on Dialogue & Deliberation 2017 Frontiers of Democracy conference may be in June 2017, at Tufts University in Boston. For details visit: http://ncdd.org/20049.

Caux Scholars Program: A multi-disciplinary approach to conflict transformation, transitional justice, and principled leadership may be in June and/or July 2017, at Initiatives of Change conference center, Rue du Panoram, 1824 Montreux, Switzerland. For details go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/.

Study Program onboard Peace Boat: Peace Education and the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America may be in June and/or July 2017, on the Peace Boat, in the Peace Studies Program onboard Peace Boat’s 92nd Global Voyage including programs in Panama, Guatemala, and El Salvador. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/.

17th Melaka International Youth Dialogue: ‘Youth for Environmental Sustainability: Our Future, Our Care’ may be in June or July 2017, at World Assembly of Youth, World Youth Complex. For information go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/.

Alternative Dispute Resolution Summer School may be in June and/or July 2017, at Central European University, Budapest, Nádor u. 9, 1051 Hungary. For information go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/.

Tenth Annual Global Studies Conference: is June 6-9, 2017, at National University of Singapore, Singapore. The Global Studies Conference is devoted to mapping and interpreting new trends and patterns in globalization, and serves as an open forum for exploring globalization from many perspectives. Scholars, researchers, and graduate students from all backgrounds, all over the world are joining this cross-disciplinary conference. For detail go to: http://onglobalisation.com.

JEAN MONNET@CRONEM SUMMER SCHOOL 2017 may be in June and July 2017 at University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, UK. For details go to: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/.

8th National Conference on Restorative Justice, is likely in the summer of 2018. Details are at: www.restorativejusticenow.org.

International Institute on Peace Education 2017, may be at the University of Toledo - Toledo, Ohio, in July and/or August 2017. For information go to: http://www.i-i-p-e.org/

The Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM), Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM), 13th Annual Conference 2017, is likely in June or July, 2017, likely at the University of Surrey, UK; details may become available in late January. For details go to: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/.
Annual Conference 2017: Arts, Peace and Conflict may be at Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies, Liverpool Hope University, UK, may be in July 2017. For more information contact: tutu@hope.ac.uk, or visit: http://tutu.hope.ac.uk/newsevents/artspeaceandconflictconferencereport.html.

The Fifth International Conference on Financing for Development may be in July 2017. For more information visit: http://www.un.org/.

IIPE 2017: International Institute on Peace Education may be in July and August 2017. for information go to; www.i-i-p-e.org.

2017 Summer Peace Leadership Courses at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Santa Barbara, CA, may be in July 2017. For details on this and other events go to: http://www.wagingpeace.org/programs/peace-leadership/.

A Residential Summer Institute for K-12 Educators: Journeys of Nonviolence: Gandhi and Mandela may be at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona), may be in July 2017. For details visit: http://www.cpp.edu.

Fellowship of Reconciliation Centennial Conference/59th Regional FOR Seabeck Conference “Persevering FOR Peace” is in July 2017, at the scenic Seabeck Conference Center west of Seattle, WA/ For details, including scholarships, visit: forseabeck.org or www.forusa.org.


A Summer Institute for K-12 Educators & Related Professionals: Teaching for Peace: An Indian Immersion Experience Into Practical Nonviolence is at Delhi, Jaipur, Pune, and Jalgaon, India may be in July 2017. For details visit: http://isjs.in/node/155/.


Mahatma Gandhi Summer Institute: Building Peaceful Communities, may be in July 2017 at Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, 11210 87 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB T6G 2T9, Canada. For details go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/event.

WCCI 18th World Conference in Education may be in July 2017. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org

Global Youth Rising Peace Summer Camp may be in July 2017, at Somesul Rece, Cluj, Romania. For information go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.

2017 Bologna, Italy Symposium on Conflict Prevention, Resolution, & Reconciliation may be at Johns Hopkins University SAIS Bologna Center, Bologna, Italy, in July and/or August 2017. For information visit: http://ipsinstitute.org/bologna-2016/.
WYSE International Learning Programme 2017 may be in July and/or August 2017 at VILLA BOCCELLA, Via Tramonte, 375, 55100 Lucca LU, Italy. For details go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.


The Sixteenth International Conference on Diversity in Organizations, Communities & Nations will be held at the University of Granada, Granada, Spain, 27-29 July 2016. For more information visit: http://www.newsletter.illinois.mx3a.com/vo/diversity_D16a.html?utm_source=D16PromoA&utm_medium=D16PromoA&utm_campaign=D16PromoA.

IFPE 2017: International Institute on Peace Education may be at the University of Toledo, Toledo Oh, in July and August 2017. For details go to: www.iipe.org.

Human Rights Education Associates, HREA ADVOCACY INSTITUTE 2017 may be in August 2017. For information visit: http://www.hrea.org/.

2017 HREA Advocacy Institute may be in Cambridge, MA, may be in August 2017. For details visit: http://www.hrea.org/.

Women’s Human Rights Education Institute may be in August 2017 at University of Toronto; Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.

Institute for Peace and Dialogue, IPD, International Summer Academy in Peacebuilding, Mediation, Conflict Resolution & Intercultural Dialogue: Summer Academy may be in August 9-19, 2017, and Summer Academy III may be August-November 2017 in Baar, Switzerland. For details visit: http://www.ipdinstitute.ch/.


ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Steve Sachs

Sarah Alexander, Food & Water Watch, June 15, 2016, act@fwwatch.org, https://secure.foodandwaterwatch.org/site/SSurvey;jsessionid=4DC798678BDFAC0042902700E25522E6.app30112b?ACTION_REQUIRED=URI_ACTION_USER_REQUESTS&SURVEY_ID=46797, stated, "Our climate can't wait any longer. We need decisive action to quickly and justly transition away from dirty fossil fuels, and we need elected leaders who listen to the people, not fossil fuel companies.

At the March for a Clean Energy Revolution on Sunday, July 24, the day before the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia — we’re bringing the message home to Democratic Party officials: we demand a just transition to a clean energy future — now!

You won't want to miss this. Join us in Philadelphia on Sunday, July 24 for the March for a Clean Energy Revolution!

Our elected leaders need to make a commitment to clean energy NOW. Politicians on both sides of the aisle have been bought out by wealthy oil and gas interests, putting profits above our climate and the
health and safety of our communities. Food & Water Watch is gathering in Philadelphia with a robust coalition of impacted communities, faith, youth, grassroots and national organizations — to call for a ban on fracking, keep fossil fuels in the ground, stop dirty energy, uphold environmental justice, and quickly and justly transition to 100% renewable energy.

Thousands will be coming together from across the country, meeting in the streets of Philadelphia, to peacefully march as one powerful movement. We’re coordinating buses and transportation from across the region, and we’re committed to helping you plan your logistics so you can join us in Philly.

Join the thousands convening in Philadelphia to March for a Clean Energy Revolution!

When you sign up, we’ll walk you through everything you need to know to get to Philadelphia and participate in this powerful action on Sunday, July 24.

I hope to see you there!

Nika Knight, "Bolstered by New Proof of Asthma Link, Anti-Fracking Groups Plan 'Massive' March at DNC: Our country's leaders 'must take a hard look at the data, acknowledge the harms of drilling and fracking, and stop it before other people become ill,'" Common Dreams, July 19, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/07/19/bolstered-new-proof-asthma-link-anti-fracking-groups-plan-massive-march-dnc, reported, "Researchers from Johns Hopkins University have conclusively shown that living close to fracking operations significantly increases asthma sufferers' risks of attacks, adding urgency to the battle against fracking within the Democratic Party as it prepares to convene in Philadelphia next week.

The study, published Monday in JAMA Internal Medicine, looked at 35,000 medical records in Pennsylvania from 2005 to 2012. The state has long been host to a controversial fracking boom, and many have clamored for politicians to pay attention to the industry's irreversible damage to the land and human health.

'This study's findings confirm what we have known for years—that fracking is an inherently hazardous process that threatens human health and safety every day. More than 17 million Americans live within a mile of a fracking site, and they are all at risk,' said Wenonah Hauter, founder and executive director of Food and Water Watch.

Indeed, this latest research joins more than 480 peer-reviewed studies that have shown increased health risks and harm from the fracking industry, noted Larysa Dyrszka, a medical doctor and co-founder of Concerned Health Professionals of New York, during a press call Tuesday.

These results were thus 'alarming but not surprising,' Dyrszka said. Locally and nationwide, leaders "must take a hard look at the data, acknowledge the harms of drilling and fracking, and stop it before other people become ill,' Dyrszka added.

And so a large coalition of groups—including environmentalists, labor organizers, peace activists, protesters against nuclear power and "free trade" agreements, public health advocates, and representatives from local communities—are preparing a massive 'March for a Clean Energy Revolution' to converge on the eve of the Democratic National Convention on July 24. Organizers predict that thousands will participate.

'As the national spotlight shines on Pennsylvania, it's important to recognize that this state is one of the most fracked in the U.S. and has faced some of the most devastating impacts,' said Hauter. And fracking is 'not just a threat to the millions who live within one mile of an active well—the majority of whom are people of color,' said Karuna Jaggar, executive director of public health advocacy group Breast Cancer Action, pointing out that dangerous chemicals used in fracking seep into soil, taint water supplies, and are dispersed by the wind.

'Fracking threatens the basic necessities of life: our food, our water, our air,' Jaggar said. 'For women's health advocates and environmental activists alike, the time to act is now.'

Russell Greene, a prominent climate activist behind the declaration of a climate emergency that was included in the Democratic Party platform earlier this month, argued that the declaration is 'a moment for us to build upon,' and hopes the march will provoke real, tangible action from Democratic leaders.

Labor, too, is joining the battle: 'Unions are deeply concerned with environmental justice,' said Jon Forster, vice president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) District Council 37, based in New York City.

'Climate change discriminates. It impacts poor communities and communities of color, and those
are the communities with fewest resources to recover, Forster said, adding that the march next week will push "against the unbridled greed that is leading to this disaster."

Margaret Flowers, an organizer with the anti-'free trade' advocacy group Stop the TPP, explained that her organization is taking part in the march to raise awareness of the Trans-Pacific Partnership's (TPP) Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) process in which corporations are able to sue countries in private tribunals for passing laws they dislike. The ISDS provision will have "a chilling affect on [climate] laws," Flowers argued.

Stop the TPP is also staging a 'No Lame Duck Uprising' during the march, Flowers said, to protest President Obama's plan to submit the TPP for congressional approval after the November election.

The Democratic Party platform committee refused to include language against the TPP in the platform, angering many activists. 'Our message is that the TPP represents climate catastrophe,' Flowers explained.

Meanwhile, fraktivists also took their fight to the Republican National Convention (RNC) currently happening in Cleveland, scaling the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame on Tuesday morning to hang a banner demanding the RNC not "Trump" local communities.

"We must remember that fracking often targets low income communities of color, often many of which are immigrants such as the Central Valley of California, where over 95% of fracking occurs in California," said Shane Davis, an activist who was forced from his home in Colorado after being exposed to the harmful impacts of fracking, in a press statement.

'We cannot stand by and accept a political system in which both candidates support the toxic fracking industry, and one candidate freely uses violent racialized language against immigrant communities,' Davis added.

Food and Water Watch confirmed, July 24, 2016, "Yesterday, we held the largest anti-fracking march in U.S. history. More than 10,000 of us marched in the streets of Philadelphia for a Clean Energy Revolution! We were calling on our political leaders to act quickly to ban fracking now, keep fossil fuels in the ground, stop dirty energy, transition to 100% renewable energy and ensure environmental justice for all."

350.org in Australia, http://act.350.org/signup/pfpp-brisbane/?akid=14384.51426.2xTj3p&rd=1&t=4&utm_medium=email, and http://act.350.org/go/11718?t=6&utm_medium=email&akid=14384.51426.2xTj3p, reported June 24, 2016, "The Pollution Free Politics Push has begun! Around the country, hundreds of Australians are taking bold and powerful action to hold their politicians to account for the damage they are doing to our climate and our future.

Just three days in and with the election looming, already we’ve seen everyday people take extraordinary action at electorate offices from coast to coast. Here’s a taster:

On Tuesday, mothers, GPs, priests, students and retirees peacefully occupied Resources and Energy Minister Josh Frydenberg’s electorate office, whilst outside community members re-branded the pro-fossil fuels Minister’s office a climate crime scene.

On Wednesday, over 50 Perth residents queued-in at Finance Minister Mathias Cormann’s office whilst over a dozen people occupied the foyer to call-out Cormann’s pro-coal, anti-climate action agenda. The entire office was locked down in response.

Then today, in the nation’s capital, dozens of Canberrans blocked the entrance to climate blocker Senator Zed Seselja’s office and dropped a banner from above to highlight his climate inaction, as passers-by watched on.

Inspired? If you’re in Brisbane or Sydney, it’s not too late to join more actions like this:

Tomorrow Brisbane residents will take a powerful message to climate action blocker Peter Dutton’s office - click here to join them.

And on Saturday, Sydney-siders will stand with Pacific Islanders as they kayak from Western Sydney to Malcolm Turnbull’s home where they’ll call on him to keep fossil fuels in the ground, for good - click here to join them.

The consequences of our politicians’ obstructionism and denial cannot be understated. You can see it in the mass coral bleaching of the Great Barrier Reef, the tightened chests of children who’ve grown
up surrounded by coal, the contaminated water of farmers whose land has been drilled by gas companies, the homes struck down by devastating fires spurned by the heat of a thousand mines and wells. When our politicians fail us, we must step up and find the audacity to set things straight. And what better way to do that in the tradition of peace and non-violence, with our bodies and hearts, taking our messages direct to the places and spaces frequented by those dragging us towards a miserable future.

A minority of people are holding us back but a majority of people are ready to do something about it. It’s a beautiful thing and we thank all of you for being a part of it.

We’ll be in touch next week with a full wrap of the week’s events. In the meantime, you can follow the updates live at:

- Pollution Free Politics Push LIVE
- The 350 Australia Facebook page
- #PollutionFreePolitics
- For climate justice,
- Charlie for the 350 team"

350.org was heavily involved in “break Free From Fossil Fuels demonstrations” and other actions on six contents, in May 2016, with 20 "Escalated Actions," with more than 30,000 participants. Details at: https://breakfree2016.org.

350.org: Bill McKibben od 350.org wrote, May 3, 2016, "Dear Friends,

Late last week, I got the interesting news that right wing operatives from the fossil fuel industry are mounting an impressive campaign against me (as well as a handful of other high-profile climate activists).

Apparently I’ll now have video trackers following me wherever I go; hired researchers are digging through fifty cartons of my papers at the university where they’re housed; and they’ll be running a six-figure digital advertising campaign to smear my reputation.

I have three takeaways from this:

It’s not me they’re after, it’s you. I’ve been writing and speaking for the better part of forty years, and never attracted this kind of notice before. But you’ve built a movement that’s starting to inflict real pain on the industry: Just in the last couple weeks, the Constitution and NED pipelines were both blocked in the northeast; ditto the Tongue River coal train in Montana; over sixty students have been arrested occupying the offices of universities to call for fossil fuel divestment; and on and on.

No need to waste sympathy on me. It’s not fun being in their crosshairs -- and I don’t look forward to see how they twist my words -- but it’s not the end of the world. Right now, we should be keeping in mind the people who are taking real risks every day to take a stand -- people like Berta Cáceres, who was murdered for her activism two months ago in Honduras, or the farmers in the Philippines recently killed in a brutal police crackdown at a protest, or the thousands of people around the world who will be risking arrest as part of the Break Free mobilization these next couple weeks.

Above all, let’s not be distracted. That’s their goal -- to get folks thinking about absolutely anything except the climate crisis, the greatest challenge humans have ever faced. February and March were record-hot months in the history of our planet, but May is going to be a record-hot political month for the fossil fuel industry.

Look, what we’re learning is this: When we fight, we win. It’s working. They’re fighting back. Let’s not back down.

If you haven’t already signed up to be part of one of the Break Free actions around the country, you can do that here.

And if you can’t make it to an action in person, sign up to help keep tabs on what’s going on around the world -- so that we can turn all this watching around, and help keep each other safe.

With great thanks for the solidarity near and far."

(at: http://350.org)’s For details go to: http://act.350.org/).
The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), "Urge the Environmental Protection Agency to Use Sound Science in Methane Rules," May 12, 2016, https://secure3.convio.net/ucs/site/Advocacy;jsessionid=FF0AA9C710E30706284669BD290B0EFA.app312a?pagename=homepage&page=UserAction&id=5250&autologin=true, stated, "The Union of Concerned Scientists has an achievable, realistic plan to cut oil consumption in half in the next 20 years, but even as we reduce our oil use, the oil that we are using is changing—and not all oil is created equal.

Currently, the oil industry is rapidly expanding its extraction of tight oil—an unconventional oil that is extracted through hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Extracting tight oil typically produces more pollution than conventional oil because it's mixed with methane gas, an extremely potent global warming emission. Methane has a heat-trapping potential 86 times that of carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. The industry does not monitor or disclose accurate methane emissions data, which is needed to set science-based standards on existing oil and gas operations.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has just finalized methane rules for new oil and gas operations, and needs to move quickly to propose standards for existing operations that currently have no pollution limits. It's a critical step to addressing the global warming emissions associated with extracting and producing oil, and we've waited long enough.

Thank the EPA for finalizing methane rules for new oil and gas operations and urge them to move quickly on strong, science-based standards for existing operations.

Please make your letter personal by adding your own thoughts and concerns. Every letter makes a difference, but customized letters have the biggest impact!

Learn more about the truth about tight oil, read our blog post about the EPA methane standards, and check out our realistic plan to cut oil use in half."

For more information visit: www.ucsusa.org.

Environmental Action, http://environmental-action.org/blog/2612/, reported May 30, 2016. "When it comes to the rebellion against fossil fuels and fracked gas infrastructure, in particular, you need to do more than tune in -- you need to show up, speak out and get radical to make change. Fortunately that's exactly what we've been doing all week as part of the #RubberStampRebellion in Washington, D.C.

But the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), has not made it easy. FERC commissioners closed their regularly scheduled May 19 meeting to the public due to "security concerns," with less than a day's notice. They then held their meeting with members of the press and "invited guests," -- including executives from the infamous SoCal Gas -- while inviting the rest of us to watch them via a televised webcast.

Polluters are invited in while the public is told to stay home and watch T.V.? If you're as angry as I am at FERC right now, join the rebel alliance of pipeline fighters right now by:

The Center for Biological Diversity, "Historic Petition: End New Fossil Fuel Leasing on Public Lands," Endangered Earth, July 14, 2016, http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2016/keep-it-in-the-ground-07-12-2016.html, reported," This week the Center for Biological Diversity led more than 250 climate, community and tribal organizations in filing a landmark legal petition calling on the Obama administration to halt all new fossil fuel leasing on federal lands -- a step that would align U.S. energy policies with its climate goals and keep up to 450 billion tons of greenhouse gas pollution from entering the atmosphere.

We're calling on Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to place an immediate moratorium on new leases for federally managed, publicly owned oil, gas, tar sands and oil shale, and to expand the current moratorium on new coal leases. It's a critical step to ensure the United States does its part to meet the global climate commitments we made last year in Paris."

Nika Knight, "Scientists Say Canada's Proposed LNG Port Threatens Paris Climate Accord, "Common Dreams, May 30, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/30/scientists-say-canadas-proposed-lng-port-threatens-paris-climate-accord, reported, "Ninety climate change experts from around the world urged Canadian government officials to 'take urgent action' and reject a proposed, 'unjustified' liquid natural gas (LNG) export terminal to be built on the British Columbia coast, joining with
fierce local Indigenous opposition to the controversial project.

"The carbon emissions of the proposed PNW LNG terminal and associated upstream natural gas development would be 'high in magnitude, continuous, irreversible and global in extent.'"

In an open letter (pdf) dated Thursday, the scientists warned 'that the B.C. project would belch out emissions rivaling a large plant in Alberta's oil sands,' the Globe and Mail reported Monday. The export terminal, known as the Pacific Northwest LNG (PNW LNG) project, "poses serious risks' to the Canada's climate change commitments—particularly those made at last year’s Paris accord, the scientists argue:

The challenges to BC and Canada's efforts to reduce GHG emissions will be exacerbated because of two issues: 1) the international agreement on climate change reached in Paris will require Canada to increase its ambition to reduce GHG emissions over time (and this requirement is embedded within the Vancouver Declaration signed by the Prime Minister and the premiers on March 3); and 2) the methane emissions from upstream gas included in the draft Environmental Assessment report likely underestimate the true contribution of emissions from the project.

Point by point, the letter writers critique proponents' arguments in favor of the PNW LNG project. The experts note that:

- GHG emissions from the project are likely underestimated.
- There is inadequate climate policy to reduce impacts for the project.
- There is no evidence that LNG from the project will replace coal in Asia.

On this last point, the scientists also note that 'LNG will also likely displace nuclear power, renewables, and natural gas from other sources in many importing countries. There are many locations where LNG consumption would be additional to coal consumption, instead of replacing it. Importantly, GHG emissions from fracking, transport, liquefaction, and regasification significantly reduce LNG's GHG benefits over coal.'

Moreover, the letter continues:

The Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency has found that the carbon emissions of the proposed PNW LNG terminal and associated upstream natural gas development would be 'high in magnitude, continuous, irreversible and global in extent.' Their research finds the project will emit at least 11.5 million tonnes of CO2 per year, not including downstream emissions when the gas is burned in Asia. Finally, the scientists put forth an argument seemingly applicable to many fossil fuel projects being debated in North America today:

"Honoring the commitment Canada made in Paris to limit global warming to well below 2.0 degrees above pre-industrial levels will require a massive effort to reduce emissions,' the letter concludes. 'We must begin by rejecting plans that would increase GHG emissions and lock us in fossil fuel extraction for decades to come.'"

Carbonfund.org Foundation (carbonfund.org) continues to work with corporations and non-profit organizations to reduce carbon emissions. Current projects include the Truck Stop Electrification Project (hooking parked trucks to on-site electric cables for heating or cooling, allowing them to shut off their engines while parked, often for long periods); the Envira Amazonia Project: A Tropical Forest Conservation Project; and New Bedford Landfill Gas-to-Energy Project. For more projects and details go to: carbonfund.org.

Greenpeace stated, May 3, 2016, https://secure3.convio.net/gpeace/site/Donation2;jsessionid=80AB4495657CC2F1935956E2B1566212.app360b?df_id=4442&4442.donation=form1&autologin=true, 100 million sharks are killed EVERY YEAR by commercial fishing operations.

That’s almost 200 sharks killed every minute of every day. It’s beyond time to act, which is why we’re putting pressure on one of the biggest offenders: industrial tuna fleets.

These ocean destroyers needlessly kill millions of sharks and wreak havoc on fish populations with their giant nets and longlines. And if that wasn’t bad enough, the industry has also been connected to human rights abuse. It’s time to escalate our campaign to stop devastating tuna fishing, but we can’t do it without your help."
Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR), stated, June 27, 2016, http://secure.psr.org/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1898&ea.campaign.id=52574&ea.url.id=643924 "Forty percent of all coal produced in the U.S. comes from federally owned public lands. If we are to address climate change and keep the temperature rise below 1.5° C, then we need to stop new leasing and keep more coal in the ground!

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is calling for comments to define its Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement of the coal leasing program. We must demand that they include a full climate and toxics assessment in that process.

What’s more, the companies mining that coal are not paying their fair share in comparison to the harms it causes.

The prices paid to extract federally owned coal must reflect the real costs of coal -- to our health, our climate and our environment -- or the mining should be stopped.

Let the BLM know that it’s time to stop subsidizing coal at the expense of our health!
Coal mining pollutes the land. Coal combustion pollutes the air. It contributes to lung disease, heart attacks, stroke and cancer, the four major causes of premature death in the U.S. It’s also a major driver of health-damaging climate change that endangers us all.
Yet the federal coal leasing program fails to take into account those enormous damages. Tell the government that coal companies should not be using public lands at the expense of our health. Send comments to the BLM today -- it’s the final day comments will be received!"

In late August, PSR was involved in two additional environmental campaigns:

"Tell Gov. Brown: No Oil Wastewater on Our Crops
Agricultural growers in California are buying wastewater from oil wells to irrigate food crops. The water is treated before use, and the oil companies that sell the water say it is safe, as they are in compliance with their wastewater discharge permits. But does that really assure safety? Some evidence suggests otherwise. One researcher collected irrigation water samples containing solvents used to degrease equipment or soften thick crude oil. Sign PSR's petition telling California Governor Jerry Brown: Potentially toxic wastewater should not be permitted on food crops.

PSR Speaking Tour on Climate & Health
PSR board member and senior scientist Alan Lockwood, MD will be visiting seven states this fall to present on climate change and how it damages our health. The occasion: publication of his new book, Heat Advisory, published by MIT Press. See the calendar of events (http://www.psr.org/news-events/events/heat-advisory-speaking-tour.html) scheduled for Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Florida."


Tactics used in the past to garner extraction agreements have included, but were not limited to: 1) making assurances that little or no negative impacts to the people and environment would be realized during or after their operations were concluded; 2) any damage done in the process of their operations would be rectified; 3) promising economic prosperity for the tribe as a government and individually for its citizens; and 4) limiting the ability for citizens to have a vote or say in the process. There are many examples of these promises and agreements that were not honored and caused great and irreversible harm.

Indigenous peoples are now facing continued and new forms of exploitation in the guise of renewable, sustainable and green development from genetically engineered trees for energy production. The other experts on this panel present the government, academic and private entities involved and others have presented the science-based reasons that the insertion and proliferation of GE trees into our natural world will further threaten both environmental and human health."
As Indigenous people, our opposition to these new threats are based on knowledge and adherence to Natural Law, which simply are comprehensive and unchangeable truths or principles inherent in the natural world that have allowed us to live and thrive for countless generations before the invasion of people who had long since destroyed their lands and sought to continue exploitation of ours.

Legislation and acts currently being considered and making their way through the government process, include language that, on the surface, would seem to give tribal governments more control over forest management and energy production on tribal trust lands. In reality, the language is purposely vague and leaves the door open for the continuation of exploitation of fossil fuel and mineral resources which now, if not stopped, will include using our lands for growing genetically engineered trees to fuel the new bioenergy and consumer pulp economy.

Specifically, the Native American Energy Act includes vaguely worded sections that may be used to, not only ensure tribal government acceptance of projects run by private corporations but also protect those corporations them from future liability or responsibility – and transferring that liability to the tribes.

These have and are being presented under the guise of Indian self-determination, when in fact they are cleverly crafted mechanisms to lift barriers and fast-track the extreme energy and consumer economy by corporate and private interests.

There are also plans and funding currently available and being negotiated that are not specifically targeted to tribal nations, but may also be used to further promote biomass/bioenergy and GE trees, to include: The American Energy Innovation Act; EPA’s Clean Power Plan; Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015; and the Department of Energy’s Strategic Technical Assistance Response Team (START) Program. These also have the potential to impact not only tribal trust lands but traditional territories and communities where these projects are being proposed and that directly threaten long established subsistence rights.

We reject the efforts by the biotech, agriculture, biofuel, and biomass industries, governments and their agencies, to com-modify trees for commercial use at the expense of the earth’s delicate biodiversity and climate stability. They do not belong because they have been forcibly contaminated with genetic material from totally unrelated lifeforms which violates Natural Law and threatens the regenerative processes of our very diverse and complex ecosystems. The monopolization of land and water to grow GE trees to replace a fraction of the fossil fuels needed as energy demands increase, will only worsen human rights abuses and intensify global water, food, and the climate crises we face. These trees and their end use are just another way to com-modify nature and are a component of carbon trading and offsets that will further displace Indigenous and front-line and traditional

"Anti-Frackers Vow Fierce Resistance as UK Goes Back 'Up for Shale': North Yorkshire council’s 'appalling' decision comes just days after UK celebrated five years 'frack-free'" Common Dreams, May 24, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/24/anti-frackers-vow-fierce-resistance-uk-goes-back-shale, reported, "Furious environmental campaigners vowed to fight back on Tuesday after councilors in North Yorkshire approved the UK’s first fracking permit in five years.

The North Yorkshire County Council on Monday approved Third Energy's application to frack the fields near the North York Moors National Park—just days after people across the country celebrated five years of being 'frack-free.'

According to The Independent, 'the application was passed despite the presence of hundreds of protestors, who gathered outside County Hall in Northallerton throughout the hearing which began on Friday.'

In fact, a council planning officer said there had been 4,375 letters of objection and 36 of support for the application.

'It is just appalling that despite the strength of public opposition to this application it has been pushed through by councilors, who are being told what to do by a government that is determined to support the fracking industry,' declared lan Conlan from local campaign group Frack Free Ryedale. 'What faith can local people have in democracy if the members of the planning committee can just completely ignore both the strength of local opinion and the sound planning grounds that objectors have raised? It is a sham.'

Furthermore, said Green MEP Keith Taylor, "Councils in North Yorkshire will now find it more difficult to reject future fracking applications. This could result in hundreds of wells across Ryedale and the
industrialization of North Yorkshire's precious countryside. The decision is also likely to send the message that Britain is 'up for shale' to other local authorities in England and the wider fracking industry.'

Indeed, he added, the announcement will also be welcomed by a government so determined to fast-track this dangerous industry that it is prepared to overrule authorities that wish to remain frack-free."

Frank Hopper, "Is It Safe? Mercury Found in Subsistence Seal Meat, Alaskan Mine Suspected," ICTMN, April 1 19, 2016, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/04/19/it-safe-mercury-found-subsistence-seal-meat-alaskan-mine-suspected-164185, reported, "There is no Walmart in Angoon, Alaska. A ferry brings in food to stock the town's only store, where a gallon of milk will run you about $10. As high as that is, traditional Native food carries an even heavier price these days. Mercury, arsenic, lead and other toxic metals suspected of coming from the nearby Greens Creek Mine are showing up in locally harvested seafood, potentially costing you your health.

The rural village of approximately 400 people on the west side of Admiralty Island sits about 60 miles southwest of Juneau in the Tongass National Forest. The population of mostly Tlingit people are 80 percent unemployed, yet they don't consider themselves poverty-stricken. 'You ask anyone here; we're not living in poverty. We don't consider it poverty as long as we have our resources. And now those resources are in question,' tribal president Albert Howard told ICTMN. 'Everyone here assumed that our food was safer than anything we can buy at the store. And now it makes you wonder


The dam has cut off the Omo river's regular flooding, which 100,000 people rely on to water their crops and livestock and a further 100,000 depend on indirectly. According to experts, this could also spell the end for Lake Turkana – the world's largest desert lake – and disaster for the 300,000 tribespeople living along its shores.

Salini did not seek the consent of local people before building the dam, but claimed that an "artificial flood release" would compensate them for their losses. However, this promised flood never came and thousands of people now face starvation.

The region is one of the most important sites in early human evolution, and an area of exceptional biodiversity, with two World Heritage Sites and five national parks. The head of Kenya’s conservation agency said last week that the dam is unleashing 'one of the worst environmental disasters you can imagine.'

Survival’s Director Stephen Corry said: 'Salini has ignored crucial evidence, made false promises and ridden roughshod over the rights of hundreds of thousands of people. Thousands are now facing starvation because Italy’s largest contractor, and one of its best known companies, didn’t think human rights were worth its time. The real consequences of the Ethiopian government’s devastating policies for its country’s 'development,'” which are shamefully supported by western aid agencies like the UK’s DFID and USAID, are plain for all to see. Stealing people’s land and causing massive environmental destruction is not “progress,” it is a death sentence for tribal peoples."

Physicians for Social Responsibility reported on several issues, May 24, 2016, http://www.psr.org/assets/pdfs/psr-fracking-policy.pdf, "PSR Calls for Ban on Fracking: PSR’s national board of directors voted on May 14 to call for a ban on hydraulic fracturing (fracking). The newly adopted position cites the extensive leaks of methane, a powerful accelerator of climate change, as a significant cause for concern. It also acknowledges that a transition is needed to end fracking and calls on the gas and oil industries to shoulder responsibility for, among other things, water testing, public disclosure on chemicals used, and the costs of managing health-threatening practices. The position replaces PSR’s earlier position calling for a moratorium.

New Methane Standards: A Good First Step: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently
released the first nationwide standards curbing dangerous methane pollution from proposed, not yet constructed, sources in the oil and natural gas industry. The rule is an important first step in minimizing leaks of methane, a powerful driver of climate change, and hazardous air pollutants, which are damaging to human health. Thousands of PSR members submitted comments to EPA calling on them to strengthen the new standards. Now we continue to advocate so that similar safeguards are extended to existing wells and infrastructure.

Gates Foundation Sells Fossil Fuel Stocks: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is divesting its fossil fuel stocks – and PSR helped make it happen! Last fall, PSR circulated an open letter calling on the Foundation to divest from fossil fuels. PSR members from across the nation signed on, and in November, PSR/Washington delivered those signatures to the Gates headquarters in Seattle. The Foundation has now sold off its $187 million holdings in the oil giant BP, and earlier sold off $824 million in ExxonMobil stock. Now, it just needs to divest the rest! Read about our divestment actions: http://www.psr.org/.

Peace and Security:
President Obama’s Historic Visit to Hiroshima: On May 27, President Obama will be the first sitting President to ever visit Hiroshima, Japan. Representatives from PSR and allied organizations met with White House officials on May 18 to thank Obama for his decision – and, since actions speak much louder than words, to urge him to announce concrete actions toward nuclear disarmament. Please email President Obama and ask him to announce these actions while he is in Hiroshima.

International Health Federations Form Historic Disarmament Partnership: Nations without nuclear weapons are forging an alliance with civil society groups to stigmatize, ban and eliminate nuclear weapons. At a United Nations working group meeting this month in Geneva, four international health federations representing over 15 million health professionals submitted a joint paper to the UN titled "The Health and Humanitarian Case for Banning and Eliminating Nuclear Weapons". The 4 groups are: International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, International Nurses Council, World Health Organization, and World Federation of Public Health Associations.

Lauren McCauley, "Anti-Fracking Momentum Grows with Another People’s Victory in California: Measure E passed with an overwhelming 71 percent, making Butte County the fourth in the state to ban fracking," Common Dreams, June 08, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/08/anti-fracking-momentum-grows-another-peoples-victory-california, reported, "Notching another victory for the growing national anti-fracking movement, voters in Butte County, California on Tuesday overwhelmingly passed a measure that bans the controversial oil and gas drilling process in their communities.

Measure E won with 71 percent of the vote, making Butte the fourth California county to pass such a measure, following Mendocino, San Benito, and Santa Cruz counties, and adding to the growing list of states and municipalities across the nation that have come out against fracking.

Agriculture is the top industry in Butte County, which sits just north of Sacramento. Proponents of the measure argued that threatening the aquifers with toxic fracking chemicals would destroy the 'lifeblood' of the local economy.

'We are thrilled that Butte County voters decided to protect our clean water and almond and walnut farms from fracking," said Dave Garcia, of Frack-Free Butte County. "We’re proud that we can hand down a community that’s green and pristine to our children and grandchildren.'

Despite the fact that a majority of Californians oppose the practice, Democratic Governor Jerry Brown has embraced fracking in the state. What’s more, two federal agencies late last month quietly lifted the ban on offshore fracking in the waters off the California coast.

'When our Governor and local elected officials fail to act, voters are taking the initiative at the ballot box to protect their health and their water from fracking,' said Ella Teevan, Northern California organizer with Food & Water Watch. ‘The victory in Butte County will inspire other counties and cities to follow suit.’

Indeed, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors are expected to rule on a similar measure this summer while residents of Monterey County will be voting on a ban in November.

The oil industry has vowed a vigorous fight in Monterey, which sits atop the yet un-fracked, petroleum-rich Monterey Shale. Democratic hopeful Bernie Sanders endorsed that measure while campaigning in California’s Salinas Valley
last week, telling supporters in Spreckels: "There is a growing movement against fracking that is beginning to spread all across our country."

The National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) was engaged, July 16, 2013, https://secure.nrdconline.org/site/Advocacy;jsessionid=0C48BACD505BB29A287C83AC75ED63D.app322a?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=4045&autologin=true&s_source=EMOTARPETACT0716FU&utm_source=alert&utm_medium=actr&utm_campaign=email, in a letter writing campaign to President Obama, saying, "I am alarmed that the oil industry plans to ship 1.5 million barrels per day of tar sands crude from Canada to the United States by pipeline and tanker -- flooding America with twice as much tar sands crude as the Keystone XL pipeline would have, choking our atmosphere with 350 million metric tons of carbon pollution and threatening virtually all of our coastlines and three major rivers with nearly impossible-to-clean-up oil spills. I urge you to direct your Coast Guard and EPA to impose an immediate ban on all tar sands tanker and barge traffic in U.S. waters.

I applaud you for responding to the dire threat of climate change by securing a breakthrough climate accord in Paris, cracking down on power plant pollution and rejecting the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. But with evidence mounting that our climate is warming far more rapidly than predicted, we must act swiftly when new threats emerge. Please do not leave this issue for the next president to address -- act now to secure your legacy of climate leadership by blocking this tar sands onslaught. Thank you."

Deirdre Fulton, "Passing Ban, Scottish Parliament Declares: 'No Ifs, No Buts, No Fracking": Non-binding fracking ban signals 'growing consensus that stopping climate change means we have to say no to new fossil fuels like fracked gas,'" Common Dreams, June 1, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/01/passing-ban-scottish-parliament-declares-no-ifs-no-buts-no-fracking, reported, "The Scottish Parliament on Wednesday narrowly passed a motion in support of an outright fracking ban, setting up a potential showdown over the controversial fossil fuels extraction method.

The motion put forth by Labor stated: 'This parliament recognizes that, to meet Scotland's climate change goals and protect the environment, there must be an outright ban on fracking in Scotland.'

After Scottish National Party (SNP) members abstained, the motion was passed by 32 votes to 29. The SNP announced a moratorium on fracking in Scotland last January, but has stopped short of an outright ban to allow for further research. The Guardian reports:

Scottish Labor’s environment spokesperson, Claudia Beamish, who tabled the amendment, immediately called on the SNP government to clarify its position after the vote, which does not create binding policy, but represents a significant defeat for the SNP so soon into this new parliamentary term.

Beamish said: 'The SNP government must now clarify whether or not they will respect the will of parliament and introduce an outright ban on fracking. It would be outrageous for this important vote to be ignored.'"


The plan would permit Enefit, a foreign company, to build oil, gas and electric transmission lines across miles of public land to enable up to 9,000 acres of strip mining for oil shale. We have until June 14 to write the BLM and stop this plan from going through!

Oil shale is not oil at all, but a rock that, if superheated to hundreds of degrees for long periods, will release a goo that can be further refined into liquid petroleum.

Current oil shale technology requires that the land be effectively strip mined, which destroys wildlife habitat and requires massive amounts of water—already precious and dwindling in the arid and over-allocated Colorado River basin where oil shale rocks are found. It would likely also require large
amounts of energy—and huge amounts of climate pollution—just to process the rock into petroleum.

Enefit hopes to produce 50,000 barrels of petroleum a day, every day, for 30 years. The company estimates that producing and burning this fuel will cause nearly 40% more greenhouse gas emissions than similar amounts of regular oil. To prevent the worst impacts of climate change we need to be moving to cleaner fuels, not dirtier ones.

For years Earthjustice has worked with groups in this region to stop any efforts to move forward with oil shale development. Now the public has an opportunity to send a message to the BLM that it should stop subsidizing dirty fossil fuels and not allow Enefit to use our lands to pollute the climate, poison the air and guzzle water from our shrinking rivers."

Environmental Action, reported, July 12, 2016, "It wasn't that kind of bang: After an amazing week of action all over the country, we won a big victory in Baltimore (your author's home town), when Houston Big Oil pusher Targa Resources withdrew plans to ship volatile crude oil on so-called "Bomb Trains" through to the port.

It was a great way to wrap up the #StopOilTrains week of action that so many Environmental Action members have shown up or chipped in to support. Click here to see the report (including lots more photos and video from events) in our blog: http://environmental-action.org/blog/ban-the-bomb-trains-week-of-action-ends-with-a-bang/.

Our goal for the week was to raise awareness about the bomb trains -- shipments of crude oil and other fossil fuels by rail through United States and Canada. While some events were overshadowed by the bloody violence in Texas, Louisiana and Minnesota -- many more went forward as planned and delivered real results.

Our hashtag dominated Twitter on July 6, the anniversary of an oil train derailment and explosion in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, that killed 47 people. The Pacific Northwest has dominated headlines since a derailment in Oregon ignited a blaze that one of the first responders told Oregon Public Broadcasting "looked like the apocalypse."

But Bomb Trains run all across the United States, including through Houston, Chicago’s South Side and Philadelphia, where people of color are the majority. That's why, our movement came together for the 3rd annual #StopOilTrains week of action — hosting dozens of events from coast to coast that showed the risk, called attention to the issues and demanded action."

"Indigenous Environmental Network Responds," July 26, 2016, "The United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has granted the final permit needed by Dakota Access Pipeline, LLC to begin construction of its Bakken oil pipeline, Dakota Access. Under the terms of the Department of the Army Nationwide Permit No. 12, the Corps has approved construction of the crude oil pipeline across significant waterways, placing critical water habitats, rivers and drinking water at risk.

The Indigenous Environmental Network offers the following response:

We are saddened to hear of this permit approval but knew the writing was on the wall. The Corps has a long history of going against the wishes and health of Tribal nations. This decision will not deter the resistance against the dirty Bakken pipeline. This decision merely highlights the necessity for the Corps of Engineers to overhaul the Nationwide Permit No. 12 process, which has been used by Big Oil to further place our lands, Indigenous rights, water and air at greater risk for disaster. We demand a revocation of this permit and advocate for the rejection of this pipeline."


In partnership with a number of Canadian and U.S. environmental groups, the Natural Resources
Defense Council (NRDC)—a major player in the fight to defeat Keystone XL—on Tuesday released a new report outlining how Energy East would 'effectively create a waterborne tar sands pipeline with hundreds of new oil tankers traversing the Atlantic coastline, making vast areas of the Eastern Seaboard vulnerable to a dangerous tar sands spill.'

Indeed, the group notes that the Gulf of Maine, Acadia National Park, and the Florida Keys are all in the pipeline's 'crosshairs,' as well as iconic marine species and billion dollar commercial fisheries on the East Coast, including New England and Atlantic Canada's lobster and sea scallops fisheries.

And that's on top of the pipeline's climate impacts; according to the NRDC analysis, Energy East would bring a significant increase in carbon pollution—equivalent to the annual emissions of as many as 54 million passenger vehicles—and lock in high-carbon infrastructure expected to operate for at least 50 years.

'TransCanada's Energy East proposal is truly Keystone XL on steroids,' said Joshua Axelrod, a co-author of the report and NRDC policy analyst. 'It's all risk and no reward for millions of Canadians and Americans, iconic landscapes, valuable fisheries and our climate.'

With the report, entitled Tar Sands in the Atlantic Ocean: TransCanada’s Proposed Energy East Pipeline (pdf), the NRDC joins a chorus of existing Energy East opponents.

The project is currently under consideration by the National Energy Board (NEB), with hearings expected to begin in Saint John, New Brunswick, on August 8.

In making its argument, the NRDC leans on a 2016 study by Canada's National Academy of Sciences (NAS), which found that large portions of diluted bitumen—which Energy East would transport—can be expected to sink if spilled in water. The same report found that current regulations and spill response techniques are incapable of managing the unique behavior and higher risks of tar sands diluted bitumen spill in water.

A press statement (pdf) from Greenpeace Canada notes that the NEB refused to consider the same NAS study in its Kinder Morgan pipeline analysis.

'To be at all credible, the National Energy Board must give the NAS study a central role in its review of Energy East,' said Matt Abbott of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick.

Meanwhile, the NRDC is calling for a tar sands oil tanker moratorium in U.S. and Canadian waters until appropriate spill response techniques are developed to address a diluted bitumen spill into water.

But beyond that, many say the pipeline simply should not be built. Pointing to the devastating pipeline leak that flooded the North Saskatchewan River with 200,000 liters of tar sands crude last week, the Council of Canadians on Monday warned that spills are 'inevitable and permanent consequences of transporting oil.'

'When thinking about the future we want, let us remember that the proposed Energy East pipeline crosses 90 watersheds, nearly 3000 waterways, and puts the drinking water of over 5 million people at risk along its route," wrote energy and climate justice campaigner Daniel Cayley-Daoust.'"

Friends of Earth Action, in a campaign, warned of, May 28, 2016, https://org.salsalabs.com/o/455/p/salsa/donation/common/public/?donate_page_KEY=13858, "The situation is dire. Beekeepers lost nearly half of their hives last year -- even more than the year before. Meanwhile, Ace Hardware is spreading propaganda about how it’s “helping” bees -- while continuing to sell bee-killing pesticides!"

Nadia Prupis, "'Won't Accept Destruction': Global Communities Line Up to Ban Fracking: 'This decision proves the power of grassroots advocacy. Individuals have won over powerful and influential mining companies'" Common Dreams, August 30, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/30/wont-accept-destruction-global-communities-line-ban-fracking, reported, "Around the world, resistance is growing to hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, as more and more communities line up to ban the controversial fossil fuel extraction method from their lands.

On Tuesday, Victoria, Australia's Premier Daniel Andrews announced that the state is set to introduce a permanent ban on all onshore unconventional gas exploration, including fracking and other methods like gas mining, making it the first state in the nation to do so.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet said, 'It is clear that the Victorian community has spoken.
They simply don't support fracking.' The government will introduce legislation for the ban later this year, and the Herald Sun added that it would also extend the current moratorium until June 30, 2020.

According to one organizer, about 1.4 million hectares of land were threatened by some form of onshore gas mining like coal seam gas, underground coal gasification, and shale gas.

The government also said the ban would help protect Victoria’s agricultural sector and pacify Australian farmers' concerns over the potential health impacts of fracking, which has been linked to cancer, birth defects, migraines, and fatigue, among other maladies.

'The fracking industry continues to lose friends all over the world. Community opposition to the fracking and unconventional gas industry has been fierce right across Australia and thankfully the Victorian Government has listened to these concerns,' said Dr. Richard Dixon, Scotland director at the environmental group Friends of the Earth. 'From a global climate change perspective, it is encouraging to see fossil fuels being kept in the ground. Developed nations need to rapidly move away our reliance on these dirty, destructive energy sources and embrace clean, safe renewables.'

Ellen Sandell, the Australian Green Party's energy spokesperson, said the decision is 'a relief to communities that have fought the threat of fracking for years.'

'This decision proves the power of grassroots advocacy. Individuals have won over powerful and influential mining companies,' Sandell said, though she added that it was "disappointing the government is leaving the door open to conventional gas drilling after the next state election."

"We won't stop fighting until all onshore gas drilling is banned," she said.

And just a day earlier, the climate advocacy group 350.org noted that more than 70 Brazilian cities have also approved fracking bans, culminating in a total of 72 cities prohibiting the extraction method since the launch of the No Fracking Brazil campaign in 2013.

'It is important to show the fracking entrepreneurs that people will not passively accept the destruction caused by the fossil fuel industry," Nicole Figueiredo de Oliveira, 350.org’s Latin America regional team leader, said in a statement on Monday. "We will continue empowering the local communities to resist this government's offensive and urging public officials to invest in renewable energy projects instead of expanding fossil fuel extraction, so that we can have a sustainable, secure future.'"
MoveOn.Org, in addition to participation in the ongoing political campaigns, in late August 2016, was engaged in several campaigns to make police accountable and reduce the number shootings by police officers. This included calling for justice in several apparently unwarranted police shootings and support for Black Lives Matter. United also was active in moving to reduce gun violence, including calling for ban on assault weapons, while being active on other justice issues. For details go to: http://www.moveon.org/.

United for Peace & Justice, actions, as of late August 2016 included "Nuclear Free Month" - to move away from atomic weapons; "Send a Letter to Congress to Halt Saudi Weapons Deal;" participation in the World Social Forum in Montreal; Actions on a variety of issues at the Republican and Democratic national conventions; Petition to Tell the President, "Bring All Troops Home from Afghanistan;" and "No to NATO, No to War" - opposing NATO involvement in the Middle East, North Africa and in Europe (E.G. against Serbia, and possibly the Ukraine). For more information go to: www.unitedforpeace.org/.

"CODEPINK Calls for Investigation into Possible War Crimes in Response to Civilian Death Toll from Government Drone Attack Report: Peace group calls for immediate repercussions for all US officials involved in slaughter of civilians, compensation for victims," July 1, 2016, http://www.codepink.org/codepink_calls_for_investigation_into_possible_war_crimes_in_response_to_civilian_death_toll, commented, "In response to today's admission by the U.S. government that 64 to 116 civilian deaths have been caused by drone strikes, CODEPINK is calling for an independent investigation of whether such killings amount to war crimes, immediate accountability for the Obama administration officials guilty of perpetrating these civilian deaths, and compensation for the family members of the innocent victims of US drone strikes. Furthermore, CODEPINK disputes the numbers put forth by the Obama administration as underestimated and unreliable, both due to the government's refusal to reveal their methodology or information on specific strikes as well as the automatic categorization of every adult male over 18 killed by drones as an enemy combatant.

'The admission by the US government that it has killed possibly over 100 civilians in drone strikes warrants an immediate independent investigation into whether or not the Obama administration is guilty of committing war crimes,' said CODEPINK Co-director Alli McCracken. 'Even more horrifying is that these numbers only take into consideration the civilians slaughtered in countries that the U.S. is not even at war with: Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya, and does not mention the other countries the US regularly conducts drone strikes in, such as Iraq and Afghanistan.'

By automatically removing every male over age 18 from the civilian category, whether or not they were engaged in any military or terrorist activity of any kind, the U.S. government statistics significantly underestimate the true number of civilian deaths caused by drone strikes. In addition to underestimating civilian casualties, the government statistics fail to capture the tens of thousands of cases of lost limbs, partial or total paralysis and other psychological or significant permanent injury caused to civilians by drone strikes. The damage done to civilian survivors of drone strikes is often brutal, devastating and lifelong and is completely unaccounted for in the government statistics released today.

'The number of civilian deaths from drone strikes claimed by the U.S. military today is an obvious underestimate and should be treated as pure propaganda,' said Medea Benjamin, cofounder of CODEPINK and author of the book Drone Warfare: Killing by Remote Control. "Independent organizations investigating civilian deaths from drones have estimated the true number to be three to ten times higher than what the Obama administration is now reporting. The military has a vested interest in underreporting the true number of civilian deaths caused by drone warfare and past practices - such as automatically categorizing all males over 18 as "enemy combatants" even when there is no evidence to support that label – guarantee that these statistics are in no way reflective of reality."

CODEPINK has hosted two international summits about drone warfare, taken delegations to Pakistan and Yemen to meet with drone strike survivors, and brought drone strike survivors to the US to tell their stories in Congressional briefings and other public events. CODEPINK and other coalition members participated in the “Shut Down Creech” action March 27 - April 2, 2016 outside Creech Air Force Base in Indian Springs, Nevada which brought attention to the use of drone warfare and used nonviolent resistance to shut down killer drone operations in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and around the
world. More information about CODEPINK’s work on drones can be found at http://www.codepink.org/ground_the_drones. For more information visit: http://codepink.salsalabs.com/.

Gush Shalom and other Israeli and Palestinian peace organizations, supported by internationals, have remained extremely active over the last three months. A list of links to many of these organizations is on the Gush Shalom web site: http://zope.gush-shalom.org/home/en/channels/links.

Some of the weekly Gush Shalom ads in the Jerusalem newspaper Ha’aretz read:

August 20, 2016: "Athletes Who won Olympic medals Got the Media spotlight. Who bothered To report On soldiers Who destroyed Palestinian homes?"

August 12, 2016: "Expelling International Human Rights Activists Won’t Hide From the world The injustice of The occupation. - On the contrary."

July 30, 2016: " It is important To investigate The conduct of The 2014 war. Even more important To investigate: What (if anything) Did the government Do in 2016 To prevent The next war."

July 23, 2016: " Who is Desecrating The flag? First and foremost, the one who Raises it In settlements Created by force On stolen land."

July 9,2016: "Occupation leads To resistance. Resistance leads To oppression. Oppression leads To terror And counter-terror. Keeping the Occupied Territories Will turn us Into murderers And murder victims (This ad was originally published on September 22, 1967 in Ha’aretz)."

See excerpts from Adam Keller’s Blog in Articles, below, for reports on Israeli Palestinian activism and conditions.

For more information on the Israeli peace movement contact Gush Shalom, P.O. Box 3322, Tel-Aviv 61033, 972-3-5221732, info@gush-shalom.org, www.gush-shalom.org, Adam Keller of Gush Shalom launched a blog, at: http://adam-keller1.blogspot.com/ in Hebrew and http://adam-keller2.blogspot.com/ in English.

United for Peace and Justice, was engaged in a campaign, July 13, 2016, http://click.actionnetwork.org/mpss/c/3AA/ni0YAA/t.1yu/P9-7l4a4dTcEcmZjd2HiBTg/h2/uQHZJSxyoM8Ao17mHz1CPey7RkkLHVunQplWjxPWqrrYtLQ3NFlfWrwKwYNALZTlwvm-2Bigrfrxw5wY9Mai19K71F7QsM-2F-2FWqComQA37bUjePulG6KgzOcQr.IrcAldaSh5jsTnSDiAnHV9m-2B5sSDpL7LorjwXP9psJ-2Fi-2FIWwF5LF-2FAdvKvgbvyGGllooo2zOGN5VZxGbf81eIFVny81y4a43MDKwG8T0EU-2FMk5o1Y6QKU1rBER7uA0KseWVp0NxxBocZBzNnv4rsCmSkLLeQplkJl-2FTtF0cJWht1DKqpnTWcNxjzG-2Bwqjy1TfCptwTCe9-2B6pTemP0w4B2zc8c8JbldQo86rSishdhH7lbs8i9as0LkD0WVz7-2B-2BzcPy0PCEwvpAFAa4v4gCjD28XNCe8AVAvy86HHzu1ce1ptryeZbveGN3J4yGIR7VENHqsWb20vSCOUqc9tWriaclL6dLOevjBOqHcZjol3xen7XJbYQgqT-2Fdq7bL8Jfs4wY1, saying, "On July 6, President Obama announced his intention to maintain 8,400 troops on the ground and in harms way in Afghanistan. United for Peace and Justice opposes this continuation of ENDLESS WAR that has neither reduced incidences of terrorism throughout the world, nor made life safer for the people of Afghanistan or here at home."

Please add your name to UFPJ’s appeal to the President and demand that he immediately withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan and commit to regional diplomacy that begins to build a solid foundation for a nuclear and weapons-of-mass-destruction free Middle East."

Just Foreign Policy, May 10, 1016, http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/protect-children-in-military?source=c.em&r_by=1135580, reported, "Human Rights Watch has reported that Israeli security forces are abusing Palestinian children detained in the West Bank. "Israel security forces are using unnecessary force in arresting and detaining children, in some cases beating them, and holding them in unsafe and abusive conditions," HRW said.

Minnesota Democratic Representative Betty McCollum is now circulating a letter to President Obama, urging him to appoint a Special Envoy for Palestinian Youth to travel to the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Israel to hear directly from Palestinian youth, human rights and legal experts, NGOs, and Palestinian and Israeli officials, about the conditions of children in military detention and what steps, including police and military leaders, can be taken to guarantee the internationally-recognized human rights
of these children.
Urge your Representative to support Rep. McCollum's letter."

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) has made several policy statements in the last three months. In brief:

PsySR Supports APA Post-Hoffman Reforms (July 28, 2016)
"A year has now passed since an independent review confirmed allegations of collusion between American Psychological Association (APA) officials and national security establishment representatives to guarantee that APA policy would not constrain psychologists’ involvement in military or CIA war-on-terror detention and interrogation operations, at a time when those operations were known to be abusive. For the APA, the Hoffman Report ended more than a decade of denials and stonewalling—a dark period during which APA members participated in the design and implementation of the CIA’s black-site torture program and the treatment of Guantanamo detainees described as “tantamount to torture” by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In light of these disturbing revelations, Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) and other social justice groups have called for the APA to undertake a rehabilitative project of transparency, accountability, and reform. The Hoffman Report has finally spurred a long overdue reconsideration by APA’s leadership of past decisions that prioritized guild interests over human rights and professional ethics. One valuable initiative in this arena has been the passage of Resolution 23B. This resolution bans psychologists from involvement in national security interrogations; adopts the determinations of the United Nations in establishing what constitutes torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; and prohibits psychologists from working at international sites that violate international law unless they are working directly on behalf of the detainees or providing treatment to military personnel.

However, in recent months these crucial efforts have come under increasing attack from parties with vested interests in casting doubt on the Hoffman Report’s conclusions and in returning APA policy to the status quo ante...." the report continues at: http://www.psysr.org/about/statements/PsySR-Supports-APA-Reforms.pdf.

PsySR Statement on Torture, Cruel, Inhuman, and Degrading Treatment and Racial Injustice in the United States (April 3, 2016)
Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR), an organization that has long worked against torture at offshore detention sites like Guantanamo Bay, calls on psychologists and other mental health professionals to look more closely at torture and related human rights violations committed within the U.S. criminal justice system.

Echoing the voices of the Black Lives Matter movement, PsySR is concerned with the staggering array of violent acts committed by public officials against individuals and communities of color within the United States. Acts constitute torture when they cause severe mental or physical pain or suffering and are intentionally inflicted by or under public authority for the purpose of obtaining a confession, punishing, intimidating or coercing, or for any other reason based on discrimination of any kind. Cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (CIDT) encompasses a broader range of exposure to substantial pain or suffering undertaken with the consent or acquiescence of public officials.

Torture, in its most immediately recognizable form, is manifest in actions such as those of Chicago police officers who, under the direction of Jon Burge, attached electric shock cables to African American suspects to gain false confessions. Far more frequent is the use of prolonged solitary confinement, a psychologically destructive practice that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture has called on all nations to abolish..." Continues at: http://www.psysr.org/about/statements/PsySR-Statement-Torture-CIDT-Racial-Injustice.pdf.

PsySR continues to undertake programs in Human Rights and Psychology; Climate Change, Sustainability, and Psychology; Violence, War, and Their Alternatives; Peacebuilding and Reconciliation; Social Health, Justice, and Well-Being; and Education for Social Responsibility. For more information go to: http://www.psysr.org.

Global Exchange, Programs, as of late August, included: Community Rights: From gas drilling to toxic dumping to water bottling...who makes the rules where you live—corporations or residents? The
Community Rights Program assists communities confronted by harmful corporate projects to assert their right to...

Economic Activism for Palestine: Our Economic Activism for Palestine project focuses on corporate accountability for human rights and international law violations of the companies profiting from the occupation in Palestine. The program targets corporations that are directly...

Elect Democracy: How do we create a system where it actually matters who you vote for?
End Dirty Energy: We know that the world must move rapidly away from oil as an energy resource to save our climate, protect democracy, and stop current and future wars for oil.
Green Festivals: Green Festival Expo is the largest and longest-running sustainability and green living event in the United States. It was founded by Global Exchange and Green America over thirteen years ago in an effort to find solutions to help make...
Local, Green Economy: Global Exchange supports programs to accelerate community-based solar power, wind power, and other clean renewable energy technologies and the green jobs they generate. We believe policies and people power are solutions that bring greater local control, democracy, and green, sustainable jobs...
Mexico and Human Rights: Our Mexico Program seeks to support Mexico's democratic movement through public education in the U.S. about the realities of Mexico and the need for changes in U.S. trade and military policy toward Mexico, especially those that are...
Stop Funding War: Global Exchange's Peace Program, including sister organization CODEPINK, inspires creative actions to expose the real...

Reality Tours include journeys to Afghanistan, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, and Palestine, on social justice issues.

For information go to: http://www.globalexchange.org.

"United to End Genocide & the Enough Project are coming together for a campaign to tell President Obama that it is time to take a new approach to Sudan sanctions," United to End Genocide, May 5, 2016, http://salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/51595/c/314/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=18523, stated, "Despite a faltering economy, sanctions from the U.N. and U.S. government, and growing political and armed opposition, the government of Sudan continues to pursue policies of exclusion, marginalization, and violent oppression. And the man behind the attacks and denial of life-saving humanitarian aid – Sudan's president Omar al-Bashir – continues to rule with impunity and reap financial rewards from the atrocities he orchestrates.


The Bashir regime has survived for more than 25 years by successfully looting the state and its considerable resource wealth and by responding to all opposition with unsparing violence. Past policy approaches have failed to counter the regime’s ability to finance conflict or to enrich itself at the expense of the Sudanese people. As long as the regime can benefit from conflict and silence opposition, it has no incentive to pursue peace. To create the pressure necessary to change calculations in Sudan's government, the U.S. and its allies must employ a much broader strategy of financial pressure to target those individuals and entities that profit from this untenable status quo."

"Join The Hibakusha In Demanding The Abolition of Nuclear Weapons," Peace Action, May 3, 2016, http://org.salsalabs.com/o/161/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=19653 stated, "Peace Action has long been a leader in the international campaign to abolish nuclear weapons. Along the way, we have worked with the Hibakusha (A-bomb survivors), hosting them on speaking tours across America and now, strongly supporting the international petition campaign they have launched. We urge you to spread the word on social media and by
International Signature Campaign in Support of the Appeal of the Hibakusha for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

Earnestly desiring the elimination of nuclear weapons without delay, we, the Hibakusha, call on all State Governments to conclude a treaty to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons."


Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) was engaged in a campaign in July 2016, http://secure.psr.org/ea-action/action?ea.client.id=1898&ea.campaign.id=53509&ea.url.id=656584, saying "President Obama recently reiterated his drive to reduce the threat from nuclear weapons. He seems determined to use the final months in office to pursue a bolder nuclear agenda that will make the world safer.

There is much he can do, because the President has a great deal of power regarding nuclear weapons policy.

Please contact the White House to urge these actions:

1. Declare "no first use" of nuclear weapons

We are often told that the United States keeps nuclear weapons to "deter others" who have them. But did you know that the current U.S. policy retains the option of a "pre-emptive nuclear strike"? Join PSR in asking President Obama to establish a "no first use" policy: that the United States will never be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict. This would be an excellent step forward to reduce nuclear tensions and dangers.

2. Cut the new nuclear cruise missile from the budget

Before he leaves office, President Obama should take at least one step to head off a new nuclear arms race by eliminating the "long range standoff missile" (LRSO) from future budgets. This program is just getting started, but is expected to balloon to a $20-$30 billion dollar cost in the next 10 years. Experts like former Defense Secretary William Perry have said this new missile is redundant, destabilizing in a crisis, and should be cancelled. Urge the President to do so.

Please, join PSR to help President Obama use his last months in office to realize his vision of a world without nuclear weapons."

Witness for Peace was engaged in a campaign in July 2016, https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfwzhq0vVJKKFBMn_NEpsuFyr5F43N3ji-SJxFrKrhNOJxuXg/viewform?link_id=3&can_id=2304a48b2891e77b9b6c14d1ce535f4f&source=email-national-call-in-day-for-berta-caceres-act-today-assassinations-continue-in-honduras&email_referrer=national-call-in-day-for-berta-caceres-act-today-assassinations-continue-in-honduras&email_subject=national-call-in-day-for-berta-c_ceress-act-today-assassinations-continue-in-honduras, saying, "Join us and activists across the US in calling your Representative NOW, to ask him/her to co-sponsor the Berta Cáceres Human Rights in Honduras Act, HR 5474. (See the call script below the following text.)

Congressional Switchboard: (202) 224-3121

This week marks the three-year anniversary of the murder of Indigenous leader Tomás García by the Honduran military during a peaceful protest against the Agua Zarca Dam. A community leader and father of seven, Tomás is just one of far too many Hondurans persecuted and murdered by the Honduran security forces for simply standing up for their rights. Indigenous leader Berta Cáceres herself was arrested by the Honduran military on trumped up charges in an attempt to discredit and silence her. When that didn’t work, she was murdered.

Army Major Mariano Díaz - a graduate of the TESON special forces training course created by the US Army Rangers - has been arrested and charged in Berta’s murder, raising serious concerns regarding the chain of command. To that end, COPINH (the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras, which Berta co-founded) and Berta’s family insist there must be an international, independent investigation into the higher levels of the Honduran government and Armed Forces to ensure all those who ordered the murder are also prosecuted.
The Honduran security forces have also been linked to numerous murders of campesinos (small farmers) in the Bajo Aguán region of Honduras, and a recent article published in The Guardian reveals that Berta, as well as prominent campesino leaders in the Aguán, “appeared on a hit list distributed to US-trained special forces units of the Honduran military.”

After she won the 2015 Goldman Environmental Prize, Berta Cáceres met with members of the US Congress and asked them to stop financing and supporting the repressive Honduran government, including its security forces. A few weeks ago, Tomás Gómez Membreño, a close colleague of Berta’s, traveled to Washington, DC to do the same, remarking that Berta had been in DC a year earlier to inform them about Tomás García and others who had been murdered. Now it was Tomás Gómez’s turn to tell them about Berta’s murder. He mentioned that if the support for the Honduran regime didn’t stop, someone else would have to come next year with news of his murder. And he said they would keep coming and denouncing murder after murder of Indigenous and social movement leaders in Honduras until there was nobody left.

And just days ago, yet another community leader actively opposing a major hydroelectric project in Lenca territory, Lesbia Yaneth Urquía, was murdered in the department of La Paz.

How many more people must be killed before Congress stops financing and training the repressive Honduran security forces?

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WORLD DEVELOPMENTS

Environmental Developments

Nika Knight, "Rising Tide of 'Politically Acceptable' Killings Spells Danger for Environmentalists Worldwide: More than three people were slain each week in 2015 for 'protecting the land, forests, and rivers,' a new report reveals," Common Dreams, Monday, June 20, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/20/rising-tide-politically-acceptable-killings-spells-danger-environmentalists, reported, "Environmental activists are being murdered for their work in record numbers, a new report finds, as 2015 saw a stunning 185 people killed—more than three people each week—for resisting destructive industries and the exploitation of land and water.

'It is necessary to defend the land, for us the poor people, because the land is our own bank. If we lose it we have lost the world.'

—Sima Mattia, Malen Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA) of Sierra Leone

The report (pdf) from U.K.-based human rights group Global Witness, titled 'On Dangerous Ground,' found that '[a]s demand for products like timber, minerals and palm oil continues, governments, companies and criminal gangs are exploiting land with little regard for the people who live on it.'

'Increasingly, communities that take a stand are finding themselves in the firing line of companies' private security, state forces and a thriving market for contract killers,' wrote the rights group.

The 2015 death toll marked a 59 percent increase from 2014, and represented more than double the number of journalists killed for their work that same year.

Mining and extractive industries were linked to the highest number of deaths, at 42.
The deadliest countries for land defenders were Brazil (50 murders), the Philippines (33), and Colombia (29). Of the total, 67 victims were Indigenous people. Global Witness also noted that because of the remote location of many of these vulnerable communities, the numbers presented in the report are likely an underestimation of the true global tally of activist deaths.

'For every killing we are able to document,' the group wrote, 'others cannot be verified, or go unreported. And for every life lost, many more are blighted by ongoing violence, threats and discrimination.'

The report includes numerous first-hand accounts from activists threatened with violence because of their work.

'On September 1, at around 3am, the killers came,' Michelle Campos, land defender in the Philippines, told her story to Global Witness. "They woke the people up and forced them to gather in the basketball court. They prevented Tatay Emok from leaving... tied his hands and feet, slit his throat, shot his chest, and left him dead. They told us to leave our community in two days or else they will finish us all.'

'On September 1, at around 3am, the killers came. They woke the people up and forced them to gather in the basketball court. They prevented Tatay Emok from leaving... tied his hands and feet, slit his throat, shot his chest, and left him dead. They told us to leave our community in two days or else they will finish us all.'—Michelle Campos, land defender in the Philippines

Justice for the victims is scarce, Global Witness observed: 'Across the world, collusion between state and corporate interests shield many of those responsible for the killings. In cases that are well documented we found 16 were related to paramilitary groups, 13 to the army, 11 to the police and 11 to private security—strongly implying state or company links to the killings. There was little evidence that the
authorities either fully investigated the crimes, or took actions to bring the perpetrators to account.’

Moreover, the organization discovered another alarming trend: ‘while impunity for perpetrators prevails,' Global Witness wrote, "the criminalization of activists is becoming more commonplace, particularly in African countries. Governments and powerful business interests use their influence to marginalize defenders and turn public opinion against them, branding their actions as 'anti-development.'"

‘Killing has become politically acceptable to achieve economic goals,' the report quoted Felipe Milanez, former deputy editor of National Geographic Brazil, as saying. 'I've never seen, working for the past 10 years in the Amazon, a situation so bad.'

The report was dedicated to Berta Cáceres, the Indigenous environmental activist in Honduras who organized her community against a proposed megadam project and was assassinated in March, a killing widely believed to be politically motivated. Her family and supporters have called for an independent investigation into her death, but their demands have thus far fallen on deaf ears.

Yet so many environment and land defenders, despite the mounting danger, are committed to their cause.

'It is necessary to defend the land, for us the poor people, because the land is our own bank. If we lose it we have lost the world,’ said Sima Mattia, secretary of the Malen Land Owners and Users Association (MALOA) of Sierra Leone.

Global Witness called on the international community to combat the rising bloodshed, observing that ‘[p]rotecting land and environmental defenders is vital—not only as a matter of justice and basic human rights, but for our collective survival.'"

Emily J. Gertz, "New Study Predicts an Intolerably Hot World: Researchers say that unless fossil fuels are kept in the ground, global temperatures could rise nearly 12 degrees Fahrenheit by 2300," Take Part, May 23, 2016, http://www.takepart.com/article/2016/05/23/high-heat-global-warming-fossil-renewable-energy, reported, "Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren may live on a planet even hotter than we feared if countries fail to slash carbon emissions now, according to a new study.

'Our key finding is that if we continue to burn our remaining fossil fuel resources, the Earth will encounter a profound degree of global warming, of 6.4 to 9.5 degrees Celsius [about eight to 12 degrees Fahrenheit] over 20th-century averages by 2300,’ said Katarzyna Tokarska, a climate scientist at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia, who led the study. The Arctic's mean temperature could rise 19 to 25 degrees Fahrenheit over the next century if such trends continue.

Sea levels, which are on a trajectory to rise one to three feet by the end of the century, would increase catastrophically under such high temperatures, drowning coastlines and low-lying regions that are home to most of the world's population. Food supplies and farming worldwide would be disrupted, potentially throwing tens of millions of people back into poverty.

 Based on current climate trends alone, a recent Princeton University study suggested that up to 200 million people, including many children, could become environmental refugees in the next half-century.

Some earlier studies with relatively simple ocean and land vegetation modeling have suggested that climate change–driven heat increases would flatten out over time despite rising carbon emissions. But Tokarska and her colleagues, using more detailed ocean and plant-cover scenarios, found a linear relationship—that is, as long as the total amount of carbon in the atmosphere keeps rising, so will the temperature."

'Tokarska said the research, which was published Monday in the journal Nature Climate Change, represents 'the worst-case scenario.'

'The results suggest that it would be better to do something now,' she said, 'and now is the time to do it.'

The study appears on the heels of record-setting April heat. Scientists from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced last week that global temperatures ran 1.43 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th-century average, the 12th consecutive month temperatures hit a record high.

The Arctic saw even stronger warming, with temperatures in Alaska between January and April averaging more than 11 degrees higher than the historic average."

"Her field research has shown, for instance, that land-based emissions of the potent greenhouse gas methane from the Arctic will likely increase dramatically as the region continues to heat up.
To have a chance of keeping warming at or below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, said Rooney-Varga, use of coal, oil, and natural gas must end between 2050 and 2070. 'That seems like it might be kind of far off. The reality is it's actually a very pressing deadline,' she said. 'Think of a building built today, expected to remain functional beyond 2065. If it is not built to maximize energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, expensive retrofits or abandonment before the end of its useful life would be needed to meet our climate goals. The same is true for power plants and energy transmission and transportation infrastructure. The faster we act, the less expensive and reckless our transition away from fossil fuels will be.'

Catrina Rorke, director of energy policy at the R Street Institute, a libertarian think tank, said her organization advocates a universal tax on carbon emissions as the best way to encourage low- and no-carbon development, with the money collected used to lower taxes elsewhere.

Lauren McCauley, "The Earth Just Experienced the Hottest Month on the Books, Period: Plus, scientists say there's a '99 percent chance of a new annual record in 2016,'" Common Dreams, Monday, August 15, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/15/earth-just-experienced-hottest-month-books-period, reported, On Monday it was confirmed that the Earth has broken an ominous climate milestone amid a wave of troubling records: July 2016 was the hottest recorded month—ever.

According to new NASA data, the global mean surface temperatures last month were 0.84° Celsius (1.51° Fahrenheit) above average and was the warmest July in their data set, which dates back to 1880.

This marks the 10th straight month to set a new monthly warming record, based on NASA’s analysis. "Every month so far this year has been record hot," reported Climate Central’s Andrea Thompson. 'In NASA’s data, that streak goes back to October 2015, which was the first month in its data set that was more than 1°C hotter than average.'

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) releases its monthly temperature report on Wednesday and it is likely theirs will reflect a 15-month streak of record-shattering heat. (Some previous reporting on monthly records here, here, here, and here.)

What’s more, because July is typically the hottest month of the year, it stands that July 2016 was "the warmest month of any in a data record that can be extended back to the nineteenth century," according to the U.K.-based Copernicus Climate Change Service (CCCS), which last week published similar temperature results.

CCCS explained:

Global temperature usually peaks in July, when the land masses of the northern hemisphere are on average at their warmest. It varies by more than 3° C over the course of each year. The largest recent deviation from this annual cycle occurred in February this year, but July was still more than 0.5° C warmer than the 1981-2010 average for the month. This made July 2016 the warmest month of any in a data record that can be extended back to the nineteenth century.

'These record breaking extremes are the result of a cocktail of weather phenomenon and human activity,' said CCCS head Jean-Noël Thépaut. 'There are higher than average temperatures over the vast majority of land and sea masses.'

Referencing the wildfires, heat-waves, marine 'hot blobs,' and other extreme weather events currently ravaging the planet and its inhabitants, Thépaut adds: 'We’re already seeing the human cost of hotter conditions.'

The year 2015 was declared the hottest on record and scientists have said that 2016 will likely be even hotter. Announcing NASA’s July data, climate scientist Gavin Schmidt had this to say about the likelihood of another record-smashing year:

July data are out, and what do you know, still 99% chance of a new annual record in 2016."

Andrea Germanos, "UN Assessment: Global Destruction of Mother Earth on Fast Track: Without a change in current trends, 'the state of the world’s environment will continue to decline,'" Common Dreams, May 20, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/20/un-assessment-global-destruction-mother-earth-fast-track, reported, "With no region of the Earth untouched by the ravages of environmental destruction, the state of the world's natural resources is in a rapid downward spiral, a comprehensive assessment by the United Nations has found.

Published Thursday, Global Environmental Outlook from the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)
involved the expertise of more than 1,200 scientists and over 160 governments, and exposes through reports on each of the world's six regions that the rate of environmental deterioration is occurring faster than previously thought—and can only be halted with swift action.

'It is essential that we understand the pace of environmental change that is upon us,' stated UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner.

One threat many of the world's inhabitants are facing is that of water scarcity. For North America (pdf), for example, it 'is of increasing concern,' though it's just one of many 'worsening pressures.'

The report points to the recent five-year drought around Texas—a problem exacerbated by climate change. It also notes how the impacts of climate change were vividly felt when Hurricane Sandy struck in 2012.

'The 30 centimeters of sea level rise off New York City since 1900 likely expanded Hurricane Sandy's flood area by approximately 65 square kilometers, flooding the homes of more than 80,000 additional people in New York and New Jersey alone,' UNEP states, adding: 'Climate change is generating impacts across the region, and aggressive hydrocarbon extraction methods bring the possibility of increased emissions, water use and induced seismicity. The coastal and marine environment is under increasing threat from nutrient loads, ocean acidification, ocean warming, sea level rise, and new forms of marine debris.'

And even with successful efforts to rein in carbon emissions, the outlook for the region isn't bright, the report notes:

A wide range of potentially catastrophic impacts are built into the near and medium term climate, so that climate change impacts are highly likely to increase regardless of how fast the region reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and how fast it supports global emissions reductions. The consequences for human lives and livelihoods will depend on measures to adapt to climate change and increase resilience that, while showing signs of promise, are not yet sufficient to meet the threats. The region has been surprised by the emergence of major failures in traditional environmental issues, such as drinking water safety, suggesting that past successes are in jeopardy.

Or take the Latin American and Caribbean region (pdf), where greenhouse gas emissions are growing, a problem fueled in part by agriculture. UNEP notes:

Agriculture has had a strong impact on the emission of nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide. Nitrous oxide emissions - from soils, leaching and runoff, direct emissions, and animal manure - increased by about 29 per cent between 2000 and 2010. The abundance of beef and dairy cattle in the region has also increased methane emissions, which grew by 19 per cent between 2000 and 2010.

Andean glaciers, which provide vital water resources for millions of people, are shrinking and an increase in the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events are affecting economies.

In Asia and the Pacific, meanwhile,

Increasing unsustainable consumption patterns have led to worsening air pollution, water scarcity and waste generation, threatening human and environmental health. Increased demand for fossil fuels and natural resources - extensive agriculture, palm oil and rubber plantations, aquaculture and the illegal trade in wildlife - are causing environmental degradation and biodiversity loss.

Spreading desertification is a key threat for West Asia, while Africa's land degradation, due, in part, to deforestation, are among the environmental challenges for those regions.

And, of course, there's the Arctic region—'a barometer for change in the rest of the world' —with dropping levels of summer sea ice extent and glacier ice loss.

Among the recommendations UNEP calls for are scaling back fossil fuel dependency and increasing sustainable infrastructure investments.

While the UN body said there was still time to address many of the threats, urgent action, it stressed, was key.

'If current trends continue and the world fails to enact solutions that improve current patterns of production and consumption, if we fail to use natural resources sustainably, then the state of the world's environment will continue to decline,' Steiner said, emphasizing the urgency 'to work with nature instead of against it to tackle the array of environmental threats that face us.'"

Tom Randall, "Climate Records Keep Shattering with Hottest April in 12th Record-Setting Month," Insurance Journal, May 20, 2016,
http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/international/2016/05/20/409307.htm, reported, "The number of climate records broken in the last few years is stunning. But here's a new measure of misery: Not only did we just experience the hottest April in 137 years of record keeping, but it was the 12th consecutive month to set a new record.

It’s been relentless. May 2015 was the hottest May in records dating back to 1880. That was followed by the hottest June. Then came a record July, August, September, October, November, December, January, February, March—and, we learned from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Wednesday—the hottest April. In an age of rising temperatures, monthly heat records have become all too common. Still, a string of 12 of them is without precedent.

Perhaps even more remarkable is the magnitude of the new records. The extremes of recent months are such that we’re only four months into 2016 and already there’s a greater than 99 percent likelihood that this year will be the hottest on record, according to Gavin Schmidt, who directs NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

If NASA's Schmidt is right, 2016 will be the third consecutive year to set a new global heat record—the first time that's ever happened. So far, 15 of the hottest 16 years ever measured have come in the 21st century."


'What concerns me most is that we didn't anticipate these temperature jumps,' David Carlson, director of the World Meteorological Organization's (WMO) climate research program, told Thompson Reuters Foundation late Monday. 'We predicted moderate warmth for 2016, but nothing like the temperature rises we've seen.'

'Massive temperature hikes, but also extreme events like floodings, have become the new normal,' Carlson added. 'The ice melt rates recorded in the first half of 2016, for example—we don't usually see those until later in the year.'

Indeed, extreme weather events are currently wreaking havoc around the world.

In Southern California, firefighters are battling one of the "most extreme" fires the region has ever seen. The so-called sand fire had consumed 38,346 acres as of Wednesday morning and forced the evacuations of 10,000 homes, and one person has died.

Meteorologist Eric Holthaus reported on the unusual fire last Friday in Pacific Standard:

The fire, which started as a small brush fire along the side of Highway 14 near Santa Clarita, California, on Friday, quickly spread out of control under weather conditions that were nearly ideal for explosive growth. The fire doubled in size overnight on Friday, and then doubled again during the day on Saturday.

'The fire behavior was some of the most extreme I've seen in the Los Angeles area in my career,' says Stuart Palley, a wildfire photographer based in Southern California. 'The fire was running all over the place. ... It was incredible to see.'" There were multiple reports of flames 50 to 100 feet high on Saturday, which is unusual for fires in the region.

Time-lapse footage filmed on July 23 showed the fire's tall flames and rapid growth.

'Since late 2011," Holthaus explained, 'Los Angeles County has missed out on about three years' worth of rain. Simply put: Extreme weather and climate conditions have helped produce this fire's extreme behavior.'

The fire is an omen of things to come, according to Holthaus: "Even if rainfall amounts don't change in the future, drought and wildfire severity likely will because warmer temperatures are more efficient at evaporating what little moisture does fall. That, according to scientists, means California’s risk of a mega-drought — spanning decades or more — is, or will be soon, the highest it's been in millennia."

As University of California professor Anthony LeRoy Westerling wrote Tuesday in the Guardian: "A changing climate is transforming our landscape, and fire is one of the tools it uses. Expect to see more of
it, in more places, as temperatures rise.'

Meanwhile, in India's northeast, Reuters reported Tuesday that over 1.2 million people 'have been hit by floods which have submerged hundreds of villages, inundated large swaths of farmland and damaged roads, bridges and telecommunications services, local authorities said on Tuesday.'

 Reuters added that nearly 90,000 people are currently being housed in 220 relief camps. 'Incessant monsoon rains in the tea and oil-rich state of Assam have forced the burgeoning Brahmaputra river and its tributaries to burst their banks—affecting more than half of the region's 32 districts,' the wire service reported.

 Local officials also told the media that 'more than 60 percent of region's famed Kaziranga National Park, home to two-thirds of the world's endangered one-horned rhinoceroses, is also under water, leaving the animals more vulnerable to poaching.'

An unusually heavy monsoon season has also devastated communities in northern China, AFP reported Monday, with nearly 300 dead or missing and hundreds of thousands displaced after catastrophic flooding hit the region.

And in Iraq, temperatures last week reached such unprecedented heights that a chef literally fried an egg on the sidewalk. The TODAY show tweeted footage of the incident:

Stateside, the heat dome continues to inflict scorching summer temperatures across the country. In one Arizona locale, for example, meteorologists are predicting a scorching high temperature on Wednesday of 114° Fahrenheit. One Arizona resident posted a video Tuesday desperately asking people to pray for the state as it faces more hot weather. 'It is still six billion degrees,' the resident lamented. "Lord, we need you."

Yet there appears to be little relief in sight: for the first time ever, USA Today reported Tuesday, the U.S. federal government's climate prediction center is forecasting hotter-than-normal temperatures for the next three months for 'every square inch' of the country."

NASA scientists announced on Tuesday that global temperatures so far this year were much higher than in the first half of 2015. Gavin Schmidt, the director of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies, said that while the first six months of 2015 made it the hottest half-year ever recorded, '2016 really has blown that out of the water.'

He said calculations showed there was a 99 percent probability that the full year would be hotter than 2015."


Sizzling at 51 degrees Celsius (123.8 degrees F), the temperature in the city of Phalodi in the western state of Rajasthan topped the nation's previous record of 50.6 Celsius set in 1956.

CNN reports:

The IMD [India Meteorological Department] has issued a red-level alert for Rajasthan as well as for other states like Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, where temperatures, despite not having crossed the 50-degree mark, are higher than average.

India has recorded higher than normal temperatures throughout 2016. Many areas are experiencing severe heat waves and state governments estimate more than 370 people killed so far. And relief isn't coming soon.

'Severe heatwave conditions will prevail in north, west India and central India for the next 10 days,'
the IMD warns.

According to Laxman Singh Rathore, director general of the IMD, look to climate change for the cause in the increasing temperatures. 'It has been observed that since 2001, places in northern India, especially in Rajasthan, are witnessing a rising temperature trend every year. The main reason is the excessive use of energy and emission of carbon dioxide. Factors like urbanization and industrialization too have added to the global warming phenomenon,' he stated.

Weeks of high temperatures have "also led to acute water shortage in many areas of central and western India which has seen water riots, government-monitored rationing and armed guards at reservoirs," the Hindustan Times reports.

There is a prolonged drought as well, withering crops and sprouting hopelessness in farmers. 'Constant failure of crops. Very low produce. He couldn't recover the investments, could not pay back the bank loans. That's why he killed himself,' said the brother of 41-year-old cotton and sugarcane farmer Srikrishna Pandit Agee who hanged himself this month. His was among the roughly 400 farmer suicides that have already occurred since the beginning of the year.

Dnyaneshwar Jadhav says his brother Tukaram, a small cotton farmer in the state of Maharashtra, took his own life over the distress of loans and failed crop yields. 'When I look into the well, I feel like dying. Life is such a struggle,' Dnyaneshwar said to NPR. 'We used to earn over $300 for our cotton, we now get less than $100 because the yield is so small.'

Last year offers a grim picture of what could be in store.

In 2015, after a heatwave claimed the lives of some 2,500 people and was followed by low monsoon rains, India's earth sciences minister said, "Let us not fool ourselves that there is no connection between the unusual number of deaths from the ongoing heat wave and the certainty of another failed monsoon."

'It's not just an unusually hot summer, it is climate change,' he said at the time."


"'We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children,' is an oft-quoted proverb, frequently used to explain the importance of environmental preservation. Unsaid, however, is how much it will impact the next generation if the Earth is bequeathed in a lesser state.

Environmental campaigners NextGen Climate and public policy group Demos published a new study that attempts to quantify the true cost of not addressing climate change to the millennial generation and their children.

The Price Tag of Being Young: Climate Change and Millennials’ Economic Future (pdf) compares some of the high costs millennials will face in the 'new inequality economy'—such as student debt, childcare costs, stagnant wages, as well as financial and job insecurity—against the fiscal impacts of unmitigated global warming.

'The fact is,' the report states, 'unchecked climate change will impose heavy costs on millennials and subsequent generations, both directly in the form of reduced incomes and wealth, and indirectly through likely higher tax bills as extreme weather, rising sea levels, drought, heat-related health problems, and many other climate change-related problems take their toll on our society.'

The impacts from climate costs alone, the report finds, are 'comparable to Great Depression-era losses.' The study employs a model developed by researchers from Stanford University and University of California at Berkeley that measures the effects of rising temperatures on long-term economic growth and national productivity drawing on 50 years of data from 166 countries.

The 'no climate action' scenario found that by 2100 global per capita GDP will shrink by 23 percent relative to a scenario without climate change. The U.S. is estimated to take a 5 percent hit by 2050 that jumps to 36 percent by 2100 should no climate action occur.

This adds up to a loss of nearly $8.8 trillion in lifetime income for millennials and tens of trillions
for their children.

In comparison, the cost of climate inaction overshadows the significant losses from other economic burdens, such as student debt. The report states:

According to Demos calculations, for a median-earning college graduate with median student debt, the lifetime wealth loss due to student debt is approximately $113,000, which is 40 percent less than the $187,000 lifetime wealth loss of a college-educated, median-earning 21-year-old if we fail to act on climate change.

But when these myriad forces are stacked together, they add up to a staggering burden. The report further highlights **how climate inaction only exacerbates preexisting inequality**:

Communities of color and low-income communities will be hit the hardest, as these communities have fewer resources to deal with the impacts of climate change [...]. Further, these same communities have always had the highest exposure to coal-burning power plants and other sources of fossil fuel pollution, with sharply negative health impacts [...]

If the transition to a clean energy economy is delayed, or if it is implemented unequally in keeping with historical patterns of racial exclusion, the fossil fuel economy will only deepen its toll on the health and well-being of America’s poorest and most vulnerable communities.

What’s more, the report notes, ‘the economic risks are compounded even further since inaction on climate change means that we are missing out on a major opportunity for much-needed new investment and millions of new jobs by transitioning to clean energy.’

'For the millennial generation,' the study concludes, 'today's status quo on climate and inequality is not only unjust but it is also unsustainable.'

Democratic heavyweight and NextGen Climate president Tom Steyer said the report underscores the importance of the upcoming presidential election between Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump.

'When we look at the consequences of this election, the choice between the candidates could not be more stark,' Steyer said, 'and the voice of millennial voters has never been more important.'

Sara Jordan, policy manager at NextGen Climate agreed, writing, 'Millennials have the numbers to elect climate champions this fall, but we have to show up to vote. Our future depends on it.' - And it may be that this report is an underestimate of the costs, given all the positive feedbacks causing warming and climate change to be faster than predicted.


The death toll in Xingtai, an industrial city in Hebei Province, rose sharply on Saturday, days after a wall of water descended on one village in the middle of the night with little or no warning, according to the Beijing News. In addition to the 25 people in Xingtai who were confirmed dead, 13 were missing."

Nadia Prupis, "Pacific Islands Nations Consider 'Pioneering' Treaty to Ban Fossil Fuels," Common Dreams, July 14, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/07/14/pacific-islands-nations-consider-pioneering-treaty-ban-fossil-fuels, reported, 'This is an avenue where the Pacific could again show or build on the moral and political leadership...to tackle climate change'

"Pacific island nations are reportedly considering the world's first treaty to ban fossil fuels, which would require signatories to work toward renewable energy targets and prohibit any expansion of fossil fuel mines.

The leaders of 14 nations on the front lines of climate change are considering the treaty after an annual summit in the Solomon Islands known as the Pacific Islands Development Forum (PIDF). The treaty would establish a 'Pacific framework for renewable energy' and require 'universal access' to clean energy by 2030. It would also bind leaders not to approve any new coal or other fossil fuel mines nor provide subsidies for extraction or consumption.

'They seemed convinced that this is an avenue where the Pacific could again show or build on the
moral and political leadership that they've shown earlier in their efforts to tackle climate change,' PIDF climate change adviser Mahendra Kumar told the Guardian on Thursday.

The Guardian explains:

The PIDF was formed in 2013, spearheaded by Fiji, and excludes Australia and New Zealand, which are members of the older Pacific Islands Forum. There were claims at the time that Australia and New Zealand attempted to sabotage the group's first meeting.

[....] But the treaty being considered by the newer group embraces the aspirational 1.5C target set at Paris, setting mitigation targets that are in line with it, as well as establishing adaptation mechanisms to cope with the effects of that warming.

Kumar said the treaty could be adopted in 2018, though it was unlikely to happen earlier. The model treaty was crafted by the Pacific Island Climate Action Network (PICAN). According to the Guardian, the coalition of nongovernmental organizations wrote in a report that "The rationale is that potential Parties to the Treaty already possess the political courage and commitment needed to adopt a flagship legal instrument that is sufficiently ambitious to prevent catastrophic changes in the global climate system."

As Common Dreams reported in May, five Pacific Islands that make up part of the Solomon Islands' archipelago have already been lost to rising seas and coastal erosion associated with climate change. Residents have also been forced to relocate due to encroaching waters.

In 2015, the Alliance of Small Island States, a coalition of the most vulnerable Pacific Islands nations, demanded a moratorium on new coal mines.

PICAN's report continues: 'As there is currently no treaty that bans or phases out fossil fuels, the Treaty would set a pioneering example to the rest of the world.'"

Thom Hartmann, "The Mainstream Media's Climate Malpractice," Smirking Chimp, June 5, 2016, http://www.opednews.com/articles/The-Mainstream-Media-s-Cli-by-Thom-Hartmann-Climate-Crisis_Flooding_Malpractice_Media-Complicity-160605-828.html, commented and reported, "The corporate media in this country need to stop kowtowing to vested fossil fuel advertisers that want to keep the US public in the dark, and they need to start telling people the truth about the connections between extreme weather events and climate change. We can't expect the US public to rally to aggressively address our climate crisis if the mainstream media refuses to talk about the realities of climate change."

A state of disaster has been declared in 31 flooded Texas counties as rivers in the region are cresting at historic highs.

Six people have died, up to four more people are missing and hundreds of people were evacuated from their homes in Houston as the Brazos River reached over 54 feet in Fort Bend County.

On the East Coast, the National Hurricane Center declared that Tropical Depression Bonnie, which caused significant flash flooding in the US Southeast over Memorial Day weekend, has "revived" off the coast of North Carolina.

It's not just remarkable that Bonnie "revived" itself as a Tropical Depression -- it's remarkable that 2016 is the second year in a row that the Atlantic hurricane season has begun before June 1. Over in Europe meanwhile, the French government issued an orange alert in response to days of torrential rains that brought the Seine's water level to over five meters.

As a result, the Louvre announced earlier today that it was not admitting any more visitors to the museum and that the museum will be closed to the public on Friday so that staff can prepare for the worst.

Nine people in total have died across northern Europe as a result of the storms and subsequent flooding: Streets are submerged, schools have been forced to close, thousands of people have been evacuated and others have been stranded on their rooftops.

The Loiret region in France alone has gotten six weeks of rainfall in three days, and the situation in Europe has been described as "worse than the floods of 1910," which cost France roughly $1.5 billion in today's dollars.

And the mainstream media in this country is committing malpractice with their coverage of these events.

The simple fact is, these storms are directly connected to global climate change.
More specifically, these storms are directly related to the "water vapor positive feedback loop."

Right now according to climate scientist Kevin Trenberth, there is about 5 percent more water vapor in the atmosphere above the oceans than there was in 1968 when Richard Nixon was sworn in, thanks to the fact that the oceans have already warmed 1 degree Celsius.

We know that the planet is warming and that it's warming because of human activities: We rip fossil fuels out of the Earth and burn them into the atmosphere, we destroy our soils with industrial farming and we clear cut carbon-rich rainforests to plant fields of monocrops.

All of those activities have contributed to unprecedented, and unnatural, global warming during the last century and a half.

And as a result, the planet's atmosphere can hold more moisture than it could have in the absence of human-caused global warming."

The Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw of Isle de Jean Charles in southeastern Louisiana are about to become the lower continental 48 states to become climate refugees, as rising oceans will soon make their home uninhabitable because of increasing flooding. A $48 million federal grant has been allocated to resettle its residents inland as a community. That will keep the people together, but with them living in a very different location, and leaving open the question of how the residents will now make a living will be approached, and possibly solved, is likely to bring culture change. A key concern is how holistic the process of relocation will be to appropriately meet economic and cultural concerns (Coral Davenport and Campbell Robertson, "Resettling the First American 'Climate Refugees'," The New York Times, May 2, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/us/resettling-the-first-american-climate-refugees.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).

Nadia Prupis, "'Warning for the World': Five Pacific Islands Officially Lost to Rising Seas: The event is the first official confirmation of what the future could be under climate change, researchers say," Common Dreams, May 10, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/10/warning-world-five-pacific-islands-officially-lost-rising-seas, reported, “Five Pacific Islands have been swallowed by rising seas and coastal erosion, in what Australian researchers say is the first confirmation of what climate change will bring.

The submerged region, which was part of the Solomon Islands archipelago and was above water as recently as 2014, was not inhabited by humans.

However, a further six islands are also experiencing 'severe shoreline recession,' which is forcing the populations in those settlements—some of which have existed since at least 1935—to flee, according to a study published last week in Environmental Research Letters.

Researchers used aerial and satellite images dating back to 1947 to track coastal erosion across 33 islands. At least 11 islands across the northern region of the archipelago "have either totally disappeared over recent decades or are currently experiencing severe erosion," the study found.

'This is the first scientific evidence...that confirms the numerous anecdotal accounts from across the Pacific of the dramatic impacts of climate change on coastlines and people,' the researchers wrote at Scientific American on Monday.

Lead author Dr. Simon Albert, a senior research fellow at the University of Queensland, told Agence France-Presse that rates of sea level rise in the Solomons are almost three times higher than the global average.

The five that sank ranged in size from one to five hectares (roughly two to 12 acres) and supported "dense tropical vegetation that was at least 300 years old," the researchers wrote for Scientific American, calling the event "a warning for the world."

Rates of sea level rise were substantially greater in areas exposed to high wave energy, the researchers found, 'indicating a synergistic interaction between sea-level rise and waves.'

That means islands exposed to higher wave energy in addition to sea level rise face faster and more widespread loss than sheltered islands.

They wrote:

These higher rates are in line with what we can expect across much of the Pacific in the second half of this century as a result of human-induced sea-level rise. Many areas will experience long-term rates
of sea-level rise similar to that already experienced in Solomon Islands in all but the very lowest-emission scenarios.

Understanding the factors that put certain regions at greater risk for coastal erosion is vital to help frontline communities adapt, the study concluded.

The families that have already been forced to relocate did so using their own limited resources and received little to no assistance from their government or international climate funds, the researchers noted. The exodus had the additional impact of fragmenting established communities of hundreds of people.

Melchior Mataki, who chairs the Solomon Islands' Natural Disaster Council, told the researchers, 'This ultimately calls for support from development partners and international financial mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund. This support should include nationally driven scientific studies to inform adaptation planning to address the impacts of climate change in Solomon Islands.'

The Solomon Islands were among the 175 nations that signed the Paris climate agreement in New York last month."

Deirdre Fulton, "Surveying Damage on World Oceans Day, Experts Say Worst is Yet to Come: 'We cannot continue to treat our seas as an out-of-sight, out-of-mind dumping ground,'" Common Dreams, June 08, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/08/surveying-damage-world-oceans-day-experts-say-worst-yet-come, reported, "Threatened by climate change, pollution, overfishing, and oil spills, the world's oceans are suffering, scientists warned on Wednesday—the day designated by the United Nations as one to honor the deep blue sea.

From widespread coral bleaching to floundering fish species to garbage stretching across the water's surface and hundreds of feet down, it's clear that human activity is taking its toll on the world's oceans, which cover more than 70 percent of the Earth's surface.

Indeed, dead coral reefs 'are perhaps the starkest reminders—like the melting Arctic—that a thickening blanket of greenhouse gases is irrevocably changing the face of the Earth,' Inside Climate News wrote on Wednesday.

'And, as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coral Reef Watch warned in April, those 'ghostly underwater graveyards' are only going to grow.'

'There's even worse news ahead,' Mark Eakin, coordinator of NOAA's Coral Reef Watch, told Inside Climate News. 'There are a lot of places with similar mortality rates. We've got bleaching going on from the east coast of Africa to French Polynesia. Right now, it's basically covering half the Southern Hemisphere.'

A separate study published Tuesday in the journal Nature found that overfishing and polluted runoff from farms and lawns made corals more vulnerable to above-average temperatures.

'Although the research showed that controlling pollution and overfishing can help corals survive in a warming world,' John Upton reported on the study for Climate Central, "the scientists said curbing pollution from fuel burning, farming and deforestation, which is causing water temperatures to rise, would be the best way to protect them in the long run.'

Deron Burkepile, a University of California-Santa Barbara ecologist involved with the research, told Upton: 'We have to start controlling carbon emissions and start cooling our planet again for coral reefs to really have a chance in the future.'

In fact, Inside Climate News warned that '[a]t the current rate of emissions, the average global temperature is expected to rise at least 2.5 degrees Celsius by 2100, a level that would be fatal to nearly all reefs.'

Even a temperature rise of 1.5 degrees by 2050 would put 90 percent of coral reefs at risk, said Michiel Schaeffer, a scientist with the Berlin-based research institution Climate Analytics.

Meanwhile, the ocean conservation group Oceana used World Oceans Day to warn of how 'rubbish dumping and waste pollution'—the impacts of which it has witnessed during its many expeditions at sea—'is hampering global conservation efforts to protect marine habitats and to restore depleted fish stocks.'

'The group says it has seen marine litter far below the water's surface, a 'worrying problem [that] is often overlooked in reports on plastic pollution, which tend to focus on waste floating on the sea surface or in shallow waters.'

'[W]e cannot continue to treat our seas as an out-of-sight, out-of-mind dumping ground,' said
Lasse Gustavsson, executive director of Oceana in Europe. As ocean scientist and explorer Sylvia Earle wrote Wednesday at the Daily Beast: 'If the ocean is in trouble, so are we. It is time to take care of the ocean as if our lives depend on it, because they do.'

**Australia continues to shut down climate change research.** Michelle Innis, "Australia to Lay Off Leading Scientist on Sea Levels," The New York Times, May 17, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/world/australia/australia-to-lay-off-leading-scientist-on-sea-levels.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "A pre- eminent scientist in the field of rising global sea levels has been given notice of his dismissal as part of deep cuts at Australia’s national science agency that will reduce the country’s role in global climate research.

The scientist, John Church, confirmed Tuesday that he was one of 275 scientists whom the agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, or Csiro, said would be laid off.

Deirdre Fulton, "'On Borrowed Time': Human Activity Puts One in Five Plant Species at Risk of Extinction: Habitat loss from agriculture and deforestation is a leading threat to world's plants," Common Dreams, May 10, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/10/borrowed-time-human-activity-puts-one-five-plant-species-risk-extinction, reported, "Human activity, from the razing of forests to the spewing of carbon, has imperiled large swaths of the plant kingdom, according to a landmark survey of the world's flora published Tuesday.

The State of the World's Plants (pdf) report 'provides, for the first time, a baseline assessment of our current knowledge on the diversity of plants on earth, the global threats these plants currently face, and the policies in place and their effectiveness in dealing with these threats,' according to scientists at the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) in Kew, London.

Culling from three previously-existing databases, the botanists estimate that—excluding algae, mosses, liverworts, and hornworts—there are 390,900 plant species worldwide, of which approximately 369,400 are flowering and about 31,000 have a documented use for medicines, food, and materials.

And they find that fully one in five—21 percent—is at risk of extinction due to threats associated with climate change, land-use change, invasive plants, and diseases.

As the Guardian reports, 'the biggest factors threatening plant species with extinction are the destruction of habitats for farming (31%)—such as palm oil production and cattle ranching—deforestation for timber (21%), and construction of buildings and infrastructure (13%).'

While the botanists found global warming currently playing a smaller role in species-extinction (4%), they note that 'the true impacts of climate change might not be seen for some time.'

'[B]ased on what is known about plants' environmental tolerances and the predicted climate change by 2050...models predict that many plant species may be on 'borrowed time,'' the report reads. 'These models predict that suitable climate space will become so severely restricted for many species that widespread climate-related extinctions are expected.'

However, the news from Kew isn't all bad.

The study also found that 2,034 new plant species were discovered in 2015, including a massive leguminous tree (Gilbertiodendron maximum), more than 90 species of begonia, 13 new species from the onion family, and a close relative of sweet potato (Ipomoea batatas). The global assessment will now be carried out annually, allowing scientists to monitor how plants are changing over time.

'Given how absolutely fundamental plants are for human well-being, for food, fuel, climate regulation, it's pretty important we know what's going on,' said Kathy Willis, director of science at the RBG. 'Unless we look at this information—the knowledge gaps—and then do something about it, we are in a very perilous situation, if we ignore the thing that underpins all our human well-being.

I do find it extraordinary we worry about the state of the world’s birds,' Willis added, 'but we don’t worry about the state of the world’s plants.'"

that were destroying the atmosphere's protective ozone layer, scientists said Thursday that there were signs the atmosphere was on the mend.

The researchers said they had found “fingerprints” indicating that the seasonal ozone hole over Antarctica, a cause of concern since it was discovered in 1984, was getting smaller. Although the improvement has been slight so far, it is an indication that the Montreal Protocol — the 1987 treaty signed by almost every nation that phased out the use of chemicals known as chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs — is having its intended effect.

Full recovery of the ozone hole is not expected until the middle of the century."

Brent Harris, "A Coolant That Threatens to Heat Up the Climate," The New York Times, July 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/opinion/a-coolant-that-threatens-to-heat-up-the-climate.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Gases found in air-conditioners, refrigerators and aerosols are among the biggest threats to our climate. Pound for pound, these hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, can be vastly more powerful for planetary warming than carbon dioxide. World leaders are in Vienna to discuss these pollutants and should agree on a plan to quickly replace them with safer alternatives.

HFCs are on track to contribute up to 10 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. They have become widespread following the phaseout of another refrigerant and aerosol propellant, chlorofluorocarbons, under a 1987 climate treaty known as the Montreal Protocol. CFCs were rapidly depleting the planet’s ozone layer, which shields Earth from the sun's dangerous ultraviolet radiation.

The treaty has been enormously successful. Kofi Annan, the former secretary general of the United Nations, has called it “perhaps the single most successful international agreement.” Every member of the United Nations has ratified the protocol, and atmospheric concentrations of CFCs have begun to decrease. But the protocol's exclusive focus on stopping ozone depletion left a loophole. Industry swapped CFCs for HFCs, resulting in a 258 percent increase in the use of heat-trapping HFCs since 1990."


Jennifer Medina and Matt Richtel, "California’s Emissions Goal Is a ‘Milestone’ on Climate Efforts," The New York Times, August 25, 2016, , reported, "California will extend its landmark climate change legislation to 2030, a move that climate specialists say solidifies the state’s role as a leader in the effort to curb heat-trapping emissions.

Lawmakers have passed, and Gov. Jerry Brown has promised to sign, bills requiring the state to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 40 percent below 1990 levels.

Though the governor had already set a similar goal in an executive order, the legislation will lock the goals into law. The ambitious plan targets both power plants and vehicle emissions." Unfortunately, the increase in wildfires is increasing the state's carbon pollution, while reducing the trees and other plant life which absorb CO₂."

A study led by Robin L. Chadon working at the Rio de Janiero International Institute for Sustainability, published in May 2016, found that recently established forests on abandoned farm land in Latin America, if allowed to grow for 40 years, would likely be able to absorb at least 31 billion tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, enough to offset almost 20 years of CO₂ emissions in the region (Justin Gillis, "In Brazil, Forests Rise to Challenge Of Carbon Dioxide," The New York Times, May 17, 2016).

The terminal would have been the largest coal shipment facility on the West Coast, with a planned capacity to increase coal exports in the United States by 19 percent, according to the Sierra Club, the environmental group.


In Madagascar, an island nation off the eastern African coast and one of the world’s richest nations in biodiversity, the booming charcoal business is contributing to deforestation. It is expected to exacerbate the effects of climate change, which has already disrupted farming, fueled a migration to cities, and pushed many rural residents into the one thriving business left: charcoal." There are similar developments elsewhere in Africa.

Ian Urbina, "A Model for ‘Clean Coal’ Runs Off the Tracks:" A Mississippi project, a centerpiece of President Obama’s climate plan, has been plagued by problems that managers tried to conceal, and by cost overruns and questions of who will pay, *The New York Times*, July 5, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/05/science/kemper-coal-mississippi.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "The fortress of steel and concrete towering above the pine forest here is a first-of-its-kind power plant that was supposed to prove that “clean coal” was not an oxymoron — that it was possible to produce electricity from coal in a way that emits far less pollution, and to turn a profit while doing so.

The plant was not only a central piece of the Obama administration’s climate plan, it was also supposed to be a model for future power plants to help slow the dangerous effects of global warming. The project was hailed as a way to bring thousands of jobs to Mississippi, the nation’s poorest state, and to extend a lifeline to the dying coal industry.

The sense of hope is fading fast, however. The Kemper coal plant is more than two years behind schedule and more than $4 billion over its initial budget, $2.4 billion, and it is still not operational."

Nadia Prupis, "'Shocking,' 'Plain Stupid': Theresa May Shuts Climate Change Office," *Common Dreams*, July 15, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/07/15/shocking-plain-stupid-theresa-may-shuts-climate-change-office, reported, "Less than a day after becoming the U.K.’s unelected leader, Prime Minister Theresa May closed the government’s climate change office, a move instantly condemned as 'shocking' and 'plain stupid.'

May shuttered the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) on Thursday and moved responsibility for the environment to a new Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. The decision comes the same week as the U.K. government’s own advisers warned in a report that the nation was not ready for the inevitable consequences of climate change, including deadly heat waves and food and water shortages.

This is shocking news. Less than a day into the job and it appears that the new prime minister has already downgraded action to tackle climate change, one of the biggest threats we face,’ said Craig Bennett, CEO of the environmental group Friends of the Earth. ‘This week the government’s own advisors warned of ever growing risks to our businesses, homes and food if we don't do more to cut fossil fuel pollution."

Bennett wrote in an op-ed for the *Independent*:

Now, with Theresa May in power, we are looking for a clear commitment to policies that will put the country on track to meeting out Climate Change Act goals and to delivering the Paris climate change Agreement to keep global temperature rises to 1.5 degrees. But there is no department directly responsible for this.

[...] Time is running out to avert catastrophic climate change and to halt the decline of nature. This is about protecting people as well as the planet we live on. There is no time to lose for the new prime minister in changing path—and, thanks to David Cameron, so much time has already been lost.

Caroline Lucas, the Green Party's sole Member of Parliament (MP) in the House of Commons,
tweeted that the move was 'a serious backwards step' and told the Independent, 'The decision to shut down DECC is a deeply worrying move from Theresa May. Climate change is the biggest challenge we face, and it must not be an afterthought for the government.'

May also made several controversial appointments to her new post-Brexit cabinet, including naming her one-time rival for prime minister, Andrea Leadsom, as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Leadsom in 2015 served as Minister for Energy at the Department of Energy and Climate Change, during which she reportedly asked officials whether climate change was real. Environmental groups were distressed. Greenpeace executive director John Sauven said Thursday, 'The voting record and affiliation with climate skeptics of key cabinet appointees are deeply worrying. They show a lack of understanding posed by climate change to the UK and the world.'

'If we are to continue to have a key global role in environmental action, we need urgent reassurance from the new government that the hard won progress on climate and renewables targets, air pollution, and the protection of wildlife will not be sidelined or abandoned in the Brexit negotiations,' Sauven said.

And it was not just the advocacy sector that slammed the decision. Former Labor leader Ed Miliband tweeted, 'DECC abolition just plain stupid. Climate not even mentioned in new [department] title. Matters because departments shape priorities, shape outcomes.'

Stephen Devlin, an environmental economist at the New Economics Foundation, released a press statement titled 'We Can't Afford to Scrap DECC' wherein he described May's action as 'a terrible move' and said it 'signals a troubling de-prioritization of climate change by this government.'

'This reshuffle risks dropping climate change from the policy agenda altogether—a staggering act of negligence for which we will all pay the price,' Devlin said.

Michelle Innis, "In Shift, Australia Pledges More Resources for Climate Research," The New York Times, August 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/05/world/australia/climate-change-research-csiro.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "In a surprising about-face, the Australian government said on Thursday that new resources would be allocated to climate research at the country's science agency, months after the announcement of staff cutbacks that scientists said would jeopardize Australia's important role in the field.

The staff reduction at the agency, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, or Csiro, had drawn stinging criticism from scientists around the world, with a petition calling its work "critical and irreplaceable" in global climate science.

Among other contributions, the agency plays a leading role in an important ocean-monitoring program called Argo, and the location of its Cape Grim research station in Tasmania makes it uniquely valuable in gauging greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

The overall number of climate scientists at Csiro would rise to about 115 from 100, but that would be well short of the 140 working there before the cuts were announced in February."


The documents, Greenpeace said, showed that American trade negotiators had pressed their European counterparts to loosen important environmental and consumer protections, along with other provisions.

But American and European trade officials, while not denying the validity of the materials, insisted on Monday that the documents — 248 pages, which Greenpeace said amounted to two-thirds of the latest negotiating text — merely represented negotiating positions, and that the criticisms were off base.

Joe Romm, "Why Used Electric Car Batteries Could Be Crucial To A Clean Energy Future," Think Progress, May 9, http://thinkprogress.org/, reported, "Battery costs are plummeting to levels that make EVs a truly disruptive technology, as we’ve explained. That’s why electric vehicle (EV) sales are exploding world-wide, and why Tesla broke every record for pre-sales with its affordable ($35,000), 200+ mile range Model 3 last month.

But what you may not realize is that major EV makers — BMW, GM, Nissan, Toyota — are now exploring how much value their EV battery has for use in the electricity storage market after that battery can no longer meet the strict requirements for powering its car. This potential second life for EV batteries is a clean energy game changer for two reasons:

These used EV batteries hold the promise of much cheaper electricity storage for renewables than is available today.

If used EV batteries have value, then EV makers can charge less for their cars, making them even more affordable.

Together, these two factors make EVs even more disruptive than most people realize, particularly for enabling deep and rapid penetration of renewables in the 2020s.”

An experimental cluster of homes in Fontana, CA is being built with solar power and high efficiency construction to be energy neutral (Diane Cardwell, "Taking Aim at Free Energy," The New York Times, June 4, 2016).

An experiment storing carbon dioxide by dissolving it in water and injecting the water into appropriate kinds of rock, underway in Iceland, developed by scientists at Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University, has had initial success in rapidly sequestering large amounts of CO₂. Further research is necessary to determine if, and to what extent, the process is practical for large scale long term sequestration (Henry Fountain, "Project in 'Iceland for Storing Carbon Shows Promise," The New York Times, June 10, 2016).


Researchers used simulated sunlight to power a solar cell that converts atmospheric carbon dioxide directly into syngas, a combination of hydrogen gas and carbon monoxide that can be burned for energy or converted into liquid fuels."


If fuel prices remain low, and trucks continue to outsell cars, the industry will probably not meet the goal of 54.5 miles per gallon as a fleetwide average by 2025, but will probably come in at only about 50 miles a gallon, according to a report by the Department of Transportation and the Environmental Protection Agency."

The state of California investing in a growing network of stations to recharge hydrogen fuel cells

NASA, in June 2016, was preparing to test an electrically powered light plane that if successful could be a forerunner of less greenhouse gas polluting light aircraft (Kenneth Chang, "NASA Plans A Test Plane That Flies On Electricity," The New York Times, June 18, 2016).


Consider the numbers: India is home to more than 280 million cows, and 200 million more ruminant animals like sheep, goats, yaks and buffalo. According to an analysis of satellite data from the country’s space program, all those digestive tracts send 13 million tons of methane into the atmosphere every year — and pound for pound, methane traps 25 times as much heat as carbon dioxide does.

So reducing animal flatulence might actually do some good — especially in India, where there is little chance of cutting back the use of fossil fuels anytime soon. (In fact, the country expects to double its coal production by 2019.)"


But the agency stopped short of declaring a global health emergency, because a fast-moving outbreak that began in Angola in December appears to be coming under control."

"Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World, August 26, 2016," Albuquerque Journal, August 29, 2016, reported that: as a result of global warming, the Arctic Ocean is likely to be free of ice in the summer by either 2017 or 2018. Storms earlier in 2016 brought down more than 100 trees in the forest in central Mexico where monarch butterflies spend the winter. Severe weather with heavy rain is reported to have killed 7% of the wintering butterflies. In the Antarctic, melting glaciers have put enough fresh water into the depths of the ocean so that it may be slowing down ocean water circulation there, which if it becomes sufficient, could change ocean currents, including those that bring warmer water to the edge of Antarctica. Tornadoes composed of millions of mosquitos have been observed in Russia, summer 2016. One such Mosqutnado was seen in Portugal, in 2014.

Nika Knight, "Are Climate-Related 'Hot Blobs' Spreading and Killing Marine Life Worldwide?" Marine heatwaves have killed whales, birds, sea lions, mangroves, and coral—and research suggests they are increasing as the climate warms," Common Dreams, August 15, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/15/are-climate-related-hot-blobs-spreading-and-killing-marine-life-worldwide, reported, "A massive swath of hot water off the West Coast of North America devastated marine life for years—killing sea lions, whales, starfish, birds, and more—and new research finds that such marine heatwaves are growing more and more frequent.

Michael Slezak in the Guardian and Craig Welch in National Geographic this weekend both published in-depth explorations of the unprecedented phenomenon. It is indeed a new problem, a result of a rapidly warming climate: a marine heatwave had never been formally recorded until the past few years and the term wasn't even coined until 2011, Slezak reported.

Welch described the havoc wreaked thus far by what climatologists termed "the blob," a hot spot
off the North American Pacific coast that began in 2013:

In the past few years death had become a bigger part of life in the ocean off North America's West Coast. Millions of sea stars melted away in tide pools from Santa Barbara, California, to Sitka, Alaska, their bodies dissolving, their arms breaking free and wandering off. Hundreds of thousands of ocean-feeding seabirds tumbled dead onto beaches. Twenty times more sea lions than average starved in California. I watched scientists lift sea otter carcasses onto orange sleds as they perished in Homer—79 turned up dead there in one month. By year's end, whale deaths in the western Gulf of Alaska would hit a staggering 45. Mass fatalities can be as elemental in nature as wildfire in a lodgepole pine forest, whipping through quickly, killing off the weak and clearing the way for rebirth. But these mysterious casualties all shared one thing: They overlapped with a period when West Coast ocean waters were blowing past modern temperature records. Slezak put it more simply: "Plague, famine, pestilence, and death was sweeping the northern Pacific Ocean between 2014 and 2015."

And while the blob appeared on the brink of disappearing in early 2016—with some scientists even declaring it dead—new research showed that it never left, and that it continues to disrupt the marine ecosystem from Alaska to Mexico. Three other such "blobs" were detected off the coast of Australia this year, Slezak noted, and the region's unprecedented rises in ocean temperatures spurred the death of most of the Great Barrier Reef, the wholesale killing of kelp forests that supported critical fisheries, and the worst mangrove die-off ever seen.

Global warming is the likely culprit, both Slezak and Welch noted. 'Is long-term warming somehow the puppeteer controlling things in the background?' Nate Mantua of NOAA's Southwest Fisheries Science Center in Santa Cruz, California, asked Welch. 'I haven't seen proof, but it's clearly a prime suspect.'

Indeed, a new body of research is focusing on determining how much—not whether—global warming will contribute to the increasing prevalence of these deadly underwater heat waves: Slezak wrote that "the big question facing researchers is if they are increasing in frequency or severity or both, as a result of global warming."

Emanuele Di Lorenzo, an oceanographer at the Georgia Institute of Technology who conducted an in-depth study of 'the blob,' warned that warming ocean temperatures have a multiplying effect, as one extreme event catalyzes several others.

'Looking at what is happening,' Slezak wrote, Di Lorenzo 'thinks climate change is increasing both the frequency and severity of marine heatwaves.' Slezak continues:

'So much so, he wonders if climate models are wrong, and underestimating the fluctuations in temperature that will occur as the globe warms.

'The real system—if you look at the observations, and this is a paper I will publish very soon—the increase in variance is much much stronger than what models are predicting,' he says. 'Maybe our models are too conservative.'"

Di Lorenzo says this sort of 'variance'—including things like heatwaves—will always be stronger in the ocean, because the ocean has a kind of 'memory' that means events build on top of each other, multiplying their effects.

That memory is a result of temperature changing much more slowly in the ocean, as well as the ocean being able to absorb more heat in general.

A climatologist recently confirmed that the frequency and duration of marine heatwaves is significantly increasing, Slezak wrote, and peer review and publication of that study is currently pending. Di Lorenzo remarked to Slezak that 'the increasing frequency of these events is well outside of what anyone predicted.'

The mass deaths wrought by heatwaves such as the North American 'blob' are likely a harbinger of things to come, both Slezak and Welch observed. Indeed, 'the blob offers something of an analogue for future seas under climate change,' Welch noted. 'And marine life in this sea of tomorrow will look very different.'"

Nika Knight, "Humans are Poisoning the Ocean—and It's Poisoning Us Back: New study shows deadly bacteria levels spiking in North Atlantic as ocean temperatures rise," Common Dreams, August 09,
It's no secret that we have trashed, poisoned, and warmed oceans at an unprecedented rate via human-caused climate change and pollution. It seems that oceans may be paying us back in kind, according to a new study that found levels of bacteria responsible for life-threatening illnesses spiking in the North Atlantic region.

The study published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) discovered that a deadly variety of bacteria known as vibrio is spreading rapidly throughout the Atlantic as a result of hotter ocean temperatures. Marine ecologist Donald Boesch, president of the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science, who was not involved in the research, described the shift to the Washington Post as 'an ecosystem-level effect of climate change:'

What this new research does is present evidence of the increased prevalence of these bacteria over broad regions of the North Atlantic from preserved samples collected over 54 years. The prevalence of these bacteria has increased as the ocean has warmed, both as result of global warming and multi-decadal variations in ocean circulation. This trend may be caused by changes in the plankton community rather than just the temperature alone. In other words, increased prevalence may be an ecosystem-level effect of climate change.

Vibrio bacteria cause infections in humans and animals, and a growing number of people are hospitalized each year after consuming fish contaminated by the pathogen, the study notes, observing that the rapid rise in vibrio levels on the U.S. and European Atlantic coasts corresponds with the increasing number of hospitalizations for vibrio infections on both continents.

'We were able to demonstrate that there was an increase in the numbers of vibrios, probably a two or threefold increase, correlated with the increase in climate temperature, and then correlated with outbreaks of vibrio infections that have been recorded in the medical records,' said Rita Colwell, a microbiologist at the University of Maryland who is a co-author of the study, to the Post.

Colwell told the Post that the shift in vibrio bacteria numbers is just one of many enormous ecological transformations to come as a result of climate change. 'It's a disruption of the natural pattern, and it will be selecting for a number of species, and that's the problem,' Colwell said.

'We don't just damage the oceans even as we ourselves go unaffected by the consequences of that damage,' the Post observes. 'Rather, from harm to fisheries to direct human health threats, that damage hurts us, too.'"
EPA also took a critical step needed to carry out the Administration’s commitment to regulate methane emissions from existing oil and gas sources: the agency issued for public comment an Information Collection Request (ICR) that will require companies to provide extensive information instrumental for developing comprehensive regulations to reduce methane emissions from existing oil and gas sources.

Methane, the key constituent of natural gas, has a global warming potential more than 25 times greater than that of carbon dioxide. Methane is the second most prevalent greenhouse gas emitted by human activities in the United States, and approximately one-third of those emissions come from oil production and the production, processing, transmission and storage of natural gas.

Methane from the oil and gas industry comes packaged with other pollutants: VOCs, which are a key ingredient in ground-level ozone (smog); and a number of pollutants known as “air toxics” – in particular, benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene and xylene.

Ozone is linked to a variety of serious public health effects, including reduced lung function, asthma attacks, asthma development, emergency room visits and hospital admissions, and early death from respiratory and cardiovascular causes. Air toxics are known or suspected to cause cancer and other serious health effects.

The methane reductions from the final New Source Performance Standards (NSPS) will build on the agency’s 2012 rules to curb VOC emissions from new, reconstructed and modified sources in the oil and gas industry. EPA’s final rule will get more methane reductions than estimated at proposal because of changes made in response to the more than 900,000 public comments we received. For example, the final rule requires low production wells to monitor leaks, rather than exempting them as proposed. Also, the final rule requires compressor stations to monitor leaks four times a year, rather than twice a year.

Reducing methane emissions is an essential part of an overall strategy to address climate change. Climate change impacts affect all Americans’ lives, from stronger storms and longer droughts to increased insurance premiums, food prices and allergy seasons. The most vulnerable among us -- including children, older adults, people with heart or lung disease and people living in poverty -- are most at risk from the impacts of climate change.

The reductions from the final NSPS, along with methane reductions from EPA’s new Natural Gas STAR Challenge Program and actions by other federal agencies, will help the country continue moving toward safe and responsible oil and natural gas development.

EPA also is working to complete final Control Techniques Guidelines (CTGs) for reducing VOC emissions from existing oil and gas sources in certain ozone nonattainment areas and states in the Ozone Transport Region. The agency anticipates issuing the CTGs later this spring.

Summary of Actions
Reducing Methane and VOCs from New and Modified Sources

Building on its 2012 requirements to reduce VOC emissions, EPA has updated the NSPS for the oil and gas industry to add requirements that the industry reduce emissions of greenhouse gases and to cover additional equipment and activities in the oil and gas production chain. The final rule will accomplish this by setting emissions limits for methane, which is the principal greenhouse gas emitted by equipment and processes in the oil and gas sector. Owners/operators will be able to meet the limits using technologies that are cost-effective and readily available.

The final NSPS will yield significant reductions in methane emissions from new, reconstructed and modified processes and equipment, along with reducing VOC emissions from sources not covered in the agency’s 2012 rules. These sources include hydraulically fractured oil wells, some of which can contain a large amount of gas along with oil, and equipment used across the industry that was not regulated in the agency’s 2012 rules.

The final rule also requires owners/operators to find and repair leaks, also known as “fugitive emissions,” which can be a significant source of both methane and VOC pollution.

Most sources subject to the 2012 VOC reduction requirements now also are covered by the new requirements to reduce methane. However, they will not have to install additional controls, because the controls to reduce VOCs also reduce methane.

- EPA made a number of changes to the final rule based on information received during the public comment period. The final rule:
Sets a fixed schedule for monitoring leaks. The final rule sets a fixed schedule for monitoring leaks rather than a schedule that varies with performance. For well sites, including low-production well sites, the rule requires leaks monitoring twice a year. Compressor stations -- generally large facilities encompassing numerous pieces of equipment that operate continuously and under significant pressure -- must conduct quarterly leaks monitoring. Owners and operators at all sites will have one year to conduct an initial leaks monitoring survey.

Allows an alternative approach for finding leaks. In addition to optical gas imaging (special cameras that allow the user to “see” leaks), the final rule allows owners/operators to use “Method 21” with a repair threshold of 500 ppm as an alternative for finding and repairing leaks. Method 21 is an EPA method for determining VOC emissions from process equipment. The method is based on using a portable VOC monitoring instrument, such as an organic vapor analyzer (sometimes referred to as a “sniffer”).

Offers owners/operators the opportunity to use emerging, innovative technologies to monitor leaks. The final rule outlines the type of information owners/operators would need to submit to receive approval to use those technologies to meet their leaks monitoring requirements.

Phases in requirements for using a process known as a “green completion” to capture emissions from hydraulically fractured oil wells. Owners/operators will have six months from the time the final rule is published in the Federal Register to meet the green completion requirements. Owners/operators of hydraulically fractured oil wells will be required to reduce emissions using combustion controls until the green completion requirement takes effect.

Before issuing the proposed regulations in 2015, EPA sought input from states, tribes, industry and environmental groups, and continued to do so as it developed the final rules. The agency received more than 900,000 public comments on the proposed NSPS and held three public hearings. A number of states regulate, or are considering regulating, air pollution from the oil and natural gas industry, and EPA’s rules allow them to continue to do so. Under the Clean Air Act, states have the authority to regulate air emissions from sources within their boundaries, provided their requirements are at least as protective as federal requirements. The final rule provides a pathway for companies to harmonize the NSPS with any comparable state requirements they may have.

The final NSPS is expected to reduce 510,000 short tons of methane in 2025, the equivalent of reducing 11 million metric tons of carbon dioxide. Natural gas that is recovered as a result of the rule can be used as a fuel on site or sold.

EPA estimates the final rule will yield climate benefits of $690 million in 2025 (2012$), which will outweigh estimated costs of $530 million. Net climate benefits are estimated at $170 million in 2025. The rule also is expected to reduce other pollutants, including 210,000 tons of VOCs and 3,900 tons of air toxics in 2025. These reductions also are expected to yield benefits; however, EPA was not able to quantify those. Those benefits include reductions in health effects related to fine particle pollution, ozone and air toxics, along with improvements in visibility.

Collecting Information to Develop Regulations for Existing Sources

EPA issued the first draft of an Information Collection Request (ICR), seeking a broad range of information on the oil and gas industry, including: how equipment and emissions controls are, or can be, configured; what installing those controls entails; and the associated costs. This includes information on natural gas venting that occurs as part of existing process or maintenance activities, such as well and pipeline blowdowns, equipment malfunctions and flashing emissions from storage tanks. Industry will be legally required to respond to the final ICR.

EPA announced its plans to issue the ICR on March 10, 2016, as part of a joint commitment between the U.S. and Canadian governments to take new actions to reduce methane pollution from the oil and gas sector, including through regulations for existing sources. The ICR is the first step in that process; the information companies will report to EPA will provide the foundation necessary for developing comprehensive regulations to reduce emissions from existing oil and gas sources.

Over the past year, substantial amounts of new information on methane emissions from the oil and gas industry have become available from a range of entities, including EPA’s Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program, industry organizations, and research studies by government, academic and industry researchers. That information shows that methane emissions from this large and complex industry are much higher than previously understood.
The information EPA receives through the ICR will help the agency determine how to best reduce emissions from existing sources. It will help EPA identify sources with high emissions and the factors that contribute to those emissions. And it will build on information that states with regulatory programs have already developed about this industry.

In addition, because technology to detect, measure and mitigate methane emissions is rapidly developing, EPA plans to issue a voluntary Request for Information, inviting oil and gas owners and operators, along with states, nongovernmental organizations, academic experts and others, to provide information on innovative strategies to accurately and cost-effectively locate, measure and mitigate methane emissions. EPA will issue the Request for Information soon.

For more details on the draft ICR and the comment process, see https://www3.epa.gov/airquality/oilandgas/methane.html

**Clarifying and Implementing Permitting Requirements**

- EPA issued two rules to clarify permitting requirements for the oil and natural gas industry: The Source Determination Rule, and a final federal implementation plan to implement the Minor New Source Review Program in Indian country.

  **Final Source Determination Rule**
  - EPA has issued a final rule to clarify when multiple pieces of equipment and activities in the oil and gas industry must be deemed a single source when determining whether major source permitting programs apply. The programs are the Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) and Nonattainment New Source Review preconstruction permitting programs, and the Title V Operating permits program.
  - The final rule defines the term “adjacent” to clarify that equipment and activities in the oil and gas sector that are under common control will be considered part of the same source if they are located near each other – specifically, if they are located on the same site, or on sites that share equipment and are within 1/4 mile of each other. Input from states, industry and other commenters was helpful in finalizing these requirements.
  - The final rule applies to equipment and activities used for onshore oil and natural gas production, and for natural gas processing. It does not apply to offshore operations.
  - For more information on the final Source Determination Rule, including a fact sheet on the rule, see https://www3.epa.gov/airquality/oilandgas/actions.html.

  **Final Federal Implementation Plan for Indian Country**
  - EPA also has issued a final rule to implement the Minor New Source Review Program in Indian country for oil and natural gas production. Known as a Federal Implementation Plan, or FIP, the rule will limit emissions of harmful air pollution while making the preconstruction permitting process more streamlined and efficient for this industry, which has expanded rapidly in some areas of Indian country.
  - The FIP will be used instead of site-specific minor New Source Review (NSR) preconstruction permits in Indian county and incorporates emissions limits and other requirements from eight federal air standards -- including the final NSPS -- to ensure air quality is protected.
  - The final FIP applies throughout Indian country, except non-reservation areas, unless a tribe or EPA demonstrates jurisdiction for those areas.
  - Requirements of the FIP apply to all new and modified true minor sources in the production segment of the industry that are seeking minor NSR permits in areas designated as attainment or unclassifiable for a National Ambient Air Quality Standard. Sources locating in nonattainment areas will need to seek site-specific minor NSR permits, or comply with reservation-specific FIPs, where those exist.
  - For more information on the final FIP, including a fact sheet on the rule, see https://www3.epa.gov/airquality/oilandgas/actions.html.

**For More Information:**

To read the final rules, including additional fact sheets, visit https://www3.epa.gov/airquality/oilandgas/actions.html.

To read the draft Information Collection Request notice, along with additional information, visit https://www3.epa.gov/airquality/oilandgas/methane.html.

To learn more about the Natural Gas STAR: Methane Challenge Program, see https://www3.epa.gov/gasstar/methanechallenge/

In the United States, an environmental law nonprofit is suing the federal government on behalf of 21 young plaintiffs. Individuals in Pakistan and New Zealand have sued to force their governments to take stronger action to fight climate change. A farmer in Peru has sued a giant German energy utility over its part in causing global warming.

And while the arguments can be unconventional and surprising, some of the suits are making progress.

Last month, a federal magistrate judge in Oregon startled many legal experts by allowing the lawsuit filed on behalf of 21 teenagers and children to go forward, despite motions from the Obama administration and fossil fuel companies to dismiss it; the suit would force the government to take more aggressive action against climate change. The ruling by the magistrate judge, Thomas M. Coffin, now goes to Federal District Court to be accepted or rejected."

"It is the first time a federal court has suggested that government may have a constitutional duty to combat climate change, and that individuals can sue to enforce that right."

Lauren McCauley, "First Nation Wins Historic Victory Over Mammoth Coal Export Terminal: US Army Corps of Engineers denies permit for proposed Cherry Point terminal, which would have been the largest in North America," Common Dreams, May 10, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/10/first-nation-wins-historic-victory-over-mammoth-coal-export-terminal, reported, "In a move being hailed as a landmark victory for the climate movement, Pacific Northwest communities, and tribal members alike, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Monday denied federal permits for the largest proposed coal export terminal in North America. "This is big—for our climate, for clean air and water, for our future," declared Mary Anne Hitt, director of the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign.

For years, the Lummi Nation led the campaign against the proposed Gateway Pacific Terminal in Xwe'chi'eXen (also known as Cherry Point), Washington. Last year, tribal leaders asked (pdf) the Army Corps to reject the project on the grounds that it would violate treaty rights and cause 'irreparable damage to important crab and salmon fisheries' in the Salish Sea.

The Army Corps, Hitt said, 'did its duty by upholding treaty rights and honoring the U.S. government's commitment to those treaties.' The decision marks the first time that a coal export facility has been rejected based on its negative impacts to the treaty rights of a tribal nation.

Quinault Nation President Fawn Sharp, who also serves as president of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and vice president of the National Congress of American Indians, called the ruling 'an appropriate and just decision.'

Sharp said that 'everyone who cares about fish and wildlife, the environment and human health should be happy with the Corps' decision. This is an historic victory for tribal treaty rights as well as for everybody else who lives here./

'Those who understand the great value of our natural resources to our health and culture, as well as the sustainable economy of the entire region, will applaud today's announcement,' she added.

'This is an historic win, and we are grateful to the Lummi Nation for their leadership in delivering a tremendous victory for Northwest families,' said Crina Hoyer, executive director of Bellingham’s ReSources for Sustainable Communities. 'The message rings loud and clear: communities will never accept the health, safety, economic or environmental impacts of dirty coal exports.'

The proposed terminal would have exported up to 48 million tons of Powder River Basin coal each year to markets in Asia. That coal would have been carried on coal trains—as many as 18 additional each
day—through communities in Washington, Idaho, and Montana, before being loaded on giant ships which would carry the pollutant across the Salish Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

The project's opponents cited a host of negative environmental impacts—from increased coal dust around the terminal and rail lines to the atmospheric effects of burning coal overseas.

Indeed, the denial comes amid a marked decline in the coal industry, including the recent bankruptcies of fossil fuel giants Peabody and Arch Coal.

At the same time, climate campaigners worldwide have launched a series of peaceful direct actions targeting key fossil fuel infrastructure to pressure their governments to commit to a clean energy future.

"The Lummi Nation's victory brings even more energy to local movements," said Cesia Kearns, who serves as co-director of the Power Past Coal coalition, an alliance of health groups and businesses, as well as environmental, clean-energy, faith, and community organizations working to stop coal export off the West Coast.

"From British Columbia, to Longview, Washington, to the Gulf of Mexico," Kearns declared, "we will continue to stand together to say no to corporate special interests and yes to healthy, community-driven futures."

Lauren McCauley, "NASA Study Nails Fracking as Source of Massive Methane 'Hot Spot': The 2,500-square mile plume is said to be the largest concentration of the potent greenhouse gas in the country," Common Dreams, August 16, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/16/nasa-study-nails-fracking-source-massive-methane-hot-spot reported, "A NASA study released on Monday confirms that a methane "hot spot" in the Four Corners region of the American southwest is directly related to leaks from natural gas extraction, processing, and distribution.

The 2,500-square mile plume, first detected in 2003 and confirmed by NASA satellite data in October 2014, is said to be the largest concentration of atmospheric methane in the U.S. and is more than triple a standard ground-based estimate. Methane, the primary component of natural gas, is a highly-efficient greenhouse gas—84 times more powerful than carbon dioxide, and a significant contributor to global warming.

The study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences and funded primarily by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), surveyed industry sources including gas processing facilities, storage tanks, pipeline leaks, and well pads, as well as a coal mine venting shaft.

It found that leaks from only 10 percent of the individual methane sources are contributing to half of the emissions, confirming the scientists' suspicions that the mysterious hotspot was connected to the high level of fracking in the region.

There are more than 20,000 oil and gas wells operating in the San Juan Basin, where Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah meet. The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that overall annual gas production in the basin is as much as 1.3 trillion cubic feet, mostly from coal bed methane and shale formations.

"NASA's finding that the oil and gas industry is primarily responsible for the 'hot spot' is not surprising," stated the Western Environmental Law Center, a nonprofit public interest law firm. "In fact, the researchers found only one large source of methane not related to oil and gas operations: venting from the San Juan coal mine. This discovery renders attempts to point the finger at other potential emissions sources, like coal outcrops and landfills, definitively refuted.'

The study further underscores how problematic current estimates of methane emissions from oil and gas operations are.

'To estimate methane emissions from oil and gas facilities, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses a process-based approach that assumes a normal distribution of emissions for each process used in extraction, processing, and distribution, the authors wrote. In reality, the flux distribution can be heavily skewed, resulting in a heavy-tailed distribution.

The Western Environmental Law Center expressed concern over the unknown sources of the remaining 50 percent of emissions and took issue with the study's conclusion that mitigation will only require 'identifying and fixing a few emitters.'

'The other 50 percent of methane emissions in the region cannot be ignored, and mitigating field-
wide emissions will require the oil and gas industry to cut emissions from all sources, large and small, if we are to eliminate New Mexico's 'hot spot,'" the group states.

Citing a recent report by energy consultants with ICF International, Ramon Alvarez, a senior scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund, notes that industry operations in the region have "the worst record in the nation" for methane leaks. '[V]enting, flaring, and leaks from oil and gas sites on federal and tribal land in New Mexico, alone, effectively threw away $100 million worth of gas in 2013,' Alvarez wrote.

Both the NASA study and Alvarez point to new methane standards under development by the Obama administration as being key to reducing these emissions. But environmentalists contend that while these rules are 'a welcome safeguard,' as 350.org executive director May Boeve recently put it, 'The only way to protect our communities from the risks of fracking, and stave off the worst impacts of climate change, is to keep fossil fuels in the ground.'"


In separate rulings, the court said a moratorium in Fort Collins and a ban in Longmont were invalid because state law pre-empted them. A lower court had reached the same conclusion earlier.

Two other cities and Boulder County have prohibitions on fracking that presumably are affected by the decisions. With oil and gas exploration in a slump nationwide, the short-term effect of the rulings in Colorado will be small, industry officials said."

Efforts by anti-fracking people are beginning to change Colorado state law on the matter.


The key finding: Thousands of fracking waste spills have left a legacy of radioactive contamination in North Dakota.

The study examined the Bakken shale region -- one of the most fracked places in the country -- and found 3,900 spills since 2007. This contamination, which has leaked into rivers and streams, will remain for thousands of years, according to researchers.

Wherever fracking takes place, it opens the door to radioactive contamination that threatens our health. Add your name in support of a fracking ban.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of fracking's impacts on health, the oil and gas industry continues to make bogus claims that fracking is safe. Meanwhile, radioactive waste from fracking is elevating cancer risks for nearby communities.

This radioactive threat adds to the many other health risks linked to fracking, like hormone disruption, respiratory issues, and higher hospitalization rates.

Despite these widespread health threats, fracking remains nearly unchecked at every step of the process. In fact, North Dakota recently loosened radioactive waste disposal regulations even further. This is unacceptable."

"Royal Dutch Shell Spills Over 88,000 Gallons of Crude Oil in the Gulf of Mexico: Spills Occurs as Gulf Coast Citizens Prepare to Speak Out Against Offshore Drilling in Washington DC," Indigenous Environmental Network, May 13, 2016, http://www.ienearth.org/, reported and commented, "Royal Dutch Shell Spills Over 88,000 Gallons of Crude Oil in the Gulf of Mexico
Spills Occurs as Gulf Coast Citizens Prepare to Speak Out Against Offshore Drilling in Washington DC."
New Orleans, LA - On Thursday, an 88,200 gallon oil spill was discovered in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico, forcing Royal Dutch Shell to shut in all wells that flow to its Brutus platform.

An oil sheen 2 miles wide and 13 miles long, 2100 barrels equal to 90,000 gallons (or at least that's what being reported), from a Shell owned leaky pipeline, 2900 feet below the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The U.S. Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) said an oil sheen 2 miles wide by 13 miles long was visible in the sea about 97 miles off the Louisiana coast. The spill occurred 2900 feet below sea level.

This Sunday, thousands will mobilize in Washington, DC as a part of the 'Break Free From Fossil Fuels' movement happening across the globe, demanding the Obama Administration to protect the waters of the Arctic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico from new fossil fuel developments and offshore drilling.

Representatives from Gulf Coast and Alaska communities will be speaking at the rally in front of the White House on Sunday. Click here for more info about the rally: https://dc.breakfree2016.org.

In response to the news of the spill, the Indigenous Environmental Network released the following statements:

**Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network Executive Director:**
Yet again the Gulf Coast experiences an oil spill, meanwhile the White House administration continues to lease federal public lands for more fossil fuel development. This does not demonstrate the leadership needed to addressing climate change. This is business-as-usual with frontline communities of the Gulf Coast paying the price; Mother Earth is paying the price. We implore the President of the United States to listen to the thousands of people who will be in Washington, DC this Sunday demanding the protection of our sacred waters and a moratorium on new offshore drilling.'

**Monique Verdin, Houma Nation Council member-elect, Louisiana:**
'Multinational corporations continue to drill off our coast, while the federal government is putting more offshore lands onto the auction block than ever before. This is absurd. The only way to ensure we protect the water and sanctity of life in and along the Gulf Coast is to put an end to extreme fossil fuel development. Oil and gas infrastructure, from pipelines to wells to refineries, are gambling with the health of our environment and the wellness of our communities along the coast. We need immediate action to facilitate just transitions and the ability to ensure we keep carbon in the ground for our communities across the Gulf and for communities around the planet.'

**Faith Gemmill, Executive Director of REDOIL, Alaska:**
'In Alaska, we are relieved that Shell Oil has decided not to pursue drilling in the Chukchi and Beaufort Seas of the Arctic Ocean. We fought hard to keep Shell Oil out of the Arctic. As such, we in Alaska stand in solidarity with Gulf Coast communities who are still fighting Big Oil in their waters. Our hearts go out to the communities dependent on the marine environment for job and food security, because we know first hand the devastation caused by oil development. When will America realize that it is time to transition our energy and economy beyond dirty fossil fuels to clean energy? It is time for President Obama to declare no new leases in the Arctic AND the Gulf Coast.'

**NOTE:** On May 24th, Monique Verdin, will travel to the Shell Annual General Meeting, in the Netherlands, supported by the UK Tar Sands Network to call on the board and investors to put an end to new offshore leases in the Gulf of Mexico in light of this recent spill and the history of devastation in the Gulf.

Nadia Prupis, "California Oil Spill Leaves 'Gooey Mess'—And a Reminder of Big Oil's Dangers: 'It is distressing to once again see this kind of devastation visited upon a sensitive location'," Common Dreams, Thursday, June 23, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/23/california-oil-spill-leaves-gooey-mess-and-reminder-big-oils-dangers, reported, "An oil spill has reportedly leaked thousands of gallons of crude from a pipeline into a canyon in Ventura County, California, fire officials said Thursday—in what environmentalists say is a reminder of the dangers of coastal fossil fuel operations.

The leak spilled at least 29,000 gallons, or 700 barrels, as emergency crews used hoses to suck up the 'gooey mess' that was created when the oil formed a small lake in a gorge known as Prince Barranca, the Los Angeles Times reported.

The operating line has been shut down. The LA Times notes that it is the 10th time in 10 years that the
pipeline company, Crimson Pipeline, has had its pipes break or fail. Meanwhile, the oil company, Aera Energy, is jointly owned by Shell and ExxonMobil and is responsible for 25 percent of California's output, making it one of the state's biggest oil producers.

'It is distressing to once again see this kind of devastation visited upon a sensitive location,' said Brian Segee, senior attorney with the Santa Barbara-based Environmental Defense Center.

The figures on the oil spill have been difficult to verify. Earlier in the day, fire officials put the estimate at 5,000 barrels—or 210,000 gallons—before amending it to a much smaller number.

Segee noted that the response to last year’s Plains All American oil spill on Santa Barbara's Refugio Beach was similar.

'So far estimates for the size of this spill have been all over the map. It is important to remember that with last year's Plains All American Oil Spill at Refugio Beach, the initial industry estimates were orders of magnitude below reality,' Segee said. 'But we are still very early in understanding the scope of this spill and the challenges that yet another major oil spill will deliver to our region. Regardless of the size, any amount of spilled oil is inexcusable and destructive.'

The Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) told the LAT the spill should serve as another warning of Big Oil's risks.

CBD attorney Kristen Monsell said, 'This major spill is another grim example of why we must get pipelines and oil drilling out of California's vulnerable coastal environment. The spill's already causing environmental damage. We've got to stop thinking about these oil spills as accidents and start regarding them as completely predictable ecological tragedies that we can prevent with strong action.'

Nika Knight, "Western Canada Oil Spill Drenches Birds, Will Taint Drinking Water for Months to Come: 200,000 liters of crude oil spilled into North Saskatchewan River, soaking local wildlife and forcing cities to shut off public water supply, Common Dreams, July 26, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/07/26/western-canada-oil-spill-drenches-birds-will-taint-drinking-water-months-come, reported, "Despite a devastating pipeline leak that flooded the North Saskatchewan River with 200,000 liters of tar sands crude last Thursday, Husky Energy waited until Monday to shut down the leaking pipeline. An executive with the oil behemoth said the company was "deeply sorry" for the incident while announcing the pipeline closure.

The apology and pipeline shutdown also only occurred after two cities were forced to shut off their water supplies and photos emerged of birds drenched in "very, very, very thick bitumen," according to Saskatoon-based rescue organization Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation.

Provincial officials and wildlife rescuers both warn that the effects of the spill will be long-term. Meanwhile, booms laid on the river to contain the spill have been ineffective, a provincial official who wished to remain anonymous told the Canadian Press, as high water levels have lifted the oil over the barriers. As of Monday evening, less than half of the oil spilled had been recovered.

The pipeline shutdown also came despite Husky's announcement on Sunday that the spill cleanup was complete.

Canada’s environmental agency announced Monday that it is investigating the spill. Reuters reports on the oil's spread downstream:

The oil reached Prince Albert, population 35,000, hours earlier than expected on Monday, widening the impact and cost of the spill. Workers there raced to stretch a 30-kilometer hose to draw drinking water from another source.

A sheen was visible on the river in the morning, spurring the city to shut its water treatment plant intake, said city manager Jim Toye. It has two days worth of stored water before it must find another source.

'We thought we had more time,' Toye said in an interview. 'We (will) really hit the wall after two days.'

Less than half of the 1,572 leaked barrels of oil had been recovered as of Monday, Saskatchewan environment official Wes Kotyk said.

Upstream of Prince Albert, the city of North Battleford stopped drawing drinking water from the river last week.

Prince Albert residents are stockpiling clean water in bathtubs and Tupperware containers, CBC reports, and city officials say they will seek compensation from Husky for the disastrous spill.
Another provincial official told the Huffington Post that North Battleford's and Prince Albert's drinking water could remain unsafe to drink for months.

North Battleford's residents are relying on well water, in the meantime. As for Prince Albert, Reuters reports: 'Once Prince Albert's stored water is exhausted, it hopes to use rainfall collected in a retention pond, buying itself four more days. After that it would rely on water from a 12-inch (30 centimeter) diameter hose to the South Saskatchewan River, running along a highway.'

A reporter with the CBC tweeted footage of a construction crew from Prince Albert "scrambling" to set up that hose:

Yet even that new arrangement may not be enough, as Toye told Reuters it would only stretch Prince Albert's water supply for another two months. Sam Ferris from Saskatchewan's Water Security Agency commented to the Huffington Post that the tainted water supply is 'not going to be a short-term event. It could go on for some time.'

Meanwhile, local wildlife rescue groups have set up a triage station near the origin of the spill in Maidstone, Saskatchewan, to help clean oil-drenched wild animals.

So far, three birds—a great blue heron, a Canada goose, and a sparrow—as well as a garter snake have been taken in for treatment. The sparrow has died. Rescuers expect many more animals will be taken in for clean-up in the days to come.

Jan Shadick from Living Sky Wildlife Rehabilitation spoke to CBC about the tragedy:

'Shadick said treating the birds that have been recovered, and the possibility of many more birds needing treatment, filled her with 'great sadness."

'For me, it's just really overwhelmingly sad to see these birds drenched in this black oil and know that I have to wait to wash them and do something about it. And to just see the struggle, I guess, in their eyes,' she said.

'Perhaps it's the potential that there are hundreds and hundreds of them and my, at the moment, sense of helplessness at [not] being able to fix it immediately.'

And despite the harm to wildlife and people's drinking water, Alberta Premier Rachel Notley defended the safety of pipelines to transport fossil fuels.

'Even with this spill it remains the case that absolutely the safest way to transport oil and gas is by way of pipeline,' she told the Canadian Press.

'Had a spill occurred on rail there might well be injuries involved. In everything you do there are risks, but I would suggest overall the risks [of pipelines] are low,' Notley added.'

Jie Jenny Zou, Center for Public Integrity, "Hot Mess: States Struggle to Deal with Radioactive Fracking Waste: Potentially dangerous drilling byproducts are being dumped in landfills throughout the Marcellus Shale with few controls," Common Dreams, June 20, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/20/hot-mess-states-struggle-deal-radioactive-fracking-waste," reported,

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The Marcellus Shale has transformed the Appalachian Basin into an energy juggernaut. Even amid a recent drilling slowdown, regional daily production averages enough natural gas to power more than 200,000 U.S. homes for a year.

But the rise of hydraulic fracturing over the past decade has created another boom: tons of radioactive materials experts call an 'orphan' waste stream. No federal agency fully regulates oil and gas drilling byproducts — which include brine, sludge, rock and soiled equipment — leaving tracking and handling to states that may be reluctant to alienate energy interests.

'Nobody can say how much of any type of waste is being produced, what it is, and where it's ending up,' said Nadia Steinzor of the environmental group Earthworks, who co-wrote a report on shale waste. (Earthworks has received funding from The Heinz Endowments, as has the Center for Public Integrity).

The group is among several suing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to regulate drilling waste under a federal system that tracks hazardous materials from creation to final disposal, or 'cradle to grave.' The EPA declined to comment on the lawsuit but is scheduled to file a response in court by early
Geologists have long known soil and rock contain naturally occurring radioactive materials that can become concentrated through activities like fracking, in which sand and chemicals are pumped thousands of feet underground to release oil and gas from tight rock. But concerns about fracking largely have focused on injection wells and seismic activity, with less attention paid to 'hot' waste that arrives at landfills and sets off radiation alarms.

An analysis by the Center for Public Integrity shows that states are struggling to keep pace with this waste stream, relying largely on industry to self-report and self-regulate. States have also been slow to assess and curb risks from exposure to the waste, which can remain radioactive for millennia. Excessive radiation exposure can increase cancer risks; radon gas, for example, has been tied to lung cancer. The four states in the Marcellus are taking different approaches to the problem; none has it under control. Pennsylvania has increasingly restricted disposal of drilling waste, while West Virginia allows some landfills to take unlimited amounts. Ohio has yet to formalize waste rules, despite starting the process in 2013. New York, which banned fracking, accepts drilling waste with little oversight.

Inconsistencies have raised concerns among regulators and activists that waste is being 'shopped around' by companies seeking the path of least resistance, or unsafely reused. In March, Kentucky's attorney general opened an investigation into two landfills he alleged illegally accepted radioactive drilling waste from West Virginia. A separate investigation is ongoing at the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, where officials exchanged emails about whether landfill workers and schoolchildren might have been exposed to dangerous levels of radiation.

Bill Kennedy, a radiation expert at the consulting firm Dade Moeller, called radioactive drilling waste 'virtually unregulated' and said consistent standards are needed to 'protect workers, protect the general public, protect the environment.'

Kennedy co-chairs a committee working with regulators and industry to develop guidelines and recommendations for states. 'You can't rely on industry to go it alone and self-regulate,' he said.

While radiation emitted from fracking waste may pale in comparison to that from nuclear power plant waste, Steinzor said regulators don't know the cumulative impacts of landfilling the loads over time. 'There's been such a push to expand the industry and to drill as much as possible,' she said. 'No one has had the desire or political will to slow the industry down long enough to figure out what the risks truly are.'

**Race to the bottom**

Trucks rolling into West Virginia landfills grind to a near halt as they pass fixed poles — monitors — that detect radiation above a set threshold. If the monitors go off, drivers reverse and pass through them again. After a second alarm, landfill staff members check drivers and trucks with hand-held detectors.

An emergency state law required landfills to install the monitors in 2015 and submit reports detailing any alarms to West Virginia's Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Health and Human Resources within 24 hours.

More than 70 alarms have been reported since, but what happened to the waste after they were set off is unclear. The reports routinely lack basic information, such as whether the waste was accepted or rejected, where it came from and how much of it there was. One report, for example, shows the landfill in Wetzel County, West Virginia, took in 14 tons of industrial bag filters from an unknown source in April 2015. The filters weren't labeled as drilling waste but contained radium 226, an isotope associated with fracking.

Landfills must reject waste that exceeds state radium limits, yet the amount of radium in the filters was left blank on that form and every other alarm report generated in 2015. Radium 226 remains radioactive for thousands of years, breaking down into gases such as radon.

After the Center contacted the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection about inconsistent or missing information in the reports, officials reviewed the records and acknowledged 'discrepancies.' They said they plan to work with state health officials to overhaul the reporting process, including revising the single-page form so it captures more useful information. Such efforts seem warranted: The health department, as a matter of practice, said it has been throwing away the reports it receives. A spokesman declined to comment further.

Scott Mandirola, waste director at the Department of Environmental Protection, said West Virginia
regulators are doing their best to keep up with the fracking industry by collaborating with their counterparts in Ohio and Pennsylvania. ‘Everybody’s dealing with it differently,’ he said, pointing out widely held concerns that one state will become the preferred dumping ground. ‘It was obvious there was waste being shopped around.’

Bill Hughes, who sits on the Wetzel County Solid Waste Authority, doubts the state will enact or enforce rules that burden industry. West Virginia is not going to do anything that Pennsylvania and Ohio are not required to do, he said.

Last year, the Department of Environmental Protection conducted its first environmental analysis of potential impacts from landfilling drill cuttings. The report, which was mandated by the state Legislature, looked at the threat of groundwater pollution from the leaching of radioactive materials through soil and found ‘little concern.’

Hughes said it was the first time state legislators had openly acknowledged that drilling waste was more than just dirt and rock and could pose a radiation hazard. The report noted that before the waste was hauled to landfills, oil and gas companies simply buried it in pits on well-pad sites.

Twisting in the wind

On windy days, grit gathers on Toni Bazala’s home in South Huntingdon Township, 40 miles south of Pittsburgh, staining her white shutters black. A chain-link fence separates her property from the Yukon landfill 200 feet away.

‘We look like we’re in a desert,’ said Bazala, 74. The black dust from the landfill, she said, is like ‘an acid that goes down your throat.’

Max Environmental Technologies, Inc., which runs Yukon and another nearby site, has footed the bills for annual cleanings of her house’s exterior and paid for a new air conditioner, she said.

The company recently surprised Bazala and her husband with a legal waiver restricting them from speaking publicly about the cleanings in court, or to state and federal regulators. “If you don’t sign this paper, you don’t get your house pressure-washed.”

The retired couple refused to sign and has no plans to leave. ‘I wouldn’t even dream of selling my house,’ Bazala said. ‘We don’t have much, but what we have is ours.’

Former township supervisor Mel Cornell said relocation isn’t an option many can afford. He spent years inspecting Yukon, often raising concerns about radiation measured on site, but quit and retired early to Florida last year. ‘They can’t clean people’s bodies when they breathe that in,’ Cornell said of the dust. On at least one occasion, he said, he vomited while inspecting the landfill because the stench was so overpowering.

The township has repeatedly sued Max Environmental for producing a strong odor Cornell called ‘burnt cement,’ which began in 2013 when Yukon started accepting drilling waste. The company has tried masking the odor with a bubblegum-scented deodorizer and paid a $10,000 fine to the township in monthly $25 installments.

Township residents say penalties have failed to spur lasting improvements or quash Yukon’s expansion plans. Yukon has been inspected more than 200 times for solid waste issues since March 2013, racking up more than $200,000 in fines. The company admitted to odor and other violations in an August consent decree with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

Max Environmental’s Carl Spadaro, who previously worked for the department, declined to be interviewed but wrote in an email to the Center that the company has “shown time and time again that we strive to operate in compliance.” Homes have been pressure-cleaned ‘for many years to remove pollen, mildew and staining,’ he wrote. When asked about the waiver Bazala refused to sign, Spadaro added, ‘We suggested to a neighbor that to continue this service, an acknowledgement of the reason for the service would be appropriate.’

Pennsylvania regulators have increasingly restricted disposal of radioactive waste, instituting monthly intake limits on landfills. But the rules keep changing. Sludge, which is left over from drilling waste processed by treatment plants, is considered highly concentrated and radioactive. But the state has gone back and forth on exactly how much of it landfills can take from one year to the next.

In a panel discussion last year, Spadaro called Pennsylvania’s protocols ‘rather stringent, saying they force landfills like Yukon to scale back the waste it takes. Landfills in the state maxed out monthly radioactive waste caps at least 87 times last year, often forcing haulers to try elsewhere.
But some haulers can be persistent. In January, a driver was caught trying to dispose of the same load from a northeastern Pennsylvania well pad three times at the same landfill in one day.

Gregg Macey, a professor at Brooklyn Law School, reviewed hundreds of Department of Environmental Protection emails and other documents obtained in an open-records request by Earthjustice, an environmental law group. His report highlighted the agency’s growing confusion over increasing numbers of radiation alarms at landfills and mislabeled waste.

**Emails from 2010 to 2013 show regulators reviewed records and found waste taken by landfills that should have gone to out-of-state facilities equipped to handle low-level radioactive debris. Officials also expressed concern that landfill operators didn’t fully grasp how to handle the new waste stream.**

'We need a statewide guidance on the handling, sampling and protocol and we need it yesterday not a year from now,’ a state employee wrote in the fall of 2012, signing his email, 'frustrated in the field.' In 2013, an employee commenting on a backlog of waste awaiting state review, wrote, 'We need to find a solution for this and it sure isn’t allowing the boxes to pile up.'

None of these concerns was mentioned in a highly anticipated report by the Department of Environmental Protection last year that found 'little potential for harm to workers or the public from radiation exposure due to oil and gas development.' The study was quickly championed by energy interests.

Some, however, have questioned the study’s methodology and the impartiality of its author, Perma-Fix Environmental Services, a nuclear waste contractor. The state works closely with Perma-Fix to assess landfill radiation risks 1,000 years in the future.

'We have evolved since 2013,' said state waste and radiation director Ken Reisinger, insisting there is 'plenty of space' in Pennsylvania for drilling waste. 'We have continued to refine our science and we continued to question ourselves on the protocols.'

Steinzor, with Earthworks, said that **without a federal tracking system, states have no reliable way of ensuring waste isn’t being illegally dumped. Pennsylvania regulators were able to pinpoint final burial locations for a third of nearly 300 loads rejected in 2015, but two-thirds remain unaccounted for.**

**Critic under fire**

Bill Hughes has sat on the Wetzel County Solid Waste Authority in West Virginia for 15 years — five as chairman — but he has a feeling this year will be his last.

A staunch fracking critic, Hughes has spoken out against the dumping of radioactive drilling waste alongside household trash in municipal landfills.

**Located at the base of West Virginia’s Northern Panhandle, Wetzel County has become a prime destination for out-of-state drilling waste.** Hughes, 71, concedes that he’s “made a lot of noise” about the dumping of such waste in the county’s 238-acre landfill; since 2012 it’s outpaced the intake of all other garbage combined.

In February Hughes, a retired electrician who belongs to the Heinz-funded FracTracker Alliance, was sued by the landfill’s operator, Lackawanna Transport Company. Lackawanna is seeking damages that “could be in excess of $1 million,” claiming Hughes illegally invoked his chairmanship of the waste authority to temporarily block the company from building a separate, lined surface pit for drilling waste in 2013.

Nearly 100 public commenters raised concerns about the pit — known as a cell — which would allow Wetzel to accept an unlimited amount of drilling waste. West Virginia does not count such waste as part of Wetzel’s monthly cap of 9,999 tons, which is meant to conserve space and limit the life of the landfill. Wetzel has already taken 650,000 tons of drilling waste since 2013.

Further south, in Harrison County, Meadowfill Landfill sought approval for a similar cell in 2013 and won easy approval. That landfill has gone on to become the state’s top disposer of drilling waste, taking in nearly 900,000 tons since 2013, including loads deemed too radioactive for Pennsylvania.

News of the million-dollar lawsuit against Hughes rattled the Wetzel authority’s volunteer members, who had bickered with him about mounting legal costs associated with fighting the proposed cell. In March, they told the authority’s lawyers to withdraw official opposition to it, and a state commission approved it a short time later.

Authority members are unpaid, but the authority itself and its popular county recycling program are funded largely by landfill fees, creating potential conflicts of interest, Hughes said. His term on the authority expires in July.
"Wild West" in Ohio

Rachelle Quigg and her son had a rude awakening one summer night in 2014 when a neighbor’s property in Hammondsville, Ohio, was invaded by large yellow tanks and humming trucks.

'It was like the most bizarre thing ever,’ Quigg said, describing trucks noisily pulling in and out at all hours of the night. She said the Ohio Department of Natural Resources sent an inspector in February 2015 only after she and others complained to a television news crew. 'It seemed like they had too much to deal with; they couldn't bother.'

A month later, officials ordered the company responsible, Anchor Drilling Fluids USA Inc., to shut down and clean up the property, which it did in July 2015. The company was not penalized outside of being ordered to close the site.

In lieu of issuing permits, the state has allowed more than 40 facilities to handle and treat drilling waste under a temporary authorization process since 2014. Some applications were approved the same day they were submitted — unlike permits, which require public comment and various stages of review.

Department of Natural Resources spokesman Eric Heis said companies consult with state engineers prior to filing applications, which shortens review times. Temporary authorizations are granted without public comment.

Under Gov. John Kasich, the department has drawn criticism for being deferential to industry. A 2012 memo detailed joint plans by the department and Kasich's office to rally support for fracking by undercutting “environmental-activist opponents, who are skilled propagandists.” The memo singled out opponents, including the Sierra Club and Democratic legislators, and potential allies such as Halliburton and other energy and business interests. The plans were never carried out.

Melanie Houston of the Ohio Environmental Council said rulemaking efforts have moved at a snail’s pace, creating a “Wild West” milieu. Proposed guidelines would require landfill operators to install radiation monitors and report alarms to health officials and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, which shares authority with the Department of Natural Resources.

The Ohio EPA began the rulemaking process in 2013, but has yet to approve any rules. Statewide, six landfills reported accepting 583,000 tons of drilling waste in 2013. In 2014, eight landfills reported taking in nearly double that amount.

Emails obtained by the Center through an open-records request show state officials struggled to coordinate response to an alarm last July triggered by drilling “filter socks” in East Sparta that were emitting roughly 200 times the state’s radiation limit. The socks, which separate liquid and solid drilling waste, were picked up unknowingly by a residential garbage truck. The waste was shipped to a Utah nuclear waste site in October, since it was too radioactive for a much closer facility in Michigan.

Dumping in New York

Like Ohio, New York is mulling new rules. In February, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced proposed regulations requiring landfills to install radiation monitors and lower the radioactivity of disposed waste. The state’s Department of Environmental Conservation is accepting public comments through the summer.

The proposals come a year after an Environmental Advocates of New York report claimed thousands of tons of fracking waste were being landfilled upstate. 'There were a lot of residents pretty outraged,' said report author Elizabeth Moran.

When the state’s fracking ban took effect in 2014, Cuomo cited health officials who called potential risks, such as water contamination from radioactive waste, 'too great' to bear.

But data show seven New York landfills have accepted at least 460,000 tons of solid fracking waste since 2010, according to Moran. The numbers, based on self-reported estimates from oil and gas companies operating in Pennsylvania, are incomplete.

They don’t reflect, for example, Pennsylvania fracking waste that was processed by a New Jersey landfill and later sent to Staten Island in New York City. Records obtained by Delaware Riverkeeper in 2014 showed the treated drilling waste was used in 2011 to cover the Brookfield Avenue Landfill, an illegal dumping ground that was shuttered in the 1980s and is undergoing a $240 million cleanup.

Lacking confidence in the state, several New York counties have banned fracking waste disposal, while a bill outlawing the dumping, use or sale of all fracking byproducts is being considered by the New York City Council.

Moran suspects many New Yorkers don’t know that radioactive waste is being scattered in the
"We banned fracking," she said, "so people don’t think we’re part of this dirty process."

Deirdre Fulton, "Fatigue, Migraines Linked to Fracking as Case Builds for National Ban: 'It is abundantly clear that fracking is harming people, and the only solution is to stop fracking'," Common Dreams, Thursday, August 25, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/25/fatigue-migraines-linked-fracking-case-builds-national-ban, reported, "13 Comments

New research published Thursday links severe fatigue and migraine headaches to hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, leading to renewed calls for a ban on the controversial oil and gas extraction method.

Researchers from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health reported their findings online in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives, saying their research adds to "a growing body of evidence linking the fracking industry to health problems."

The study was based on a survey of 7,785 adult primary care patients of the Geisinger Health System, a healthcare provider that covers 40 counties in north and central Pennsylvania. With the Marcellus Shale running below most of Pennsylvania, the northeastern and southwestern parts of the state have become ground zero for drilling.

According to a press statement from Johns Hopkins, the researchers found that 1,765 respondents (23 percent) suffered from migraines; 1,930 people (25 percent) experienced severe fatigue; and 1,850 (24 percent) had current symptoms of chronic rhinosinusitis, defined as three or more months of nasal and sinus symptoms.

The researchers then used publicly available well data to estimate participants' exposure to the fracking industry—accounting for both the size and number of wells, as well as the distance between wells and people's homes. 'While no single health condition was associated with proximity to active wells, those who met criteria for two or more of the health conditions were nearly twice as likely to live closer to more or larger wells,' they reported.

'These three health conditions can have debilitating impacts on people's lives,' said study author Aaron W. Tustin, a resident physician in the Department of Environmental Health Sciences at the Bloomberg School. 'In addition, they cost the health care system a lot of money. Our data suggest these symptoms are associated with proximity to the fracking industry.'

And while the study proves correlation, not causation, senior author Brian S. Schwartz, a physician and environmental epidemiologist at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, told the New York Times, 'there have now been seven or eight studies with different designs and in different populations, and while none is perfect, there is now a growing body of evidence that this industry is associated with impacts on health that are biologically plausible. Do we know the exact mechanism? No. That requires further study.'

In fact, noted Food & Water Watch executive director Wenonah Hauter on Thursday, 'this is the third study released by Hopkins in the past year that connects proximity to fracking sites with adverse health outcomes. Last fall, researchers found an association between fracking and premature births and high-risk pregnancies, and last month, found ties between fracking and asthma.'

'While the industry will no doubt continue to refute the expanding science about the dangers of fracking, we can't afford to ignore it,' said Hauter, who is a vocal proponent of a national fracking ban. 'The public health and climate impacts of extreme fossil fuel extraction requires bold leadership to keep fossil fuels in the ground and transition swiftly to renewable energy.'

Indeed, said Diane Sipe, Pennsylvania resident and steering committee member of Pennsylvanians Against Fracking: 'Enough is enough.'

'It is abundantly clear that fracking is harming people, and the only solution is to stop fracking,' Sipe declared. 'The people in this state do not deserve to be put in harm's way by leaders who are choosing to ignore the dangers of fracking and related infrastructure. It is time for Governor [Tom] Wolf to follow the example set in New York, and put the well-being of his constituents above the profits of the oil and gas industry and ban fracking in Pennsylvania once and for all.'

A separate study, also published Thursday, found that prenatal exposure to fracking chemicals may threaten fertility in female mice.

'The evidence indicates that developmental exposure to fracking and drilling chemicals may pose a threat to fertility in animals and potentially people,' said the study's senior author, Susan C. Nagel of the
University of Missouri. 'Negative outcomes were observed even in mice exposed to the lowest dose of chemicals, which was lower than the concentrations found in groundwater at some locations with past oil and gas wastewater spills.'

She added: 'These findings build on our previous research, which found exposure to the same chemicals was tied to reduced sperm counts in male mice. Our studies suggest adverse developmental and reproductive health outcomes might be expected in humans and animals exposed to chemicals in regions with oil and gas drilling activity.'

Nadia Prupis, "Victory in Canada as Court Strikes Down Northern Gateway Pipeline: Opponents 'said 'no' to Enbridge 12 years ago when it first proposed the project. And now that 'no' has the backing of the courts," Common Dreams, June 30, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/30/victory-canada-court-strikes-down-northern-gateway-pipeline, reported. "Environmentalists and Indigenous rights advocates celebrated on Thursday after a judge struck down the Canadian government's 2014 approval of a controversial pipeline project in a landmark ruling.

The court found (pdf) that the government had not done enough to consult with First Nations communities that would be impacted by the building of the Northern Gateway pipeline, approved under then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

The decision 'confirms that the environmental assessment of major pipeline projects was badly eroded by the previous government's dismantling of environmental laws,' said Barry Robinson, an attorney for the environmental law firm Ecojustice, which brought the case. Caitlyn Vernon, a spokesperson for the Sierra Club, told CBC, "Today is a good day for the B.C. coast, climate and salmon rivers. By overturning federal approval of Northern Gateway, the courts have put yet another nail in the coffin of this pipeline and tankers project.'

'First Nations, local communities, and environmental interests said 'no' to Enbridge 12 years ago when it first proposed the project. And now that 'no' has the backing of the courts,' Robinson said.

The pipeline would have transported tar sands crude from Alberta to Kitimat, British Columbia. Opponents have long warned that it would expand the use of dangerous fossil fuels, delay the implementation of clean energy, and increase dangers faced by the environment and impacted communities, including possible violation of First Nations treaty rights.

Critics have also pointed out that Northern Gateway's parent company, Enbridge, has a history of environmental destruction, including a massive pipeline rupture that spilled close to one million gallons of crude oil into Michigan's Kalamazoo River and Talmadge Creek in 2010—eventually forcing the company to pay $75 million in cleanup costs.

Karen Wristen, executive director of Living Oceans Society, one of the plaintiffs in the legal challenge, said Thursday, 'We know from Enbridge's own shoddy public safety record that tar sands oil spills have devastating consequences. Today's decision is a victory across the board: for the wildlife living in this marine environment, and for the communities living at its shores.'

The social advocacy group Council of Canadians congratulated the First Nations communities and all other groups involved in the court case. The organization's executive director Maude Barlowe has previously called the opposition movement against Northern Gateway 'one of the most important fights we have right now.'

The court ruling also denotes an early victory for Alberta Premier Rachel Notley, who campaigned on a promise of ushering in climate-friendly policies, telling voters after a landslide victory in May 2015 that 'change has finally come to Alberta. New people, new ideas and a fresh start for our great province.'


The spills are all attributed to State oil company PetróPerú, which has failed to conduct routine maintenance on its pipelines. One spill released at least 2,000 barrels of oil, which spread into the local rivers, affecting indigenous communities that include the Achuar, Shapra, Wampis and Awajún.
The spills have destroyed the ecosystem, compromising the health, food and safety of local communities. Locals have lost their livelihoods and are no longer able to drink water from the rivers or fish for food.

Whilst the cleanup is the responsibility of PetroPerú, both the company and the government have been slow to react. Communities have resorted to trying to clean up the toxic oil themselves. Shocking images reveal that children, without protection, have been involved in this dangerous process.

This environmental disaster is just the latest in a long history of oil and gas leaks in the area. More than 70% of the Peruvian Amazon has been leased by the government to oil companies. Many of these leases are inhabited by indigenous people. These projects not only open up previously remote areas to outsiders, such as loggers and colonists, but destroy the ecosystem for indigenous peoples.

The national indigenous peoples’ organization, AIDESEP, has denounced the oil spills. Criticizing the slow action of the government, the organization called on 'international public opinion, the media, NGOs and civil society to pay attention to this serious.'

Nika Knight, "Repeat Oil Spills Turning Peruvian Amazon into 'Sacrifice Zone' for Big Oil: 'The situation is criminal',' Common Dreams, June 28, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/28/repeat-oil-spills-turning-peruvian-amazon-sacrifice-zone-big-oil, reported, "Less than six months after two horrific oil spills in the Peruvian Amazon devastated Indigenous communities and the local ecosystem, yet another spill in the region has been reported.

'Somehow virtually none of the profits generated by the oil industry over decades is available to ensure that Amazonian communities don't have to watch their primary sources of livelihoods—the river, the forest—become irrevocably polluted by spills.'—Andrew Miller, Amazon Watch

On Friday afternoon, a leak was discovered in the Northern Peruvian Pipeline—the same pipeline responsible for the earlier spills—that eventually coated over 16,000 square meters of Amazon rainforest in Peru's northeast Loreto region with crude oil, according to OEFA, the country's environmental regulator.

The pipeline is operated by the state-run corporation PetroPeru.

'Upon initial reports of the spill on June 24th, PetroPeru went into crisis response mode, issuing statements via Twitter to national and international journalists. PetroPeru claimed that the Northern Peruvian Pipeline still isn't pumping oil following the disastrous spills in early 2016, but the OEFA report belies that, stating that they found 'indicators that PetroPeru is pumping hydrocarbons through the pipeline,' said Andrew Miller, advocacy director of Amazon Watch, in an email to Common Dreams.

'So it appears that PetroPeru is currently pumping oil, though they publicly deny it,' Miller added, 'without having carried out the proper reparation and replacement of deteriorated pipeline sections ordered by the OEFA after the prior spills.'

As with previous spills, local Indigenous residents have been employed to help with the cleanup—but health officials on Tuesday reported (pdf) a lack of proper safety equipment, which puts those people at risk for "poisoning and burns" from direct contact with the crude.

Moreover, while PetroPeru 'personnel arrived at the spill site at 10pm [on Friday] and tried to contain the spill using makeshift barriers of leaves and branches," Mongabay writes, the health officials' report states that this 'did not help much, because the oil continued to leak and affect lower areas.'

Miller wrote that at least 430 people are affected by this latest spill.

The health officials found that the 'community of Barranca, which is close to the spill site, is most directly threatened,' observes Mongabay. 'The community of about 725 people lacks basic services, such as safe drinking water and electricity, making it even more vulnerable. If the oil should reach the stream known as Barranca Caño, it would pose a serious risk, because the stream is the community's main source of drinking water.'

Amidst this current scandal, 'OEFA announced yesterday that they are fining PetroPeru some 10 million soles (a little over $3 million) for improper clean-up of the Cuninico oil spill in mid-2014,' Miller reported. 'This follows a recent report that Kukama indigenous villagers in Cuninico have high levels of mercury and cadmium in their urine. There's no reason to assume the fate of the at least 430 people impacted by the most recent spill will be much different.'

Miller roundly condemned the situation as "criminal":

Overall at play here is a system of environmental racism in which indigenous villages along the
pipeline route become de facto 'sacrifice zones.' Somehow virtually none of the profits generated by the oil industry over decades is available to ensure that Amazonian communities don't have to watch their primary sources of livelihoods—the river, the forest—become irrevocably polluted by spills.

The situation is criminal, and responsibility extends through PetroPeru to national politicians who weakened environmental regulations in recent years and the international oil companies that benefit from the pipeline.

"The third oil spill in the Amazon [this year] and still no preventive actions," lamented Henderson Rengifo of local Indigenous rights group AIDESEP."


The agencies each weighed in during March and early April with separate letters exhorting the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which is about to make a decision about the pipeline, to conduct a formal Environmental Impact Assessment and issue an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Each of them cited potential effects on and lack of consultation with tribes, most notably the Standing Rock Sioux."

Lauren McCauley, "Damning Probe Finds EPA 'Turning Blind Eye' to Toxic Chemical Cocktails: Despite the EPA's claims, information on dangerous synergistic effects is publicly available. In fact, the agro-giants collected it themselves," Common Dreams, July 19, 2016," reported, "While the use of one toxic chemical—on our foods, lawns, and elsewhere—has its inherent risks, scientists warn that the combination of two or more such ingredients in common pesticides could have an even more noxious impact, one which is commonly overlooked.

In fact, a investigation released Tuesday by the environmental watchdog Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) found that over the past six years the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has approved nearly 100 pesticide products that contain these so-called "synergistic" compounds, effectively "increasing the dangers to imperiled pollinators and rare plants."

As CBD explains, '[s]ynergy occurs when two or more chemicals interact to enhance their toxic effects,' turning "what would normally be considered a safe level of exposure into one that results in considerable harm.'

'In the case of Toxic Concoctions: How the EPA Ignores the Dangers of Pesticide Cocktails (pdf),

One toxic cocktail that has gotten some attention is Dow AgroScience's Enlist Duo, which contains two of the most commonly used pesticides in the nation: 2,4-D and glyphosate. The EPA approved the product in October 2014 but revoked the license after discovering a patent application in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office Database that warned of synergistic toxicity to plants.

Following the lead of the EPA, Donley analyzed the patent database for other recent pesticide products approved by the EPA for agrochemical giants, Bayer, Dow, Monsanto, and Syngenta. According to Donley, among the key findings are:

• 69 percent of these products (96 out of 140) had at least one patent application that claimed or demonstrated synergy between the active ingredients in the product;

• 72 percent of the identified patent applications that claimed or demonstrated synergy involved some of the most highly used pesticides in the United States, including glyphosate, atrazine, 2,4-D, dicamba and the neonicotinoids thiamethoxam, imidacloprid and clothianidin, among others.

As the research notes, another example of a common pesticide that has proven synergy but that the EPA has failed to cross-examine for compounded impacts are bee-harming neonicotinoids. 'It's alarming to see just how common it's been for the EPA to ignore how these chemical mixtures might endanger the health of our environment,' Donley said.
'It's pretty clear that chemical companies knew about these potential dangers, but the EPA never bothered to demand this information from them or dig a little deeper to find it for themselves,' he added.

Andre Leu, an organic farmer based in Australia and president of the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movements (IFOAM), has done extensive research on the subject of synergistic compounds.

In Leu's 2014 report *The Myths of Safe Pesticides* (pdf), he states unequivocally that it is a 'myth' that pesticide formulations are 'rigorously tested.'

Leu writes: 'Given that the other chemical ingredients are chemically active as they are added to the formulations to make the active ingredient work more effectively, the assumption that they are inert and will not increase the toxicity of the whole formulation lacks scientific credibility. The limited scientific testing of formulated pesticide products shows that they can be hundreds of times more toxic to humans than the pure single active ingredient.'

Donley said that 'the EPA has turned a blind eye for far too long to the reality that pesticide blends can have dangerous synergistic effects. Now that we know about all the data that are out there, the EPA must take action to ensure that wildlife and the environment are protected from these chemical cocktails.'

Friends of the Earth reported, June 21, 2016, Friends of the Earth is forcing California utility giant PG&E to close the state’s last nuclear reactors at the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

On top of that, we got PG&E to agree to replace Diablo Canyon with renewable energy, energy efficiency and storage. Plus, we won support for Diablo Canyon’s workers in the transition to a clean-energy economy."

Exelon announced, in early June 2016, that it is closing its two nuclear power plants in Illinois, the Clinton Power Station and the Quad Cities Generating Station, as both are losing money and the company cannot obtain a bailout for them (Diane Caldwell, "Unable to Win Relief, Exelon Plans to Close 2 Illinois Nuclear Plants." *The New York Times*, June 3, 2016).

Nadia Prupis, "Greenpeace: ‘Extremely High’ Jump in Post-Fukushima Radioactive Chemicals: Concerns are ‘both ongoing and future threats, principally the continued releases from the Fukushima No. 1 plant itself and translocation of land-based contamination’," *Common Dreams*, July 21, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/07/21/greenpeace-extremely-high-jump-post-fukushima-radioactive-chemicals, reported, "Japan reported Thursday that waterways in the Fukushima district have hundreds of times more radiation now than before 2011, when the nuclear disaster that forced the evacuation of at least 160,000 people occurred.

Looking back at the past five years, the environmental group’s new report, *Atomic Depths: An assessment of freshwater and marine sediment contamination: The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster—Five years later* (pdf), finds that the hazardous chemical cesium-137 was present in the soil on the banks of the Abukuma, Niida, and Ota rivers.

'The extremely high levels of radioactivity we found along the river systems highlights the enormity and longevity of both the environmental contamination and the public health risks resulting from the Fukushima disaster,' said Ai Kashiwagi, energy campaigner at Greenpeace Japan. 'These river samples were taken in areas where the Abe government is stating it is safe for people to live. But the results show there is no return to normal after this nuclear catastrophe.'

The report states:

Fukushima prefecture and neighboring prefectures have a number of major and minor river systems that flow from contaminated upland forests to coastal plains, and ultimately empty into the Pacific Ocean. These river systems, in particular the Abukuma, Naruse, Nanakita, Natori, Kuji, and Naka, as well other smaller river systems including the Mano, Nitta, Ota, and Ukedo, have catchments of thousands of square kilometers.
The radiological impacts of the Fukushima nuclear disaster on the marine environment, with consequences for both human and nonhuman health, are not only the first years. They are both ongoing and future threats, principally the continued releases from the Fukushima No. 1 plant itself and translocation of land-based contamination throughout Fukushima Prefecture, including upland forests, rivers, lakes and coastal estuaries,' the report continues.

Lake Biwa is a particularly contentious site, as it provides drinking water for about 14 million people in the Kansai region, the Japan Times reports.

Kansai Electric Power Co. wants to restart nuclear reactors in the nearby Fukui Prefecture, while residents in the area have been fighting to keep them shut down, the Times says.

Greenpeace states:

The lifting of evacuation orders in March 2017 for areas that remain highly contaminated is a looming human rights crisis and cannot be permitted to stand. The vast expanses of contaminated forests and freshwater systems will remain a perennial source of radioactivity for the foreseeable future, as these ecosystems cannot simply be decontaminated.

'The radiation levels in the sediment off the coast of Fukushima are low compared to land contamination, which is what we expected and consistent with other research,' said Kendra Ulrich, senior global energy campaigner at Greenpeace Japan. 'The sheer size of the Pacific Ocean combined with powerful complex currents means the largest single release of radioactivity into the marine environment has led to the widespread dispersal of contamination.'

The report comes as the 'much-hyped ice wall,' an underground refrigeration system created to build a barrier to contaminated groundwater, is said to have 'failed to stop groundwater from flowing in and mixing with highly radioactive water inside the wrecked reactor buildings.'

'The scientific community must receive all necessary support to continue their research into the impacts of this disaster,' said Ulrich. 'In addition to the ongoing contamination from forests and rivers, the vast amount of radioactivity onsite at the destroyed nuclear plant remains one of the greatest nuclear threats to Fukushima coastal communities and the Pacific Ocean.'

'The hundreds of thousands of tones of highly contaminated water, the apparent failure of the ice wall to reduce groundwater contamination, and the unprecedented challenge of three molten reactor cores all add up to a nuclear crisis that is far from over,' she said."

"Food and Water Watch commented, May 24, 2016, "We Can't Let the Crisis in Flint Happen Again. Take Action to support the WATER Act and fix America's crumbling water systems. The crisis in Flint, Michigan shows the desperate state of our nation's water crisis."

Most of our water pipes were built after World War II and some are over 100 years old — as old as Ford's first Model T car. We aren't investing nearly enough to make sure safe, clean water flows from our taps. Without adequate upgrades, our water systems are set up to fail. It shouldn't take poisoning kids in Flint to wake us up to this water crisis. That's why Food & Water Watch is joining Representative Conyers from Michigan as he introduces the WATER Act today — a bill to finally fund our water infrastructure, replace lead pipes and fix our national water crisis"

"The federal government has sharply decreased funding for public water systems – by 82% per capita since 1977, traded away in funding cuts and budget negotiations. EPA estimates that our public drinking water and sewer systems need at least $35 billion a year in investment to comply with key federal environmental laws.

The WATER Act - Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability — will provide dedicated funding by closing corporate tax loopholes to keep our water and sewer systems up to date and protect our drinking water. It will:

Support publicly owned and managed water and sewer systems (which on average are more reliable and cost-effective than privately managed systems) so that no community has to sacrifice their clean water and their residents' health to budget shortfalls.²

Provide grants to help homeowners replace lead pipes running to their homes, a costly but essential part of keeping everyone's water free of lead contamination.

Help public schools test, repair and replace water lead infrastructure.

In the process of making all these improvements, create up to 945,000 jobs.
Multinational water corporations want to use national attention to capitalize on the crisis and pass weak legislation that would ultimately benefit big corporations more than local communities trying to provide safe drinking water."

"If we don’t fix our aging drinking water systems now, more communities will be in danger — and Flint’s crisis shows just how much is at stake. We can’t let this happen again."


"The Swain family’s predicament is common among Canada’s indigenous families, according to a report published by Human Rights Watch on Tuesday ['Make it safe: Canada’s obligation to end the First Nation Water Crisis,' https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/06/07/make-it-safe/canadas-obligation-end-first-nations-water-crisis]. In spite of living in one of the world’s most water-rich regions, First Nations people living on reserves depend on water sources that are not regulated or protected by Canada’s government. That means the available water is often contaminated, inaccessible, and degraded, leaving communities at risk of cancer, skin infections, and gastrointestinal disorders.

'It’s often indigenous groups and communities of color that miss out on access to safe drinking water, even in countries that have a large amount of natural resources,' Amanda Klasing, the report’s author, told TakePart. 'First Nations communities not only lack the same level of access to clean water but also the basic legal infrastructure to ensure that they have safe drinking water on the reserve.'

First Nations reserves in Canada do not have the level of sovereignty and control over governance that Native American reservations in the U.S. do, leaving the Canadian government responsible for the regulatory gap that has inhibited potable water access in these communities, according to Klasing. Recognizing that responsibility, candidate Justin Trudeau made a campaign promise to end boil-water advisories in First Nations communities within five years of being elected prime minister. His administration has since earmarked $1.8 million to address water access on indigenous reserves.

Now, advocates like Klasing are waiting for that plan to be put into action—and to see whether indigenous stakeholders will be involved in the process. “Funding commitments by the government in the past haven’t led to progress or change in the communities,” said Klasing.

The tainted water, in which contaminants such as E. coli, coliform, uranium, and cancer-causing disinfectant byproducts have been found, has led to negative health consequences for many of the households surveyed by Human Rights Watch. The lack of access to drinkable water recalls that experienced by members of the Navajo Nation in the U.S. throughout New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. Contaminated wells and groundwater in this region, along with limited resources necessary to build infrastructure to bring safer water from the San Juan and Colorado rivers to the Navajo people, has left many unable to access water that runs through their lands."

Nika Knight, "At Least Six Million Americans Are Drinking Toxic 'Teflon Chemicals' With Their Water: 'The available data only reveals the tip of the iceberg of contaminated drinking water'," Common Dreams, August 10, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/10/least-six-million-americans-are-drinking-toxic-teflon-chemicals-their-water, reported, "At least six million Americans in 33 states are being exposed to unsafe levels of industrial perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) chemicals in their drinking water, found a study published Tuesday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology Letters.

'Virtually all Americans are exposed to these compounds. They never break down. Once they are released into the environment, they are there.' —Xindi Hu, Harvard University “And the available water data only reveals the tip of the iceberg of contaminated drinking water,” said study co-author Dr. Philippe Grandjean of the Harvard School of Public Health to the Charleston Gazette-Mail.

The Washington Post details the researchers’ findings: 194 of 4,864 water supplies across nearly three dozen states had detectable levels of the chemicals. Sixty-six of those water supplies, serving about six million people, had at least one sample that exceeded
the EPA’s recommended safety limit of 70 parts per trillion for two types of chemicals — perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

PFOA and PFOS chemical compounds—including C8, popularly known as the Teflon chemical—are extremely dangerous to human health, and despite an EPA advisory released earlier this year and increasing calls for action, research shows they are near-ubiquitous in the United States.

"Virtually all Americans are exposed to these compounds," said Xindi Hu, the study’s lead author and a doctoral student at Harvard’s Department of Environmental Health, to the Post. "They never break down. Once they are released into the environment, they are there."

Moreover, the study also notes that research suggests ‘That exposure to these chemicals can make people sick, even at or below the concentration recommended as acceptable under the EPA health advisory,’ according to the Gazette-Mail.

"The EPA advisory limit ... is much too high to protect us against toxic effects on the immune system," said Grandjean to the Gazette-Mail.

PFOAs are the contentious center of a years-long legal battle against DuPont, which manufactured the chemical for decades—and dumped it into public waterways—despite knowing that it was severely harmful to human health and the environment. Thousands of personal injury cases are currently pending against the chemical giant.

The Gazette-Mail further reports:

DuPont and other companies have agreed on a voluntary phase-out of the chemical, but researchers noted in this week’s study that declines in production in the U.S. and Europe have been offset by increases in developing regions such as Asia. Scientists have also been increasingly concerned about chemical contamination of consumer products, and the new study provides important details about the potential threats from waste disposal practices and varying uses of the substances.

The dire situation is a result of decades of weak or no regulations, as Hu remarked to the Harvard Gazette: "For many years, chemicals with unknown toxicities, such as [PFOAs], were allowed to be used and released to the environment, and we now have to face the severe consequences."

"In addition, the actual number of people exposed may be even higher than our study found," Hu continued, "because government data for levels of these compounds in drinking water is lacking for almost a third of the U.S. population—about 100 million people."


Officials said the new standards would require up to a 25 percent reduction in carbon emissions for big tractor-trailers over the next 10 years, and somewhat smaller improvements for delivery trucks, school buses and other large vehicles.

Over all, administration officials said the new rules would cut 1.1 billion metric tons of carbon emissions through 2027 and represent a global benchmark for reducing vehicle-exhaust pollutants linked to climate change."

With the support of the chemical industry, the U.S. Senate, in early June 2016, approved legislation updating the 1976 Toxic Substance Control Act, authorizing the EPA to begin slowly testing 64,000 chemicals, 20 at a time within 7 years per chemical. The bill would allow EPA chemical regulations to preempt stronger state regulations. Numerous health and environmental advocates criticized the bill as only a slight step forward, when much more regulation is needed (Coral Davenport, "Senate Approves Updating Of Rules on Toxic Chemicals," The New York Times, June 8, 2016).

A study by the International Energy Agency, released in April 2016, found that air pollution - much of it from burning coal and vehicle exhaust - kills some 6.5 million people worldwide each year. The agency called for closing coal plants and putting stricter emissions standards in place to counter the problem.

Mexico City, which had greatly reduced its serious air pollution some years ago by closing area oil refiners, has returned to being a toxically air polluted city as the metropolitan area population has grown to 20 million, with a great many driving cars in slow heavy traffic (Elisabeth Malkin, "Pollution Returns to a City Where Driving Is Hardly an Option," *The New York Times*, June 14, 2016).


Deirdre Fulton, "Melting Permafrost Releases Deadly, Long-Dormant Anthrax in Siberia: 'This week's anthrax outbreak signals that global warming is transforming Siberia's lonely wilderness into a feverish nightmarescape,'" Commons Dreams, August 01, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/01/melting-permafrost-releases-deadly-long-dormant-anthrax-siberia, reported, A Russian heatwave has activated long-dormant anthrax bacteria in Siberia, sickening at least 13 people and killing one boy and more than 2,300 reindeer. According to the Siberian Times on Monday:

A total of 72 people are now in hospital, a rise of 32 since Friday, under close observation amid fears of a major outbreak. 41 of those hospitalized are children as Russia copes with a full scale health emergency above the polar circle which has also killed thousands of reindeer.

A state of emergency has been imposed throughout the region in western Siberia, and reindeer herding communities have been quarantined.

While NBC News last week pinned the blame for the outbreak on '[t]he carcass of a reindeer thought to have died from anthrax decades ago,' new reports suggest an old burial ground could be the source.

Nadezhda Noskova, press secretary of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Region government, told the Siberian Times:

We are working out all the versions of what has happened. The first version is that due to the very hot weather permafrost thawed and bared the carcass of an animal which died from anthrax long ago. The other version is that it could have been a human body. The point is that Nenets and Khanty peoples do not bury their dead in the ground. They put them into the wooden coffins—they resemble boxes—and place them on a stand or hillock.

The old cemetery could be also the source of the disease. But regardless of the precise culprit, there's little doubt that climate change is exacerbating the health crisis.

The Washington Post noted last week, 'Temperatures have soared in western Russia's Yamal tundra this summer,' with several regions seeing record heat. Indeed, temperatures in the Yamal tundra above the Arctic Circle have hit highs of 95°F this summer, compared to an average of 77°F.

The Post quoted two Russian researchers, who warned in 2011: 'As a consequence of permafrost melting, the vectors of deadly infections of the 18th and 19th centuries may come back...especially near the cemeteries where the victims of these infections were buried.' "The extreme heat has triggered a seemingly endless rash of freak weather, natural disasters, and signs of ecological malaise, including enormous wildfires, record flooding, and natural moon bounces [methane bubbles] that might be explosive," staff writer Maddie Stone reported at Gizmodo. 'But above all else, this week's anthrax outbreak—the first to hit the region since 1941—signals that global warming is transforming Siberia's lonely wilderness into a feverish nightmarescape.'

Or, as Charles Pierce wrote at Esquire on Monday, 'an anthrax strain that has spent 75 years resting, sleeping a lot, going a few times a week to the Bacteria Gym, and generally muscling up, gets another chance at sickening reindeer and people because the Great Climate Change Hoax has thawed the permafrost, so it gets its shot at the reindeer and people that didn't die in the record wildfires. I would point out that one of our two major political parties doesn't believe that any of this is happening, and that the party’s candidate for president thinks it all might be a hoax thought up by the Chinese'"
The Chaco is home to Paraguay's most vulnerable tribe, the Ayoreo, and is the largest South American forest outside the Amazon. Scientists have called it one of the most biodiverse places on earth.

The report by Guyra, a Paraguayan environmental organization, shows that 28,000 hectares were cut down in October. The Chaco is currently facing the fastest rate of deforestation in the world.*

Part of this land belongs to the Ayoreo, who have been forced out of their forest home by cattle ranchers. Cattle firms Yaguareté Porã SA and Spanish-owned Carlos Casado SA have already destroyed large swathes of the Indians' ancestral forest.

Some members of the tribe remain uncontacted. They spend their lives on the run, fleeing the bulldozers that encroach on their ever shrinking island of forest.

Following first contact, many Ayoreo have died from diseases such as colds and flu, which they previously had no immunity against. Healthcare remains wholly inadequate. Many are now dying from a TB-like illness, and are not receiving the help that they need.

Survival is calling on Paraguay to stop the rampant destruction of Ayoreo land and to return it to its rightful owners.

*This is based on a study conducted by M.C Hansen et al (2013), titled, ‘High-Resolution Global Maps of 21st-Century Forest Cover Change’. The study analyzed satellite data from 2000 to 2012 and demonstrates that Paraguay had the highest net loss/area for that time period."


Under the governor's executive order, emergency drought regulations, like bans on hosing down driveways or watering lawns within 48 hours of a rainstorm, will remain indefinitely. Urban water suppliers will be required to report their water use to the state each month and develop plans to get through long-term periods of drought.

Despite winter rains that replenished reservoirs and eased dry conditions in parts of Northern California, Mr. Brown suggested that the drought may never entirely end, and that the state needed to adapt to life with less water."


The death toll in Xingtai, an industrial city in Hebei Province, rose sharply on Saturday, days after a wall of water descended on one village in the middle of the night with little or no warning, according to the Beijing News. In addition to the 25 people in Xingtai who were confirmed dead, 13 were missing."


"Deadly Floods in India Force 1.2 Million People From Homes," The New York Times, July 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/27/world/asia/india-floods-assam.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Heavy rains and floods have killed at least seven people and forced about 1.2 million in India to leave their waterlogged homes in the northeastern state of Assam."

"Linda Daniels, "Indigenous Knowledge Fighting Drought in South Africa," ICTMN, March 27, 2016, http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/03/27/indigenous-knowledge-fighting-drought-south-afirca-163830. reported, "Indigenous knowledge and modern software have been brought together to mitigate the devastating drought in Southern Africa."
The drought has affected large parts of southern Africa including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana and Madagascar.

A government statement released last week confirmed that South Africa’s agriculture sector has incurred losses of copy billion. South Africa’s diverse agricultural sector, from grains to livestock, has been hit by a scorching drought which has been exacerbated by a powerful El Nino weather pattern.

El Nino is the name given to a weather pattern associated with a sustained period of warming in the central and eastern tropical Pacific which can spark deadly and costly climate extremes in other parts of the world.

However, a unique attempt to stave off the serious effects of the drought has been spearheaded by a team of researchers at the Central University of Technology in the Free State in South Africa. They have integrated modern approaches of predicting drought using sensor networks with indigenous knowledge on drought for an effective drought early warning system.

The combination of drought and deforestation (that reduces the ability of the land to hold water) in Malawi threatens the water supply for the capital, Lilongwe. In 2015, soldiers were posted in the national forest reserve 30 miles from the city to stop deforestation (Norimitsu Onshi, "Drought and Felled Trees Take a Toll at Makave's Taps," The New York Times, August 21, 2016).

Andrea Germanos, "Mass Evacuation as 'Apocalyptic' Inferno Engulfs Canadian Tar Sands City: 'There was smoke everywhere and it was raining ash,' says Fort McMurray evacuee," Common Dreams, May 04, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/04/mass-evacuation-apocalyptic-inferno-engulfs-canadian-tar-sands-city, reported, "A raging wildfire in a Canadian tar sands town has forced tens of thousands of evacuations and destroyed several residential neighborhoods, offering a bleak vision of a fiery future if the fossil fuel era is not brought to an end.

The blaze in Fort McMurray, Alberta, started over the weekend, doubled in size on Monday, and grew into an inferno on Tuesday. It is expected to worsen on Wednesday as strong wind gusts and record high temperatures persist.

Officials estimate 17,000 citizens fled north to industry sites. Another 35,000 headed south, including 18,000 people enroute to Edmonton."

"Fire season came early to Western Canada this year; already there have been 311 fires in Alberta, according to the province’s Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, and approximately 192 fires in British Columbia. Experts attribute the early onset and extremity of the fires to human-caused climate change, exacerbated by a strong El Niño effect, which led to a drier and warmer winter with lower-than-average snowfall.

'Because spring came about a month early here, we are already in the middle of our prime fire season for the spring,' Mike Flannigan, a wildfire expert at the University of Alberta, told Global News. 'Given the already dry conditions means it’s easier for fires, once they sustain themselves, to go underground until it gets windy and they re-appear.'

Furthermore, University of Lethbridge professor Judith Kulig told the publication, 'the whole aspect of climate change and global warming...is then interrelated [to] things such as insect infestation, so pine beetle increases because it’s not a cold enough winter. The trees are infested and drier and more prone to fire.

At Climate Central on Wednesday, senior science writer Brian Kahn put it succinctly:

The wildfire is the latest in a lengthening lineage of early wildfires in the northern reaches of the globe that are indicative of a changing climate. As the planet continues to warm, these types of fires will likely only become more common and intense as spring snowpack disappears and temperatures warm.

Fort McMurray is home to the Athabasca tar sands, the largest single oil deposit in the world, containing an estimated 174 trillion barrels of bitumen. Tar sands oil production is the fastest growing source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Canada, and greatly increases the country's contribution to global warming."

By 7:47 pm, CDT, May 5, 2016, radio news reports and the Toronto Star,
The Fire continued to burn out of control. On May 17, with a reversal of winds, it was headed back toward Fort McMurry, preventing people from returning, some being reevacuated, as it threatened a previously spared neighborhoods and two major oil producing areas to the north, that had to be evacuated just as they were preparing to restart production (Ian Austin, "Wind Pushes Raging Alberta Blaze Back Toward Fort McMurray," The New York Times, May 16, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/17/world/americas/fort-mcmurray-canada-wildfire.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).

Ian Austen, "First Residents Return to Fort McMurray After Wildfire," The New York Times, June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/02/world/americas/fort-mcmurray-fire-return.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Some residents returned to Fort McMurray, Alberta, on Wednesday for the first time since wildfires forced them out and ravaged their city four weeks ago. But it was hardly a triumphant homecoming, as the city's gradual reopening came amid concerns that it was premature."

"And many of the 88,000 evacuees have been told that it is still not safe for them to return: older people, children under 7, pregnant women and people with any of a variety of medical conditions. The city's tap water is not drinkable yet, and may not be available for weeks. Other utilities are not back online, either."

"It may be a long wait. Environmental experts say the ash left by the fire is so caustic and full of toxins that many surviving houses in the worst-hit neighborhoods must be sealed off, probably until September."

"Three neighborhoods of Fort McMurray were particularly devastated by the fire. After laboratory analysis of the ash and debris there, some 567 surviving houses and a dozen apartments in or near those neighborhoods have been declared unfit for habitation until a cleanup can be completed. In all, 1,921 buildings were destroyed and 174 damaged by the fire, about 10 percent of the structures in the city. Judging by what could be seen by reporters on a recent tour, the vast majority of lost structures were houses or apartments."

Ian Austin, "Canada Fire Deals Staggering Blow to Oil Sands Industry and Economy," The New York Times, May 11, 2016, reported, "Oversize transport trailers typically barrel dangerously along Highway 63 as they deliver heavy loads of equipment and even prefabricated metal buildings to the multibillion-dollar oil sands projects that dominate this area. But more than a dozen such trailers, still full, now sit at pull-ins and rest stops, abandoned by drivers who unhitched their tractors and fled south on warnings of a devastating forest fire.

As the fire ripped through Fort McMurray, oil companies severely pulled back or stopped pumping altogether. Production dropped by a million barrels a day, roughly 40 percent of Alberta’s output. While the oil markets have remained relatively stable and production is slowly picking up, the economic blow is significant to a region and a country already battered by weak oil prices and uncertainty over global growth.

Oil companies could take weeks or months to get fully up and running, depriving the province of Alberta of royalty payments. And rebuilding costs will add to the strain on a national government that had only recently, and perhaps not fully, recovered from a mild recession. Ultimately, the financial fallout from the fire could sap what little growth Canada was expected to eke out in the latest quarter."

There is strong evidence that global warming induced climate change is causing the great surge of many and often huge fires across the Boreal forests that stretch the length of Canada and Alaska across
Russia to all of Scandinavia. The huge loss of forest and related habitat that is occurring is part of a multiple positive (and for us negative) feedback loop, as the fires increase global warming by directly putting large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, which continues as killed trees and other plants rot, while any dark ash falling on ice or snow lowers its ability to reflect light and heat away from the earth, and the lost trees and other green plants can no longer convert carbon dioxide into oxygen (Justin Gillis and Henry Fountain, "Global Warming Cited as Wildfires Increase in Fragile Boreal Forest: Scientists say the near-destruction of Fort McMurray last week by a wildfire is the latest indication that the vital boreal forest is at risk from climate change," The New York Times, May 10, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/11/science/global-warming-cited-as-wildfires-increase-in-fragile-boreal-forest.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).

Spring 2016 in the Midwest South and East of the United States continued to have more heavy storms than usual. One of the worst, Christine Hauser, "6 Dead in Texas Floods, and More Rain Is Coming," The New York Times, May 30, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/31/us/6-dead-in-texas-floods-and-more-rain-is-coming.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "At least six people have died in flooding from torrential rain across large areas of Texas, and emergency workers were searching for an 11-year-old boy who was swept away in a storm-swollen creek in Kansas, the authorities said on Monday. Record-breaking rain since the middle of last week has swallowed cars, damaged houses and led to the evacuation of 2,600 inmates. Thunderstorms brought more troubles to areas already saturated by other recent storms.

In an area including San Antonio and Austin, Tex., the heavy rain could not soak into the limestone and sandstone that characterize the Hill Country region, leading narrow creeks to brim with fast-running waters.

Since Wednesday, the thunderstorms have dropped pockets of intensely heavy rain, or “rain bombs,” as meteorologists call them. These have circulated through East Texas, Dallas and Corpus Christi, along with Austin and San Antonio, hitting some parts harder than others, said Kurt Van Speybroeck, a National Weather Service meteorologist.

As a result, rainfall has ranged from four inches in parts of the Dallas-Fort Worth area to 30 inches in Washington County, the authorities said. As a result, rainfall has ranged from four inches in parts of the Dallas-Fort Worth area to 30 inches in Washington County, the authorities said.

And the rain and flooding in Texas grew worse end of May into June, with Accuweather, reporting, June 2, 2016, "Travel has become nearly impossible in some areas of Texas as substantial rain and rising rivers have led to widespread flooding over the past week. Some of the worst flooding has occurred from central Texas to the Gulf Coast. Up to 13 inches of rain fell in just 12 hours near Saratoga, Texas, according to radar estimates. Saratoga is located about 60 miles northeast of Houston."

"Flooding has forced road closures all across the state with more than 130 closures as of Thursday afternoon, according to the Texas Department of Transportation. The river reached record level on Thursday as the water level climbed above 54 feet, the highest water level ever recorded on the river at the Richmond water gauge. Over 300 water rescues have been conducted since Sunday due to the rising water, according to the Associated Press. Residents along the river were also forced to evacuate their homes due to the rising water.

The flooding left not only people, but also animals, running to higher ground. Organizations, such as the SPCA, helped to rescue animals including horses and cattle that were trapped by high water." "Texas Governor Greg Abbott declared a state of disaster for 31 counties in Texas. The counties include the cities of Lubbock and College Station, as well as areas surrounding Houston and Austin.

More life-threatening flooding is likely with additional rounds of rain expected into the weekend.
Not only can additional rain worsen existent flooding, but it could also cause flooding in new areas.

Very heavy rains returned to Louisiana and southern Mississippi, in mid-August, to bring record wide spread flooding, with rain still falling, August 12. The Governor of Louisiana declared a state of emergency in several parishes, that was threatening to be extended to others as the rain continued ("Louisiana: Emergency order follows torrential rain, flooding," San Francisco Chronicle, August 13, 2016).

Campbell Robertson and Alan Blinder, "As Louisiana Floodwaters Recede, the Scope of Disaster Comes Into View," The New York Times, August 16, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/17/us/louisiana-flooding.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, "As the receding floodwaters continued to expose the magnitude of the disaster the state has been enduring, Louisiana officials said Tuesday that at least 11 people had died, and that about 30,000 people had been rescued. Gov. John Bel Edwards acknowledged that the state did not know how many people were missing, but he said that nearly 8,100 people had slept in shelters on Monday night and that some 40,000 homes had been impacted to varying degrees."

The governor called this a "thousand year flood," worst in Louisiana history, and scientists predict more of them as with global warming there is now 5% more water in the air than before industrialization began.

A heat wave across the Southwest in mid-June 2016, brought record 120 degree Fahrenheit temperature to Phoenix, AZ, June 19 (Acuweather.com, http://www.accuweather.com/en/us/phoenix-az/85004/weather-forecast/346935). The heatwave brought record high temperatures to several locations over a number of days and made more difficult fire fighting from California to New Mexico.

Feranda Santos, "Raging Wildfires in the Southwest Stretch Resources," June 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/23/us/raging-wildfires-in-the-southwest-stretch-resources.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Firefighters across Arizona and New Mexico battled 31 wildfires on Wednesday, their efforts complicated by a relentless heat wave and bone-dry conditions. And in the Angeles National Forest, on the northern edge of Los Angeles, two fires kept more than 300 families from their homes as the fires threatened to merge into one.

Other fires ignited in Colorado and Utah, threatening homes, closing roads and stoking the zero-sum competition for finite resources — firefighters and the airplanes and helicopters that dump chemicals and water."

"the Cedar Creek fire, burning on the Fort Apache Reservation in east-central Arizona, just outside the city of Show Low. The Cedar Creek fire is burning at 6,300 feet, and temperatures were in the mid-90s on Wednesday — some five degrees above average, though nowhere near the 110 registered in Phoenix that day."

"Wildfires are judged not by size, but by complexity, and none were more complex in Arizona on Wednesday than the Cedar Creek fire, which had burned roughly 43,000 acres, an area about the size of Baton Rouge, La. Another fire, named Juniper, in the Tonto National Forest, had consumed less than that — 31,000 square miles — but because the area it was burning was so remote, it had a smaller corps of firefighters assigned to it, according to official reports."

"At 4,900 acres, the San Gabriel Complex, as the merging Southern California fires have come to be known, was licking at backyards in the cities of Azusa and Duarte. Some 1,400 firefighters fought the flames Wednesday, taking advantage of the slightly cooler temperature to make headway."

As of July 15, the heat Southwest wave was continuing, and with very little rain. In Albuquerque, we usually have just a few days over 100 degrees each summer. So far this year, we have had a month of a great many 100 or more degree days. Some municipalities in New Mexico have had a number of record hot days for the date, and records for the number of days in a row over 100. Following an extremely dry winter and spring, the monsoons that normally begin late June or early August have yet to arrive, and Albuquerque has received less than 40% of the average rain fall for so far this year (local radio, TV and newspaper weather reports).
The heat wave that has been burning the Southwest, as of July 22, had spread across the U.S. with temperatures over 100 in Chicago, Detroit, Saint Louis, Cincinnati, and Washington, DC, and 95-100 in New York. Accuweather, http://www.accuweather.com, was predicting no relief through the end of July.

The heat wave was continuing to make fighting wild fires more difficult, with a sizable number in progress in late July. Christine Hauser, "Wildfires Sweep Through Nearly 50,000 Acres in California," The New York Times, July 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/us/wildfire-in-california.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Thousands of firefighters were battling wildfires on Monday in central and Southern California that have burned through nearly 50,000 acres and prompted thousands of people to evacuate their homes, the authorities said.

One of the blazes, called the "Sand Fire," broke out on Friday in the Santa Clarita area and burned deeper into the mountains above Los Angeles over the weekend. It was about 10 percent contained, the United States Forest Service said Monday morning. The moving wall of flames had scorched more than 33,000 acres and had forced about 20,000 residents from their homes, the Los Angeles County Fire Department said.

A separate fire in the Big Sur area, on the central coast, had spread to nearly 15,000 acres by Monday morning, officials said." One person had been reported killed and one house destroyed by the Sand Fire.

Nadia Prupis, "As Southwest Burns, Climate Scientists Warn: You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet" "If we continue with business-as-usual burning of fossil fuels, by mid-century what we think of as extreme summer heat today will become a typical summer day," Common Dreams, June 22, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/22/southwest-burns-climate-scientists-warn-you-aint-seen-nothin-yet, reported, "Wildfires in the Southwestern U.S. continued to rage on Wednesday, as the combination of extreme heat and erratic winds fueled the devastation and firefighters warned that blazes near Los Angeles were only about 10 percent contained.

As residents flee and emergency crews attempt to contain the infernos, climate scientists are warning that these deadly fires are climate change in action.

More than 20 fires are also burning in Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Washington state, Colorado, Montana, and New Mexico. Meanwhile, record-breaking heat reached 123°F in Palm Springs and 115°F in Phoenix. Death Valley recorded the country's hottest temperature on Monday at 126°F. At least six deaths have been attributed to the extreme heat.

Michael Mann, a professor of meteorology at Penn State University who was in Phoenix for the Democratic National Platform committee meeting last weekend when the temperatures hit 106°F, told the panel that the extreme weather was 'an example of just the sort of extreme heat that is on the increase due to human-caused climate change.'

The California cities of Azusa and parts of Duarte were evacuated as twin wildfires burned through the San Gabriel Valley, destroying more than seven square miles combined. Firefighters with the Angeles National Forest service told ABC News that the conditions were the hottest they'd ever encountered.

Mann warned on Tuesday that the worst is yet to come.

"The likelihood of record heat has already doubled in the U.S. due to human-caused warming, and that's just the tip of the proverbial iceberg," he told the HuffPost.

The high temperatures have stymied emergency workers' efforts to extinguish the fires, which began burning even before the heatwave hit.

Kevin Trenberth, a senior scientist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research, told the HuffPost that there was no question the fires and scorching temperatures were the result of human-caused climate change.

The added heat from rising greenhouse gases equated to "running a small microwave oven over every square foot, at full power for 6 minutes, for every month of drought conditions" in the affected region, Trenberth said. 'So what used to be a regular heat wave now has extra oomph, and the danger is not just heat but also a wildfire risk.'

Mann also warned that, absent immediate action to curb climate change, scorching heat in the region could become the new normal by 2050.

"If we continue with business-as-usual burning of fossil fuels, by mid-century what we think of as
extreme summer heat today will become a typical summer day,' he said."

On August 4, though the heat was cooling off somewhat, 27 major fires continued burning in the western U.S. One in Southern California that had explosively spread in a few days, had burned a least 14 homes and killed one person ("Wildfires Bearing Down in Western States," The New York Times, August 4, 2016; and CNN TV news in San Jose, CA morning of, August 4, 2016).

Cynthia H. Craft, "Like Tens of Millions of Matchsticks, California's Dead Trees Stand Ready to Burn," The New York Times, August 29, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/30/science/california-dead-trees-forest-fires.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "At the height of California's fierce wildfire season, the Sierra Nevada and North Coast forests are choked with tens of millions of dead and dying trees, from gnarly oaks to elegant pines that are turning leafy chapels into tinderboxes of highly combustible debris.

Ground crews wielding chain saws, axes and wood chippers are braving the intense summer heat in the Sierra's lower elevations, where most of the pine trees have died. The devastation and danger are greatest in the central and southern Sierra Nevada, where the estimated number of dead trees since 2010 is a staggering 66 million.

Scientists say rarely is one culprit to blame for the escalation in the state’s tree deaths, and the resulting fire hazard. Rather, destruction on such a broad scale is nearly always the result of a complex convergence of threats to forest ecosystems.

Chief among them is a severe, sustained drought in the Sierra Nevada that is stressing trees and disabling their natural defenses. Climate change is raising temperatures, making for warmer winters. No longer kept in check by winter's freeze, bark beetle populations are growing. Separately, a nonnative, potent plant pathogen is thriving in the moist areas of the North Coast, introduced to California soil by global trade. Opportunistic fungi are standing by, ready to finish the kill.

Factor in human shortcomings — poor or absent forest management, a failure to clear out ignitable dead wood, the darker temptation of arson, unchecked carelessness — and you have a lethal recipe." - But most of the several causes are directly related to global warming induced climate change.

Richard Perez-Pena, "West Virginia Floods Cause 23 Deaths and Vast Wreckage," The New York Times, June 24, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/25/us/west-virginia-floods.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Record flooding in West Virginia killed at least 23 people, stranded thousands, left thousands more without utilities, and washed away houses, roads and vehicles after a band of thunderstorms battered the region on Thursday." Much of West Virginia received one to three inches of rain in a few hours June 23.

Extreme weather crossing the U.S. in late July, brought unusual torrential rains to some places. Mike McPhatee, "Flood Rips Through Historic Maryland Town, killing at Least 2," The New York Times, July 31, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/01/us/ellicott-city-flood-maryland.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "Ellicott City, Md., a historic town west of Baltimore, was devastated by flooding on Saturday night after more than six inches of rain fell in just two hours, sending a fast-moving current down its Main Street and leaving at least two people dead.

Officials and witnesses said the floodwaters rushed through the downtown area after torrential rain fell between 7 and 9 p.m. It ripped up sidewalks, gutted many of the town's quaint shops and carried off vehicles, depositing some of them blocks away.

The body of a woman was recovered from the nearby Patapsco River early on Sunday, and the body of a man was also found, said Mark Miller, a spokesman for Howard County, where Ellicott City is the county seat.

'This was a different type of flooding than you would normally get when just the Patapsco rises — far more devastating,' Mr. Miller said. ‘It's like the water was a piston. The water came through with such force.'"

Record rains returned to Louisiana and southern Mississippi, in mid-August, to bring wide spread flooding, with rain still falling. August 12. The Governor of Louisiana declared a state of emergency in
several parishes, that was threatening to be extended to others as the rain continued ("Louisiana: Emergency order follows torrential rain, flooding," San Francisco Chronicle, August 13, 2016).

By August 15, with more rain coming, across much of Louisiana the floods had reached record levels, with 6 known dead, more than 20,000 people rescued, and many thousands more displaced. Some areas had received more than two feet of rain in 72 hours (Campbell Robertson, "Thousands Displaced in Storm-Drenched Louisiana," The New York Times, August 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/15/us/louisiana-storm-floods-rescue.html?ref=todayspaper).

Tornadoes striking twice in 10 days in August 2016, in Indiana, might be an indication of a new climate change weather pattern, although it is too soon to say if it is a one time event or a new pattern. As a hotter Earth puts more water in the air, more frequent tornadoes would be a likely result ("Are August tornadoes becoming more frequent?" USA Today Network. Shari Rudavsky, The Indianapolis Star, August 26, 2016, http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2016/08/26/august-tornadoes-frequency/89394800/).

Severe rain storms from tropical storm Earl, dumping as much as a month's rain in five hours, inundated the Mexican states of Puebla and Vera Cruz, August 8, 2016, causing flash floods and mudslides that killed hundreds of people, in the worst rain storm in half a century (Kirk Semple, "Sudden Storm Left Little Time to Flee Mudslides in Mexico," The New York Times, August 9, 2016).

Aurelien Breeden and Katarina Johannsen, "From Paris to Bavaria, Heavy Rains Cause Deadly Floods," The New York Times, June 2, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/03/world/europe/france-germany-floods-rain.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, "Torrential rains have caused deadly flooding in central and northeastern France this week, forcing the evacuation of thousands of people, some on boats or kayaks, and threatening works of art stored in Paris’s most celebrated museums.

A man on horseback was swept away by floodwaters on Thursday and found dead in Évry-Grégy-sur-Yerre, 30 miles southeast of Paris, the authorities in the Seine-et-Marne administrative department, where the town is located, said. In Germany, heavy rains claimed the lives of nine people.

The heavy rains caused the Seine in Paris to rise to 18 feet by Thursday evening, flooding the lower embankments and shutting several roads but causing no significant damage. The level is still far from the record of 1910, however, when the river rose to 26 feet."

"Officials in France and Germany were bracing for even more rain this week. The Loing River, a tributary of the Seine, has risen to levels not seen since 1910, and the Île-de-France region, which includes Paris, got more rainfall last month than in any May since 1960.

President François Hollande said Thursday that the rainfall and floods were “very serious” and linked them to global warming."

"About 19,000 homes in France were still without power on Thursday evening, and the interior minister, Bernard Cazeneuve, said that an estimated 20,000 people had been evacuated.

Meteorologists attribute the recent deluge to a dip in the jet stream that has trapped low-pressure air over much of France and Germany, where the air is then warmed by the sun. This occurrence often leads to heat waves, and to thunderstorms as the hot air rises.

The recent thunderstorms have been more intense than usual because the hot air rises to encounter colder air in the upper atmosphere. Generally, the greater the difference between the rising hot air and the colder high air, the bigger the storms.

Forecasters say there could be a few more days of rain before the low-pressure air moves on.

More than 3,000 people were evacuated from Nemours, about 50 miles south of Paris, after the Loing overflowed, flooding businesses and homes. The surrounding Seine-et-Marne area was on high alert for floods on Thursday, and 12 other departments in the Île-de-France and Centre-Val de Loire regions were on the second-highest level of flood alert."

"Thousands of homes in Bavaria were without power, officials said."

"In Germany, heavy rains claimed the lives of nine people."
Raphael Minder "Deadly Wildfires on Portuguese Island of Madeira Reach Its Largest City." *The New York Times*, August 11, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/12/world/europe/portugal-fires-madeira.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Portuguese island of Madeira continued on Thursday to battle wildfires that have reached Funchal, the island’s largest city, killing three people and destroying over 150 homes, while the national government sought help to deal with nearly 200 blazes on the mainland."


At least 21 people were killed and 77 injured in what officials described on Sunday as the worst flooding disaster in a half-century to hit Skopje, the Macedonian capital and a city of more than a half-million people in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula."


In what may be a record, lightning strikes that punctuated the season’s inaugural heavy rains killed more than 70 people in India on Tuesday and Wednesday, disaster management officials said. Some reports in the Indian news media put the toll at nearly 100."

Dharisha Bastians, "Floods and Landslides in Sri Lanka Leave Dozens Dead." *The New York Times*, May 18, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/19/world/asia/sri-lanka-landslides-flooding.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "At least 37 people were killed in landslides and flash floods and hundreds of thousands were displaced, Sri Lankan officials said on Wednesday, as torrential rains and gusting winds continued to lash the country just days after the beginning of the monsoon season."

A serious drought in Vietnam, related to el Nino, had reduced and was threatening to largely destroy the season’s rice crop, as of late May, 2016 (Jane Perlez, "Struggling to Farm in a Parched Land," *The New York Times*, May 29, 2016).

The World Food Program, "URGENT: WORST DROUGHT IN 50 YEARS DEVASTATES ETHIOPIA," May 5, 2016, https://support.wfpusa.org/site/Donation2;jsessionid=C25054C6817568839ECF130EDBECB1A.app262a?id=1338231252&d_id=4423&mfc_pref=T&4423.donation=form1&s Src=UNR1605EMAPPctrl1&aut ologin=true&utm_campaign=1605EMAPP&id=0&utm_source=UNR1605EMAPPctrl1&utm_content=UNR1605EMAPPctrl1&utm_medium=email, reported, "A "Godzilla El Niño" has brought about the worst drought in decades. Crops have failed. Livestock are dying. And we’ve seen a spike in the number of severely malnourished children who require specialized medical care to survive."
"As EU Weighs Approval, More Evidence Industry is Rigging the Glyphosate Game: Suspicious donation from Monsanto emerges after WHO seemingly flipped in its assessment of the dangers posed by the chemical," Common Dreams, May 18, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/18/eu-weighs-approval-more-evidence-industry-rigging-glyphosate-game, reported, "As European officials on Wednesday weigh whether or not to reapprove the use of Monsanto's glyphosate, a storm has erupted after the World Health Organization (WHO) seemingly flipped in its assessment of the dangers posed by the chemical.

Ahead of this week's European Commission meeting, which could approve the use of glyphosate for up to nine years, the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the WHO released a joint summary report concluding that the chemical, a favored ingredient of agrochemical producers like Monsanto and Dow, was "unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet."

These findings were widely (and inaccurately) reported as a 'clean bill of health' for a pesticide once declared to be 'probably carcinogenic' for humans by the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

What's more, documents obtained by the anti-GMO watchdog group U.S. Right to Know found that one of the chairs of the UN's Joint Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) had, in another capacity, received a six-figure donation from Monsanto.

The Guardian reported on Tuesday:

Professor Alan Boobis, who chaired the UN's joint FAO/WHO meeting on glyphosate, also works as the vice-president of the International Life Science Institute (ILSI) Europe. The co-chair of the sessions was Professor Angelo Moretto, a board member of ILSI's Health and Environmental Services Institute, and of its Risk21 steering group too, which Boobis also co-chairs.

In 2012, the ILSI group took a $500,000 (£344,234) donation from Monsanto and a $528,500 donation from the industry group Croplife International, which represents Monsanto, Dow, Syngenta and others, according to documents obtained by the US right to know campaign.

Those opposed to the chemical's re-approval in Europe said the exposed 'conflict of interest' in the FAO/WHO report should disqualify it from consideration. The EU's deliberations, which are expected to last two days, were postponed in March after a wave of public opposition forced lawmakers to renege on their approval.

'The timing of the release of this report by the FAO/WHO could be described as cynical if it weren't such a blatantly political and ham-fisted attempt to influence the EU decision later this week on the approval of glyphosate,' said Green MEP Bart Staes.

'Any decision affecting millions of people should be based on fully transparent and independent science that isn't tied to corporate interests,' said Greenpeace EU food policy director Franziska Achterberg. 'It would be irresponsible to ignore the warnings on glyphosate and to re-license this pesticide without any restrictions to protect the public and the environment.'

Pointing to the discrepancy between the various reports on the toxicity of glyphosate, The Intercept's Sharon Lerner noted Tuesday that what distinguished the WHO's March 2015 study, which concluded with a cancer warning, is that it used research "on both glyphosate alone as well as the complete formations of Roundup and other herbicides," which included the impact of supposedly "inert" ingredients.

'Research on these chemicals seems to have played a role in the stark disagreement over glyphosate's safety that has played out on the international stage over the last year,' she writes.

As Lerner noted in the in-depth report, scientific study of these other ingredients has been hampered by biochemical giants claiming industry secrets, though there is increasing evidence that the combination of chemicals could be very harmful to human health.

Lerner reports:

Independent scientists have been reporting since at least 1991 that pesticides containing glyphosate along with other ingredients were more dangerous than glyphosate on its own. More recently, two papers — one published in 2002, the other in 2004 — showed that Roundup and other glyphosate-containing weed formulations were more likely to cause cell-cycle dysregulation, a hallmark of cancer, than glyphosate alone. In 2005, researchers showed that Roundup was more harmful to rats' livers than its
'active ingredient' by itself. And a 2009 study showed that four formulations of Roundup were more toxic to human umbilical, embryonic, and placental cells than glyphosate by itself.

But because manufacturers of weed killers are required to disclose only the chemical structures of their 'active' ingredients — and can hide the identity of the rest as confidential business information — for many years no one knew exactly what other chemicals were in these products, let alone how they affected health.

As for the European Commission’s negotiations, an early draft report proposed banning at least one potentially toxic co-formulant (polyethoxylated tallowamine, or POEA) though many other unknown chemicals remain in the glyphosate-based pesticides.

'The decision on glyphosate is a critical test of who's interests the EU is acting on,' said Aisha Dodwell, a food campaigner with Global Justice Now.

'On one side,' Dodwell continued, 'there are powerful agribusiness companies like Monsanto, whose Roundup weed killer contains glyphosate and accounts for a third of its total sales. And on the other side you have over a million citizens from across the EU who have signed petitions saying that they don’t want to be exposed to chemicals that are probably causing cancer.'

The Chinese government has promised to replace running tracks at schools made of industrial waste that is reported to have sickened children (Owen Guo, "China Vows to Replace Running Tracks That Have Sickened Schoolchildren," The New York Times, June 24, 2016).

Medical doctors and scientists in the United States are calling for tougher regulations on chemicals that come into households causing health problems. These include fire retardants in upholstery, chemicals used to make plastic flexible, and make vegetables and fruits more abundant. The chemical industry supported a weak bill to begin slowly testing many household impacting chemicals, but many scientists and Mds find the legislation far to weak (Roni Caryn Rabin, "Doctors and Scientists Call for Tougher Regulation of Toxic Household Chemicals," The New York Times, July 2, 2016).

Elisabeth Malkin, "Prosperous Mexican Farms Suck Up Water, Leaving Villages High and Dry ," The New York Times, May 19, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/20/world/americas/mexico-water-farms-drought.html?ref=todayspaperh, reported, "But the well in San Antonio de Lourdes, a village in Guanajuato State in central Mexico, went dry years ago. The village itself, depleted by poverty and migration, seems to be drying up, too, and only 29 children are left in the primary school. But a half-hour’s drive away, fertile farms pump water from deep underground to irrigate fields that grow broccoli and lettuce for American supermarkets."

Nika Knight, "At Least Six Million Americans Are Drinking Toxic 'Teflon Chemicals' With Their Water: 'The available data only reveals the tip of the iceberg of contaminated drinking water','" Common Dreams, August 10, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/08/10/least-six-million-americans-are-drinking-toxic-teflon-chemicals-their-water, reported, "At least six million Americans in 33 states are being exposed to unsafe levels of industrial perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) chemicals in their drinking water, found a study published Tuesday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology Letters.

'And the available water data only reveals the tip of the iceberg of contaminated drinking water,' said study co-author Dr. Philippe Grandjean of the Harvard School of Public Health to the Charleston Gazette-Mail.

The Washington Post details the researchers' findings:

194 of 4,864 water supplies across nearly three dozen states had detectable levels of the chemicals. Sixty-six of those water supplies, serving about six million people, had at least one sample that exceeded the EPA's recommended safety limit of 70 parts per trillion for two types of chemicals — perfluorooctanesulfonic acid (PFOS) and perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA).

PFOA and PFOS chemical compounds—including C8, popularly known as the Teflon chemical—are extremely dangerous to human health, and despite an EPA advisory released earlier this year and increasing calls for action, research shows they are near-ubiquitous in the United States.
'Virtually all Americans are exposed to these compounds,' said Xindi Hu, the study's lead author and a doctoral student at Harvard's Department of Environmental Health, to the Post. "They never break down. Once they are released into the environment, they are there."

Moreover, the study also notes that research suggests "that exposure to these chemicals can make people sick, even at or below the concentration recommended as acceptable under the EPA health advisory," according to the Gazette-Mail.

"The EPA advisory limit ... is much too high to protect us against toxic effects on the immune system," said Grandjean to the Gazette-Mail.

PFOAs are the contentious center of a years-long legal battle against DuPont, which manufactured the chemical for decades—and dumped it into public waterways—despite knowing that it was severely harmful to human health and the environment. Thousands of personal injury cases are currently pending against the chemical giant.

The Gazette-Mail further reports:

DuPont and other companies have agreed on a voluntary phase-out of the chemical, but researchers noted in this week's study that declines in production in the U.S. and Europe have been offset by increases in developing regions such as Asia. Scientists have also been increasingly concerned about chemical contamination of consumer products, and the new study provides important details about the potential threats from waste disposal practices and varying uses of the substances.

The dire situation is a result of decades of weak or no regulations, as Hu remarked to the Harvard Gazette: "For many years, chemicals with unknown toxicities, such as [PFOAs], were allowed to be used and released to the environment, and we now have to face the severe consequences."

"In addition, the actual number of people exposed may be even higher than our study found," Hu continued, "because government data for levels of these compounds in drinking water is lacking for almost a third of the U.S. population—about 100 million people."

In the aftermath of a spill of toxic water from an abandoned mine into the Animus River in Colorado, EPA has proposed adding the Bonita Peak Mining District, with many abandoned mines including the source of the spill, to the National Priorities List (NPL) or Superfund, for clean up, which would still take considerable time (Damon Toledo, "EPA proposes adding Bonita Peak to NPL list." Southern Ute Drum, April 29, 2016).


Ms. King's 3-year-old son, Josiah, has a worrisome amount of lead in his blood, according to test results she received last week. Like about 1,100 other poor, largely black residents of West Calumet, including 670 children, she is scrambling to find a new home after Mayor Anthony Copeland of East Chicago announced last month that the residents had to move out and that the complex would be demolished.

"The extent of the contamination came as a shock to residents of the complex, even though it is just north of a huge former U.S.S. Lead smelting plant and on top of a smaller former smelting operation, in an area that was designated a Superfund site in 2009. Now, in a situation that many fearful residents are comparing to the water crisis in Flint, Mich., they are asking why neither the state nor the Environmental Protection Agency told them just how toxic their soil was much sooner, and a timeline is emerging that suggests a painfully slow government process of confronting the problem."

Nadia Prupis, "GMOs Safe to Eat, Says Research Group That Takes Millions From Monsanto: 'We won't have good public policy on new technologies like GMOs until these rampant conflicts of interest are exposed,'" says Food & Water Watch," Common Dreams, May 18, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/18/gmos-safe-eat-says-research-group-takes-millions-monsanto, reported, "Public skepticism is growing over a new report that claims genetically modified (GE
or GMO) foods are safe for consumption, particularly as information emerges that the organization that produced the report has ties to the biotechnology industry.

*Genetically Engineered Crops: Experiences and Prospects* (pdf), released Tuesday by the federally-supported National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, states not only that GMO crops are safe to eat, but that they have no adverse environmental impacts and have cut down on pesticide use. Its publication comes as U.S. Congress—which founded the institution—considers making GMO labeling mandatory on consumer products.

'There clearly are strong non-safety arguments and considerable public support for mandatory labeling of products containing GE material. The committee does not believe that mandatory labeling of foods with GE content is justified to protect public health,' the report states.

However, one day before publication, the environmental advocacy group Food & Water Watch (FWW) reported in an issue brief (pdf) that the National Research Council (NRC)—the National Academy of Sciences’ research arm—has deep ties to the biotech and agricultural industries, which FWW says have 'created conflicts of interests at every level of the organization.'

The NRC and the National Academy of Science take millions of dollars in funding from corporations like Monsanto, DuPont, and Dow Chemical, FWW reported in its issue brief, *Under the Influence: The National Research Council and GMOs* (pdf).

Representatives from those companies—along with Cargill, General Mills, and Nestlé Purina, among other GMO-friendly businesses—also sit on the NRC's board that oversees GMO projects. NRC has not publicly disclosed those ties, FWW said. In fact, more than half of the invited authors of the new report have ties to the industry.

According to the issue brief, not only does the NRC have a history of bias toward the industry, it has also worked to silence critics of GMOs and of the companies that sit on its board.

'While companies like Monsanto and its academic partners are heavily involved in the NRC’s work on GMOs, critics have long been marginalized,' said Wenonah Hauter, FWW executive director. 'Many groups have called on the NRC many times to reduce industry influence, noting how conflicts of interest clearly diminish its independence and scientific integrity.'

The issue brief states:

Weak, watered-down or biased findings from the NRC have a very real impact on our food system. Policy makers develop 'science-based' rules and regulations on GMOs based on what the science says—especially what the NRC says, because it is part of the National Academy of Sciences, chartered by Congress to provide scientific advice to the federal government.

And this is where science can become politicized. Companies like Monsanto need favorable science and academic allies to push their controversial products through regulatory approval and on to American farms. Corporate agribusinesses pour millions of dollars into our public universities, play a heavy hand in peer-reviewed scientific journals and seek to influence prestigious scientific bodies like the National Research Council.

Despite these criticisms, the NRC has continued to cover up its connections to agribusiness and the true influence the industry wields over its research.

'Under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the NRC is required to form balanced committees of scientists to carry out its research—and to disclose any conflicts of interest,' Hauter continued. 'Yet the NRC failed to disclose even the conflicts of the members of this deeply unbalanced committee..'

In its issue brief, FWW called for specific changes to combat industry influence:

- Congress should expand and enforce the Federal Advisory Committee Act to ensure that the scientific advice the NRC produces for the government is free of conflicts of interest and bias;
- Congress should immediately halt all taxpayer funding for agricultural projects at the NRC until meaningful conflicts-of-interest policies are enforced;
- The NRC should no longer engage funders, directors, authors or reviewers that have a financial interest in the outcome of any of the NRC's work; and
- The NRC should prohibit the citation of science funded or authored by industry, given the obvious potential for bias.

'Agribusiness companies like Monsanto have an outsized role at our public universities, at peer-reviewed journals, and the NRC,' Hauter concluded. "We won't have good public policy on new
technologies like GMOs until these rampant conflicts of interest are exposed."

Nida Najar and Sushasni Raj, "Taj Mahal Under Attack by Bugs and Their Green Slime," The New York Times, May 17, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/world/asia/india-taj-mahal-pollution-yamuna-river.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, ""Over the centuries, the Taj Mahal has endured its share of attacks — plundered by the Jats of northern India and looted by British soldiers, among other indignities. In recent years, officials have worried that growing air pollution could permanently darken the tomb's brilliant white exterior.

But few people anticipated the latest affront — millions of mosquito-like insects, their numbers supercharged by nutritious algae blooming profusely along the banks of the polluted Yamuna River nearby. Like generations of romance-driven human couples before them, the bugs have swarmed the Taj Mahal on a mating flight, excreting a green substance on parts of its marble walls.

The Yamuna has suffered mightily in recent years from the dumping of solid waste in its waters, said an environmental activist in Agra, India, the site of the Taj Mahal."


The report, which compiled air quality readings from 3,000 cities in 103 countries, found that more than 80 percent of people in those cities were exposed to pollution exceeding the limits set by W.H.O. guidelines, above which air quality is considered to be unhealthy. And in poorer countries, 98 percent of cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants were out of compliance with the health organization's guidelines.

Lower levels of pollution were far more prevalent in North America and higher-income European countries than in most other places, especially countries like India, Pakistan and China. But in Europe, a higher percentage of cities exceeded the limits set by the W.H.O. than in North America."

Suzanne Daley, "Peru Scrambles to Drive Out Illegal Gold Mining and Save Precious Land: A force of marines and rangers is outnumbered as it tries to protect the area anchored by the Tambopata reserve, one of the most biologically diverse places on earth," The New York Times, July 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/world/americas/peru-illegal-gold-mining-latin-america.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Trying to protect one of the most biologically diverse places on earth from an army of illegal miners that has carved a toxic path through the rain forest, the Peruvian government is setting up outposts and stepping up raids along the Malinowski River in the Tambopata Nature Reserve.

But some experts wonder whether it is far too little too late."


"U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, Yurok Tribal Chair Thomas P. O'Rourke Sr., Karuk Tribal Chair Russell "Buster" Atteberry, Klamath Tribal Chair Don Gentry, the governors of Oregon and California, and dam owner PacificCorp signed the landmark agreements, set out on two long fish tables, on the Yurok Indian Reservation in northern California on April 6."

"O'Rourke said the agreement means the Klamath River can begin to heal.
'Dam removal is a key element of large-scale fish restoration efforts on the Klamath, and we believe it puts the people of the Klamath Basin back on a path toward lasting prosperity,' O'Rourke said in a statement.

The dam demolitions are slated to begin by 2020, but the agreement still needs approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). That shouldn't pose a problem, said Craig Tucker, Natural Resources Policy Advocate for the Karuk Tribe, since dam owner PacificCorp is a willing seller.

Julie Turkewitz, "Tainted Water Near Colorado Bases Hints at Wider Safety Concerns," The New York Times, July 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/us/tainted-water-near-colorado-bases-hints-at-wider-safety-concerns.html?ref=todayspaperreported, "Fountain — named for a creek that once gave life to this southern Colorado town — is now part of a growing list of American communities dealing with elevated levels of perfluorinated chemicals, or PFCs, in their drinking water. In the last few months, PFC poisoning has upended municipalities around the country, including Hoosick Falls, N.Y., home to a plastics factory, and North Bennington, Vt., once home to a chemical plant.

Unlike in many of the other places, the contamination in Fountain and in two nearby communities, Widefield and Security, is not believed to be related to manufacturing. Rather, the authorities suspect that it was caused by Aqueous Film Forming Foam, a firefighting substance used on military bases nationwide.

Defense Department officials initially identified about 700 sites of possible contamination, but that number has surged to at least 2,000, most of them on Air Force bases, said Mark A. Correll, a deputy assistant secretary for environment, safety and infrastructure at the Air Force.

All of the nine bases that the Air Force has examined so far had higher-than-recommended levels of PFCs in the local drinking water. Four bases identified by the Navy were also found to have contaminated water. In some places, the contamination affects one household. In others, it affects thousands of people.

The bases are in Alaska, California, Colorado, Delaware, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

'It's quite possible it will touch every state," said Jennifer Field, a professor at Oregon State University and an expert on the chemistry of Aqueous Film Forming Foam. 'Every place has a military base, a commercial airport, an oil refinery, a fuel tank farm'."


In truth, there was little they could do: The disaster that engulfed the St. Lucie River and its estuary had been building for weeks. In May, a 33-square-mile algal bloom crept over Lake Okeechobee, the vast headwaters of the Everglades. After an unseasonably wet winter, the Army Corps of Engineers was forced to discharge water from the lake to lower water levels, flushing the ooze along channels to the east and west until it coagulated along the shores of the famed Treasure Coast.

The mess in Florida is only the latest in a string of algal blooms that some experts believe are increasing in frequency and in severity. An immense plume of blue-green algae last September covered a 636-mile stretch of the Ohio River. A month earlier, the city of Toledo, Ohio, warned more than 400,000 residents to avoid drinking tap water after toxic algae spread over an intake in Lake Erie. (Indeed, the Lake Erie bloom is now an annual event.)

Almost exactly a year before the Florida bloom, another stretching 7,500 square miles washed ashore in Qingdao, China, a popular beach destination. Government officials called in hundreds of boats and bulldozers to remove it. The green blob appeared again earlier this month.

The largest and most dangerous algal bloom ever recorded, which ranged from Central California to British Columbia, produced high levels of a toxin that last year closed crab and clam fisheries along the West Coast."
Emily J. Gertz, "Contamination Threatens One of the World's Biggest Freshwater Supplies: Scientists find high salt and arsenic concentrations in an aquifer that 750 million people rely on for drinking water and irrigation, August 29, 2016, http://www.takepart.com/article/2016/08/29/contamination-threatens-one-world's-biggest-freshwater-supplies?cmpid=tpdaily-eml-2016-08-30, reported, "Three-quarters of a billion people across four South Asian nations rely on one vast water basin for much of their irrigation and drinking water. Called the Indo-Gangetic Basin, it stretches east to west over 618 million acres, sitting like a cap over the Indian subcontinent, and contains about 7,200 cubic miles of groundwater, roughly 20 times the annual flow of the region's Brahmaputra, Ganges, and Indus rivers combined.

Satellite measurements collected since 2002 have led to worries that the region's aquifers were being severely depleted by overuse, increasing vulnerability to failed harvests, skyrocketing food prices, and civil unrest.

But in a new study that includes on-the-ground measurements from 3,429 water wells across the basin over multiple years, an international team of scientists has found that water quality, not quantity, is a much bigger problem.

More than 60 percent of the Indo-Gangetic Basin is too contaminated with salt or arsenic to be safe for drinking or agriculture, according to research published Monday in the journal Nature Geoscience."

The lucrative "Himalayan Viagra Fungus," picked and sold as anaphrodesiac in Nepal, is seriously declining and becoming endangered as a result of climate change (Kai Schultz, "Climate Change Seen as Threat to Lucrative 'Himalayan Viagra Fungus'," The New York Times, June 27, 2016).

The U.S. National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration, finding that many oceanic species, especially whales, suffer from the noise of the now large number of ocean vessels, in early June 2016, released a draft 10-year Ocean Noise Strategy Roadmap, to reduce human caused noise at sea (Tatiana Schlossberg, "An Effort to Give Ocean Life Some Peace and Quiet," The New York Times, June 5, 2016).


Then in 2015, a team of marine biologists was stunned and overjoyed to find Coral Castles, genus Acropora, once again teeming with life. But the rebound came with a big question: Could the enormous and presumably still fragile coral survive what would be the hottest year on record?

This month, the Massachusetts-based research team finished a new exploration of the reefs in the secluded Phoenix Islands, a tiny Pacific archipelago, and were thrilled by what they saw. When they splashed out of an inflatable dinghy to examine Coral Castles closely, they were greeted with a vista of bright greens and purples — unmistakable signs of life.

Carl Zimmer, "Climate Change and the Case of the Shrinking Red Knots," The New York Times, May 12, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/17/science/climate-change-bird-red-knots.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Animal migrations combine staggering endurance and exquisite timing. Consider the odyssey of a bird known as the red knot. Each spring, flocks of the intrepid shorebirds fly up to 9,300 miles from the tropics to the Arctic. As the snow melts, they mate and produce a new generation of chicks. The chicks gorge themselves on insects, and then all the red knots head back south."

"The precipitous decline of the red knots that winter in West Africa may provide a small but telling parable of the perils of climate change.

In a study published Thursday in the journal Science, Dr. van Gils and his colleagues present evidence that indicates climate change is putting pressure on the birds along their entire journey, possibly helping to drive down the birds' population and making them yet another of many species around the
world being affected by climate change.

The new study shows how climate change can create ecological ripples that can threaten a species in unexpected ways."

"Looking at satellite images of their Arctic summer habitat, the scientists found a clue to this trend. The Arctic has been warming up earlier because of climate change. Today, the snow is melting two weeks earlier than in 1985.

The insects in the Arctic are responding to the shift by hatching earlier. But the red knots are not adjusting their schedule. By the time their chicks hatch, the insects are far past their peak, and the birds can't find as much food as they could 30 years ago.

When the birds arrive in Mauritania in July, the smaller juveniles with shorter beaks cannot dig deep enough to eat their regular diet of clams. Instead, they are eating more sea grass. This new diet appears to be taking a toll: Dr. van Gils and his colleagues have found that juvenile red knots with short bills are more likely to die than birds with long bills.

"Dr. van Gils said that climate change might be a factor behind the decline of the red knots that winter in Mauritania. They have decreased from about half a million birds to a quarter of a million.

"If that continues, they're going to go extinct," he said."

Julie Girshfield Davis, "Obama to Create World's Largest Marine Reserve Off Hawaii," The New York Times, August 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/topic/person/barack-obama?inline=nyt-person, reported, "President Obama is set to vastly expand a marine sanctuary northwest of the main Hawaiian Islands, White House officials said Thursday, creating the world's largest protected marine area as he seeks to cement his environmental legacy in his last months in office.

Mr. Obama will travel next week to Midway Atoll, a remote spit of land within the Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument, to recognize the designation and highlight the importance of protecting pristine lands and waters as the perils of climate change intensify."

The vaquita, the Earth's smallest porpoise, is close to extinction, being caught in the nets of those fishing illegally in Mexican waters, despite the Mexican navy's efforts to stop such fishing (Elisabeth Malkin, "Earth's Smallest Porpoise Slips Closer to Extinction," The New York Times, May 16, 2016).

Jim Robbins, "Tiny Invader, Deadly to Fish, Shuts Down a River in Montana," The New York Times, August 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/us/tiny-parasite-invader-deadly-to-fish-shuts-down-yellowstone-river-in-montana.html?ref=todayspaper, reported that Montana wildlife officials shut down almost 200 miles of the Yellowstone and its tributaries to recreation, in late August 2016, to prevent the parasite proliferative kidney disease, or P.K.D., which kills mountain whitefish, and possibly trout, from spreading to other rivers, or south into Yellowstone National Park. Climate change is the primary cause, bringing warmer and lower water in which P.K.D. can spread among the fish. Thousands of dead whitefish have lined the banks of the river.

Erica Goode, "Leopards Are More Vulnerable Than Believed, Study Finds," The New York Times, May 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/05/science/leopards-are-more-vulnerable-than-believed-study-finds.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "A study published Wednesday suggests that leopards have lost as much as 75 percent of their historical range since 1750. At that time, the big cats roamed over about 13.5 million square miles in Africa, Asia and parts of the Middle East. But that has shrunk to about 3.3 million square miles, according to the study, conducted by a team of 14 scientists representing 15 universities and organizations, including the Zoological Society of London, the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Iranian Cheetah Society, National Geographic and Panthera, a global wild cat conservation organization.

The study, which appears in the journal PeerJ, is believed to be the first to assess the leopard's status globally across nine subspecies and won immediate praise from other scientists for its scope and detail."

A report by the Democratic staff of the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee found that
allowing regulated hunting and charging fees used for conservation, does not actually help conservation of threatened species, because of rampant corruption and poorly managed game preserves in some countries (Jada E. Smith, "Report Finds Fees Do Not Help Conservation," The New York Times, June 15, 2016).


World Overview

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Seizing the Moment: From Early Warning to Early Action," Special Report N°2 June 22, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/global/002-seizing-the-moment-from-early-warning-to-early-action.aspx?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d70eda3e13-Seizing_the_Moment_Special_Report&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d70eda3e13-359871089, commented, "After a period of relative calm, an upsurge of crises is testing the international system, pitting major powers and regional players against one another and highlighting the weaknesses of preventive diplomacy. Governments and international organisations were taken by surprise by the Arab uprisings in 2011 and slow to react to crises in South Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR) in the years that followed. Global and regional rivalries have weakened diplomacy over Syria, Ukraine and the South China Sea. Policymakers, stretched by the symptoms of this wave of instability, including mass displacement and the spread of transnational terrorism, struggle to focus on conflict prevention.

Yet, preventive diplomacy is not necessarily dead. The Iranian nuclear deal, progress toward peace in Colombia and the high-level push to avoid election-related chaos in Nigeria in 2015 have been reminders of what intensive international engagement can deliver. If politicians, diplomats and international officials invest in key dimensions of early warning and early action – analyzing conflict dynamics closely, building sensitive political relationships in troubled countries and undertaking complex "framework diplomacy" with other powers to create political space for crisis management – they still have a chance to avert or mitigate looming conflicts and ease existing wars.

This report, drawing on Crisis Group’s field-centered analysis and policy recommendations from the past five years, sets out a broad strategic framework for preventive diplomacy. Its primary focus is on conflicts, like those in Ukraine and Syria, which directly involve outside powers. While classical inter-state conflicts remain rare, internationalized civil wars are a leading source of regional and global frictions. Building frameworks to address both the internal and external tensions that shape them is likely to be a recurrent challenge for big powers, regional players and multilateral organisations in the years ahead.

The first half of this report focuses on the internal drivers of recent and current crises. It argues that while it is exceedingly hard to identify specific triggers of future conflicts, it is possible to identify likely threats to peace and work out how they may play out if left unaddressed. It emphasizes the need to understand the political dimensions of conflicts and, especially, the leaders and elites whose choices for or against violence are pivotal. Grasping how such leaders make these decisions is essential for effective early warning, but it must be buttressed by much broader political analysis covering, inter alia, the dynamics of ruling parties, opposition groups and civil society, not just at the national but at all levels of society.

Building anticipatory relations with all these actors constitutes a bedrock for effective early action by outside partners, once a crisis looks set to break. It is important, too, to grasp the politics and strategies of militaries and internal security forces in cases such as Egypt, or of non-state armed groups in chaotic environments like Libya. The report also highlights the sources of many conflicts in countries’ marginalized peripheral regions. Local rebellions in Yemen, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Pakistan and CAR, to name a few, have expanded unexpectedly and exponentially, causing widespread violence and overthrowing a number of governments.

A focus on the internal players in countries at risk must be complemented by efforts to engage
and balance the interests of external actors, while recognizing that the distinction between “internal” and “external” actors is moot in many crises. In the Middle East and Central and West Africa, conflicts frequently flow across borders, and regional powers simultaneously fuel conflicts and position themselves as peacemakers. Ethnic groups such as the Kurds in the Middle East straddle multiple countries, while organized criminal networks and transnational extremist groups are not restricted to individual states. This means that experts engaged in early warning and early action must treat regional and wider international factors as integral to their conflict analysis and development of appropriate policy.

The report goes on to look more closely at the varieties of “framework diplomacy” that can facilitate the requisite engagement. In many crises it is necessary to look beyond established multilateral frameworks – important though these can be – and pull together case-specific groupings of states and institutions to manage a problem, or at least minimize frictions. Sometimes neither formal nor ad hoc inter-gov-ern-mental arrangements will be suitable: back-channel diplomacy led by local “insider mediators”, specialized international NGOs or other actors may be the best initial way to handle looming tensions.

The remainder of the report reviews the means available for directly engaging in conflicts as they escalate or in anticipation of their outbreak. It emphasizes the need for inclusive approaches to political dialogue, meaning not only outreach to civil society, women’s groups and other constructive forces, but also marginalized minorities and armed groups – including some highly controversial actors such as Islamist extremists. In addition to mediation and other diplomatic options such as deploying high-level envoys, tools include a range of coercive measures and incentives for peace. Coercive tools include diplomatic “naming and shaming”, threats of international legal action in response to atrocities and the use of sanctions. All have significant limitations and can worsen rather than alleviate crises if not well coordinated and aligned to a broader political strategy.

At least equal caution should be applied to the use of force. As the Arab intervention in Yemen has underlined, like many interventions before it, military action can prove costly and counterproductive. This caution also applies to deployments of military peace operations, which have become a standard part of international crisis management (especially in Africa) and increasingly tend toward more robust forms of peace enforcement. While such missions can and do save lives, they can also become entangled in local conflicts, get bogged down in situations from which they have no exit strategy and become overly aligned with governments that do not always enjoy much popular support.

Whatever direct or indirect means of engagement states use, they should set explicit and limited political goals and communicate these clearly to other actors (including their opponents) to avoid violence spiraling beyond control. While coercion may have a role to play in management of a specific crisis, it should be balanced with clear incentives for leaders, elites and their supporters to follow paths away from violence. These may include aid for post-action demobilization, governance reforms and reconstruction.

More strategically, the best peace incentives that outsiders may be able to offer are ideas and advice to actors in a crisis on how to structure mutually-beneficial arrangements to share power and resources. In Libya, for example, the interest all sides ultimately have in a functioning energy sector could be a point of consensus even while political disputes create friction. No one group of analysts and forecasters is consistently right in its early warnings (Crisis Group included), and no early action strategy is foolproof. Tackling conflicts as they emerge and develop is an inherently chancy business, and governments and international organisations that engage in it inevitably risk failure. Nevertheless, early, strategic, well-designed engagement predicated on the discipline of close analysis, development of anticipatory relationships and framework diplomacy may help prevent conflict or limit its escalation. To the extent that their resources permit, governments, regional bodies and international organisations should invest in four key areas:

Knowledge and relationships. Policymakers, working directly or through others, should develop the closest possible knowledge of troubled countries’ political systems and cultivate channels for frank discussions with leaders, elites, security forces and civil society over the risks of crisis. “Early warning” should, in sum, rest not only on economic and other indicators of danger (although these are useful), but also on in-depth political links with crucial actors.

Framework diplomacy. Given the dangers of international and regional tensions exacerbating a crisis, policymakers should make early and concerted efforts to bring international players to the table to assess their interests, hear their analyses and develop common positions on how to act. This can
take place in formal multilateral settings or ad hoc, but it is essential to choose mechanisms that enable real bargaining, resulting in frameworks for handling a conflict, rather than formal exchanges or public recriminations.

**Strategic planning and communication.** It is easy for policymakers to stumble into crises without a clear grasp of what they aim to achieve. The constant need to make statements, launch initiatives and satisfy calls for action makes strategic thinking and planning difficult. It is crucial that governments and international organisations invest in laying out clear overall goals for engaging in crises and communicate these clearly both to the players involved in a conflict and other international actors with interests at stake.

**Creating pathways to peace.** The ultimate goal of all this relationship-building, framework diplomacy and strategic planning is not simply to guide early action, but to signal to the parties at the center of a conflict that they can take paths to peace rather than wade into violence. Outside actors can rarely compel leaders and factions on the brink of conflict to step back. But if they are able to engage in well-informed political and diplomatic work and sketch out ideas for lasting peaceful solutions to a conflict, they may persuade their interlocutors to pause before escalating – and perhaps follow an alternative political route that avoids, or at least limits, all-out violence."

The International Crisis Group (ICG), *CrisisWatch: Tracking Conflict Worldwide*, September, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=935d8a0655-CrisisWatch_1_September_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-935d8a0655-35987108, found:

**Global Overview AUGUST 2016**

The month saw Yemen’s peace talks collapse with violence there intensifying, and the Syrian conflict escalate following Ankara’s launch of a cross-border ground offensive against Islamic State (IS) and Kurdish forces, days after a major terror attack in Turkey’s south east. Troop deployments in Western Sahara threatened to bring about clashes, and violence flared in the Central African Republic. In Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, security forces brutally suppressed anti-government protests, while in Gabon, the president’s disputed re-election triggered violent clashes. In Asia, a suicide bombing killed over 70 people in Pakistan, while suspected militants in Thailand’s southern insurgency launched attacks on targets outside the traditional conflict zone. In positive news, peace talks between the Philippines government and communist rebel groups resumed after a four-year hiatus. On 24 August, Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) declared that they had reached a final peace accord, paving the way for an end to 52 years of armed conflict.

**Trends and Outlook**

Yemen suffered a significant uptick in violence after UN peace talks in Kuwait collapsed in early August. Huthi rebels launched indiscriminate rocket attacks into Saudi Arabia, while the Saudi-led coalition resumed airstrikes on Sanaa, the capital, and Huthi strongholds in the north. In the south, an IS suicide bomb attack on a pro-government militia compound in Aiden killed at least 60. The violence aggravated an already desperate humanitarian situation, with at least 10,000 people killed and more than three million internally displaced since the conflict began. As Crisis Group has warned, without an inclusive negotiated settlement Yemen risks sliding further ‘into state disintegration, territorial fragmentation and sectarian violence’. The war is increasingly threatening Gulf security, as violence spills over the Yemeni-Saudi border and, in southern Yemen, plays into the hands of violent jihadist groups.

The conflict in Syria escalated and Turkey’s involvement grew, as Ankara launched a major offensive in northern Syria in an attempt to remove IS from the border area and contain Kurdish YPG forces’ territorial gains. Turkey’s military operation came days after a bomb attack on a Kurdish wedding in the country’s south east, assumed to be the work of IS, which killed 56 people, mostly children, and injured more than 90. In a significant gain for the Syrian regime, the rebel stronghold Darayya outside the capital Damascus surrendered to government forces on 25 August. Meanwhile, the battle for Aleppo between Russian-backed government forces and rebels continued to rage, reportedly killing over 600 civilians in August.

A tense standoff developed in Western Sahara. Morocco’s deployment of troops and roadworks in
the UN buffer zone angered the Polisario Front armed independence movement, which sent in its own troops. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said on 28 August he was deeply concerned by armed units from Morocco and the Polisario being 'in close proximity'. In the Central African Republic, a convoy of former Séléka rebels, including leaders under arrest warrants, left the capital Bangui for their northern stronghold, shooting their way past security forces. The UN managed to arrest some, but others escaped, undermining already faltering efforts to disarm the country’s multiple armed factions.

In Ethiopia and Zimbabwe, security forces’ brutal responses to mounting protests have led to new spikes in violence. In Ethiopia, at least 87 protesters were reportedly killed in Oromiya and Amhara regions. In Zimbabwe, hundreds protesting against the government's economic misrule and calling for electoral reforms fought running battles with police, with at least 50 injured. In Gabon, supporters of opposition presidential candidate Jean Ping took to the streets and clashed with security forces as soon as the government announced President Bongo winner in the 27 August election.

In Asia, Pakistan suffered reportedly its worst ever attack targeting civil society. A suicide bombing at Quetta Civil hospital on 8 August killed over 70 people, mostly lawyers gathered to mourn Balochistan Bar Association President Bilal Anwar Kasi, who was killed the previous day. Tehreek-e-Taliban faction Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and IS both claimed responsibility for the attack. In Thailand, a series of deadly attacks on 11-12 August suggested the Malay-Muslim separatist insurgency in the Deep South may have entered a “disturbing new phase”, targeting locations outside the traditional conflict zone. Elsewhere in the region, the Philippines government and the National Democratic Front (NDFP), which includes the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People’s Army insurgent group, resumed peace talks and agreed to a ceasefire. The talks in Oslo are the first meetings since negotiations to resolve the 47-year-old conflict were suspended in 2012.

After four years of talks in Cuba, Colombia and the FARC announced on 24 August that they had reached a ‘final, full and definitive’ peace accord. The landmark agreement brings an end to one of the world’s longest-running armed conflicts. However, Crisis Group has cautioned that major challenges remain in the months ahead. The most immediate will be a binding plebiscite on 2 October, when Colombians will vote on whether to accept the peace deal.

Latest Updates

Africa
Burundi AUGUST 2016

President Nkurunziza consolidated control of ruling party as regime continued to repress opposition. Ruling party CNDD-FDD at congress 20 Aug replaced party president position with sec gen and appointed Nkurunziza’s former chief of staff and civil war commander Evariste Ndayishimiye to role. Commission for inter-Burundian Dialogue 23 Aug concluded from public consultations that most Burundians favor scrapping constitutional presidential term limit; opposition said findings fabricated. Govt 3 Aug rejected UNSC resolution to deploy 228 police to Burundi, calling it violation of sovereignty. UN Committee against Torture 12 Aug condemned forced disappearances of govt’s political rivals and its “genocidal rhetoric”. Govt repression targeted security force members believed opposed to Nkurunziza’s third term: police 20 Aug arrested and beat Major Clément Hamenyimana in Gitega; army 19 Aug said eleven officers refused to return after missions abroad fearing arrest. Search for journalist Jean Bigirimana, missing since 22 July, found two bodies in Mubarazi river, Muramvya province early Aug, neither identified as Bigirimana. Third body reportedly found in neighboring Gitega province. Police 21 Aug arrested 54 members of WhatsApp group in Bujumbura for spreading false rumors.

Cameroon AUGUST 2016

Boko Haram (BH) continued deadly attacks in Far North, including: gunmen attacked Gambarou 10 Aug, killing five; suicide bombing at Mora 21 Aug killed four and injured 24. Military reportedly killed five BH members at Bourvari-Plateri 5 Aug in operation supported by civilian vigilante groups. Local media 16 Aug published open letter purportedly from ‘elites’ of Adamawa region denouncing marginalization of region.

Central African Republic AUGUST 2016

Over 30 ex-Séléka rebels, including leaders under arrest warrants, 12 Aug left capital Bangui and exchanged fire with security forces at checkpoints, stopped by MINUSCA next day 50km south of Sibut, ten arrested; Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) leaders Abdoulaye Hissène and Aroun Gaye escaped and 17 Aug reportedly arrived in Kaga Bandoro in north. Police 16 Aug raided
Hissène’s house in Bangui, seized around 700 weapons and ammunition. 22 representatives of ten armed groups 20 Aug formed disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) platform in Bangui. MINUSCA 5 Aug arrested Jean-Francis Bozizé, son of former President François Bozizé, under 2014 international warrant for torture, involvement in assassination and personal use of public funds; court 9 Aug granted him provisional release.

Chad AUGUST 2016

Security forces used tear gas to disperse banned opposition rallies in N’Djamena 6-7 Aug; one protestor killed 7 Aug, day before President Déby’s inauguration for fifth term. French President Hollande received Déby in Paris 20 Aug, reaffirmed support for fight against terrorism and development in Lake Chad region. Four soldiers killed when vehicle hit Boko Haram landmine 27 Aug at Kaiga Kindji near Niger border.

Democratic Republic Of Congo AUGUST 2016

President Kabila and electoral commission (CENI) delayed setting electoral calendar, while some opposition groups continued to reject dialogue. Kabila 4 Aug said electoral calendar would not be published before end of voter registration, launched 31 July; CENI 20 Aug said elections could not be held before July 2017 due to lack of finances and voter list. In support of political dialogue Catholic Church 10 Aug began consultations with ruling party and major opposition groups. To ease tensions Kabila 18 Aug met youth activists Lutte pour le Changement (Lucha) and govt 19 Aug said it would free 24 political prisoners; opposition claimed twenty of those 24 already free. Dialogue preparatory committee convened 23-27 Aug, set dialogue for 1-14 Sept. Some opposition parties, including Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC), took part in preparatory meetings; main opposition coalition Rassemblement boycotted committee and called for general strike to be held 23 Aug, with limited success: police arrested 32 people. Police dispersed with tear gas opposition rally in Lubumbashi, Haut-Katanga 29 Aug. Armed groups continued violence against civilians in N Kivu: army said Mai Mai and Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) 6-7 Aug launched attacks in several places in N Kivu, killing fourteen people; suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) members reportedly killed 51 people in Beni, N Kivu night of 13-14 Aug; suspected ADF 22 Aug reportedly killed two people in Kiteya, N Kivu; crowd in Butembo, N Kivu killed two women suspected of supporting ADF. Attacks sparked protests in east; violent protest in Beni 17 Aug left three dead, including policeman and woman suspected of being ADF member. 

REPORT: Katanga: Tensions in DRC’s Mineral Heartland

Gabon AUGUST 2016

Violent protests broke out after opposition candidate Jean Ping rejected President Bongo’s victory in 27 Aug presidential election, announced 31 Aug. Both candidates 28 Aug claimed victory and accused each other of fraud; govt same day said process 'satisfactory' despite irregularities. Govt 31 Aug announced Bongo won with 49.80% of votes, with Ping garnering 48.23%; opposition rejected results and called for recount in Haut-Ogooué province, Bongo stronghold where turnout was reportedly 99.93%. Ping supporters protested 31 Aug-1 Sep in Libreville and second city Port-Gentil, clashed with security forces, set fire to buildings including parliament building in Libreville; security forces dispersed protests with live rounds and tear gas; same night helicopters and presidential guard on ground attacked opposition HQ, reportedly killing two and injuring nineteen. Ping called for international assistance to protect population. UNSG Ban expressed “deep concern” about violence.

Rwanda AUGUST 2016

Police 17 Aug shot dead one suspected terrorist in Kigali and 19 Aug killed three more and arrested three others in Bugarama, Rusizi district.

Ethiopia AUGUST 2016

Clashes between anti-govt protestors and police and security forces 6-7 Aug in Amhara (NW) and Oromiya regions (center-south) reportedly left at least 87 protestors dead and hundreds arrested. At least seven protestors reportedly killed in clashes with police in Gondar, Amhara region 6 Aug and at least 30 protestors killed in clashes in Bahir Dar, Amhara capital 7 Aug. Residents in Gondar and Bahir Dar reportedly held strikes (“stay-home protests”) from mid-Aug. Security forces 6 Aug reportedly killed over 50 protestors across Oromiya and dispersed protest in Addis Ababa. OHCHR 10 Aug stressed need for investigations into allegations of excessive use of force in both regions.

Kenya AUGUST 2016
Al-Shabaab attacks decreased: militants 6 Aug attacked police camp in Basuba, Lamu county, injuring four officers. Anti-terror police 28 Aug arrested two men suspected of links to Islamic State at Malindi, Kilifi county. Clan militias killed four and injured one in two attacks 28 and 29 Aug on border between Eldas and Wajir North constituencies, Wajir county. Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) 3 Aug agreed to resign following months of protests against its perceived pro-govt bias.

Somalia AUGUST 2016

Al-Shabaab continued attacks against civilians and police, and gov't postponed elections. In Mogadishu, militants tried unsuccessfully to assassinate MP with hand grenade 8 Aug; suspected Al-Shabaab killed local gov't official 12 Aug in drive-by shooting; militants 25 Aug attacked beach restaurant killing at least ten and detonated car bomb prematurely outside Turkish embassy; AMISOM and Somali National Army (SNA) 28 Aug arrested two suspected Al-Shabaab militants in joint operation; suicide car bombing 30 Aug outside presidential palace checkpoint killed 22 people and partly destroyed nearby hotel. Elsewhere, Al-Shabaab militants fired mortars in residential areas of Baidoa, Bay region 6 Aug, killing one; militants 21 Aug carried out twin suicide attacks in market and next to local gov't HQ in Galkayo, Mudug region, killing at least twenty and injuring 30; militants’ roadside bomb 26 Aug injured three in Bardhere, Gedo region; Al-Shabaab 29 Aug launched assaults on four SNA checkpoints in Muri and K-50 neighborhoods, Lower Shabelle, killing at least six. U.S.-assisted SNA troops 10 Aug attacked Al-Shabaab checkpoint in Saakow, Middle Juba region, killing three militants; SNA 12 Aug killed one Al-Shabaab commander and arrested three militants in Beledweyne, Hiraan region; SNA and AMISOM 16 Aug recaptured from Al-Shabaab four locations close to Bardhere, Gedo region. AMISOM 22 Aug said eight militants killed when Al-Shabaab ambushed its convoy near Baidoa, Bay region; SNA and AMISOM 27 Aug killed seven Al-Shabaab militants 15km from Burdehbo, Gedo region. Govt 7 Aug announced new electoral timetable: legislative elections scheduled between 24 Sept and 10 Oct, presidential vote 30 Oct. Talks to merge Hiraan and Middle Shabelle regions collapsed 18 Aug after Middle Shabelle elders refused to select proposed state’s congress before presidential vote.

South Sudan AUGUST 2016

President Kiir contested UN-mandated regional protection force and former first VP Riek Machar travelled to Sudanese capital Khartoum, as limited fighting continued. Taban Deng Gai, who replaced Machar as first VP 26 July, received official welcome from presidents of Kenya and Sudan 16 and 21 Aug; U.S. Sec State Kerry 22 Aug and former Botswana President Mogae, chair of peace monitoring body, 28 Aug said leadership of Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) was internal matter; SPLA-IO loyal to Machar say his replacement violate Aug 2015 peace agreement. After fleeing Juba in early July, Machar late month crossed into Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and, at request of DRC President Kabila, UN provided flight within DRC; he subsequently travelled to Khartoum where he received medical treatment. Govt 5 Aug agreed in principle to deployment of regional protection force in S Sudan. Uganda 11 Aug said neither it nor Sudan would contribute troops to force. Govt 12 Aug announced new process to integrate armed groups into national army. UNSC same day authorized deployment of 4,000-strong regional protection force until 15 Dec; govt rejected resolution, 15 Aug said parliament would consider resolution. Kiir 15 Aug said govt would discuss with international community how implementation could serve “mutual interests”. Limited fighting between former SPLA-IO rebels and govt forces continued in several places in Equatoria region, most intensely in and around Yei, former Central Equatoria state.

COMMENTARY: South Sudan’s Risky Political Impasse

Sudan AUGUST 2016

’Sudan Call’ coalition of armed and unarmed opposition groups 8 Aug signed 'roadmap' peace agreement, signed by govt in March. Govt 10-14 Aug engaged in direct talks with Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) on cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access in Two Areas (S Kordofan and Blue Nile) and with Darfuri rebel groups, Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minnawi (SLM-MM), on Darfur. Govt and SPLM-N rebels 10-11 Aug failed to agree on agenda of cessation of hostilities talks, 13 Aug accused each other of hampering process; talks faltered due to disagreements on direct transportation of humanitarian aid from outside country to Two Areas and govt’s insistence on discussing security arrangements. JEM and SLM-MM accused govt of
refusing to make concessions. Thabo Mbeki, African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) mediator, 14 Aug suspended talks indefinitely; govt 20 Aug said talks will resume in Sept. Govt 23 Aug said Riek Machar, S Sudan rebel leader and former first VP, receiving medical treatment in Khartoum (see S Sudan).

Uganda AUGUST 2016

COMMENTARY: Museveni’s Post-election Politics: Keeping a Lid on Uganda’s Opposition

Angola AUGUST 2016
Clashes between rebel Front for the Liberation of Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) and Angolan Armed Forces (FAA) intensified late July and 4-6 Aug in several areas reportedly killing at least two FLEC and 42 FAA. Ruling Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) party at congress 17-20 Aug re-elected sole nominee President dos Santos party leader and named his daughter Welwitschia and son José Filomeno to MPLA Central Committee.

Mozambique AUGUST 2016
Govt and armed opposition Renamo 17 Aug agreed to set up committee to draft new laws that could enable appointment of Renamo governors in six central and northern provinces where party claimed it won 2014 elections. Delegations suspended talks late month until 12 Sept having failed to agree ceasefire. Renamo continued attacks on civilians and police in Tete, Sofala, Manica, Zambezia and Niassa provinces including freeing 23 prisoners in Morrumbala, Zambezia 12 Aug; killing six at Nangue, Sofala 12 Aug; and wounding four in ambush between Vanduzi and Luenha river, Manica 22 Aug.

Zambia AUGUST 2016
President Lungu won another five-year term in 11 Aug elections with 50.35% of vote; Hakainde Hichilema of United Party for National Development (UPND) came second with 47.67%. Hichilema 19 Aug filed court petition challenging result claiming vote rigged, denied by ruling party and electoral commission. Police 16 Aug said it had arrested 133 people protesting against Lungu’s re-election for destroying property; govt late month shut down three private broadcasters.

Zimbabwe AUGUST 2016
Clashes between anti-govt protestors and police intensified as opposition parties joined forces. Police 3 and 17 Aug broke up anti-govt protests in Harare using batons, tear gas and water cannon. Main opposition leaders Morgan Tsvangirai and ex-Deputy President Joice Mujuru held joint rally 13 Aug, called for protest in Harare 26 Aug to demand electoral reforms before 2018 vote. Police 26 Aug fired tear gas and water cannon at opposition leaders and hundreds of demonstrators sparking running battles between protestors and police in large parts of Harare, at least 50 people injured; police arrested 68 people for public violence including burning buses, police vehicles and shops. Opposition call for protest strike 31 Aug not heeded in Harare, minor clashes broke out in second city Bulawayo.

Burkina Faso AUGUST 2016
Koglweogo civilian self-defense group members 6 Aug demanded govt free members arrested following late June clashes with youths in Zongo near Ouagadougou. Koglweogo member arrested for murder in Koulpelogo province (center-east) 23 Aug. Koglweogo 27 Aug handed over to security forces 130 weapons they had seized.

Côte D’ivoire AUGUST 2016
Following 22 July National Assembly vote in favor of constitutional referendum, President Ouattara 7 Aug said proposed new constitution will include creation of VP position and senate; opposition reiterated rejection of referendum process and proposed amendments. Voter rolls displayed 20-27 Aug in preparation for Sept/Oct referendum and Nov/Dec parliamentary elections. Antoinette Rouissa Mého, opposition party Ivorian Popular Front (FPI) member and defense witness for former President Gbagbo and his wife Simone, arrested 10 Aug, indicted 17 Aug for crimes including breach of state security.

Gambia AUGUST 2016
Estimated half a million people took part in largely peaceful opposition rally in Conakry 16 Aug; police reportedly shot dead one onlooker. Opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) MP Ousmane Gaoual Diallo 12 Aug received two-year suspended prison sentence for insulting President Condé.

**Guinea-Bissau AUGUST 2016**

Amid ongoing parliametary standoff, ECOWAS Commission chair Marcel Alain de Souza and new ECOWAS representative in G-B Blaise Diplo met PM Djá, President Vaz and main political leaders 14-15 Aug in effort to restart political dialogue, said regional bloc’s mission (ECOMIB), deployed since 2012, will withdraw, citing high costs and pressure from African heads of state.

**Mali AUGUST 2016**

After significant deterioration in security late July, rival Tuareg armed groups clashed again in Kidal region and suspected jihadist groups continued attacks in north and center. Ethnic Imghad Self-Defense Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA), member of pro-unity Platform coalition, 8 Aug clashed with ethnic Ifoghas High Council for Unity of Azawad (HCUA), member of main rebel alliance Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA); informal talks between parties in Bamako failed to reach agreement. Unidentified armed men attacked two army convoys near Tenenkou, Mopti region 8 Aug killing at least five soldiers; forced gendarmes to evacuate position in Nantaga, Mopti region 19 Aug; attacked Gathi Loumo, Mopti region, burning city hall 21 Aug; same day attacked security forces on Gossi-Hombori axis in Timbuktu region. One MINUSMA peacekeeper killed when vehicle hit mine 7 Aug in Kidal region. Inter-ethnic clashes left five dead near Tenenkou, Mopti region 27 Aug. Arrest of radio presenter Mohamed Youssouf Bathily or “Ras Bath” in Bamako 16 Aug for criticizing govt sparked riots, police killed demonstrator; Ras Bath released 18 Aug but judicial process ongoing. Former Ansar Dine member Almed al-Faqi al-Mahdi appeared before International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands 22 Aug charged with destruction of mausoleums in Timbuktu.

**Niger AUGUST 2016**

Alleged Boko Haram attack at Kimégana, Diffa region (SE) 15 Aug killed at least five, injured one. Opposition party National Movement for Development of Society-Nassara mid-Aug decided to join ruling majority, responding to President Issoufou’s call to form unity govt.

**Nigeria AUGUST 2016**

Military continued offensive against Boko Haram (BH) in NE of Borno state, vandalism eased in Niger Delta, communal and religious violence flared in several areas. Islamic State 3 Aug named Abu Musab al-Barnawi new BH leader, replacing Abubakar Shekau, who rejected appointment. Army said it killed sixteen insurgents 14 Aug repelling BH attack in Kangarwa; air force said it killed some 300 insurgents including three key commanders 19 Aug. BH attacked Kuburubu 20 Aug killing six and abducting thirteen; next day burnt down Shawa village near Chibok. BH 14 Aug released video showing some 50 of over 200 girls abducted in Chibok in 2014, demanding govt free captured fighters in exchange for their release; President Buhari 28 Aug said govt ready to negotiate. In Niger Delta, attacks on oil installations declined relative to July. Unidentified gunmen 7 Aug killed three soldiers in Nembe area, Bayelsa state. New armed group Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate claimed three attacks on oil pipelines in Delta state 18, 19 and 30 Aug. Niger Delta Avengers and other groups late Aug suspended attacks, laid out conditions for talks. Herder-farmer clashes continued: suspected herders killed 30 in Kodomun, Adamawa state 29 July-1 Aug; killed two in Ndiagu Attakwu, Enugu state 25 Aug. Communal and religious violence flared in five other states killing at least 47: unidentified gunmen killed eleven near Godogodo, Kaduna state 2 Aug; at least five killed in clash between Share and Tsaragi communities in Kpaldna, Niger state 4 Aug; at least six killed in clash between ethnic Igbo indigenes and Hausa residents in Akokwa, Imo state 11 Aug; mob 22 Aug burnt eight to death over alleged blasphemy against Islam in Talata-Mafara, Zamfara state. Military launched operations against armed groups in Benue and Bauchi states 6 and 20 Aug, and in Niger Delta 29 Aug.

**COMMENTARY: North-eastern Nigeria and Conflict’s Humanitarian Fallout?**

**Asia**

**People’s Liberation Army Daily** 16 Aug reported govt tested 21 new pieces of ‘security equipment’ including drones and assault helicopters in five-day counter-terrorism exercise in S Xinjiang.
Xinjiang regional govt 5 Aug passed new counter-terrorism law prohibiting spread of 'distorted Islamic ideas'.

China/Japan AUGUST 2016

Tensions escalated as Japan protested increasing Chinese activities in disputed East China Sea (ECS). Japan defense ministry 2 Aug released annual defense white paper; reported interception of record high of 571 Chinese aircrafts in 2015 fiscal year; also cited 'deep concern' over Chinese maritime assertiveness. China responded accusing Japan of distorting China's 'justified and reasonable defense work' and 'attempting to deceive' international community. Tokyo lodged series of complaints to Chinese ambassador throughout month on Chinese activities in disputed waters in ECS: Japanese FM said Chinese Coast Guard vessels had entered contiguous zone around Senkaku/Diaoyu; Japan Coast Guard 6 Aug said some 230 Chinese fishing vessels had entered contested waters in ECS since 5 Aug, escorted by Chinese Coast Guard; Japan's Kyodo News 7 Aug reported a record thirteen Chinese Coast Guard vessels sighted in contested waters since 5 Aug. Tokyo 5 Aug issued protest against China's installation of first radar unit on offshore gas platform near disputed waters in ECS. Group of Japanese cabinet members and political leaders 15 Aug visited controversial Yasukuni Shrine to commemorate anniversary of Japan's WWII surrender; China condemned visit, urged Japan to "face up to and reflect upon the history of aggression". Japanese and Chinese FMs 24 Aug met in Tokyo, agreed to "make efforts" to resolve disputes and build "good atmosphere" for talks between President Xi and PM Abe at Sept G20 Summit in Hangzhou.

Korean Peninsula AUGUST 2016

DPRK 3 Aug test-launched ballistic missile into Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off coast of N Japan; PM Abe called test "serious threat" to Japan. U.S. Strategic Command and ROK military said second missile was fired simultaneously, exploding immediately after launch. DPRK 24 Aug test-fired third missile from waters off NE coast; reportedly first instance of DPRK missile landing in Japan's air defense identification zone (ADIZ), prompting further condemnation from Japan; ROK FM said ROK prepared to "thoroughly respond" to any provocation from DPRK. UNSC 26 Aug issued unanimous statement condemning DPRK's missile launches. In first ever response to foreign media inquiries, Pyongyang 17 Aug confirmed resumption of plutonium production in interview with Japan's Kyodo News. U.S. responded same day, calling DPRK's plutonium production "clear violation of UN Security Council resolutions", urged DPRK to cease uranium enrichment. Following 24 Aug trilateral meeting in Tokyo, FMs of China, Japan and ROK urged DPRK "to exercise self-restraint regarding its provocative action, and to observe the UN Security Council's resolutions". ROK unification ministry 17 Aug confirmed defection of DPRK deputy ambassador to London, Thae Yong Ho, to South Korea, reportedly most senior DPRK official to defect since 1997; 31 Aug reported that DPRK had executed high ranking Minister Kim Yong-jin and banished two others for re-education in July.

Afghanistan AUGUST 2016

Taliban 10 Aug captured four strategic districts surrounding Helmand provincial capital Lashkar Gah; Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) prevented capture of city. Taliban 14 Aug captured Dahan-e-Ghori district, Baghlan province; 20 Aug temporarily captured Khanabad district, Kunduz. After five days of fighting, Taliban 26 Aug reportedly took control of Janikhail district, Paktia province. Hizb-e-Islami representative Ghairat Baheer 6 Aug said peace talks with Kabul govt expected to resume shortly. Unidentified militants 24 Aug attacked American University in Kabul, killing at least thirteen, mostly students. President's office reportedly said National Directorate of Security (NDS) had "reliable evidence" attack was coordinated from Pakistan; President Ghani 25 Aug asked Pakistani Army Chief General Raheel Sharif to take action against culprits in Pakistan. Ahead of end of National Unity Government's (NUG) two-year arrangement in Sept, oppositions groups reportedly criticised NUG for failure to deliver on key reforms. CEO Abdullah Abdullah 11 Aug denounced Ghani as unfit to govern, intensifying inter-factional tensions. Abdullah 8 Aug said NUG had developed roadmap for electoral reforms; President Ghani's press office 15 Aug said finalized electoral law amendments would be sent to cabinet for approval.

Bangladesh AUGUST 2016

Govt crackdown on suspected jihadists including those responsible for July Gulshan and Sholakia attacks continued. Security forces 27 Aug killed three alleged militants in Dhaka, including Bangladeshi-Canadian, Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, accused of masterminding Gulshan attack. Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 4 Aug killed two alleged militants in Mymensingh district, reportedly linked to 7 July Sholakia attack.
Law enforcement arrested at least ten alleged Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) operatives throughout month, including five reportedly arrested with explosives and detonators 11 Aug. Police 5-6 Aug detained at least eighteen suspected jihadists in four different districts, including fourteen Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and activists allegedly possessing jihadist propaganda. Police 4 Aug detained Bangladeshi-UK national Hasnat Karim and Bangladeshi Canadian permanent resident Tahmid Hasib, both present at café during attacks, for suspected involvement. Officials 13 Aug said investigation had yielded evidence of Karim’s involvement, Hasib interrogation ongoing. Police 12 Aug said they had identified another “top-level militant organizer” responsible for coordinating attack. Following July announcement of plans for national convention against militancy, Bangladesh National Party (BNP) continued efforts to forge “national unity” against jihadist violence; smaller opposition parties raised objections to participating in platform that would include BNP ally Jamaat-e-Islaami, several of whose members were detained for suspected involvement in attacks. BNP 6 Aug constituted new national executive committee, prompting criticism from PM Sheikh Hasina for inclusion of family members and personal staff of convicted war criminals Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Abdul Alim. Dhaka court 17 Aug issued arrest warrants for 67 leaders and activists of BNP-led opposition alliance, in connection with Feb 2015 arson case. Two separate Dhaka courts 10 Aug granted BNP chief Khaleda Zia bail in sedition and nine arson cases. International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) 10 Aug sentenced one former Jamaat-e-Islaami lawmaker to death, seven others to life imprisonment for crimes committed during 1971 war.

India (Non-Kashmir) AUGUST 2016

Suspected Bodo militants 5 Aug opened fire on market in Kokrajhar, Assam, killing at least thirteen civilians; security forces reportedly killed one alleged militant following attack. National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) denied accusations of involvement. Security forces 17 Aug reportedly killed four alleged Maoists in raid in Dantewada, Chhattisgarh. All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and People’s Joint Action Committee for Bodoland Movement 25 Aug said they would relaunch non-violent agitation for separate statehood, claiming that despite promises of talks, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) govt was “neglecting and ignoring” them.

Kashmir AUGUST 2016

Tensions between India and Pakistan rose as clashes between Indian police and protesters continued in wake of Indian security forces’ 8 July killing of Hizbul Mujahideen leader Burhan Wani. At least five people reportedly killed 15 Aug in clash with police following India Independence day protests in Srinagar. Alleged militants 17 Aug killed one police officer, two soldiers following police ambush. Fresh protests erupted in several parts of Kashmir including Srinagar after Indian authorities 29 Aug lifted 52-day curfew in most of Kashmir; parts of Srinagar remained under lockdown. Security forces 31 Aug reportedly fired at protesters in Nadihal village, killing one and bringing civilian death toll to at least 69 since protests broke out in July. Protesters 3 Aug staged sit-in in Pakistan-administered Kashmir after Pakistan security forces blocked aid convoy of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JD – the renamed Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, LeT) activists reported to attempting to cross LoC with food and medical supplies. Pakistani Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan 4 Aug accused India of “open terrorism” in Kashmir at South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) ministerial summit in Islamabad. Indian PM Modi 12 Aug accused Pakistan of encouraging “cross-border terrorism” in Kashmir. Pakistan foreign secretary 15 Aug extended formal invitation to New Delhi for talks on Kashmir, Indian govt said talks should focus on cross-border terrorism; rejected Pakistan’s ‘self-serving allegations’ of misconduct in Kashmir. UN human rights chief 17 Aug released statement requesting “full and unhindered access” to population affected by violence in Pakistan and India-administered Kashmir in order to investigate alleged human rights violations.

Nepal AUGUST 2016

CPN (Maoist Centre) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal elected prime minister 3 Aug; joined by Nepali Congress (NC) in new ruling coalition with UML in opposition. Dahal claimed addressing demands of dissenting Madhesi, Tharu, and Janajati groups and broadening buy-in for new constitution among govt’s top priorities. CPN(MC) and NC 2 Aug signed three-point deal with alliance of Madhesi and Janajati parties agreeing to compensate families of those killed during constitution-related protests in southern Tarai plains, and to register constitutional amendment in parliament to address demands on federal boundaries and inclusion. In exchange, alliance supported Dahal’s nomination for PM. Deputy PM Bimalendra Nidhi visited New Delhi 18-23 Aug, met with Indian PM Modi and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj; visit
underscored Dahal govt’s efforts to repair ties with India following difficult relations during KP Oli-led regime. Transitional justice mechanisms on truth and reconciliation and disappearances completed their case-registration period 10 Aug, have until Feb 2017 to investigate over 60,000 registered cases. Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chairperson Surya Kiran Gurung 30 Aug threatened to resign if transitional justice-related legislation was not amended in accordance with international standards, criticised govt for lack of cooperation.

**Pakistan** AUGUST 2016

In largest attack since March Lahore bombing, suicide bomb at Quetta Civil hospital 8 Aug killed over 70 people, mostly lawyers gathered at hospital to mourn 7 Aug killing of Balochistan Bar Association President Bilal Anwar Kasi; reportedly country’s worst attack ever targeting civil society. Pakistan Bar Council 9 Aug called for nationwide strike by lawyers demanding additional security; strikes and protests by lawyers continued throughout month. Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP) faction Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and Islamic State (IS) both claimed responsibility for attack; Balochistan chief minister accused Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) of coordinating attack. Military also suggested Indian involvement, calling attack “attempt to undermine CPEC [China Pakistan Economic Corridor]”, PM Sharif 8 Aug echoed concerns that “enemies of Pakistan are after CPEC”. No concrete evidence of RAW involvement found. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah 1 Aug authorized extension of Rangers’ policing authority for another 90 days, limited to Karachi. Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) leaders 6 Aug concluded two-day hunger strike, criticised Rangers’ continued detention of party’s mayoral candidate Waseem Akhtar. MQM worker Mohammad Waheed died 7 Aug allegedly from torture sustained during imprisonment Chief Minister Shah 18 Aug ordered release of six MQM activists, reportedly warning Rangers against detaining innocent people. Civilian and military leadership 11 Aug agreed to establish “high-level task force” to oversee implementation of 2015 National Action Plan (NAP) on terrorism; General Raheel Sharif 12 Aug said lack of progress on NAP was “affecting the consolidation phase” of Operation Zarb-i-Azb in N Waziristan. PM Sharif 15 Aug approved creation of additional Frontier Corps units in KPK to manage cross-border security. Military 16 Aug launched Operation Khyber-3 in Rajgal Valley near Pakistan-Afghanistan border; Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) 22 Aug said security forces had killed 40 militants, destroyed 43 hideouts since launch. U.S. Congress 3 Aug rejected release of $300m in Coalition Support Funds (CSF) reimbursements to Pakistani military after U.S. Sec Defense Ashton Carter declined to certify that Pakistan had taken “sufficient action” against Haqqani Network.

**Sri Lanka** AUGUST 2016

Parliament 11 Aug passed bill on establishment of Office of Missing Persons (OMP) to investigate cases of enforced disappearance. Civil society activists criticised govt for absence of formal consultations with victims of conflict; families of missing persons 18 Aug staged protest in north demanding OMP be based in conflict-affected areas. Govt responded to protests confirming OMP local offices would be set up in conflict-affected parts of N and E. Zonal Task Forces (ZTF) comprised of local civil society organisations held public consultations on transitional justice across country during month; some participants in N and E reported intimidation and threats from military, one man allegedly tortured for testifying to ZTF in NW town Mannar. Govt pledged additional security to participants. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) politicians, including Northern Provincial Council (NPC) chief minister, claim that 107 former LTTE cadres had died from possible poisoning in govt rehabilitation centres. State Minister of Defense Ruwan Wijewardene criticised Tamil politicians for falsely accusing military, while cabinet spokesperson 10 Aug said govt would investigate allegations. In 15-16 Aug meeting in Geneva, UN Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged Sri Lanka to improve protection of ethnic and religious minorities following reports of continuing human rights violations against Muslims and Tamils of Indian origin. UNSG Ban began three-day visit 31 Aug. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, former defense secretary and brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, charged with corruption 31 Aug over alleged illegal transfer of state-owned weapons.

**Indonesia** AUGUST 2016

Police 5 Aug arrested 6 suspected militants, allegedly planning rocket attack on Singapore’s Marina Bay from Batam Island, Indonesia. Officials reportedly identified suspects as members of Katibah Gigh Rahmat (KGR) network with possible ties to Islamic State (IS).

**Myanmar** AUGUST 2016

Four-day Panglong-21 peace conference began 31 Aug between govt and armed groups, including...
UNFC alliance of armed groups; UNSG Ban gave opening address. Negotiations to include three smaller, previously excluded groups unsuccessful and they did not attend. Armed clashes between Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) and govt forces took place near group’s Laiza HQ 7 Aug, while KIO front-line posts were reportedly shelled 18 Aug. Followed clashes in Kachin State’s Hpakan and Tanai townships starting 8 Aug; Hpakan fighting reportedly began with KIO ambush of police convoy. Govt 23 Aug appointed high-profile joint national-international Advisory Commission to find “lasting solutions” to “complex and delicate issues” in Rakhine State, where first phase of revamped citizenship verification process – issuance of “national verification cards” that can later be used to initiate citizenship claims – continues to proceed slowly due to low interest/resistance from Muslim communities. Commission to be chaired by former UNSG Kofi Annan; international members include former special advisor to UNSG Ghassan Salame, national members include Buddhists and Muslims, but no Muslims from Rakhine State. Aung San Suu Kyi visited China 17-21 Aug, met with Premier Li and President Xi, discussed major Chinese projects including Myitsone Dam, Chinese support for Myanmar peace process.

OP-ED: Give Burma a Chance
Philippines AUGUST 2016

Govt and communist rebel group National Democratic Front (NDFP), which includes the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the New People’s Army (NPA) insurgent group, resumed peace talks in Oslo 22-27 Aug, first meetings since negotiations to resolve 47-year-long conflict were suspended in 2012. Parties 21 Aug agreed ceasefire for duration of talks, 26 Aug extended ceasefire indefinitely and agreed to continue negotiations 8-12 Oct. Govt and MILF negotiators conducting peace talks in Malaysia 13-14 Aug signed joint statement agreeing to increase membership of newly reconstituted Bangsamoro Transition Committee (BTC) from previous fifteen to 21 members, including new representatives from Moro National Liberation Front (MLLF) and indigenous communities. Meetings reportedly focused on developing more inclusive implementation plan for peace roadmap, including plans to draft new version of Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), which President Duterte hopes to implement as part of country’s move toward federalism. In lead-up to talks, presidential peace adviser Jesus Dureza 4 Aug said negotiations complete, committee now entering implementation phase of new peace roadmap approved by Duterte 18 July. MILF chair Al Haj Murad Ebrahim 13 Aug said MILF has “new solidified relationship” with new administration, hopes to see “final closure” to Mindanao conflict. Duterte announced crackdown on Abu Sayyaf group after it beheaded teenage hostage 24 Aug; over 1,200 military troops reportedly raided several areas of Sulu province 26-29 Aug, killing at least 21 alleged Abu Sayyaf militants including one commander. Abu Sayyaf reportedly kidnapped at least three other hostages in Sulu province during month. Army spokesman 29 Aug reported twelve soldiers killed in clash with Abu Sayyaf in Patikul, Sulu. Philippine National Police (PNP) chief Ronald dela Rosa 23 Aug said over 1,900 people had been killed since 1 July in Duterte’s ‘War on Drugs’ crackdown; police claimed responsibility for approximately 900 deaths. UN 18 Aug condemned crackdown and extrajudicial killings.

OP-ED: Philippines Peace Process: Duterte Playing for High Stakes
South China Sea AUGUST 2016

Following contentious July arbitration ruling by Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Philippine Special Envoy to China Fidel Ramos 10-11 Aug met informally with Fu Ying, chairperson of Foreign Affairs Committee of China’s National People’s Congress, to renew Sino-Philippine relations; joint statement said discussion focused on trust building and opportunities for cooperation. Philippine President Duterte 23 Aug said talks on territorial dispute with China expected to start this year. At 13th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on implementation of 2002 Declaration on the Conduct (DOC) of Parties in the South China Sea, 15-16 Aug in Inner Mongolia, Chinese and ASEAN officials agreed on guidelines for senior diplomat’s hotline for emergencies at sea and joint statement on Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), to be discussed at China-ASEAN Summit in Sept; also set first formal timeline for binding Code of Conduct (COC) in SCS, with framework to be complete by mid-2017. U.S. think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 9 Aug released satellite photos allegedly showing China’s construction of reinforced hangars on Fiery Cross, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef in disputed Spratly islands; said size and structural features of hangars suggest military purpose. Reuters 18 Aug released report accusing Vietnam of secretly sending mobile rocket launchers to five bases in Spratly islands; Vietnam said report “inaccurate”.

102
Thailand AUGUST 2016

Month saw escalation of separatist violence in Deep South with deadly attacks targeting areas outside traditional conflict zone. Series of IEDs and incendiary devices exploded in seventeen locations across seven provinces of peninsular Thailand 11-12 Aug, killing four people and wounding at least 35; attacks targeted tourist locations including Krabi, Phang-nga, Phuket, Hua Hin. National police chief General Chakthip Chaijinda 21 Aug said bombings were work of New Generation of Malay-Muslim militants. Voters 7 Aug approved draft constitution prepared by National Council for Peace and Order’s (NCPO) drafting committee; Electoral Commission reported 59% turnout, with 61% voting in favor. Voters also approved by 58% second measure allowing Senate to help select PM together with lower house. Result reflected persistent regional divide, with Bangkok and south (except for three southernmost provinces) voting in favour of new charter, most north and NE provinces rejecting it. New constitution enshrines period of “guided democracy” following general election scheduled for late 2017. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha, who has repeatedly denied any ambition to serve as PM after an election, told reporters 17 Aug that he would accept position if no other qualified candidates could be found. Prayuth visited Deep South 25 July to unveil six-year plan to develop agro-industry, sustainable energy, trade with Malaysia. At least 35 small IEDs exploded across three southernmost provinces 6-7 Aug, eve of constitutional referendum, no casualties. Two bombs exploded at hotel in Pattani 24 Aug, one person killed; third Pattani bomb same day caused no casualties.

OP-ED: Can Thailand Really Hide a Rebellion?

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina AUGUST 2016

Bosnia’s international partners and Bosniak and Croat parties expressed increasing concern over referendum scheduled for 25 Sept in Serb-majority Republika Srpska (RS) entity on whether to continue to celebrate annual 9 Jan “RS day”, which Constitutional Court (CC) in Nov 2015 ruled was unconstitutional and discriminatory.

Kosovo AUGUST 2016

Row erupted over nepotism after media website Insajderi 1 Aug released what it claimed were parts of wire-tapped conversations in late 2011 between high-level ruling Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) party officials, including President Thaci (then PM), showing influence over appointments including senior prosecutors and judges. Further leaked conversations released 4, 5 Aug, prompting protests in Pristina. PDK chief Adem Grabovci resigned 17 Aug; chief prosecutor 26 Aug announced investigation into him. Rocket-propelled grenade fired at parliament 4 Aug; police 30 Aug arrested six members of Self-Determination (Vetevendosje) party, which denied role in attack. Hand grenade thrown at public TV station 22 Aug and in Pristina suburb reportedly targeting head of state broadcaster 28 Aug; no injuries. Opposition MPs again released tear gas in parliament 9 Aug during session scheduling vote on controversial Montenegro border agreement 1 Sept. Several hundred ethnic Albanians staged protest preventing Kosovo Serb pilgrims visiting church in west 28 Aug.

Macedonia AUGUST 2016

Four main political parties 31 Aug agreed to hold early parliamentary elections, already postponed twice, on 11 Dec; interim govt to be elected in Sept. Greek FM visited Skopje for meetings to improve communications between Greece and Macedonia, amid ongoing dispute between countries over official name of Macedonia, which has blocked Macedonia’s EU accession progress.

Armenia AUGUST 2016

Following July Yerevan hostage crisis and anti-govt protests, President Sargsyan 2 Aug promised to form govt of “national accord”, said it would not include “terrorists and their defenders”. Hundreds continued to protest in Yerevan calling for release of arrested members of Sasna Tsrer, group responsible for hostage-taking. Three opposition Heritage Party figures arrested late July in connection with protests released after Heritage Party 15 Aug pulled out of upcoming local elections. Yerevan police chief sacked early Aug for “failing to prevent violent attacks on protesters and journalists”; over a dozen police reprimanded/suspended.

Azerbaijan AUGUST 2016

Prominent opposition movement figure Natig Jafarli arrested 12 Aug on charges of 'illegal entrepreneurship and abuse of power'; several activists arrested 13 and 15 Aug on various charges. EU
condemned arrests, said debates surrounding constitutional referendum scheduled for 26 Sept should be pluralistic. Govt 16 Aug launched criminal investigation into alleged supporters of Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen, who Turkish govt holds responsible for 15 July failed coup attempt; arrested four Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APCHP) activists on charges of ties to Gülen.

**Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) AUGUST 2016**

Armenia and Azerbaijan continued to accuse each other of violating ceasefire. Facing domestic opposition over speculation of his govt’s concessions to Azerbaijan (see Armenia), Armenian President Sargsyan 1 Aug asserted that there would be "no unilateral concessions" in N-K peace process. Russian President Putin 8 Aug met with Azerbaijani and Iranian presidents, 10 Aug with Armenian president, with talks focused among others on N-K settlement.

**Russia/North Caucasus AUGUST 2016**

Four suspected militants killed during counter-terrorism operations in Botlikh district, W Dagestan 11 Aug; judge murdered in Shamil district 11 Aug, two police killed near Iberbash city 12 Aug. Russian special forces 17 Aug killed four militants in St Petersburg counter-terrorism operation reportedly targeting N Caucasus militant leaders suspected of responsibility for terrorist attacks. Two Chechen men same day attacked police in Moscow region with axes, injuring two; both attackers killed. Islamic State (IS) 18 Aug claimed men were IS supporters, marking first known declaration of IS attack in Russia outside N Caucasus, according to Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs. Russian National Guard service 23 Aug reported it had destroyed fifteen terrorist facilities over previous week during more than 120 special operations, seized small arms and ammunition, detained over 12,000 citizens including for public order breaches. Human Rights Watch report 30 Aug accused Chechen authorities of crackdown on critics ahead of 18 Sept parliamentary and regional elections in which republic head Ramzan Kadyrov is running for office as governor of Chechnya.

**Ukraine AUGUST 2016**

Tensions increased between Kyiv and Moscow after Russian security forces in Crimea 10 Aug reported clash with alleged groups of Ukrainian state saboteurs planning attack on infrastructure; two elite Russian troops reported killed, seven alleged Ukrainian saboteurs captured. Russia accused Ukraine of state terrorism, PM Medvedev suggested severing diplomatic relations; President Putin said that in current situation Normandy Group consultations are “senseless”. However later in month Kremlin confirmed Putin would meet his French and German Normandy counterparts as planned early Sept, and Putin made clear he would not cut relations with Kyiv. Ukrainian President Poroshenko 17 Aug said he did not exclude possibility of military mobilization in Ukraine if situation in eastern Ukraine deteriorated following Crimea incident, which he called fabricated. Russia announced major military exercises, including near Ukrainian border and around Crimean peninsula 25-31 Aug. Elsewhere clashes continued between Ukrainian forces and separatists with daily exchanges of small arms and heavy artillery fire, focused around heavily populated Zaitseve, Avdiivka and Mariinka in Donetsk region. Discussions in the Minsk format showed modest progress as Minsk Tripartite working group 26 Aug called for indefinite ceasefire on front line with Donbas starting 1 Sept. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch 29 Aug announced release of thirteen civilians from Security Service of Ukraine (SBU)-run secret detention center in Kharkiv who had allegedly been abducted and tortured. Luhansk and Donetsk separatist leaders Igor Plotnitsky and Alexander Zakharchenko both survived alleged assassination attempts during month. IMF again delayed release of third $1.7bn loan tranche as Kyiv lagged in reform efforts.

**COMMENTARY: Parsing Russia’s Tough Talk on Ukraine**

**Cyprus AUGUST 2016**

Weekly meetings between Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci and Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades continued, with new round of seven meetings initiated 23 Aug. Akinci late July reported significant steps have been taken in economy, EU, property, governance and power-sharing. Turkish Cypriot media early Aug reported disagreements between Akinci and northern Cypriot PM Ozgurgun on conduct of talks after Ozgurgun publicly criticised Akinci, accused him of being weak.

**Turkey AUGUST 2016**

Month saw major terrorist attack in SE, assumed to be work of Islamic State (IS), and launch of major cross-border ground offensive against IS positions in N Syria. Bomb attack on Kurdish wedding in Gaziantep province in SE 20 Aug killed 56, mostly children, and injured more than 90; came as govt...
continued domestic crackdown on IS-linked individuals, with scores detained during month suspected of preparing attacks, recruiting for IS. Turkish policy on Syria continued to shift: President Erdoğan 9 Aug met with Russian President Putin for first time since Turkey’s downing of Russian jet in Nov 2015, reportedly discussed coordinating on Syria. Military 24 Aug began air and ground offensive ‘Euphrates Shield’ on IS positions near Jarablus in N Syria, with Turkey-backed Syrian rebels taking control of town same day. Amid concern over recent U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish YPG gains in N Syria, Turkish shelling also targeted some YPG positions (see Syria). PM Binali Yıldırım 20 Aug stated that President Bashar al-Assad could remain in power for transitional period. Iraq’s Kurdish Regional Govt President Barzani visited Ankara on 23 Aug for high-level talks. U.S. VP Joe Biden visited Ankara 24 Aug, expressed support for Turkish operations targeting IS in Jarablus. Ankara continued to press U.S. on extradition of Fethullah Gülen. PKK further escalated fight against Turkish security forces with intensification of IED attacks in Aug, two-fold increase in deaths of security forces compared to July. Violence continued to be concentrated in rural areas, mostly targeting police and military posts. 64 state security force members, at least 51 PKK/PKK-affiliated militants, and eighteen civilians killed during month; attacks included vehicle-borne IED targeting police station in SE Elazığ province 18 Aug, killing three police and injuring over 200 including at least 60 civilians. Another vehicle-borne IED attack on police checkpoint in Şırnak’s Cizre district 26 Aug killed eleven police, wounded 78. Senior PKK figure 8 Aug warned group will “spread its war to the cities”. Ankara continued to restructure state institutions and remove individuals thought to be linked to Gülen network (state-christened FETO/PDY) it blames for July failed coup; some 80,000 public officials reported to have been suspended since coup attempt. Govt 31 July closed all military academies, land, air and ground commands that were subordinated to defense minister.

Kazakhstan AUGUST 2016
Visiting Turkey 5 Aug, President Nazarbayev said Kazakhstan would extradite anyone who has “terrorist connections” with Fethullah Gülen, cleric blamed by Ankara for coup; also said schools financed by Gülen would be inspected. Govt 18 Aug extended until 2021 moratorium on selling and renting of land to foreigners, introduced May following April/May protests in major cities. Head of journalists’ union and chair of National Press Club put on trial on corruption charges 23 Aug; rights organisations claim charges politically motivated. Authorities 22 Aug announced arrest of four suspected members of radical group allegedly plotting terrorist attacks; 26 Aug announced arrest of Russian citizen suspected of recruiting for Islamic State (IS); Committee for National Security (KNB) 31 Aug announced detention of 21 alleged Islamic militants. Three more police died early Aug from injuries sustained during 18 July attack in Almaty, bringing total killed to nine. Five Central Asian FMs met with U.S. Sec State Kerry in Washington DC 3 Aug under multilateral C5+1 format; discussed security, economic integration, counter-terrorism, climate change.

Kyrgyzstan AUGUST 2016
President Atambayev 28 July controversially proposed amending constitution; draft of amendments to be put to referendum published 29 July, despite 2010 moratorium prohibiting any change to constitution until 2020. Amendments officially intended to expand powers of executive and legislative branches, particularly PM, and advance judicial reform. Proposals include introduction of “Supreme Values of the Kyrgyz Republic” to tackle foreign ideological influences; requirement for judges to permit auditing of their telecommunications; prioritization of Supreme Court decisions over international agreements; and permission for special parliamentary disciplinary committees to dismiss Supreme Court and local judges. President Atambayev 31 July denied intention to become PM after his term ends in 2017. Amendments have support of four parliamentary parties, however several high-profile political figures publicly criticised them; Atambayev delivered Independence Day speech 31 Aug denouncing critics. Chinese embassy struck by alleged suicide car bomber 30 Aug, killing attacker, wounding three Kyrgyz employees; Atambayev ordered govt to step up counter-terrorism measures, China to assist with investigation. Five Central Asian FMs met with U.S. Sec State Kerry in Washington DC 3 Aug under multilateral C5+1 format (see Kazakhstan).

Tajikistan AUGUST 2016
Tajikistan 3 Aug joined China-led counter-terrorist alliance together with Afghanistan and Pakistan, Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism. Concerns about border security increased after Taliban in Afghanistan recaptured territory close to border. Afghan National Security Advisor Hanif Atmar
10 Aug discussed regional and border security issues with Tajik govt in Dushanbe. General prosecutor 4 Aug called for restoration of death penalty for those convicted of terrorism or attempting military coups; some 170 alleged supporters of former Deputy Defense Minister Abduhalim Nazarzoda, accused of coup attempt in Sept 2015, still detained. Govt issued decree giving it right to “regulate and control the content of all television and radio networks”. Five Central Asian FM’s met with U.S. Sec State Kerry in Washington DC 3 Aug under multilateral C5+1 format (see Kazakhstan).

Turkmenistan AUGUST 2016

Amid shortage of foreign currency, Central Bank 25 July introduced tight restrictions on currency conversion; independent Turkmen media outlets (reporting from outside country) report citizens stockpiling food. Five Central Asian FM’s met with U.S. Sec State Kerry in Washington DC 3 Aug under multilateral C5+1 format (see Kazakhstan). President Berdymukhamedov visited Germany 29 Aug, first visit since 2008; said country was working on constitution reform, will introduce human rights ombudsman; is looking into new gas export routes.

Uzbekistan AUGUST 2016

Govt 28 Aug reported long-serving President Karimov, 78 years old and rumored to be seriously ill, had been hospitalized. Amid growing speculation over his state of health, Karimov’s youngest daughter Lola 31 Aug reported he was recovering from a brain hemorrhage. Tensions increased with Kyrgyzstan after Uzbekistan 22 Aug detained four Kyrgyz nationals in disputed border area. Five Central Asian FM’s met with U.S. Sec State Kerry in Washington DC 3 Aug under multilateral C5+1 format (see Kazakhstan).

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia AUGUST 2016

Govt and FARC 24 Aug signed “final, full and definitive” peace accord ending more than five decades of conflict, culmination of four years of talks; includes measures aiming to deal with conflict causes, including comprehensive rural reform, reforms to drug policy and coca crop substitution; truth commission and special judicial apparatus to provide redress for victims; reintegration of FARC into Colombian political system and of its fighters into civilian life. FARC to contest 2018 congressional elections, will be guaranteed ten seats in legislature. Ceasefire came into effect 29 Aug. President Santos announced plebiscite on agreement will take place 2 Oct. Opinion polls regarding plebiscite displayed contradictory results, with some showing high likelihood of defeat for peace deal; opposition 3 Aug announced it would be carrying out “no” campaign rather than promote abstention. Six-month weapons abandonment process to begin following official signing of agreement late Sept. Joint groups of delegates from govt, FARC and UN verification mission 9-23 Aug carried out technical visits to 30 villages to verify they could be adapted for use as cantonment sites for FARC guerrillas. ELN guerrilla group stepped up violence: 16 Aug kidnapped four rice growers in eastern province Arauca; President Santos stated group was holding hostages in Venezuela. ELN also killed alleged rapist in small town in north 16 Aug. Clashes between ELN and Clan Úsuga drug trafficking group displaced over 170 people in west; ELN threatens displaced several families in north-central Colombia; combat between armed forces and guerrilla groups, believed to be ELN and EPL (Popular Liberation Army, small regional former guerrilla group mainly dedicated to drug trafficking), displaced nearly 1,000 in NE. ELN criticised govt-FARC peace agreements for maintaining “violent, exclusionary, unequal, unjust and predatory [govt] regime”. ELN also stated it supports FARC decision for peace but maintains its “right to rebellion”.

OP-ED: ¿Durará el acuerdo de paz de Colombia?

Venezuela AUGUST 2016

National Electoral Council (CNE) 9 Aug presented timetable for recall referendum against President Maduro, specifying that signature gathering for referendum will take place late Oct. Timetable would likely push potential poll (to be held only if 20% of electorate sign petition) to no earlier than Feb 2017 – too late to trigger new elections, instead allowing ruling party to replace Maduro until his term ends in 2019. Opposition alliance MUD immediately called for major protest march in Caracas 1 Sept. Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro backed opposition, 22 Aug made public letter to imprisoned opposition leader Leopoldo López declaring recent events “end of democracy” and “termination of rule of law” in Venezuela. Maduro 18 Aug warned of harsh response to any ‘attempted coup’. Ahead of 1 Sept planned protest interior ministry 28 Aug returned opposition leader Daniel Ceballos to jail. As economic crisis continued to intensify, IMF late July predicted Venezuela will be world’s worst performing country of
2016, with economy likely to shrink up to 10%, inflation to reach 700% by year's end. UNSG Ban early Aug called situation in Venezuela 'humanitarian crisis'; Venezuela's ambassador to UN denied. Colombia and Venezuela 13 Aug officially reopened five pedestrian border crossings, sealed for over a year, for 15 hours a day; over 150,000 Venezuelans reportedly crossed border first weekend, stockpiling up on food, medicines.

OP-ED: La hora de los militares en Venezuela

Guatemala AUGUST 2016

Amid mounting tensions over perceived undue influence of former military officers on govt of President Morales, El Periódico newspaper 16 Aug reported accusations of illegal surveillance operation managed by President's security office; plot allegedly controlled by group of former military officers serving as close advisors to president. Cases against corruption continued. High-risk court judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez 29 July indicted 53 of 57 suspects in “Co-optation of the State” case, including former President Otto Pérez and former VP Roxana Baldetti, plus members of political and business elites; accused will face charges of illicit association, illicit electoral financing, bribery, money laundering. Supreme Court (CSJ) 18 Aug lifted Congressman Luis Rabbé’s immunity, opening possibility for prosecutors to investigate him on allegations of irregular contracts during his period as president of Congress; Rabbé subsequently absconded. President Morales agreed with El Salvador and Honduras counterparts to launch new force to combat criminal gangs and drug traffickers.

OP-ED: Mexico is Already the Immigration 'Wall' Some Politicians Want

Haiti AUGUST 2016

Ahead of first round of repeat presidential elections set for 9 Oct, Organization of American States (OAS) 2 Aug stated it will again serve as electoral observer, but issued list of recommendations to reform election process ahead of polls including more training for poll workers to identify irregularities, changing indelible ink used to identify who has voted. 9 Oct ballot to feature 27 candidates for president plus candidates for legislative seats; campaigning opened 23 Aug. Election funding remained uncertain, with President Privert reportedly reaching out to private sector to raise $55m budget announced 17 Aug. Leaked UN report appeared to confirm organization's responsibility for 2010 cholera outbreak which killed over 10,000 people, believed to have originated with contingent of peacekeepers from Nepal.

Mexico AUGUST 2016

Human Rights Commission (CNDH) 18 Aug published report holding Federal Police, attorney general's office and Michoacán state's attorney general's office accountable for violating human rights of scores of alleged criminals during May 2015 confrontation between govt forces and purported members of Jalisco New Generation Cartel; said 22 out of 42 dead civilians were victims of extrajudicial executions, announced it will pursue criminal and administrative actions against those responsible. Chief of police sacked 29 Aug to allow 'transparent investigation'. Suspected Sinaloa cartel operator and son of prominent drug kingpin Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán, Jesús Alfredo Guzmán Salazar, kidnapped 15 Aug in Puerto Vallarta along with five others by armed group allegedly belonging to rival Jalisco New Generation Cartel, prompting concerns over increasing power of New Generation, renewed drug trafficking-related violence. New scandal revealing possible conflict of interest involving first lady’s use of $2.05m luxury apartment in Florida owned by potential govt contractor interested in running Mexico’s ports; President Peña Nieto denies any wrongdoing on his or his wife’s part. His approval ratings slid to 23%, lowest level yet. Free speech group Article 19 issued report showing 2016 already deadliest year for journalists in Mexico since 2010, eight killed during first six months including three in Veracruz. National statistics agency announced 2.6% increase in homicides from 20,010 in 2014 to 20,525 in 2015, first rise in four years.

OP-ED: Mexico is Already the Immigration 'Wall' Some Politicians Want

Paraguay AUGUST 2016

Armed group 27 Aug reportedly killed eight soldiers in roadside attack in Arroyito, N Paraguay. Interior minister said small Marxist group Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) believed to be responsible; president vowed to “personally lead the fight against these terrorists”.

Middle East & North Africa

Israel/Palestine AUGUST 2016

After a lull, month saw attempted stabbings and other attacks resume, including 24 Aug incident
in which Israeli soldier shot Palestinian assailant dead; also Israeli raids in West Bank, dozens injured and one killed during raid in Fawwar refugee camp 17 Aug, while Israeli soldiers killed reportedly unarmed Palestinian near Ramallah in West Bank 26 Aug. Israel 21-22 Aug launched some 50 strikes on targets in Gaza in response to rocket fired from Gaza 21 Aug, claimed by Salafi group Ahfad al-Sahaba and landing in Sderot town causing no injuries. Several Palestinians reported injured in Israeli strikes. Israeli military investigation 24 Aug cleared Israeli army of wrongdoing in incidents in which dozens of civilians were killed during 2014 Gaza war, including shelling of UN school; Palestinian officials urged International Criminal Court to act. With preparations underway for Palestinian municipal elections scheduled 8 Oct, Hamas and Fatah accused each other of obstructing one another’s campaigns. West Bank saw worsening water shortages. Egyptian President Sisi 23 Aug said Russia’s President Putin has offered to host Israeli-Palestinian summit to find a solution; Israel reiterated it is ready for talks without preconditions, Palestinian officials remained firm on demands for talks. No date set yet for France’s proposed international peace conference to convene sides for talks before end of 2016; meeting between FM to discuss peace process reportedly scheduled for sidelines of UNGA in Sept. Israel reportedly approved 464 new homes in Jewish settlements in W Bank 30 Aug. Likud MP David Amsalem proposed law that would prevent any future criminal investigation into PM Netanyahu while he is in office, drawing opposition condemnation.

**Lebanon** AUGUST 2016

Visiting Egyptian FM Sameh Shoukry 16-17 Aug met with counterpart and Lebanese political parties, expressed concern over lack of president and resulting political vacuum and offered support to find compromise. Election of president postponed again early Aug until 7 Sept due to lack of quorum in parliament. One person killed, eleven wounded in bomb attack in Beqaa Valley 31 Aug. Armed forces continued raids of Syrian refugee camps on Beqaa Valley, arresting dozens 22 Aug over suspicious activity, lack of proper identification. U.S. 9 Aug delivered $50m military aid package to help Lebanon fight militant threat from Syria, bringing 2016 total military aid to $220m. Hizbollah early Aug reported it had deployed hundreds of reinforcements to Aleppo to support Syrian regime fighting rebels (see Syria). UNSC 30 Aug extended mandate of UNFIL peacekeeping force in south for another year.

**Syria** AUGUST 2016

Month saw new escalation as Turkey launched major offensive in north, while regime seized an opposition stronghold outside Damascus and battle for Aleppo continued. U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) dominated by Kurdish YPG fighters captured Manbij from IS 6 Aug, capping twelve-week campaign west of Euphrates river. YPG seized some areas of Hasaka in NE from regime forces 23 Aug, expanding their hold within city despite regime’s first ever use of airstrikes against YPG forces. Seeking to remove IS from border area and contain growing YPG control in N Syria, Turkey 23 Aug launched air and ground offensive on Islamic State (IS) positions near Jarablus together with Turkish-backed rebels and U.S. fighter jets; next day took control of city, as operation continued west of city to seize last remaining IS-held territory along border. U.S. said Kurdish forces must retreat from Menbij area to east of Euphrates river, key Turkish demand to which U.S. agreed prior to Manbij campaign. SDF forces linked to YPG clashed with Turkey-backed forces near Jarablus; latter seized several villages from SDF 29 Aug. Battle for Aleppo between Russian-backed govt forces and rebels continued; coalition of rebel groups (including Jabhat Fath al-Sham, formerly Jabhat al-Nusra) 6 Aug broke month-long siege on east Aleppo. Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported over 600 civilians killed in Aleppo during month as fighting including further regime and Russian airstrikes continued. UN continued calls for regular 48-hour ceasefire in Aleppo to allow aid delivery; proposed third round of UN-mediated intra-Syrian peace talks previously planned for late Aug deferred. Negotiations continued between Russia and U.S. on restoring cessation of hostilities agreement and initiating military cooperation against Fath al-Sham. IS-affiliated media 30 Aug reported IS chief strategist Abu Muhammad al-Adnani killed in Aleppo province. In significant gain for Assad regime, rebel stronghold Darayya outside Damascus surrendered to govt forces 25 Aug ending four-year siege; regime reported evacuation of residents and fighters complete 27 Aug. UN and Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) investigation determined regime and IS responsibility for specific chlorine and mustard chemical attacks in 2014 and 2015; separate report by OPCW also suggested that regime maintained chemical weapons agents in violation of Chemical Weapons Convention and 2013 agreement brokered by U.S. and Russia.

**Bahrain** AUGUST 2016
Govt crackdown on dissent targeted Shia clerics, including court sentencing 18 Aug of Sheikh Ali Humaidan to one year in prison for taking part in “illegal gathering” in Diraz village. UN rights experts 16 Aug urged govt to stop persecution of Shias.

Iran AUGUST 2016
Russia 16-18 Aug used Nojeh air base near Hamadan in NW to launch airstrikes against rebels in Syria; some MPs said move breached constitution which prohibits foreign militaries from being based in Iran, govt 22 Aug said Russia had stopped using base “for now” and criticised Russia for publicizing its use. Govt said security forces 15 Aug killed Islamic State (IS) senior member and 16 Aug killed three IS-linked militants in Kermanshah province bordering Iraq. Naval boats maneuvered around U.S. warships in Persian Gulf area 23 and 24 Aug, provoking warning shots. Local media 28 Aug reported that member of Iran’s nuclear negotiating team suspected of espionage had been questioned and released on bail.

Iraq AUGUST 2016
Leadership struggle between PM Abadi and former PM Maliki intensified as security forces continued to prepare to retake Mosul from Islamic State (IS). MPs in Maliki’s State of Law coalition 3 Aug questioned Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi on corruption case; Obeidi released documents implicating parliament speaker Salim al-Jibouri and two State of Law MPs. Jibouri filed defamation lawsuit against Obeidi and Supreme Judicial Council 9 Aug closed case against Jibouri for lack of evidence. Obeidi dismissed 25 Aug following parliamentary vote of no confidence. Abadi continued cabinet reshuffle: parliament 15 Aug approved five new ministers. IS attacked border guard base between Rutba and Trebil near Jordan 16 Aug killing at least nine; attacked Shiite wedding party 28 Aug at Ain al-Tamer, 50km from Karbala, killing eighteen.

REPORT: Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq’s “Generation 2000”

Saudi Arabia AUGUST 2016
Huthi rebels in Yemen increased rocket attacks into Saudi Arabia as Saudi-led coalition increased bombing of rebel-held territory in Yemen (see Yemen).

Yemen AUGUST 2016
Peace talks collapsed and fighting escalated. UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed 6 Aug announced talks suspended for one month; govt and Huthi rebels disagreed over sequencing of withdrawal of rebel forces from cities, disarmament and formation of unity govt. Huthis increased rocket attacks into Saudi Arabia and tried to hold territory there as Saudi Arabia-led coalition resumed airstrikes on capital Sanaa after three months’ break and on Huthi northern strongholds. Saudi-led coalition airstrikes 13 Aug killed nineteen people, mostly children in Saada province (NW), 15 Aug hit Médecins Sans Frontières hospital in Hajjah (NW) killing fifteen. Saudi-led coalition renewed efforts to retake Sanaa through NW entrance at Nehm. Tens of thousands rallied in Sanaa 20 Aug in support of Huthi rebels and ex-President Saleh; Saudi-led coalition same day bombed Sanaa, reportedly killing three civilians. U.S. Sec State Kerry 25 Aug proposed new peace plan to form unity govt; Huthi rebels 28 Aug said they would restart talks when Saudi-led coalition stopped bombing. Islamic State suicide bombing on pro-govt militia compound in Aden 29 Aug killed at least 60.

Algeria AUGUST 2016
Three suspected Islamist militants 3 Aug surrendered in Adrar province (S). Army found militant hideout 3 Aug in Skikda province (NE) and weapons cache 14 Aug in Boumerdes (N). Four killed by IED 5 Aug in Chechar (E). Security officials 24 Aug said Islamic State-affiliate Jund al-Khalifa had been dismantled.

Egypt AUGUST 2016
Military 4 Aug said it had killed Abu Duaa al-Ansari, leader of Islamic State-affiliate Sinai Province (SP), in al-Arish, N Sinai; group 18 Aug confirmed death, announced Sheikh Abdullah as new leader. Suspected SP militants continued to attack civilians and security personnel in al-Arish area: three IED attacks killed four civilians, injured four civilians and at least eleven police; sniper 22 Aug shot dead security officer; unidentified militants 23 Aug shot dead army officer and police. Govt 11 Aug announced $12bn agreement with IMF to support implementation of economic reforms.

Libya AUGUST 2016
Conflict deepened between supporters and opponents of UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) of PM-designate Serraj. In controversial 22 Aug vote, Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR)
rejected GNA with 60 voting against, one in favor and 40 abstaining; other HoR members boycotted vote considering it illegal. GNA’s Presidential Council 24 Aug acknowledged HoR vote and said it would submit revised cabinet. In Tripoli, pro- and anti-Serraj armed groups early Aug fought over control of govt buildings. In Sirte, Misratan-led forces, nominally under Serraj’s command, continued to advance to retake control of city from Islamic State (IS) but suffered heavy death toll, with at least 34 killed 28 Aug. U.S. 1 Aug said it had begun airstrikes supporting anti-IS advance, carried out almost 100 in area throughout month. In Benghazi, General Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) launched strikes against strongholds of Shura Council coalition in Ganfuda neighbourhood, claiming it is an IS-affiliate and therefore legitimate target; residents accused LNA of indiscriminate shelling. Suicide car bomb attack against LNA troops 2 Aug killed 23, Shura Council claimed responsibility. In oil crescent east of Sirte, forces under control of local strongman and GNA ally Ibrahim Jedran kept control of oil terminals despite threat of LNA advances.

Mauritania AUGUST 2016
Govt mid-Aug reportedly deployed short- and medium-range missiles at northern border with Western Sahara following Morocco’s deployment of gendarmes in area in anti-smuggling operation (see Western Sahara).

Morocco AUGUST 2016
Govt 16 Aug said it had arrested four suspected Islamic State members allegedly planning attacks in Casablanca. Govt anti-smuggling operation in southern Western Sahara that began 14 Aug sparked protests by Polisario Front independence movement and Mauritania (see Western Sahara and Mauritania).

Tunisia AUGUST 2016
President Essebsi 3 Aug named Nida Tounes (NT) party member Youssef Chahed as PM following 30 July parliamentary vote of no confidence in PM Essid. Chahed 20 Aug named 26 ministers and fourteen secretaries of state, including representatives of six major parties and independents. Parliament 26 Aug passed vote of confidence in govt even though NT MPs and Islamist An-Nahda party members 20-21 Aug expressed reservations about cabinet composition. New govt took office 29 Aug. Jihadist attack on Mount Semmama (NW) same day killed three soldiers, wounded seven. Police 31 Aug killed two Islamist militants in Karma near Algerian border, one civilian died in clash.

Western Sahara AUGUST 2016
Moroccan troop deployment and roadworks raised tensions with Polisario Front armed independence movement, which deployed its troops in area. Polisario Front 16 Aug accused Morocco of violating ceasefire by sending troops and military equipment into buffer zone near Mauritanian border, called on UN to intervene. Morocco same day said it was conducting anti-smuggling operation and paving road. UN 18 Aug reportedly said peacekeeping mission MINURSO found no sign of suspicious military activity by Morocco, but Polisario 28 Aug said in letter to MINURSO that it was deploying troops to area ‘to prevent further Moroccan activities’ beyond its territory. UNSG Ban 28 Aug said he was deeply concerned by ‘introduction of armed units from Morocco and the Polisario in close proximity.”.

Going back over the previous two months, International Crisis Group (ICG), CrisisWatch: Tracking Conflict Worldwide, August 1, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=2815d1d9a4-Weekly_Update_29_July_5_August_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-2815d1d9a4-359871089, found, “The month saw protracted conflicts intensify, attempts to resolve them derail and political crises erupt or deepen. In Turkey, a failed coup attempt led to hundreds killed and prompted concern over the government’s commitment to the rule of law and divisions within the security bureaucracy. In neighboring Syria, regime forces cut off the final supply line into opposition-held areas of Aleppo city, with scores killed in airstrikes and rocket attacks. Violent crises flared up in Armenia and India-administered Kashmir, and both Bangladesh and Afghanistan experienced major terrorist attacks. In Mali, efforts to implement the June 2015 peace deal faced a violent backlash, and in South Sudan clashes between government forces and former rebels left hundreds dead. A new split in the opposition there could make the conflict more difficult to end.
On 15 July, a segment of the Turkish army attempted to topple the elected government and President Erdoğan, failing in the face of resistance from police, part of the army and citizens. At least 240 people were reported killed during clashes, while over 10,000 people were arrested, over 18,000 detained and some 60,000 public officials dismissed in the wake of the coup attempt. The scale of the backlash has prompted concerns in the West over Turkey’s commitment to the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and more generally over divisions within the security bureaucracy and the state’s capacity to address security challenges including operations against the Kurdish insurgency in the south east.

In Syria, the Assad regime, assisted by re-intensified Russian airstrikes, severed the final supply line into areas of Aleppo city held by mostly non-jihadist opposition forces, amid renewed diplomatic maneuvering between the U.S. and Russia. Scores were killed by fighting in and around Aleppo as airstrikes and rocket attacks hit civilian areas, where as many as 300,000 people are estimated to remain in encircled portions of the city with dwindling basic supplies. As the regime informed residents and rebels willing to surrender that they could leave through “humanitarian corridors”, the UN called for guarantees of protection and humanitarian access, and insisted no one can be forced to flee. Elsewhere, over 40 people were reported killed in an Islamic State (IS) bombing of Qamishli city near the Turkish border on 27 July, and activists reported that an U.S. airstrike on Menbij city killed at least 73 civilians on 19 July, making it allegedly the worst coalition attack on civilians.

In Bangladesh, a brutal attack on a café in an upscale neighbourhood of the capital Dhaka on 1 July left 22 people, mostly foreigners, dead. Although IS claimed responsibility, officials pointed to the likely involvement of local affiliates of al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS), an ally of the group behind recent killings of secular and atheist bloggers and publishers. In a commentary published after the attack, Crisis Group noted that the government’s primary challenge is to tackle the growing local constituencies of both IS and AQIS, and adopt a counter-terrorism approach based on accountable and impartial law enforcement. IS also claimed responsibility for a joint suicide attack on ethnic Hazara protesters in the Afghan capital on 23 July which killed at least 80 people and injured over 250.

Also in South Asia, the killing by Indian security forces of Burhan Wani, operations chief of Kashmir’s largest militant group Hizbul Mujahideen, on 8 July, sparked a fresh crisis in India-administered Kashmir. As major protests broke out across Jammu and Kashmir in response to the killing, 49 people were reported killed and over 5,000 injured in clashes with security forces. Pakistan condemned the killing of Wani and violence against protesters, while India’s home minister blamed Islamabad for orchestrating the violence.

Meanwhile, Armenia was rocked by an armed opposition group’s seizure of a police headquarters in the capital Yerevan on 17 July, taking several hostages and killing two police before surrendering at the end of the month. The gunmen were demanding President Sargsyan’s resignation over his handling of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan, amid speculation over his government’s possible concessions to Baku. Thousands of people joined daily protests in support of the gunmen, with dozens injured in clashes with police, and scores detained.

In Mali, the peace process in the north faced serious setbacks as fighting flared up between an ethnic Tuareg armed group allied with the government and a coalition of Tuareg fighters who favor northern secession, killing at least twenty. Meanwhile in Juba, South Sudan’s capital, four days of clashes between government forces and SPLA-IO former rebels left hundreds of fighters dead and dealt the peace process a major blow. The replacement of Riek Machar, long-time SPLA-IO leader, as first vice president split the former rebels, and more fighting in several areas in late July could signal further splits and an escalation in the coming weeks. To pull South Sudan back from the brink, Crisis Group urged regional leaders, especially Uganda and Sudan, backed by the African Union, China and the U.S., to clarify the consequences for the warring factions if they do not halt the violence.

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Burundi: Talks to end political crisis 12-14 July in Arusha failed to address main points of contention. Opposition members attended but govt refused to meet them formally, said its internal dialogue sufficient. Tanzanian govt’s attempt during talks to arrest Burundian opposition member wanted by Burundian govt undermined opposition’s trust in Tanzanian mediation. Next round not yet announced. In
Mossi, recently critical of regime Bujumbura unidentified assailants 13 July shot dead Burundian member of East African Parliament Hafsa Mossi, recently critical of regime. Human rights minister 5 July rejected UN Human Rights Chief’s 29 June report denouncing regime’s abuses. Human Rights Watch 7 July released report detailing torture by intelligence officers. UN Committee against Torture 28-29 July conducted special review on Burundi. Despite continued govt opposition, UNSC 29 July authorized deployment of up to 228 UN police to monitor security and human rights in Burundi for one year, mission requires Burundi govt approval; govt 30 July organized march in Bujumbura to protest resolution. UN 8 July said Burundian peacekeepers in CAR under investigation for sexual abuses.

Cameroon: Boko Haram (BH) carried out fourteen attacks against civilians and military in Far North, killing at least seventeen civilians, kidnapping eleven and killing one soldier. Govt and local media criticised Amnesty International report on abuses by army in Far North published 14 July. Twelve Cameroonians kidnapped March 2015 by armed group in Eastern province freed 19 July in Central African Republic (CAR), four others had died in captivity; one captive, mayor of Lagdo, said Patriotic Movement for the Safety of Cameroon (MPSC) loyal to imprisoned politician Aboubakar Sidiki kidnapped them and CAR armed group Democratic Front for the Central African People (FDPC) freed them in deal with Cameroon govt.

Central African Republic: Insecurity and tensions persisted in NW, N, SW and center as armed groups remained reluctant to disarm. Fighting between ex-Seleka rebel factions Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) and Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (PPRC) in Bambari 4 July left fourteen dead including civilians. Ex-Seleka attack in Ngakobo, south of Bambari 23 July left at least three dead. Govt 12 July said it had begun talks with UN on lifting arms embargo to enable it to procure weapons for army. French President Hollande 13 July confirmed that Sangaris military mission would end Oct 2016. UNSC 26 July extended UN mission (MINUSCA) until Nov 2017. EU Military Advisory Mission (EUMAM) replaced 16 July by EU Military Training Mission (EUTM) to support defense sector reform initially for two years. UN 8 July said over 6,000 people had fled from CAR to Chad and Cameroon since violence rose mid-June. International Monetary Fund 20 July approved $115.8mn three-year loan arrangement.

Chad: Army continued operations against Boko Haram (BH) on Lake Chad islands: arrested several suspected BH members including on Tchoukoudoum islet near Nigerian border and Kaiga Kindjiria islet near Niger border, early July clashed with BH near Nigerian border. Army and air force reportedly supporting Nigerian army repel BH attacks in Borno state, Nigeria. At African Union (AU) summit 17-19 July in Rwanda, President Déby, current AU chairman, proposed creation of trust fund for fighting terrorism in Africa. 31 opposition parties 26 July formed Front de l’opposition nouvelle pour l’alternance et le changement (FONAC) coalition.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Little progress made to resolve electoral crisis as opposition continued to reject President Kabila’s political dialogue. Electoral commission 5 July said it would organize elections after renewal of electoral register which would take at least sixteen months. Opposition grouping Rassemblement 4 July reiterated rejection of Kabila’s dialogue and 24 July rejected African Union (AU) facilitator Edem Kodjo. Catholic Church 22 July and AU 26 July called for dialogue to begin soon, AU expressed confidence in Kodjo. After two years’ absence Etienne Tshisekedi, leader of opposition Union of Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) and Rassemblement, returned to Kinshasa 27 July. In Kinshasa tens of thousands of Kabila supporters rallied 29 July and similar numbers of opposition supporters rallied 31 July calling for Kabila to step down. Ex-Katanga governor and opposition leader Moïse Katumbi and former Planning Minister Olivier Kamitatu 13 July in Washington called for more sanctions against govt; opposition delegation led by Tshisekedi, 18 July sought support from EU, U.S. and UK special representatives for Great Lakes region in Paris. UNSG Ban 5 July said peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) developing plans in case of widespread violence, UN Deputy SG 7 July expressed concern that mission would not have capacity to respond. In east, attacks against civilians attributed to Allied Defense Forces (ADF) rebels continued, including 5 July raid in Oicha, near Beni, N Kivu that left nine people dead; clash between army and ADF 30-31 July in Oicha killed three ADF, two soldiers and two civilians.

Ethiopia: Arrests by security forces and subsequent violent protests 12 July in northern Gondar town, reportedly related to dispute over Wolqait district’s status as part of Tigray region, left at least five civilians and eleven security forces dead. Localized anti-govt protests held in Oromia region throughout month.
Kenya: Al-Shabaab increased attacks along Somalia border and at coast: suspected militants shot buses near Elwak, Mandera county, killing six people 1 July; attacked vehicle heading from Mandera to Lafey, killing one 9 July; same day overran police station in Wajir near Somalia border, stole guns and ammunition; attacked police camp in Mangai, Lamu county 14 July, one militant reportedly killed. Police 21 July shot dead two suspected Al-Shabaab militants in Mombasa; army vehicle 26 July detonated IED at Ishakani, Lamu county, several soldiers injured; Al-Shabaab 28 July destroyed communication mast in Fino town, Mandera county. Fighting between ethnic Kipsigis and Maasai over land in Pimpinyet border area in south-western Narok county 14-18 July left two people dead.

Somalia: Al-Shabaab continued to launch attacks against civilians and clash with security forces. Group carried out twin suicide attacks using vehicle-borne IEDs near Medina Gate checkpoint in Mogadishu close to Aden Ade International Airport and AMISOM base 26 July, killing at least fifteen people; Al-Shabaab claimed one bomber was former MP Salah Nuh Ismail aka Salah Badbado. Militants 2 July launched mortar attacks in Baidoa, Bay region, killing four; suspected militants 5 July threw hand grenade in Mogadishu market, injuring nine; suspected Al-Shabaab bombing outside police station in Mogadishu 13 July wounded one; Al-Shabaab suicide bombers and gunmen 31 July attacked police Criminal Investigations Department in Mogadishu killing at least five civilians and a soldier. Somali National Army (SNA) 4 July regained control of villages near Qansahdhere, Bay region; 9 July overran Al-Shabaab base in Gobanle, Lower Shabelle; 30 July reportedly retook control of Garas Weyne area, Bakool region. Al-Shabaab 11 July raided SNA base in Laanta Buuro near Mogadishu, killing ten soldiers; same day retook port city Marka, Lower Shabelle; 17 July clashed with AMISOM in Awdinle, Bay region, fourteen civilians and four militants killed. Al-Shabaab Emir Ahmed Diriye aka Abu Ubaidah 12 July reiterated group’s commitment to al-Qaeda. Al-Shabaab member Mohamed Dahir aka Timo Jilac 21 July surrendered to police in Galmudug. Puntland and Somaliland forces 18 July clashed in contested Sanaag region (see Somaliland).

South Sudan: Fighting between govt forces and former rebels erupted in Juba early July. Clashes in Juba between govt forces and Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) former rebels 7-11 July left hundreds of fighters and two Chinese peacekeepers dead. Under pressure from Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) regional bloc President Kiir and Riek Machar, SPLA-IO leader and first VP, declared ceasefire 11 July, Machar and SPLA-IO forces left Juba same day. Machar said he would return when regional forces provided him protection. During fighting Kiir provided protection for Machar and ordered troops not to kill certain SPLA-IO leaders. Regional leaders at IGAD summit 11 July proposed deploying intervention brigade in Juba, African Union endorsed decision; Kiir 14 July rejected proposal. Following proposal from minority SPLA-IO faction, Kiir 25 July replaced Machar as first VP with Mines Minister Taban Deng Gai; SPLA-IO military leaders and most SPLM/A-IO members rejected replacement. Since early July clashes SPLA-IO forces loyal to Machar attacked civilian vehicles on main road between Juba and Uganda and repelled attacks by govt forces. Renewed fighting also began 30 July in Nasir, former Upper Nile state. UNSC 29 July extended UN peacekeeping mission until 12 Aug.

Sudan: “Sudan Call” coalition of armed and unarmed opposition groups met in Paris 18-22 July, agreed to hold preparatory meeting with African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) in coming months to discuss opposition’s requirements for joining AUHIP-mediated “roadmap” peace plan signed by govt in March. Govt 13 July said it would postpone final session of National Dialogue (ND) if opponents sign roadmap plan and thereby express willingness to join ND. Pro-govt militia Rapid Support Force (RSF), deployed in Northern state June 2016, 30 July said it had arrested about 600 Ethiopians allegedly heading to Libya intending to travel to Europe. From Conflict to Cooperation? Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda

Uganda: Following flare-up in fighting in S Sudan capital Juba 7-11 July between govt forces and Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) former rebels, regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) including Uganda 11 July proposed deploying intervention brigade in Juba; President Museveni later suggested forces should only deploy with Juba’s consent (see S Sudan). Museveni 23 July advised S Sudan President Kiir, visiting Uganda, to accept third party troops in S Sudan deployed under IGAD to protect senior Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) officials. UN Refugee Agency 26 July said almost 37,500 South Sudanese had crossed into Uganda since 7 July fleeing fighting, govt 9-10 July deployed troops along S Sudan border. Army convoy 14 July entered S Sudan to evacuate Ugandan citizens; army 20 July said 38,000 civilians, mostly
Ugandans, had left S Sudan for Uganda since start of fighting. High Court released Kizza Besigye, leader of opposition Forum for Democratic Change, on bail 12 July pending trial for treason for staging his own presidential inauguration ceremony in May. Ruling National Resistance Movement district chairpersons 13 July resolved to support motion to remove constitutional age limit for president currently 75.

From Conflict to Cooperation? Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda

Mozambique: Peace talks between armed opposition Renamo and govt began in Maputo 21 July but suspended 23 July amid disagreements. Tensions persisted as Renamo continued ambushes and raids: *militants raided health centres in Banga, Tete province and Muapula, Niassa province 6 and 24 July respectively; 23-24 July ambushed truck near Barue, Manica province; 25 July ambushed coal train near Inhamitanga, Sofala province; attacked police station and health center in Mopeia, Zambezia province and Maiaça, Niassa province 30 and 31 July respectively. Renamo 13 July kidnapped former Renamo MP Manuel Lole in Chimoio, Manica province; Lole’s body found in Tica, Sofala province 16 July.

South Africa: Violence continued in run-up to 3 Aug municipal elections: in KwaZulu-Natal province unidentified gunmen 18 July killed local candidate for ruling African National Congress (ANC); at least twelve other ANC members reported killed in last two months.

Zambia: In run-up to 11 Aug general elections, supporters of ruling Patriotic Front (PF) and leading opposition United Party for National Development (UPND) clashed several times; police 8 July opened fire on UPND supporters, killing one. Election commission 10 July suspended campaigning for a week in Lusaka and Namwala to stop violence. Police 20 July fired teargas and arrested 28 people during raid on home of UPND VP.

Zimbabwe: Authorities repressed anti-govt protests as splits in ruling party ZANU-PF widened. Citizens 6 July heeded civil society’s call for national strike; police same day fired tear gas at protesters demonstrating against govt’s economic mismanagement. In response ZANU-PF mid-July mobilized thousands of youth to march in Harare. ZANU-PF politburo 6 July endorsed disciplinary committee’s recommendation to expel War Veterans Association chairman Christopher Mutsangwva for insulting first lady; association’s leadership 21 July said it would no longer support President Mugabe. Contradicting govt assurances that International Monetary Fund would soon relieve debt crisis with loan, institution 14 July said it was not discussing financing program with govt.

Burkina Faso: Police in Niger arrested seventeen members of Koglweogo civilian self-defense groups from Burkina Faso for illegally crossing border in search of two alleged bandits. Security Minister Simon Compaoré 11 July met Koglweogo delegation to address dispute with govt over group’s powers and said govt would create community police. Following 7 July meeting with opposition, President Kaboré 13 July amended composition and decision-making process of commission tasked with reforming constitution. Relations with Côte d’Ivoire improved: ambassadors from both countries filled vacant positions late July and govts held Friendship and Cooperation Treaty (TAC) summit 27-29 July in Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire.

Côte d’Ivoire: Tensions grew between govt and opposition: police 15 July broke up gathering in Abidjan urging signing of petition to demand release of former President Gbagbo, arrested three opposition supporters who were put on trial 25 July for organizing “gathering that could upset public calm”. Govt 13 July indicted two military officers for being in contact with perpetrators of mid-March terrorist attack at Grand-Bassam prior to attack but failing to expose them; officers denied accusation. Riots and looting erupted 22 July in Bouaké in center over rising electricity prices; one person killed and dozens injured in clashes between civilians, including disgruntled former combatants, and security forces. Relations with Burkina Faso improved (see Burkina Faso).

Guinea: Preparations for local elections planned for Oct continued despite lack of dialogue between govt and opposition. Govt invited opposition to talks 14 July on electoral preparations but leader of main opposition Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea, Cellou Dalein Diallo, declined 9 July, deploring non-implementation of previous agreements, called for protests 4 Aug against “dictatorship, poverty, corruption and insecurity”. Ruling Rally of the Guinean People 13 July accused Diallo of trying to destabilize institutions through coup. Mining company Rio Tinto 4 July said it would not develop iron ore mine in Simandou area, hailed as future motor of economic growth, because of low market prices.

Guinea-Bissau: President Vaz and PM Djá tried to consolidate power against dominant faction of former ruling party, African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). Supreme Court
15 July endorsed Djä’s nomination as PM. Djä from 11 July sought diplomatic and financial support from presidents of Togo, Burkina Faso and Senegal and from West African Development Bank, West African Economic and Monetary Union and Central Bank of West African States.

Mali: In north security forces violently repressed protests and rebel groups clashed. Security forces 12 July opened fire on youth associations in Gao protesting appointment of interim authorities in north – major step in implementation of peace deal – and demanding to be included in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process; four killed, 37 injured. Protests also broke out in Timbuktu and Bamako in following days. Govt delegation 13 July met youth in Gao to ease tensions. Following rise in tensions between ethnic Tuareg groups, Imghad Self-Defense Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) and Ifoghas High Council for Unity of Azawad (HCUA) over control of Kidal city and trafficking routes, groups 17 July in Niamey, Niger signed agreement on local security and power sharing. However, clashes between groups in Kidal 21-22 July left up to twenty dead. GATIA and main rebel alliance Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) 30 July clashed at Edjerer about 50km NE of Kidal, GATIA claimed to have killed six CMA. Seven new ministers appointed 7 July including Nina Wallet Intallou of signatory rebel group National Movement for Liberation of Azawad (MNLA). Suspected jihadist groups including Ansar Dine and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb continued attacks against national and international forces throughout month in Mopti, Ségou, Koro, Timbuktu and Kidal regions, killing at least nineteen soldiers, one National Guard and local official. Ansar Dine and ethnic armed group National Alliance for the Protection of Fulani Identity and the Restoration of Justice (ANSIPRU), formed in June, claimed 19 July attack on army base at Nampala, Ségou region that killed seventeen soldiers. Security forces 27 July arrested regional leader of Ansar Dine, Abou Yehiya, allegedly involved in Nampala attack. Parliament 30 July extended state of emergency until March 2017.

Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?

Niger: Despite decrease of Boko Haram (BH) attacks in SE, govt 29 July extended state of emergency in Diffa region until Oct. Niger component of regional Multinational Joint Task Force 25 July reportedly launched large-scale military operation against BH in N Nigeria. Arrests and judicial action against political opponents and civil society representatives continued: seven members of opposition party Moden Lumana, close to former presidential candidate Hama Amadou, sentenced to ten months’ prison 12 July following arrest in Nov 2015 for “armed gathering and public disorder”.

Nigeria: Clashes between military and Boko Haram (BH) insurgents continued in Borno state in NE while violence continued in Niger Delta and Middle Belt and escalated in SW. Troops 8 July repelled BH attack on army base in Rann, killed sixteen insurgents, two soldiers killed. Suspected BH suicide bomber same day attacked mosque in Damboa, killing six. BH 12 July attacked army in Kangarwa, killed two soldiers; several insurgents killed. BH 21 July ambushed army in Guro Gongon village, wounded nineteen soldiers, about eleven missing. Multinational Joint Taskforce 28 July retook Damasak town under BH control since Oct 2014. Humanitarian crisis in NE deepened: UNICEF 14 July said 250,000 children suffering severe malnourishment in Borno state; suspected BH 28 July attacked aid convoy wounding five, UNICEF 30 July said it would continue aid in NE. In Niger Delta, armed groups continued attacks on oil installations: Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) claimed responsibility for at least fourteen attacks on oil and gas installations 1-24 July in Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom states. Violence escalated in SW: oil installation vandals 14 and 26 July attacked outlying communities in Lagos and Ogun states; army and navy bombarded vandals’ base 28 July, killed scores. Clashes between pastoralists and sedentary crop farmers continued especially in Middle Belt: at least four killed in Niger state 8 July; community leaders 9 July reported over 80 killed in Logo and Ukum areas, Benue state in previous two weeks, police reported 22 killed; suspected herdsmen 18 July killed traditional ruler in Plateau state. President Buhari 13 July launched military operation to curb rural banditry in Zamfara state: army 17 July reported eleven bandits killed.

Asia

China (internal): Media 21 July reported that China and Pakistan launched first joint patrol of mutual border between Xinjiang and Kashmir. U.S. think-tank 20 July reported that over 100 Uighurs fled Xinjiang to join Islamic State between mid-2013 and mid-2014.

China/Japan: Chinese defense ministry 4 July issued statement criticizing Japan for 17 June encounter over East China Sea (ECS) in which it claimed two Japanese fighter jets reportedly warned and
intercepted “at high speed” two Chinese jets executing “routine patrol” over China's ECS Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ). Japan’s Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary 5 July denied Japanese jets took any provocative actions; also denied 28 June report of same encounter by Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) officer alleging Chinese aircraft launched threatening attack man oeuvre. Japan’s Self-Defense Force Chief of Joint Staff 30 June announced number of scrambles of ASDF fighters against Chinese aircraft from April–June increased by more than 80 from 114 over same period in 2015.

Korean Peninsula: ROK and U.S. 8 July announced decision to deploy Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-missile system in ROK, solely to counter DPRK threat; ROK defense officials said system expected to be operational end-2017 at latest, foreign ministry 13 July said system to be deployed in SE Seongju county in order to protect “one half to two-thirds of citizens”. Chinese foreign ministry summoned ROK and U.S. diplomats, issued statement expressing “discontent” and opposition to deployment, urged ROK and U.S. terminate process. DPRK 9 July test-launched KN-11 submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM); ROK joint chiefs of staff reported test failed. DPRK 19 July launched three projectiles, believed to be Scud-type short-range ballistic missiles, into Sea of Japan. U.S. Treasury 6 July announced sanctions against DPRK leaders including Kim Jong-un for human rights abuses; sanctions are first to directly target Kim and regime officials, include asset freezes within U.S. jurisdiction and prohibition of transactions involving designated persons. DPRK 7 July said measures constituted “open declaration of war”, threatened to cut off all diplomatic contact. Chinese foreign ministry stated opposition to unilateral sanctions.

Afghanistan: Joint suicide attacks on ethnic Hazara protesters in Kabul 23 July killed at least 80 people, injured over 250, making it reportedly the deadliest in capital since 2001; Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, marking first apparent IS attack in capital; Taliban condemned attack, denied involvement. President Ghani 15 July pledged major anti-IS operation after officials in Badakhshan province 10 July warned of IS activities in east. Afghan security forces 26 July reportedly killed top IS commander Saad Emarati in Kot district, Nangarhar. With fighting expected to escalate during Taliban’s annual summer offensive, defense ministry 2 July said Afghan National Defense and Security Force (ANDSF) had intensified operations in several districts across country. Taliban 21 July reportedly gained control of large portions of Qala-e-Zal and Dasht-e-Archi districts of Kunduz province following several days of intense clashes. Helmand official 30 July reported Taliban had taken control of Kanashin district. Noting recent security gains in Kandahar, province’s police chief 3 July claimed deaths of former Taliban leaders Mullah Omar and successor Akhtar Mansour had weakened insurgency, while Herat Provincial Council’s security committee 8 July warned of growing insurgency. Presidency 14 July confirmed govt has no plans to revive talks with Taliban. U.S. President Obama 6 July announced 8,400 U.S. troops would remain in Afghanistan until end of his term Jan 2017, changed rules of engagement to allow for direct combat with Taliban and more airstrikes. Series of drone strikes throughout month reportedly killed several dozen insurgents in Nangarhar province, including twelve killed in 11 July strike on IS radio station. At 8-9 July Warsaw Summit, NATO reaffirmed its commitment to Afghanistan, including Operation Resolute Support to train and assist Afghan security institutions through end-2017 and provide ANDSF with $4.5bn annually until 2020; govt committed to reforms including anti-corruption and transparency measures.

Bangladesh: Brutal attack on café in Dhaka’s upscale Gulshan neighbourhood 1 July left 22 dead, mostly foreigners, in hostage siege, first incident of its kind. Attackers reportedly included affluent, educated youth, including son of ruling Awami League (AL) member. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility, though some experts and officials pointed to likely involvement of al-Qaeda in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS) affiliates. PM Sheikh Hasina vowed to bring terrorists to justice; opposition BNP leader Khaleda Zia 3 July condemned attack. Special investigation team claimed to have identified mastermind of attack, who allegedly fled at least seven months prior and now hiding in India’s West Bengal state; described incident as combined operation by Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), Ansarul Islam (previously Ansarullah Bangla Team) and banned Hizb ut-Tahrir. Four killed in 7 July attack on country’s largest Eid prayer congregation site in Sholakia, Kishoreganj district. Police arrested scores of alleged JMB and Ansarul Islam members across country; 26 July killed nine alleged militants in Dhaka; identified new suspect, Bangladeshi-Canadian Tamim Chowdhury, as mastermind of Gulshan and Sholakia attacks. In latest in series of targeted killings, Hindu priest hacked to death 1 July in SW Jhenaidia district. BNP-led opposition alliance 13 July announced it would hold anti-militancy national convention; pro-BNP
professionals advised Zia to insist Jamaat apologies to nation and sever links with extremist groups. Rapid Action Batallion (RAB) Director General Benazir Ahmed said state would offer 1mn takas (over $12,700) to any militant renouncing terrorism.

India (non-Kashmir): Ten soldiers reported killed in clash with Maoist rebels in Bihar’s Aurangabad district 18 July; three alleged insurgents reported killed 18 July in gunfight with police in Dumrinala, Bihar. Cabinet Committee on Security 24 July approved twelve new battalions for states most affected by “Left Wing Extremism (LWE)” including Chhattisgarh, Jarkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra.

Kashmir: Indian security forces’ killing of Hizbul Mujahideen militant Burhan Wani and state’s violent crackdown on subsequent protests sparked fresh crisis in India-administered Kashmir. Wani and two other Hizbul Mujahideen members killed in southern Indian-administered Kashmir 8 July prompting scores of major protests throughout Jammu and Kashmir throughout month, with at least 49 civilians killed and over 5,000 reportedly injured in clashes with security forces. Indian authorities imposed immediate round-the-clock curfew; 15 July imposed information “blackout”, including printing ban and limited cell phone and internet coverage. Indian govt 17 July sent 2,000 additional troops. Authorities 26 July briefly lifted curfew in most of Srinagar and parts of N Kashmir, but re-imposed 27 July as unrest continued, including strikes and street protests. Pakistan’s foreign office and army chief General Raheel Sharif condemned killing of Wani and protesters. Hizb-ul-Mujahadeen leader Syed Salahuddin 13 July led rally in Pakistan-administered Kashmir capital Muzaffarabad, accusing India of genocide of Kashmiris. Pakistan senate 18 July passed unanimous resolution protesting violence in Indian-administered Kashmir; Indian home minister blamed Pakistan for orchestrating bloodshed.

Nepal: PM KP Oli resigned 24 July after no-confidence motion filed 13 July by coalition partner CPN (Maoist Centre), or CPN (MC), citing ruling UML party’s failure to transfer govt leadership as previously agreed. Motion supported by opposition Nepali Congress (NC); two parties also blocked passing of fiscal 2016/17 budget. CPN (MC) Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal seen as most likely new PM in coalition with NC, with NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba taking over after nine months. Dissenting Madhesi parties urged to join new govt, but seek assurances on constitutional amendments for disputed provincial boundaries and affirmative action. CPN (MC) and NC 27 July proposed postponing local elections from Nov to Feb-Mar 2017 to determine number and borders of village and municipal councils. Transitional justice (TJ) issues in spotlight amid concerns that new govt could transfer conflict-era cases to commissions on truth and reconciliation, and disappearances, already under strain to investigate over 55,000 complaints by February 2017 deadline. High-ranking leaders including Dahal and Deuba face charges.

Pakistan: Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) leader 10 July called for accountability in alleged extrajudicial killing after body of MQM activist Riazul Haq, detained by paramilitary Rangers in May, found in Karachi 30 June. Rangers-led security operation escalated following drive-by shooting of prominent singer late June claimed by Pakistani Taliban faction. Police 19 July arrested senior MQM members, including Karachi mayor-elect, in connection with investigations into links with militants after anti-terrorism court rejected their applications for pre-arrest bail. Head of Sindh Rangers 16 July reportedly issued ultimatum to Sindh chief minister that Sindh home minister surrender his brother and alleged associate, arguing that Rangers’ policing powers applied only to Karachi, not Larkana. Military 19 July announced Sindh chief justice’s kidnapped son freed during operation in KPK’s Tank district. U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan’ Nangarhar province killed Pakistani Taliban (TTP) faction commander Umar Mansoor, suspected mastermind of Dec 2014 Peshawar school attack. Several civilians and security personnel killed in attacks in Balochistan late June-July, including three security personnel killed 2 July in two attacks in Mastung district. Roadside bomb 18 July killed seven in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)’s Upper Dir district. Seven alleged TTP and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) militants reportedly killed 31 July in clash with counter-terrorism forces west of Lahore. Following murder of social media celebrity Qandeel Baloch by her brother 15 July in so-called “honor killing”, officials barred family from pardoning killer; independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimated over 1,000 women killed in “honor killings” in 2015.

Punto muerto prolongado entre India y Pakistán

Sri Lanka: President Sirisena early July called meeting to review PM Wickremasinghe’s decision to increase VAT and Nation Building Tax (NBT); following petition by opposition parliamentarians, Supreme Court 11 July ordered suspension of tax hike, on grounds that it was implemented without parliamentary
vote and therefore unconstitutional. Opposition parties exploited controversial tax policies with small but disruptive protests across country through July. Sirisena 30 July announced coalition govt will remain in place for five years, not two years as initially agreed. Son of former President Rajapaksa arrested 11 July over allegations of financial misappropriation. FM Samarawera, upon returning from June UN Human Rights Council (HRC) session, told media that special accountability court and truth commission will be finalized by 2017. Visiting U.S. delegation 12 July commended govt on efforts to implement HRC resolution to investigate violations of international law during final stages of civil war, stressed need for wider public consultations; U.S. also pledged to support Sri Lanka’s economic development if Colombo honored its human rights commitments. On 15 July, in potentially significant step toward justice for past human rights violations, local court in northern town Mullaitivu requested military provide list of persons who surrendered to them at end of conflict in 2009. In another positive move, police arrested intelligence officer for 2009 killing of newspaper editor and govt critic Lasantha Wickrematunge.

Indonesia: Security officials 18 July killed East Indonesia Mujahideen (EIM) leader and “most wanted terror suspect”, Santoso aka Abu Wardah in gun battle in Poso, Central Sulawesi. Following 13-14 July Special Leaders’ Summit in Honiara, Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) again deferred decision on whether to award member status to United Liberation Movement for West Papua (ULM). Suicide bomber 5 July attacked police station in Solo, Central Java, injuring one police officer. Large-scale clash in W Papua 31 July, reportedly between members of Amungme/Damal and Dani tribes in Timika, left three dead, dozens injured.

Myanmar: Ahead of Panglong-21 peace conference between govt and armed groups planned for late-Aug, representatives of seventeen armed groups held major strategy meeting in Kachin Independence Organization territory 26-30 July; decisions by armed groups on whether they will attend Panglong-21 to be taken individually on basis of further discussions with govt. UN and China attended as international observers. Over 1,000 people demonstrated 16 July in N Shan state capital against late June killings of seven civilians, five of whom were among several detained by military 25 June. In unprecedented move, military took public responsibility for killings; military intelligence chief 20 July indicated that military investigation had found that troops acted illegally in killing five of the civilians; action to be taken against them. Renewed clashes erupted early July between Ta’ang National Liberation Army and Shan State Army-South armed groups inN Shan state, over 100 villagers fled. Arakan National Party issued statement rejecting June proposal by Myanmar representative to UN Human Rights Council to use term “Muslim community in Rakhine state” instead of “Rohingya”, launched Rakhine state-wide protests 3 July. UN human rights chief released report 20 June on “systematic discrimination” and other rights violations against minorities in Myanmar, particularly Rohingya Muslims. In first incident of anti-Muslim violence under new govt, Buddhist mob ransacked Muslim shop and mosque in Bago region village 23 June, prompting 100 villagers to flee; chief minister indicated no charges would be brought. In Kachin state mob burned down Muslim prayer hall 1 July; five suspects arrested. Chief minister of Yangon region 3 July criticised Buddhist nationalist MaBaTha organization; MaBaTha demanded action against him and threatened protest, but backed down after ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) voiced support for him. State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, (the Sangha Council, tasked with safeguarding/regulating Buddhism), 12 July issued statement declaring MaBaTha has no lawful status as a Buddhist organization. Civil society group previous day lodged criminal complaint against leading MaBaTha monk Wirathu for “showing disrespect to Buddhism”. Religion data from 2014 census released by govt 21 July showing percentages essentially unchanged: 88% Buddhist, 6% Christian, 4.3% Muslim; some analysts and Muslim leaders questioned credibility of data. Myanmar’s New Government: Finding Its Feet?

Philippines: Building on President Duterte’s campaign pledge to federalize country, administration 19 July announced it would launch simultaneous push for “enabling law” creating autonomous Bangsamoro region and work on shift to federal form of govt. New comprehensive peace roadmap approved by Duterte 18 July calls for all-Moro body to draft more inclusive law in lieu of Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), to consolidate existing peace agreements including 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) and 1996 Final Peace Agreement with Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF); body which drafted BBL to be “reconstituted” with representation from Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MLF), MNLF and other Bangsamoro representatives. Duterte 22 July encouraged quick passage of enabling law, excluding...
constitutional issues, which he said could be incorporated into constitution under move to federalism. MILF said its Central Committee meeting late July to discuss proposal; presidential peace adviser Jesus Dureza and MILF leader Murad Ebrahim 21 July announced govt-MILF Implementing Team meeting early-Aug. Govt and MILF 12 July signed agreement to coordinate in combatting illegal drugs in areas formerly under MILF control. Duterte 25 July announced immediate, unilateral ceasefire with Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), New People’s Army (NPA) and National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP); ceasefire lifted 30 July when no immediate reciprocal ceasefire was declared and after 27 July firefight between NPA and military in Davao del Norte in which one “civilian auxiliary force member” died and three wounded, according to Dureza. Govt earlier announced resumption of peace talks with NDFP to take place 20-27 Aug; NDFP requested govt release detained leaders to participate in negotiations. Military 11 July said troops killed 40 Abu Sayyaf fighters in early-July fighting on Jolo and Basilan islands; 17 July announced 33 members of Islamic State (IS)-linked Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters killed in four days of fighting in Maguindanao province. Suspected Abu Sayyaf members 14 July killed three Philippine soldiers. Three Indonesians abducted 10 July, Abu Sayyaf suspected of responsibility; Dureza 19 July confirmed Abu Sayyaf kidnapped five Malaysians.

South China Sea: Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague 12 July issued landmark ruling in SCS territorial dispute case brought by Philippines, ruling “no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources … within “nine-dash line”", and that none of disputed Spratly chain are legally "islands" and therefore do not generate exclusive economic zones (EEZs); also ruled that China violated Philippines’ sovereign rights in its EEZ; and that Chinese activities have severely harmed marine ecology and environment. Beijing repeated its refusal to accept or comply with ruling, restated claims in SCS; said completion of lighthouse on Mischief Reef expected “soon”. China 13 July tested two airfields in Spratlys with civilian flights; military spokesman 18 July announced combat air patrol encompassing disputed Scarborough Shoal conducted “recently”, would become “regular” in future. China Navy commander met with U.S. chief of naval operations in Beijing same day, said China would not give up efforts to peacefully resolve SCS disputes. Philippines FM 19 July said he had refused Chinese offer of bilateral negotiations “outside of and [in] disregard of” court ruling; prior to ruling Philippine President Duterte 5 July proposed bilateral talks on basis of ruling. Two Chinese coast guard vessels reportedly rammed and sank Vietnamese fishing boat 9 July within area cordoned off by China for 5-11 July military drills; Vietnam demanded compensation for fishermen. Indonesian defense minister 13 July confirmed country refurbishing and upgrading military assets on Natuna islands. China 28 July announced it will hold joint military exercises with Russia in SCS in Sept. Former Philippine President Fidel Ramos appointed special envoy to China 23 July.

Thailand: Ahead of 7 Aug referendum on draft constitution, ruling National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) early July began to establish “peace centres” around country, ostensibly to ensure smooth balloting; opponents claim centres intended to influence vote. 23 ambassadors from Europe, U.S. and Canada 15 July issued public statement expressing concern at NCPO’s stifling of debate about draft. UN 6 and 26 July expressed concern over reports of restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly ahead of referendum. NCPO Order 41/2016 went into effect 13 July, authorizing Office of National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) to close down media outlets that fail to cooperate with junta or present information deemed threat to national security, including “dishonest” criticism of NCPO operations. NBTC 21 July ordered that Red Shirt Peace TV cease broadcasting for 30 days. 117 leading members of political parties and civil society 20 July issued statement calling on NCPO to allow people to debate contents of draft constitution in public forum; Deputy PM next day told media govt will organize debates in each province. Democrat Party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva 27 July announced he will vote against draft constitution. NGO Deep South Watch reported 32 people killed and 61 wounded during Ramadan in 82 violent incidents, fewer than same period in 2015. Incidents in July included: security forces killed two suspected insurgents in gun battle in Reuso district, Narathiwat 2 July; Malay Muslim man killed and three others wounded when grenade exploded in front of mosque in Yala 4 July; police officer killed by car bomb in Nong Chik district, Pattani 5 July.

Papua New Guinea: PM O’Neill, facing calls to resign over corruption allegations, 22 July survived no-confidence vote in parliament by 85 to 21 votes. Vote came amid strikes by airline pilots, transport workers and medics, with civil society groups pledging to continue protests.
Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina: Republika Srpska (RS) assembly delegates 15 July approved decision to organize referendum 25 Sept on whether to celebrate annual “Day of RS” holiday on 9 Jan, despite Constitutional Court Nov 2015 ruling it discriminatory and unconstitutional. Bosniak politicians in RS urged international representative Valentin Inzko to reverse decision. RS leaders 31 July agreed to drop opposition to reforms needed to clear way for EU to accept Bosnia’s membership application.

Kosovo: Parliament scheduled to debate controversial border demarcation agreement with Montenegro, requirement for EU visa liberalization and subject of opposition protests, 3 Aug.

Macedonia: Govt and opposition parties 20 July reached new deal on political crisis, agreeing on cleaning up electoral rolls; media reforms to foster balanced election reporting; new interim govt to be formed 100 days before election; and support for special prosecutor investigating high-level corruption. Interim interior minister to be appointed from opposition, though with limited authority for appointments of police chiefs. Parties to assess implementation of deal and agree on election date by end-Aug. Journalists’ union criticised deal, said measures to ensure balanced reporting insufficient.

Armenia: Standoff between security forces and around twenty armed members of opposition group Sasna Tsrer began 17 July as latter took several police officers hostage in Yerevan’s Erebuni district police HQ, killing one police officer and injuring six; all hostages released by 23 July however standoff continued, several wounded personnel treating wounded members of group taken hostage 26 July. Police officer shot dead 30 July by group inside police station, day before they surrendered. Gunmen mostly veterans of 1990s Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) conflict, demanding resignation of President Sargsyan over handling of N-K conflict amid speculation of his govt’s possible concessions to Azerbaijan, formation of interim govt and parliamentary elections, and release of political prisoners including Zhirair Sefilyan, leader of opposition movement New Armenia Public Salvation Front arrested in June for illegal firearms possession. Thousands joined daily anti-govt protests starting 18 July in support for gunmen and calling for peaceful resolution of standoff with Sasna Tsrer; dozens of protesters injured in clashes with police and scores detained.

Azerbaijan: Local and international observers criticised May prisoner amnesty for excluding political prisoners. President Aliyev 18 July proposed extending presidential term of office from five to seven years, approved by Constitutional Court 25 July. Islamic State released propaganda video 23 July featuring Yurik Khasiev aka Abdulla the Caucasian, using both Azerbaijani and native Lezgin language spoken on border with Dagestan, threatening govt.

Georgia: EU-Georgia association agreement entered into force 1 July. U.S. and Georgia 6 July signed agreement on Deepening the Defense and Security Partnership, however NATO summit concluded 9 July with no offer of formal relationship with Georgia. European Commissioner Hahn 14 July promised visa-free EU travel for Georgians by October. In breakaway Abkhazia republic, over 1,000 opposition protesters 5 July attempted to storm de facto interior ministry, all opposition protesters 5 July attempted to storm de facto interior ministry to demand resignation of top police official and Minister Leonid Dzapshba, clashing with police. De facto president next day suspended Dzapshba, denied opposition demand to postpone 10 July referendum on early presidential elections. Referendum declared invalid after only 1.23% of voters participated, following calls first by de facto govt and later also those who initiated referendum to boycott poll. Moscow 11 July approved agreement on unifying Abkhaz and Russian armed forces within framework of Nov 2014 alliance and strategic partnership.

Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan): Azerbaijan and Armenia repeatedly accused each other of violating ceasefire. Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) defense ministry 23 July reported one soldier killed and one wounded in shooting from Azerbaijan’s side of line of contact. Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) 4 July adopted statement reaffirming confidence in OSCE Minsk Group format and work of mediators in conflict zone, reiterated necessity to implement agreements between presidents reached in Vienna in May and St. Petersburg in June. U.S. Sec State Kerry 9 July held meeting with Azerbaijan and Armenia presidents in Warsaw, and Russian FM Lavrov 11-12 July with Azerbaijan leaders in Baku. Armenian capital Yerevan rocked by armed opposition group’s seizure of police HQ for two weeks in protest at govt’s handling of N-K conflict and speculation of its possible concessions to Azerbaijan (see Armenia).

North Caucasus (Russia): Chechen republic head Ramzan Kadyrov 2 July announced he will run for another term in Sept elections. Kadyrov 5 July demanded Turkey hand over twelve Chechen nationals he
claimed are terrorists. Eight militants and one law enforcement officer reported killed in clashes south of Dagestan capital Makhachkala 7-8 July. Police 11 July killed alleged member of Yuzhnaya gang militant group during counter-terrorism operation in Dagestan. U.S. 13 July named IS leader in Chechnya Aslan Avgazarovich Byutukayev, or Amir Khamzat, as “specially designated global terrorist”.

Russia’s North Caucasus Insurgency Widens as ISIS’ Foothold Grows

Moldova: EU-Moldova association agreement entered into force 1 July; IMF 26 July agreed to $179 mn loan over three years conditional on govt economic reforms. Former top anticorruption official called for international investigation into fraud case which in part saw conviction of former PM Filat in June.

Ukraine: Ceasefire between Ukrainian forces and separatists barely holding across parts of 500km front line, with June worst month for military casualties in a year, including seven soldiers killed 19 July. Fighting centered around Donetsk’s Avdiivka, Marinka, Horlivka, also heavy shelling in govt-controlled Mariupol. UN Human rights chief 14 July report criticised “rampant impunity” on both sides for killings in east, called for accountability to deal with rights abuses and so-called detainee “exchange fund” mechanism allegedly created by Ukrainian security services; joint Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch delegation accused both sides of torture and arbitrary, secret detention of civilians. Heads of self-proclaimed separatist republics again postponed local elections from 24 July to 6 Nov. Parliamentary Speaker Andriy Parubiy 4 July again cast doubt on possibility of decentralization for east, said terms can only be discussed once area is secure and when paragraph giving region “special status” is removed from bill on decentralization. Belarussian journalist Pavel Sheremet killed in car bomb in central Kyiv 20 July; perpetrator, motive unknown. Prosecutor General Yury Lutsenko 25 July announced deputy head of National Police arrested for illegally organizing surveillance of Sheremet and his companion. Former prisoner of war and popular parliamentary deputy Nadezhda Savchenko made statements in interview broadcast 21 July calling for Ukraine to “ask forgiveness” to people of Donbas, called for Kyiv to speak directly to separatist leaders and said she is ready to engage in dialogue; in media interview said she can and “must” become president; interior ministry official called her “Trojan horse” infiltrated by Moscow. President Poroshenko suffered setbacks 17 July in by-elections, which saw Yulia Timoshenko’s Batkivshchyna party gain two new representatives in parliament; party reportedly planning alliance with Opposition Bloc. 8-9 July NATO summit in Warsaw pledged solidarity and aid package to Ukraine and agreed to new deployments in Eastern Europe.

Cyprus: As weekly meetings between Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci on reunification talks resumed, after 1 July meeting Anastasiades reportedly noted “substantial differences” remain on property issue despite rising optimism on peace process, and that issue of who will be eligible for property compensation remains unclear. U.S. Asst Sec State Nuland 12 July had two separate meetings with Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders in Nicosia: Anastasiades raised issue of guarantees, repeating position of not accepting presence of 43,000 Turkish troops on island; Turkish Cypriot side expressed desire to take negotiation process to decisive final step Sept 2016. Following 15 July attempted military coup in Turkey, Akinci gave assurance that chain of command in Turkish army in N Cyprus was intact; also reassured N Cypriots of precautionary measures to prevent potential provocations. In separate statements 20 July, both Anastasiades and Akinci emphasized that next two months would be crucial to reach settlement in Cyprus.

France: 84 people killed and over 300 injured by Tunisian terrorist who drove truck through crowd in Nice gathered to watch 14 July national day fireworks; police shot dead driver. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility; five suspected accomplices arrested in following days. Two 19-year-old men killed priest and took several people hostage in attack in church outside Rouen, Normandy 26 July; both attackers were known to security services over links to IS, which claimed responsibility; two people arrested over suspected links to attack.

Germany: Seventeen-year-old Afghan refugee attacked passengers on train near Wurzburg, Bavaria with axe and knife 18 July, wounding five, before being shot dead by police; Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility. Failed asylum-seeker from Syria 24 July blew himself up outside bar in Ansbach, Bavaria, injuring fifteen; had reportedly pledged allegiance to IS in videos found on his phone. Two other attacks during month, including 22 July attack in Munich in which a teenager shot dead nine people, considered not politically motivated. Govt said attacks not connected, no consistent pattern.
Turkey: Attempt by segment of Turkish army to topple elected govt and President Erdoğan 15 July saw hundreds killed and injured and prompted thousands of detentions including military and public officials the state claimed were connected with state-christened Fethullahist Terrorist Organization/Parallel State Structure (FETÖ/PDY), allegedly led by U.S.-based cleric Fethullah Gülen, which govt blamed for coup. Coup attempt failed in face of resistance from police, part of army and citizens responding to call from Erdoğan and mosques to take to streets. At least 240 people reported killed during clashes between police and army and attacks on civilians, over 1,500 injured. Turkish military 16-28 July discharged 117 generals, 32 admirals, 1,505 officers. Govt also dismissed some 60,000 public officials including in interior, foreign, education ministries. 2,745 judges and prosecutors suspended, 88 journalists detained, some 100 media outlets shut down on allegations of being connected to so-called FETÖ/PDY. Erdoğan 30 July announced 10,137 arrested, 18,699 detained in wake of coup attempt. Scale of backlash prompted concern in the West over Turkey’s commitment to rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Concern also abounds over divisions within security bureaucracy and capacity to address security challenges including operations against Kurdish PKK insurgency in SE and fight against Islamic State (IS). All four political parties in parliament condemned coup attempt. Parliament 21 July approved three-month state of emergency; deputy PM same day announced Turkey will temporarily suspend implementation of obligations pertaining to European Convention on Human Rights. Amnesty International 24 July published report alleging detained coup plotters being subjected to ill-treatment and torture; govt dismissed allegations. Coup attempt also ignited public debate on reinstalling capital punishment; Erdoğan 19 July said he would back a bill passed by parliament, EU warned such move would rule out EU accession. Clashes between state security forces and PKK continued, killing 42 security force members, 33 PKK militants, eight civilians in July. Govt 16 July imposed security lockdown at Incirlik Air Base following reports that some tanker aircraft deployed in coup attempt took off from base; operations resumed 17 July. Erdoğan 2 July announced govt would start working on granting citizenship to Syrian refugees in Turkey, prompting backlash from public and opposition.

Kazakhstan: Gunman killed four police and two civilians, and injured seventeen others in 18 July attack in Almaty: 26-year-old suspect Ruslan Kulikbayev from Kyzylorda captured alive. President Nazarbayev described incident as terrorist attack, head of National Security Committee (KNB) Vladimir Zhumakanov said Kulikbayev had previous convictions and was radicalized by Salafis in prison, however Minister of Information Dauren Abayev 18 July played down Islamist links. Zhumakanov 19 July said legislation on combatting terrorism and extremism will be tightened and those fighting abroad will be deprived of citizenship. Court in Aktobe 12 July convicted twelve people for planning travel to Syria to fight. Petropavlovsk court 19 July sentenced man to seven year’s jail for joining Islamic State (IS) in Syria. Hundreds of oil industry workers went on strike 28 July over pay cuts in Zhanaozen, Mangistau region.

Kazakhstan’s Protests Postponed – But for How Long?

Kyrgyzstan: Supreme Court 12 July sent case of activist Azimjan Askarov – convicted in 2010 for inciting crowd to murder ethnic Kyrgyz police during June 2010 riots in Bazar-Korgon – back for review, prompting fears that his release could reignite ethnic violence in south. During 13-14 July visit, German Chancellor Merkel welcomed decision to retry Askarov’s case, also discussed extremism with President Atambayev.

Tajikistan: In 18 July statement Afghan Taliban assured Central Asian countries it “does not seek to interfere in the internal affairs of others”, added it would not allow others to use Taliban-held territory for that end, apparently referring to Islamic State (IS) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Govt 22 July reported migration to Russia dropped by almost 7% during first half of 2016.

Turkmenistan: State media 2 July reported President Berdymukhammedov pardoned 612 prisoners ahead of Eid al-Fitr celebrations. Govt mid-month closed border with Kazakhstan for five days amid increased security measures.

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia: Constitutional Court 18 July ruled on referendum on govt-FARC peace accords, accepting govt’s proposal of minimum number of votes required to validate result of the plebiscite at 13% of electorate. Communiqué from FARC’s First front, located in SE and reported by state authorities to be heavily engaged in drug-trafficking, announced it would not take part in peace process. FARC leadership 8 July stated that group would be excluded from FARC since it did not follow orders to take part in peace
process; many FARC fronts and units subsequently affirmed commitment to peace process. ELN guerrilla group late June publicly stated it “respects” agreements signed by govt and FARC; three ELN leaders called for peace with govt, blamed govt for stalled negotiations. “Gulf Cartel”, regarded as Colombia’s most important criminal organization, stated it would “respect” FARC cantonment areas, also announced it would be “neutral but not indifferent observer” of process. Govt and FARC negotiators on peace talks' gender commission 24 July agreed to improve land access for women and ensure sexual violence will be excluded from amnesty, as well as respect gender focus in the agreements already reached in Havana. Military and FARC guerrillas clashed in Meta province early July as a result of communications errors, some injuries reported. UN Office on Drugs and Crime report on coca cultivation in 2015 revealed 39% increase in total cultivated area compared to 2014, rising to 96,000 hectares, prompting some observers to speculate that govt had relaxed its anti-narcotics efforts in order to secure a final peace deal with FARC.

Venezuela: President Maduro 11 July gave Defense Minister Gen Vladimir Padrino López, Operational Commander of Armed Forces, overall control of govt’s efforts to resolve supply crisis of basic goods, ordered all cabinet ministers to report to him. Deadlock between govt and opposition intensified as opposition-controlled National Assembly (AN) 14 July voted to annul Dec 2015 appointments of thirteen Supreme Court (TSJ) justices and 21 deputies. AN 28 July reinstated three opposition legislators from Amazonas state suspended by TSJ in Jan after allegations of vote-buying, restoring opposition’s two-thirds majority in AN; former AN president and deputy leader of ruling Socialist Party (PSUV) Diosdado Cabello previously threatened the three with imprisonment if they take up their seats. Govt 9 July opened Colombian border crossing for twelve hours; Colombian authorities said 35,000 people crossed, mainly seeking food and medical supplies; some 130,000 crossed during longer opening the following weekend, some travelling hundreds of kilometers to do so. Most Organization of American States (OAS) members continued to back attempt by former Spanish Premier José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, along with two former Latin American presidents, to foster dialogue between govt and opposition, however opposition conditioned talks on scheduling of next phase of recall referendum. Electoral authority (CNE) postponed answer until August. Maduro late July accepted suggestion that Vatican help facilitate dialogue, but Vatican 26 July said no request yet received. Row broke out within Mercosur after Venezuela assumed rotating presidency of bloc 30 July despite opposition from some member countries and absence of formal handover.

Guatemala: Powerful ex-army captain Byron Lima killed 18 July in Pavón prison allegedly under his control, alongside twelve other prisoners and a female visitor. Attack reported to have been ordered by Marvin Montiel, aka “El Taquero”, another Pavón inmate allegedly in charge of crack cocaine distribution in prison, in response to Lima’s supposed prohibition of drug’s sale. El Periódico 17 July reported Lima was part of group seeking to murder Attorney General Thelma Aldana, who returned to Guatemala 16 July after almost a month abroad following death threats as she pursues corruption cases against former top govt officials. Judge 28 July ordered another corruption investigation into former President Pérez Molina. Congress 29 June approved new law for judicial careers, establishing Council charged with selection and appointment of magistrates, and mechanisms to evaluate and penalize judges on basis of their professional record and capacities; proponents of law, which is supported by International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) and various international bodies, argue it will strengthen independence of judges. Homicide rate continued to fall during first six months of year, down to 2002 level, with police and public ministry continuing major operations against large criminal structures dedicated to extortion during recent months, including on 15 July when 109 gang members were captured in twelve municipalities including 75 women, allegedly extortion collectors.

Haiti: Attempt to hold National Assembly session 14 July on transitional governance and election timetable failed for fourth time, with political parties again unable to debate disputed provisional governance arrangements due to lack of quorum. Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro 15 July expressed concern over inability to convene session needed to achieve institutional stability and press ahead with electoral process. U.S. early July announced it will not finance Haiti’s 9 Oct rerun presidential elections; UN peacekeeping chief Hervé Ladsous warned international community was losing patience with stalled govt. U.S. Special Envoy Kenneth Merten 21 July returned to Haiti to try and secure agreements for new transitional govt and political consensus on elections. Estimated 130,000 Haitian nationals who received Dominican Republic residence permit for one year under National
Regularization of Foreigners Plan (PNRE) saw documents expire 18 July; human rights organisations warned of increased risks of new wave of deportations, expulsions or spontaneous returns to Haiti.

**Mexico:** Protesters backing teachers opposed to educational reforms continued to block major highways in several southern states, reportedly causing major economic losses and shortage of basic goods in remote areas. Govt attempted to defuse protests in 13 July talks with main teacher’s union, however proposals rejected by dissident union. President Peña Nieto signed new anti-corruption reform into law 18 July, while apologizing for 2014 conflict of interest scandal involving property purchase by his wife. Federal prosecutor’s office 11 July said it would challenge laws passed by State Congresses in Veracruz and Quintana Roo that could protect outgoing governors from prosecution. Court in Texas 19 July convicted Marciano (aka “Chano”) Millán Vásquez of conspiring to commit numerous murders as a Zetas cartel leader in border town Piedras Negras, Coahuila state; relatives of those who disappeared in Coahuila said they would use evidence presented during trial to file charges against state govt before International Criminal Court, accusing authorities of complicity in mass disappearances. Two mayors killed in separate attacks in Guerrero and Chiapas states 23 July.

**Middle East & North Africa**

**Israel/Palestine:** International Quartet 1 July issued report identifying three main sets of obstacles to resolution of Israeli-Palestinian conflict: violence and incitement; settlement expansion, land designations and denial of Palestinian statehood; and Gaza Strip’s military build-up, dire humanitarian situation and Palestinian divided governance. Palestinian Authority (PA) criticised report, continued to voice support for France’s peace initiative. Egypt continued to advance its initiative, with its FM meeting with President Abbas late June and PM Netanyahu 10 July – first Egyptian ministerial visit to Israel since 2007. Cairo said it seeks to follow up on President Sisi’s call in May for Israelis and Palestinians to resume direct negotiations. Abbas repeated his demands for any such talks: Israel’s commitment to a settlement freeze, release of fourth tranche of prisoners, and agreement to hold discussions on basis of pre-1967 borders. Hamas declared it would participate in PA municipal elections 8 Oct and permit them to take place in Gaza. Several fatal shootings in West Bank during month, including killing of two members of Palestinian security forces, fuelled discussion about deteriorating security there. Rabbi from Otniel settlement shot dead 1 July; Israeli forces 27 July killed suspect in attack. Palestinian boy killed in clash with troops in East Jerusalem 19 July. Attorney general 10 July ordered new inquiry into matters relating to Netanyahu, with media reporting speculation over suspicions of PM’s possible involvement in criminal offences including money laundering.

**Lebanon:** Interior ministry sources reported that the eight perpetrators of suicide bombing in Al-Qaa 27 June were Syrian nationals, who all came from inside Syria, mainly from Raqqa, blamed on Islamic State (IS). Bombings exacerbated already strained relations between Lebanese and over 1mn Syrian refugees country is currently hosting. Governor of Baalbek al-Hermel reportedly imposed curfew on Syrians living in Al-Qaa and surrounding villages starting late June, while Lebanese forces repeatedly cracked down on refugee camps since attack arresting hundreds, most on charges of staying illegally; media also reported attacks against Syrian refugees.

**Syria:** Regime air and artillery fire, assisted by re-intensified Russian airstrikes, severed final supply line into areas of Aleppo city held by mostly non-jihadi opposition mid-month, amid renewed diplomatic maneuvering between U.S. and Russia. Scores killed by fighting in and around Aleppo during month as airstrikes and rocket attacks hit civilian areas; four hospitals hit by airstrikes 24 July. As many as 300,000 civilians estimated to remain in encircled portion of city, as UN warned of critical humanitarian conditions and dwindling basic supplies, called for regular ceasefires around city. Regime 28 July said army had cut off all supply routes, in Russian-supported initiative informed residents and rebels willing to surrender that they could leave through “humanitarian corridors”; UN called for guarantees, humanitarian access, ICRC said departures must not be forced. Elsewhere, over 40 people reported killed in Islamic State (IS) bombing of Qamishli city near Turkish border 27 July. Kurdish YPG-led, U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces’ (SDF) campaign to capture Menbij city from IS continued, meeting sustained IS resistance; activists reported U.S. airstrike on city killed at least 73 civilians 19 July, reportedly worst coalition attack on civilians. U.S. 28 July opened formal investigation; another coalition airstrike 28 July reportedly killed over a dozen civilians. Month also saw extensive bilateral talks between Russia and U.S., which proposed military coordination against Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) jihadi group in exchange for Russia’s help in re-imposing
cession of hostilities and halting regime aerial attacks. U.S. Sec State Kerry 26 July said talks had made progress, hopes to announce details of planned military cooperation and intelligence sharing early Aug. UN envoy De Mistura late July said third round of UN-mediated intra-Syrian peace talks planned for late Aug; opposition representative said no progress on ground that would indicate a return to talks, while regime said ready for new round of talks “without preconditions”. JN 28 July announced split from al-Qaeda, changing name to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons announced that regime has retained chemical warfare agents, violating 2013 deal supposedly eliminating them. Amnesty International report published early July documented “serious abuses” of civilians by armed Syrian opposition groups since 2011.

Bahrain: High Civil Court 17 July ordered dissolution of main Shiite opposition al-Wefaq group and seizure of its funds, after suspending its activities in June; U.S., UK and UN condemned move. Prosecutor 17 July charged Nazeeha Saeed, correspondent for French media, for working without license. Trial of prominent Shiite cleric Ayatollah Isa Qassim opened 27 July on charges of “illegal fund collections, money laundering and helping terrorism”.

Iran: Govt troops continued to clash with Kurdish forces in NW near Iraqi border. Two Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) fighters died 8 July in skirmishes in Sawlawa, Iranian Kurdistan. Four snipers 11 July shot at MP Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh’s car in NW Kermansha province, killing two other passengers; govt blamed Kurdish armed group Party of Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK). Relations with Saudi Arabia strained when Saudi prince and former spy chief Turki al-Faisal 9 July attended meeting in Paris of Iranian govt-designated terrorist group Mujahideen-e-Khalq Organization (MEK) and called for regime change in Iran. U.S. House of Representatives 8 July passed legislation blocking Boeing’s planned sale of aircraft to Iran; White House 12 July promised to veto bill.

Iraq: Islamic State (IS) increased suicide bombings as security forces pushed closer to IS-held Mosul. Suicide bombing 3 July in Karrada district, central Baghdad killed over 290 people, IS claimed responsibility. Alleged IS suicide bombers and gunmen 8 July attacked Shia shrine in Balad, 90km N of Baghdad, killing over 80. Suicide bombing 24 July at checkpoint in Baghdad claimed by IS killed at least twenty. Suicide bombing 25 July at Khalis, 80km NE of Baghdad, killed at least seventeen. Security forces mid-July continued to push back IS around Mosul in NE, including 17 July taking control of Qarraya air base S of Mosul. IS 31 July attacked two energy facilities NW of Kirkuk, killing at least five. PM Abadi shuffled govt posts in particular in security sector: Interior Minister Mohammed al-Ghabban, affiliated with Badr Corps Shia militia, resigned 5 July; Abadi dismissed Abdul Amir al-Shammari, former head of Baghdad Operation Command and appointed new inspectors general in four ministries including defense.

Saudi Arabia: Suicide bombers hit three cities 4 July: bomber detonated explosives outside U.S. consulate in Jeddah in W killing only himself; bombing near Prophet’s Mosque in Medina in W killed four security personnel; suicide bombers blew themselves up outside mosque in Qatif in E, killing only themselves. Cross-border clashes between security forces and Yemen-based Huthi-Saleh forces escalated; five Saudi border guards killed in Najran 25 July, seven killed 30 July (see Yemen).

Yemen: Talks between govt and Huthi rebels faltered as fighting continued in Yemen and escalated across Yemen-Saudi Arabia border. Talks resumed in Kuwait 16 July after two-week break but parties failed to agree on sequencing of political solution and military withdrawals; Kuwait extended 30 July deadline for deal to 7 Aug. Huthis and ex-President Saleh’s General People’s Congress party 28 July formed joint Supreme Political Council to replace Huthi’s ruling Revolutionary Committee. Neither side made significant military gains. Govt reinforced troops north of Sanaa in Nihm, al-Jawf and Marib and reiterated threats to retake Sanaa by force. Clashes escalated between Huthi-Saleh forces and Saudi security forces at Yemeni-Saudi border, Huthis launched at least two ballistic missiles into Saudi territory and Saudi-led coalition bombed Huthi positions. Fighting in Taiz in S continued. Two suicide bombings at military checkpoints 18 July west of Mukalla in SE claimed by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) killed at least eleven people. Militants carried out car bombings and attempted assassinations in Abyan governorate and Aden; AQAP sub-group Ansar al-Sharia claimed 6 July attack on al-Solban military base and 15 July attempted killing of governor and police chief in Aden.

Algeria: Crackdown on dissent continued. Court 11 July sentenced journalist Mohamed Tamalt to two years’ prison for insulting President Bouteflika. Authorities briefly arrested Salah Dabbouz, head of country’s main human rights NGO, and five political or civil society activists 13 July in Ghardaia in north.
Court 13 July ruled billionaire Issad Rebrab’s bid to buy influential media group and thereby take control of El Khabar, newspaper critical of govt, illegal.

_Egypt:_ Violence continued in al-Arish area in N Sinai: Islamic State (IS)-affiliated group Sinai Province 13 July killed army conscript at checkpoint south of Sheikh Zuweid; residents 13 July said improvised explosive device (IED) killed three army conscripts, injured twelve; Sinai province fighters 15 July shot dead police officer; unidentified gunman 24 July shot dead police officer in attack claimed by IS. Air force 31 July reportedly struck IS ammunition depot in Rafah, N Sinai killing 46 militants. President Sisi 12 July extended state of emergency in N Sinai for three months starting 29 July. Amnesty International 13 July accused National Security Agency of “abducting, torturing and forcibly disappearance people [to] wipe out peaceful dissent”. Italian parliament 7 July decided not to supply Egypt with military equipment following govt’s failure to cooperate in investigation into murder of Italian student Giulio Regeni in Cairo in Jan.

_Libya:_ Rival political and military forces showed no sign of willingness to reconcile. UN-backed Presidential Council (PC) 11 July moved out of naval base in Tripoli, took control of PM’s office and some PC-appointed ministers in Govt of National Accord (GNA) started working from their respective offices, but GNA’s authority remained weak. UN envoy Martin Kobler 16-18 July convened session of Libyan Political Dialogue in Tunis to overcome deadlock but meeting led to no major decision. Feud between rival Central Bank governors continued after east-based governor Ali Hibri throughout June distributed in east currency minted in Russia. PC 28 July signed agreement with Petroleum Facilities Guard armed group to restart exports from Ras Lanuf, al-Sidra and al-Zueitina oil terminals after eighteen months’ closure. Misratan-led forces loyal to PC 24 July said they took Islamic State bomb factory in Sirte and now controlled almost entire city. Libyan National Army loyal to General Khalifa Haftar throughout month continued to push back Shura Council coalition of Islamist militias for control of Benghazi in east. France 20 July acknowledged presence in Libya of its Special Forces following death of three French soldiers in helicopter crash in east 17 July, sparking protests in several cities in following days; GNA 20 July condemned French military involvement.

_Mauritani:_ Authorities 29 June-3 July arrested at least nine anti-slavery activists following protest against forced eviction of ethnic Haratin, many former slaves, in Nouakchott by security forces. 23 people, including the nine activists, reportedly jailed 12 July for “assault against the police”, “incitement of violence and belonging to an unauthorized organization”. Arab League summit held in Nouakchott for first time 25 July.

_Morocco:_ Govt 15 July said security services previous day dismantled terrorist cell in several cities planning attack and linked to Islamic State (IS) in Libya. Govt 27 July said 52 suspected IS militants arrested 19 July.

_Tunisia:_ Parliament 30 July passed vote of no confidence in PM Essid, govt expected to resign. Essid mid-July said he would not yield to pressure from President Essebsi to step down, asked that constitutional process be followed through parliamentary vote. Nine political parties and three major trade unions 13 July, after month of negotiations, signed Cartaghe Declaration laying out priorities of future unity govt. Govt 20 July said it had dismantled cell linked to Islamic State planning attacks in Sousse in NE; army 28 July said it killed two militants in Jendouba area, one soldier wounded. Govt 19 July extended nationwide state of emergency for two months.

_Western Sahara:_ Civilian staff 13 July started returning to UN peacekeeping mission (MINURSO), following Morocco’s expulsion of staff in March in protest at UN’s perceived bias. Brahim Ghali 9 July elected unopposed as head of Polisario Front and president of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, replacing historical leader Mohamed Abdelaziz who died in May.


The findings are laid out in the think tank's latest Global Peace Index (GPI), now in its 10th edition,
released Wednesday. It ranks 163 states and territories based on 23 indicators covering domestic and international conflict, societal safety and security, and a country’s militarization.

Book-ending the 2016 index (pdf) are Iceland, ranking as the most peaceful country, and Syria, which ranks dead last. The United States comes in at 103, just behind Uganda and Guinea, while the UK comes in much further ahead at 47.

Putting a precise figure on the downward trend, the authors of the new index say the world has become 2.44 percent less peaceful since 2008. While 77 countries improved over the past decade, 85 countries fell.

Driving the decline is the impact of terrorism and political instability. Deaths from terrorism shot up 80 percent, while the number of countries suffering more than 500 deaths as a result of terrorist acts jumped from 5 to 11. And only 23 percent of all the countries on the index have been spared terrorist activity.

While the latest index shows that more countries improved than deteriorated (81 to 79) compared to the prior index, the level of deterioration outweighed the gains.

Europe is the most peaceful of the nine geographical regions on the new index, with North America coming in as the second. Not only did the Middle East and Africa (MENA) again rank last, it was also the region with the biggest drop since the previous index. Three of the five that fell compared to the prior year are also in that region: Yemen, Libya, and Bahrain.

'As internal conflicts in MENA become more entrenched,' stated Steve Killelea, Founder and Executive Chairman of the IEP, "external parties are increasingly becoming more involved and the potential for indirect or 'war by proxy' between nation states is rising. This was already evident in Syria with the conflict between the Assad regime and multiple non-state actors, and is now spilling into countries such as Yemen. There is a broader proxy conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and more recently both U.S. and Russia have increased their level of involvement."

On top of that region’s conflicts, the report notes that the UN Refugee Agency described over 57 million people in 2015 as refugees, internally-displaced people, or others of concern.

Among the highlights, as noted in the report:

- Two indicators improved by more than ten percent, external conflicts fought and UN peacekeeping funding.
- The total number of deaths from terrorism rose from less than 10,000 in 2008 to over 30,000 in 2014.
- Terrorism is at historical levels, battle deaths are at a 25-year high, and the number of refugees is at a level not seen in sixty years.
- Internal peace and the societal safety and security domain declined every year for the past eight years.
- Nine countries have more than ten percent of their population displaced in some form, with Somalia and South Sudan both having more than 20 percent and Syria over 60 percent.

Another finding, as noted by the Independent, is that 'only Botswana, Chile, Costa Rica, Japan, Mauritius, Panama, Qatar, Switzerland, Uruguay and Vietnam are free from conflict.'

There's another sobering point in the report: while the ten-year trend downward has continued, there's been more spending on violence than peace. The price tag on the violence added up to $13.6 trillion in 2015, or 13.3 percent of gross world product. Investments in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, in contrast, totaled $15 billion.

Even a meager improvement could bring about big dollar value. Killelea notes that "peacebuilding and peacekeeping spending remains proportionately small compared to the economic impact of violence, representing just 2% of global losses from armed conflict. Addressing the global disparity in peace and achieving an overall 10% decrease in the economic impact of violence would produce a peace dividend of $1.36 trillion. This is approximately equivalent to the size of world food exports."

Achieving sustainable peace is paramount, the report notes, as 'international cooperation on an unprecedented scale' is needed to address the 'unparalleled challenges' facing the world including 'climate change, decreasing biodiversity, increasing migration, and over-population.'

Afghanistan killing one of the city's last pediatricians. A Saudi-led military coalition bombs a hospital in Yemen. In Afghanistan, American aircraft pummel a hospital mistaken for a Taliban redoubt. The rules of war, enshrined for decades, require hospitals to be treated as sanctuaries from war — and for health workers to be left alone to do their jobs.

But on today's battlefields, attacks on hospitals and ambulances, surgeons, nurses and midwives have become common, punctuating what aid workers and United Nations officials describe as a new low in the savagery of war.

On Tuesday, the Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution to remind warring parties everywhere of the rules, demanding protection for those who provide health care and accountability for violators. The measure urged member states to conduct independent investigations and prosecute those found responsible for violations “in accordance with domestic and international law.”

But the resolution also raised an awkward question: Can the world's most powerful countries be expected to enforce the rules when they and their allies are accused of flouting them? Russian warplanes were blamed for the bombing of Syrian health centers, for instance, and Syrian soldiers, backed by the Kremlin, continue to remove lifesaving medicines, even painkillers, from United Nations aid convoys heading into rebel-held areas.

At the same time, Britain and the United States back a Saudi-led coalition that is accused of attacking health facilities in Yemen. China and Russia support the government of Sudan, which is accused of at least two attacks on health facilities supported by Doctors Without Borders, the international medical charity, in Kordofan State."

International Crisis Group (ICG), Emma Bonino, Former Foreign Minister of Italy and European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, "Toward Building a More Humane Refugee Policy." May 19, 2016, https://medium.com/the-future-of-conflict/toward-building-a-more-humane-refugee-policy-b27228e6aba8#.t3qvchrgs, commented, "European countries are accepting migrants and integrating them into their societies. So my question is: Why not more Syrians? And, for that matter, why not more Iraqis, Afghans or Somalis? Is it because of racism? Is it because they are suspected of posing a risk of terrorism? Is it because they are considered not properly skilled or trained? These are questions that European leaders need to begin answering in order to overcome the refugee crisis.

Europe is well aware that it faces a structural problem, with dramatic demographic declines in Germany, Italy and Spain to name but a few. In 2014, European countries welcomed in around 2.3 million migrants and successfully integrated them — reuniting them with their families, and providing them with work permits and education. In fact, the UK was the best country at integrating migrants, taking in 568,000 people in 2014 alone, including from the U.S., India, China and Brazil. But how many from Syria? Almost none. Even my country, Italy, integrated more than 200,000 people in 2014. And yet many Europeans continue to resist accepting refugees and migrants stemming from the "crisis" along the continent's southern borders.

When refugees make it to Europe, there must be an effective integration policy that avoids past mistakes. Investment is needed in areas such as housing, education, language and skills training to avoid future alienation or disenfranchisement. Europe cannot afford to continue its uncoordinated and woefully inadequate approach to the reality of human migration. Our failure to effectively manage the entry and resettlement of refugees and migrants has magnified the problem, creating an acute political crisis.

In the absence of a comprehensive plan for managing the arrival and distribution of asylum seekers, the nations of Europe have panicked. Many of them have erected strict border controls and cast about for scapegoats.

Greece, which has been under economic strain for years before the current crisis, has been singled out for failing to adequately process and house refugees. It is unreasonable to expect the country to bear such huge burdens alone. The EU has pledged €509 million for the Greek national program (2014–2020) — and additional aid totaling €264 million — to help the country manage the influx of migrants. However, some member states have failed to pay their share. This lack of solidarity is compounding the crisis and means that Greece does not have the resources to individually process each migrant to determine their right to asylum. That process requires more case workers, interpreters and judges — which Europe has promised but not yet provided.

While it is true that there has been a lack of leadership on this problem, there have been some
positive actions taken. For example, German Chancellor Angela Merkel bravely opened the door to refugees — or, as she put it recently, simply refused to close the door. She has been accused and criticised for “picking and choosing refugees”, favoring Syrian refugees in particular who tend to be better trained and educated. Regardless, at least she kept the German border open in order to process new arrivals, and I would encourage other European Union (EU) states to follow that example.

In Italy, we can be proud of the lives saved through the Mare Nostrum search-and-rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea. That program rescued more than 140,000 people in less than a year, before it officially wound down in late 2014. We are continuing with search-and-rescue on a much more limited scale, thanks to efforts by the Italian Coast Guard, fishermen’s associations and NGOs.

A properly conceived mission in the Mediterranean should include an active search-and-rescue program, following the successful model of Mare Nostrum, in order to negotiate the coming months and years of this crisis. The idea of losing lives at sea is absolutely unacceptable.

European institutions need to improve their forecasting ability to identify early warning signs of political instability and potential conflict — and take pro-active steps to help vulnerable states before another mass exodus of people begins. One country at risk is Algeria, where there is extensive social conflict, a closed political system, and widespread corruption. There is no viable successor to President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Considering all the turmoil in Libya and other neighboring countries, it is fair to describe Algeria as a ticking time bomb. Europe is not doing enough to anticipate and prevent a potential eruption and the inevitable migration consequences that would have for our continent.

There are a number of complicating factors regarding the current crisis, including how to separate refugees from economic migrants. This is, of course, an important distinction, but one that is not always easy to make. First of all, most of these people come without documents. They might say that they come from Eritrea, for example, but how would one establish whether or not this is true? And then, should this person be categorized as a refugee or as an economic migrant? It is admittedly very difficult.

We can build a more rational system to address the challenges, but only if we first calm the hysteria that is gripping Europe. Millions of people are fleeing war, repression, torture and death threats. Above all, refugee policy must safeguard human lives.

This is a global problem, not confined to the Mediterranean. It helps to look at the situation in other countries: Tunisia has taken one million Libyans into a population of around eleven million; Lebanon has absorbed more than one million Syrians into a population of around four million. How can Europe not show the same generous spirit in welcoming those fleeing horrors?"

Nadia Prupis, "Refugee Planet: There Have Never Been This Many Displaced People on Earth: Half of refugees worldwide are children, new United Nations report finds, Common Dreams, June 20, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/20/refugee-planet-there-have-never-been-many-displaced-people-earth, reported, "An unprecedented 65.3 million people have been displaced around the world due to war and persecution, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reported on Monday.

The new figure is not only a 21st century record, it is also the first time that the numbers have surpassed 60 million—which means one in every 113 people worldwide is now either an asylum-seeker, internally displaced, or a refugee, the UN said. Half of them are children.

Over the past five years, forced displacement has increased quicker than ever due to longstanding conflicts in regions like Somalia and Afghanistan; "dramatic" escalations in newly destabilized countries like Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine; and a growing resistance from other nations to providing asylum for refugees, the UN reported.

'More people are being displaced by war and persecution and that’s worrying in itself, but the factors that endanger refugees are multiplying too,’ said UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi.

Grandi also warned on Sunday that a 'climate of xenophobia' was spreading due to political rhetoric painting refugees as terrorists or beggars. 'Refugees... don’t bring danger' but 'flee from dangerous places,' he told Agence France-Presse.

The UN's report, Global Trends (pdf), was released to mark World Refugee Day on June 20 and in
conjunction with the agency's #WithRefugees campaign, which calls on governments to ensure asylum seekers are given education, safe shelter, and opportunities to work.

At sea, a frightening number of refugees and migrants are dying each year; on land, people fleeing war are finding their way blocked by closed borders," Grandi said Monday. "Politics is gravitating against asylum in some countries. The willingness of nations to work together not just for refugees but for the collective human interest is what's being tested today, and it's this spirit of unity that badly needs to prevail.' accounted for more than half the refugees under the UNHCR mandate. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, in total, saw the highest numbers of displaced people in 2015. Intervention in Syria—led in part by the U.S.—has seen at least 4.9 million people driven out of the country and at least 6.6 million displaced internally, totaling around half of the nation's pre-war population.

Hikmat, a Syrian farmer now living in a tent in Lebanon with his family, told the UN, 'We're stuck here. We can't go on and we can't go back. My children need to go to school, they need a future.'

Elsewhere in the world, people fleeing drug gangs in Central America contributed to a 17 percent rise in displacement in the region, while refugees from Asia and the Pacific accounted for almost a sixth of global refugees and internally displaced people in 2015. Meanwhile, as Europe and the U.S. have largely turned their backs on asylum seekers, Pakistan and Iran held onto their position as two of the world's leading refugee host countries. In fact, 86 percent of refugees are currently living in low- and middle-income countries in close proximity to areas of conflict, such as Ethiopia, Jordan, and Turkey.

The report excluded people who were displaced by natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes, which separately uprooted at least 19 million people in 2015, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, which released its own report in May.

UNHCR said the 2016 report must act as a 'watershed moment' for the cause. 'World leaders can no longer watch passively as so many lives are needlessly lost,' the report states. 'We must be smart about finding solutions to help refugees. We must find humane and dignified means to ensure refugees don’t risk their lives and those of their families by resorting to ruthless traffickers or by boarding flimsy boats in a bid to reach safety.'"

Lauren McCauley, "'Europe, This is Unbearable': Deadly Crossings Drive Migrant Fatalities to New Heights: Record numbers of children are now making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, aid groups say," Common Dreams, May 30, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/05/30/europe-unbearable-deadly-crossings-drive-migrant-fatalities-new-heights, reported, "Describing a heartbreaking and horrific scene of hundreds of bodies floating on the surface of the Mediterranean, the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) confirmed Sunday that more than 700 asylum seekers drowned last week, capping off the deadliest period for those fleeing war and violence in over a year.

'The casualties happened in three separate incidents on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday after more than 13,000 people set sail from Libya for Italy in an eight-day period,' the Guardian reported. UNHCR spokeswoman Carlotta Sami said that with 700 dead, last week was the deadliest since April 2015, when roughly 1,300 refugees were killed in two fatal shipwrecks off the coast of Libya. Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) Sea, the Doctors without Borders' Mediterranean migration team, estimated that as many as 900 might have drowned.

Giorgia Linardi, a member of a rescue team from German NGO Sea Watch, described the "gruesome" scene that included the bodies of children and mostly young people being dragged in by nets. "There were already many dead bodies floating in the sea. Some of them were between life and death because they weren’t reacting, but still breathing," Linardi said. "Whether they made it, we don’t know, because then we handed them to the Italian warship," which was helping pull people from the water after Friday's shipwreck.

The image of a drowned infant that went viral this weekend, for many, captured the heartbreak of the ongoing migration crisis.

'The disasters show that despite attempts to crackdown on smugglers in the southern Mediterranean, the flow of migrants between Libya and Italy continues unabated,' the Guardian reports, noting that 'roughly the same number of people—46,000—arrived in Italy in the first five months of 2016.
as during the same period last year.'

Meanwhile, the number of children who are making the deadly crossing is on the rise.

'The number of minors who make the journey on their own and arrive in Europe is much higher than what we saw last year,' Save the Children spokeswoman Giovanna Di Benedetto said. 'But we are increasingly coming across much younger children, children of nine or ten years of age, who have made the journey alone or who have lost their parents or family members with whom they were traveling.'

On Wednesday, the Italian Coast guard announced that a staggering 5,600 migrants had been rescued from the waters off the Libyan coast in 48 hours alone, as Common Dreams reported.

The staggering casualties highlight the failure of European countries to organize a designated search-and-rescue operation, Linardi said.

Echoing that criticism, Aurelie Ponthieu, a humanitarian specialist on displacement with MSF, wrote online Sunday: "No lessons learnt, no #safepassage, only more lives lost at sea because of wrong and useless policies."

Meanwhile, MSF Sea has been sharing updates on the weekend crossings and deaths, writing, "Europe, this is unbearable."

400 #people have just arrived in Italy on board #Dignity1 after a long journey. May Europe treat them with humanity. pic.twitter.com/TT2DA7Wvaf


A phone number on your t-shirt could be the only way to inform your family that you didn't make it to #Europe. pic.twitter.com/s71VNNvwcu


Around 900 #people may have died in the #CentralMediterranean in the last week alone. Europe, this is unbearable. pic.twitter.com/j73FsSsO99

— MSF Sea (@MSF_Sea) May 29, 2016

At a prayer service on Saturday, Pope Francis mourned those lives lost and implored Western nations to remember that the migrants "are in danger, not dangerous."

"Needed: new model for global aid, Report: Old way won't work in face of worst crisis since WWII," The Christian Science Monitor Weekly, April 25-May 2, 2016, reported that the great strides that the world has taken in the last 20 years are at risk as a result of the worst humanitarian crisis since World War II. The huge series of refugee crisis are a result of war and violence in the Middle East and Africa, with economic dimensions considerably related to climate change, mistreatment of people including violent attacks in other parts of Asia, and violence in Central America. The world's humanitarian assistance processes have not been able to keep up with the serious needs.

The World At Risk report, released in April 2016, proposes that humanitarian needs can be met if some of the methods that led to significant global development gains since 2000 are applied to aid: "Greater involvement of local actors in meeting their own needs; Private Sector Participation; Emphasizing crisis prevention where crisis response once sufficed; and Steady flow of funding."

The annual United Nations Children's Fund Report, "The State of the World's Children 2016," warned that the 2030 development goals for children are at risk. If current trends continue, by then, 70 million children will die of preventable causes and 750 million girls will be married while still children., while more than 60 million primary school-age children will be out of school, mostly in Africa. A major factor is the widening disparities between rich and poor with the poorest most at risk (Rick Gladstone, "United Nations Says Goals for Children Are at Risk," The New York Times, June 28, 2016).

This trend is largely driven by the intensifying conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. Terrorism is at an all-time high, battle deaths from conflict are at a 25-year high, and the number of refugees and displaced people are at a level not seen in sixty years. Notably, the sources for these three dynamics are intertwined and driven by a small number of countries, demonstrating the global repercussions of breakdowns in peacefulness.

So intense is the current concentration of violence and conflict in the Middle East that it drags down the global average. When considered separately, the rest of the world's average peace levels actually improved. Many countries are at record-high levels of peacefulness, while the bottom twenty countries have progressively become much less peaceful, increasing the levels of global inequality in peace.

This striking data comes from the latest edition of the Global Peace Index, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), which I founded. Our aim is to provide the world with the research, data and insight required to inform decisions we take to secure a more peaceful future.

Measuring peace is, of course, a difficult task. However, thanks to the Global Peace Index, now in its tenth year, we have solid quantitative analysis that can shed light on the questions of whether we are becoming more or less peaceful, and what are the underlying factors that help maintain peace.

For example, our research shows that, amidst the global deterioration, the world continues to spend enormous resources on creating and containing violence but comparatively little on promoting peace. The economic impact of violence in 2015 was estimated at $13.6 trillion, or 13.3 per cent of world GDP. Of this amount, the economic losses caused by armed conflict amount to $742 billion. The corresponding global investment in peacekeeping and peacebuilding was around $15 billion — or less than 2 per cent of the economic losses from conflict.

The economic impact of violence in 2015 was estimated at $13.6 trillion, or 13.3 per cent of world GDP. Of this amount, the economic losses caused by armed conflict amount to $742 billion.

I believe that the key to reversing the global decline is through support for Positive Peace, a holistic framework made up of eight pillars which together create an optimum environment for human potential to flourish. Derived from a statistical analysis of over 4,000 datasets, we identified pillars for peace — including well-functioning government, low levels of corruption, equitable distribution of resources and free flow of information — and established three indicators in each category. This provides a baseline measure of the effectiveness of a country’s institutions and attitudes to build and maintain peace. It also provides a measure for policymakers, researchers and corporations to use for monitoring and evaluation efforts.

Many of the challenges facing humanity are fundamentally global in nature, such as climate change, decreasing biodiversity, continued economic instability and increasing migration. All of these challenges are interconnected and multifaceted, requiring new ways of conceptualizing the relations between countries and the larger systems upon which humanity depends. We need to use systems thinking, as it has developed in the study of ecology, and consider how it applies to nation states.

As part of this effort, the Institute for Economics and Peace has also conducted an audit of the available data to measure the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) related to the promotion of peace, justice and strong institutions, SDG16. For the first time, UN member states have formally recognized the critical nature of peacefulness in advancing the global development agenda, alongside issues like poverty, inequality, and climate change. We believe that SDG 16 incorporates key aspects of both Negative Peace, which is defined as “the absence of violence and the fear of violence”, as well as Positive Peace, which is defined as “the attitudes, institutions and structures that support and sustain peaceful societies”.

At the IEP, we found that measuring Goal 16 presents a number of methodological concerns. In the spirit of the SDGs being country-led, the intention is for many of the measurements to be guided by National Statistical Offices. However, national statistical data is non-existent for many of the targets and indicators. In addition, the majority of targets in Goal 16 face potential conflicts of interest in measurement by the state. We recommend that independent third-party organisations provide complementary support to the national offices, and offer a useful benchmark against which to compare results. We have joined the SDG16 Data Initiative, which brings together a coalition of well-respected international organisations that will collaborate to identify information gaps and useful alternative data sources in SDG16 target areas.
Thanks to data and research, we can develop better informed analyses and insights on peace — enabling more intelligent, focused action to reverse the terrible recent trend toward more deadly conflict.

Measuring Goal 16 is not an easy task, but it is one that injects accountability into an otherwise elusive yet coveted ambition for the world. This is a serious challenge that needs greater investment and levels of cooperation.

Andrea Germanos, "CIA Chief Just Confirmed "War on Terror" Has Created A Lot More Terrorists: John Brennan tells Senate Intelligence Committee 'our efforts have not reduced the group’s terrorism capability and global reach,' Common Dreams, June 16, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/16/cia-chief-just-confirmed-war-terror-has-created-lot-more-terrorists, reported, "Agency director John Brennan said Thursday that, years into the United States' fight against the Islamic State, the terrorist group's reach and power have not been diminished and that it has even more fighters than al-Qaeda had at its height.

Speaking to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Brennan said, 'Unfortunately, despite all our progress against ISIL on the battlefield and in the financial realm, our efforts have not reduced the group's terrorism capability and global reach. The resources needed for terrorism are very modest, and the group would have to suffer even heavier losses of territory, manpower, and money for its terrorist capacity to decline significantly.'

He also said the group is still 'a formidable adversary,' adding, 'The branch in Libya is probably the most developed and the most dangerous.'

He also projected that it 'will intensify its global terror campaign to maintain its dominance of the global terrorism agenda.'

And, despite the apparent failure of the military strategy, Brennan said "a long and difficult fight" would continue against the group whose number of fighters now "far exceeds what al-Qaeda had at its height."

His comments confirm warnings from many on the left that a military strategy to defeat ISIL, or ISIS, as it is also known, would only foment further acts of terrorism. Institute for Policy Studies fellow Phyllis Bennis, for example, warned in 2014, when President Barack Obama said he authorized new U.S. military airstrikes in Iraq to target ISIS, "it should be eminently clear that we cannot bomb Islamist extremists into submission or disappearance. Every bomb recruits more supporters."

U.N. peace keepers in a number of nations have come under strong criticisms for lack of needed action in some instances, and for serious abusive actions in others. For some time, there have been accusations of French troops in The Central African Republic committing sexual assaults and rapes.


The 49-page report by the Human Rights Advisory Panel, part of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo, or Unmik, contains extraordinarily strong language criticizing the mission's handling of civilian grievances, including failures to investigate disappearances and killings as well as negligence in the mass lead poisoning of displaced Roma, also known as Gypsies, at United Nations camps.

The report's conclusions are a potential source of embarrassment for the United Nations, which regularly assails governments for a lack of accountability and defends victims whose human rights have been violated in conflict zones around the world.

'Due to Unmik's unwillingness to follow any of the Panel's recommendations and Unmik’s general intransigence,' the report said, the panel's own work had "obtained no redress for the complainants."

'As such, they have been victimized twice by Unmik: by the original human rights violations committed against them and again by putting their hope and trust into this process,' it said."

Their track record, however, shows that they have not always been able or willing to do that. When civil war broke out in South Sudan more than two years ago, the United Nations took pains to tell the world that its peacekeepers in the country had opened their compound gates and given refuge to tens of thousands of civilians. Since then, however, the troops have faced blistering criticism for not taking steps in time to head off an ethnic massacre in a camp for displaced people; for being unable to protect women who were raped when they ventured outside camps to gather firewood; and for being confined to their bases as new spasms of violence over the weekend led to the deaths of even more civilians."

First Peoples World Wide, "Investors React to World Bank Safeguards Rollback," July 14, 2016, http://firstpeoples.org, "Trustees of the Calvert Social Investment Fund are considering a ban on purchasing World Bank bonds, in response to proposed changes to the Bank’s Environmental and Social Safeguards Framework (ESSF) that weaken protections for Indigenous Peoples. Since 2012, the Bank has been revising the ESSF, which is intended to identify and minimize harm caused by its projects. The process has been criticized for failing to comply with international human rights standards on a number of fronts. Calvert is among the growing number of investors that recognize the staggering financial losses incurred by companies and governments that destroy ecosystems, violate human rights, or fail to obtain community support for their operations. In February 2016, the CEO of Blackrock, the world’s largest asset manager, called on companies to pay more attention to environmental and social issues in order to generate sustainable returns.

In a letter addressed to Bank President Jim Yong Kim, trustees expressed concern that Calvert’s long history of constructive engagement with the Bank on Indigenous Peoples, human rights, and gender is being eroded, prompting them to 'reconsider whether continued involvement with the Bank aligns with our sustainable and responsible investment practices.' The letter mentions the Bank’s recent decision to waive the Indigenous Peoples Safeguard for an agribusiness project in Tanzania because the government claims there are no Indigenous Peoples in the country. This sets a precedent that will likely trigger the denial of Indigenous Peoples’ existence in many parts of the globe, in blatant violation of Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination. In February 2015, Calvert joined Boston Commons Asset Management, NEI Investments, and other investors worth $125 billion in assets under management to sign a letter urging the Bank to ensure the ESSF is consistent with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. ‘In addition to ignoring its devastating toll on Indigenous Peoples and other vulnerable communities, the Bank is failing to recognize major changes that are happening in the market,’ says Rebecca Adamson, Calvert trustee and Founder and President of First Peoples Worldwide (FPW). 'Companies are seeking business climates that are suitable to the acquisition of a social license to operate. By weakening the environmental and social conditions tied to its loans, the Bank is leading borrower countries away from policy reforms needed to attract foreign investment.' In 2014, FPW published the Indigenous Rights Risk Report, which quantified corporate risk exposure to violating Indigenous Peoples’ rights.

Currently, the Bank is deliberating the ESSF and is expected to release the final draft for public review on July 20th, 2016. A final vote on the new policies by the Bank’s Board of Directors is set for August.

Contact: Nick Pelosi, Corporate Engagement Director, First Peoples Worldwide, npelosi@firstpeoples.org, (917)324-3160; Julia Radomski, Information Services Coordinator, Bank Information Center, jradomski@bankinformationcenter.org, (202)624-0636"
Andrew Blum, USIP outgoing vice president for planning, learning and evaluation, "Gauging What Works and What Doesn't in Peacebuilding: Reflections on Monitoring and Evaluation" from a Departing “M&E Guy,” (Original article: USIP. June 17, 2016), Global Campaign for Peace Education, July 1, 2016, http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/gauging-works-doesnt-peacebuilding, commented, “Those of us who work in peacebuilding are constantly reminded that the challenges we confront are big and the resources we command are small. So there is both a practical and an ethical obligation to use those resources wisely and be certain of their value. Toward that end, a little over four years ago, USIP asked me to become the organization’s first director of learning and evaluation. At its core, my job description was simple: help the Institute use evidence to do more of what works and less of what doesn’t.

As my time at USIP wraps up and I move to a new position as the executive director of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego, I wanted to take the opportunity to reflect on what I got right, what I got wrong and the work left to do. Recently, The Ford Foundation posted a job description for a director of strategy, learning and evaluation. Every day I see more job postings like this, illustrating the growth of this field. So I hope these quick reflections from a soon-to-be-former “M&E guy” will help all those moving into these new positions as well as those already working on the challenge I took up four years ago.

Three Things I Got Right

A Focus on Organizational Change: Improving project design, monitoring, evaluation and learning fundamentally requires deep organizational change; it is not just a technical challenge. For instance, one of the first things we did was to develop a template for a monitoring and evaluation framework. But very few people used it. We realized very soon that providing this type of technical support does not work unless you address the more fundamental issues. For instance, if we provide resources, are there accountability mechanisms in place to ensure they are used? Focusing on deeper organizational issues has meant at times that the progress we've made has felt slow, but that progress has been sustained. In contrast, some organizations try to quickly make comprehensive changes in the way they monitor and evaluate programs. These efforts often collapse under their own weight, leaving the organization worse off than when they started.

Engaging Funders: There is a tendency among implementers to blame challenges in improving monitoring and evaluation on donors, saying they are too rigid in their requirements and too intolerant of failure to allow flexible, creative, effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E). From the beginning at USIP, we committed to the strategy of engaging funding partners such as government agencies on M&E issues. Funders have seen this as a positive, and that has proved crucial in creating M&E strategies that meet everyone’s needs while allowing for the kind of honest reporting on programs that leads to true learning.

More M, less E: From the beginning, we focused more on monitoring than evaluation, for two reasons. First, all evaluation efforts require rigorous project monitoring, which in turn requires a solid, well-thought-out project design. Second, since project teams are responsible for designing and monitoring their programs, they also become responsible for their own M&E. If we had just done evaluations at the end of project, the originating teams could have more easily have dismissed the task as someone else’s responsibility, meaning either my team or the outside evaluation consultants.

Three Things I Wish I Had Known

Prioritize Early: As the first director of learning and evaluation at USIP, I was acutely aware that I needed to demonstrate my worth to my colleagues in programs by helping them solve their problems. A key success metric my team and I always used was demand for our services. But this makes it very difficult to say no. And not saying no leads to being spread too thin, and to always being reactive in the face of requests. I wish I had worked harder from the beginning to prioritize and clearly communicate a set of strategic priorities to the organization. Along the lines of, “this is what we’ve determined are the most strategic areas of focus to improve M&E at USIP, these are the things we can help you with, these are the kinds of things we won’t do.”

The Last Mile Problem: We underestimated the importance and difficulty of gathering data at the local level—for USIP, that often means in conflict zones. Again and again, we saw how strong project designs and monitoring strategies were undermined by the challenges of gathering credible,
rigorous data, in an ongoing, cost-effective way. While we have recently prioritized solving what I now call the “last mile problem,” we should have focused on this earlier as part of all our project monitoring initiatives.

Are We Doing it Well vs. What Should We Do? I always considered it important to be able to answer two kinds of questions. First, are USIP programs having an impact? Second, what kind of programs should we be implementing? At the beginning, I assumed that both of these questions could be answered with similar strategies. It turns out however that the “what should we do” question is orders of magnitude harder to answer and requires different strategies to answer. Project-level evaluation is important, but not sufficient to answer the question of whether, for instance, you should invest more in community dialogue programs or security sector reform. Moreover, the challenge of organizational change is different for the “what should we do” question as well. For example, a specialist in community dialogue is almost always willing to work to make their programming better. That specialist responds very differently if you are making the argument that the organization should be doing less community dialogue—an argument that threatens their identity and their livelihood.

Three Things Left to Do

Leveraging Data: I have often said that peacebuilding is a data-scarce endeavor. Collecting data in dangerous, politicized conflict environments is always difficult. But as the result of USIP’s efforts on monitoring and evaluation, there is a lot more data flowing throughout the organization. The next challenge is to do a better job of aggregating, sharing, presenting and leveraging that information throughout the Institute. USIP has recently renewed its commitment to confronting these knowledge-management challenges, but for a large, complex, mature organization like USIP, the task is somewhat daunting and will take time.

Adaptive Programming: There is a groundswell of discussion within the peacebuilding community—and in the development field more broadly—about how to make programming more flexible and more adaptive. The goal is to ensure that programs can learn as they go in order to respond to the complex, rapidly changing environments in which we work. To date, however, there has been more rhetoric about these approaches than actual changes in the way programs are implemented. The next challenge is to build the systems and processes that truly support flexible, adaptive, iterative programming.

A Stronger Theory of Change: M&E can only tell you one piece of the story. An evaluation, for instance, can tell you if trust was built between groups. Only a broader theory of change about how peace can be built—and then testing it—can tell you if that increased trust will have an impact on larger peace and conflict dynamics. That requires combining M&E and applied research to provide a firmer evidence base for that theory of change. This will enable USIP to make stronger claims about larger impact, e.g., we built trust, and trust matters for broader, long-term peace.

One final thought, looking a bit farther back than four years. When I first started working on monitoring and evaluation in the peacebuilding field, perhaps 10 years ago, there was still a significant debate underway regarding whether monitoring and evaluation had any relevance for the peacebuilding field at all. Some people argued that peacebuilding is too complex, too non-linear, too much art rather than science to be rigorously monitored and evaluated.

This argument is now over. The question is no longer “if” we should evaluate, but “how.” How do we evaluate in ways that acknowledge the complexities of peacebuilding while holding ourselves accountable for producing results? How do we conduct assessments in a cost-effective way that provides a positive return on investment? How do we evaluate in ways that create continuous learning and improvement in our programs? How do we hold ourselves accountable not just to funders, but to our partners and the communities in which we work? Although I am leaving USIP, I will continue working on these questions, along with my amazing, soon to be former, colleagues and the rest of the peacebuilding community."

Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan

The Iran nuclear deal has been successful, to date, in its own terms, with Iran following its
agreement concerning nuclear materials and not undertaking nuclear weapons development related activity, but with a few exceptions - some of importance - it has not otherwise improved U.S. - Iran relations or brought de-escalation of regional tensions (David E. Sanger, "Iran Sticks to Terms of Nuclear Deal, but Defies the U.S. in Other Ways," The New York Times, July 13, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/14/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-deal.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).

Not long after a U.S. court ruled that American Citizens could suit Iran for losses from terrorism it has sponsored, Rick Gladstone, "Iran Accuses U.S. of Meddling as Tensions Grow," The New York Times, May 4, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/05/world/middleeast/iran-us-relations-persiangulf.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Tensions between Iran and the United States, never far from the surface, showed signs of worsening on Wednesday, with the Iranians threatening to block a vital Persian Gulf access route and protesting what they called the American 'meddling approach and tone.'

The Iranian messages, conveyed in statements by a commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps and by the Foreign Ministry, came a few days after Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the supreme leader, expressed exasperation with the United States, questioning the longstanding deployment of the Navy's Fifth Fleet in the Persian Gulf."

Thomas Erdbrink, "Iran Bars Pilgrims From Traveling to Mecca for Hajj, The New York Times, May 29, 201, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/30/world/middleeast/iran-saudi-arabia-mecca-hajj.html?ref=todayspaper,"In a sign of further tension between regional rivals, Iran will not allow its citizens to travel to Saudi Arabia for the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca in September, Iran's state television reported on Sunday.

The decision, which means that tens of thousands of Iranians cannot make their spiritual journey to the main pilgrimage site of Islam, came after several failed rounds of talks between officials of both countries and on the heels of accusations that Saudi Arabia has started a cyberwar against Iran."

Iraq, including in its cities, remains violent even away from the major fighting. For example, Falih Hassan and Omar al-Hawoshy, "Scores Are Killed as a Wave of Bombings Bloody Baghdad," The New York Times, May 11, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/12/world/middleeast/baghdad-market-bombisis.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "In a burst of attacks recalling Iraq’s sectarian civil war, three bombings in three different neighborhoods of Baghdad killed more than 90 people on Wednesday and wounded scores more, the Iraqi authorities said.

The Islamic State claimed responsibility for the biggest attack, in a crowded food market in the Shiite neighborhood of Sadr City in northern Baghdad. Explosives hidden in a parked pickup truck loaded with fruit and vegetables detonated around 10 a.m., killing at least 66 people and wounding 87 others."


As familiar as the last week of violence in Baghdad — more than 200 killed since last Wednesday — might seem to those who have watched Iraq over the years, this is not business as usual here. The American history in Iraq tells us that successful bombings in Baghdad are not to be taken lightly.

The official talking points say the new wave of bombings is a sign that the Islamic State is losing. The terrorists are lashing out in Baghdad because they are abandoning territory to pro-Iraqi ground forces and American-led airstrikes."

As July began, the situation in Baghdad became worse, with political repercussions for the Iraqi government. Falih Hassan, Tim Arango and Omar al-Jawoshy, "Bombing Kills More Than 140 in Baghdad, The New York Times, July 3, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/04/world/middleeast/baghdadbombings.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "As celebrations for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan stretched past midnight into Sunday in central Baghdad, where Iraqis had gathered to eat, shop and just be together, a minivan packed with explosives blew up and killed at least 143 people — the third mass slaughter across three countries in less than a week."

137
The attack was the deadliest in Baghdad in years — at least since 2009 — and was among the worst Iraq has faced since the American invasion of 2003. The bombing came barely a week after Iraqi security forces, backed by American airstrikes, celebrated the liberation of Falluja from the Islamic State, which almost immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

Even as fires still blazed Sunday morning at the bombing site, Iraq’s machinery of grief was fully in motion: Hospitals tried to identify charred bodies, workers sorted through the rubble searching for more victims, and the first coffins were on their way to the holy city of Najaf and its vast cemetery, always expanding, where Iraq’s Shiites bury their dead. By Sunday evening, a worker at the cemetery said more than 70 bodies had arrived, and many more were expected on Monday.

There were also immediate political repercussions, as the bombing brought an abrupt end to the brief victory lap that Iraq’s beleaguered prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, was enjoying after the recapture of Falluja. Mr. Abadi rose to power in 2014, and the Obama administration had hoped that he could reunite the country after the divisive tenure of his immediate predecessor, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, whose sectarian policies were blamed for the rise of the Islamic State.

"When Mr. Abadi visited the bombing site on Sunday morning, people threw rocks and shoes at his convoy and yelled, "Thief!” The epithet was directed as much at Iraq’s dysfunctional and corrupt political class as it was at the prime minister."

"As those scenes unfolded and with anger swelling in the streets of the capital, many are now sure to wonder how long Mr. Abadi may remain in power; at the very least, the chaos is likely to presage the resumption of street unrest that had calmed during Ramadan and the military operations in Falluja.

The scenes that unfolded across the city on Sunday were another brutal illustration of the paradox Iraq faces as its security forces — and the American military, which is training the Iraqi Army and carrying out airstrikes and raids by Special Forces — make gains against the Islamic State. As more territory is won back, the group is reverting to its roots as a guerrilla insurgency, turning Baghdad again into an urban killing field.”

As of June 23, 2016, a combination of Iraqi government forces, Kurdish and Shiite militias supported by U.S. Airstrikes had retaken about one-third of the city of Falluja including the government buildings downtown, while fighting continued, particularly in western neighborhoods. Thousands of civilians had fled the largely destroyed city, where thousands had been killed by ISIS and fighting (Tim Arango, "A Tour of Falluja Reveals Grim Remnants of Life Under ISIS," The New York Times, June 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/23/world/middleeast/a-tour-of-falluja-reveals-grim-remnants-of-life-under-isis.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0). By July 1 Falluja was reported to be almost completely freed of ISIS.


"The Islamic State’s latest suicide attack in Baghdad, which killed nearly 330 people, foreshadows a long and bloody insurgency, according to American diplomats and commanders, as the group reverts to its guerrilla roots because its territory is shrinking in Iraq and Syria.

Already, officials say, many Islamic State fighters who lost battles in Falluja and Ramadi have blended back into the largely Sunni civilian populations there, and are biding their time to conduct future terrorist attacks. And with few signs that the beleaguered Iraqi prime minister, Haider al-Abadi, can effectively forge an inclusive partnership with Sunnis, many senior American officials warn that a military victory in the last urban stronghold of Mosul, which they hope will be achieved by the end of the year, will not be sufficient to stave off a lethal insurgency.”

Omar al-Jawoshy and Falih Hassan, "Iraqi Protesters Clash With Troops in Baghdad’s Green Zone," The New York Times, May 20, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/21/world/middleeast/baghdad-iraq-green-zone-protests.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "In a violent escalation of Iraq’s political crisis on Friday, protesters breached Baghdad’s Green Zone, the secure hub of government, storming the prime minister’s office as security forces fired tear gas at demonstrators and live ammunition in the air."
The protesters withdrew within a couple of hours, but dozens of people were injured, according to officials. And Baghdad Operations Command, which is in charge of security in the capital, imposed a curfew for several hours, and closed all entrances to the city.

It was the second time in three weeks that protesters managed to breach the blast walls and razor wire of the Green Zone, a fortified area of government buildings and embassies that was named by the American military and that for the Iraqi public has long been a symbol of corruption, occupation and dysfunction.

The crisis on Friday was a further demonstration of the rising anger among Iraqis toward a leadership class that is widely reviled, and presented a new challenge to the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi at a time when Baghdad has faced a surge in attacks from the Islamic State, which have killed an estimated 200 people in less than 10 days."


International Crisis Group, (ICG), "Maria Fantappie," Iraq: On the Edge of Chaos, May 14, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/2016/05/14/iraq-on-the-edge-of-chaos-2/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=c967f6d0a2-Iraq_commentary5_16_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-c967f6d0a2-359871089, commented, "The recent storming of Baghdad’s heavily fortified Green Zone by protesters led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr brought to the surface a long-standing dilemma: the system which has governed the country since 2003 is in need of radical reform, but because the ruling political class has in many ways come to embody the system, it is highly resistant to genuine change. Street protests and recalcitrant politicians have created a combustible formula, paralyzing state institutions and threatening to bring them down. Meanwhile, the security situation is dire, as evidenced by a series of attacks in Baghdad this week claimed by the Islamic State.

Three dynamics are at play. The first is the dysfunction of the post-2003 political system. Ostensibly designed to ensure fair ethnic-sectarian representation in state institutions, in practice it allows political parties defined by ethnic-sectarian identities to control them. Second is the mounting loss of popular trust in these parties and anger over their poor performance. Third is the fracturing of the political leadership, especially among and within the largest Shiite political forces — the Daawa Islamic Party, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and Sadr’s own al-Ahrar — which has been accelerated by the popular discontent and the system’s shortfalls.

The latest crisis erupted when Sadr, a Shiite leader and cleric well-positioned to claim distance from the establishment, took control of mass protests in February. Sadr channeled popular anger into the political scene, effectively creating a double confrontation: between the street and the political elite, and between his own al-Ahrar bloc — which he positioned as the spearhead of the reform movement — and the other Shiite political parties.

The country’s institutions are now paralyzed: under pressure from the street movement to reform but blocked from doing so by divided Shiite political parties. Parliament was the first victim of the stand-off. On 26 April, Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi struck a deal to replace five ministers, a move that would have accommodated al-Ahrar’s demands and, by appointing technocrats, avoided damage to other parties’ interests. This temporary compromise backfired when al-Ahrar raised the stakes by demanding the replacement of the entire cabinet and the so-called three presidencies: the prime minister, president and speaker of parliament. (Of course, as elected leaders, the president and speaker of parliament cannot simply be replaced, but the Sadrist’s call for this has rhetorical power as an indictment of the entire system.)

The parties that had at first voted for the more modest overhaul proposed by Abadi now refused to approve the replacement of their respective ministers and blocked the quorum needed for parliament to convene. As the vote was postponed, the crisis shifted once again to the street when protesters, heeding Sadr’s call, entered the Green Zone, seat of many government institutions, and stormed the parliament building on 30 April. As the conflict between street activists and political leaders escalates and intra- and
inter-party struggles reach their peak, parliament is becoming moribund.

**The Street: A New and Dynamic Variable of Politics**

Resentment against the political elite has assumed different forms of expression at different times. Its most recent manifestation is street protests. For over a decade, connections with party figures based in the Green Zone have determined who gets access to education, employment, entrepreneurial opportunities and even to certain areas of the country. But these patronage networks were only the tip of an iceberg, perpetuating and exacerbating the corruption and favouritism which has long been rife throughout the public sector. This has left young people with no prospects unless they play by the rules set by the Green Zone elite. The new generation has been mobilized by a desire to challenge the status quo rather than by any specific political agenda.

Various actors, now led by Sadr, are channeling these anti-establishment feelings to implement their own agendas. A similar rage triggered protests in Sunni provinces in 2013 that likewise targeted the Green Zone political establishment. Because it overlapped with grievances of the Sunni community, the government’s violent repression transformed these protests into a Sunni-Shiite confrontation, paving the way first for Sunni insurgents and then for jihadist groups to influence their direction. This set the stage for the Islamic State’s surge in June 2014, when it overran a large portion of country’s Sunni provinces. A year later, in August 2015, Shiite youth took to the streets of Basra and other majority-Shiite towns due to similar resentments against the failure of Green Zone politicians.

Sadr has capitalized on these same sentiments, leading his supporters into the heart of the country’s political establishment, the Green Zone, triggering a direct confrontation between the street and the elites, turning street protests into a major variable in Iraqi politics.

**Barriers to Reform**

Meaningful reform of the post-2003 political system faces serious structural obstacles, as political parties and state institutions have become interdependent and help each other to survive. The system cannot generate renewal of the political class — whether through elections or legislative changes — nor will the political class genuinely try to reform that system.

Political parties brought together in power-sharing governments were the means by which the U.S. tried to ensure broad ethnic and sectarian representation within state institutions during the period of military occupation (2003-2011). This gave party figures appointed as ministers the power to fill top-level positions with their cronies and recruit party rank-and-file for other positions within their ministries. Not only did this place a constellation of party cadres in key decision-making roles across state institutions, it also allowed them to overcome their lack of public support by effectively using the state’s payroll to buy people’s loyalty. It is therefore not surprising that key party figures are resisting reforms that would jeopardize the patronage system that makes them powerful.

The way that political parties are embedded in state institutions has frozen Iraqi politics around the same familiar figures and has complicated efforts to rejuvenate the political class. Younger politicians often act just like their elders. Even when they want to challenge the old guard, they remain dependent on their predecessors’ patronage networks to gain influence or are compelled by the system’s logic to build their own networks within state institutions.

While dissociating such party figures from state institutions is in principle the right thing to do, in practice it would paralyze those institutions and potentially encourage political figures to reinvest their own power in challenging them. For instance, after Maliki was replaced as prime minister in 2014, he withdrew his financial and security network from the government, and has now partially reinvested it in challenging and weakening Abadi.

What complicates matters even further is that the demand for reform cloaks an unfolding power struggle within the Shiite political bloc, the National Alliance. Each of its constituent parties wants to weaken Abadi in order to strike a deal that would give them leverage over the choice of cabinet members or otherwise secure their interests. In appealing to the street’s anti-establishment feelings Sadr hopes to strengthen his position precisely within that establishment. Meanwhile, his bloc, al-Ahrar, has raised the stakes by shifting from calls to reform the system to demands for its dismantlement. The strategy has been successful in allowing the bloc to keep the street on its side and giving it leverage to strike a deal with Abadi in the first cabinet overhaul. But it has created larger obstacles to finding an intra-Shiite agreement.
Confronted with the sudden empowerment of al-Ahrar, other Shiite political factions might not want any reforms to be achieved quickly, as this could further strengthen the Sadrists at their own expense. They have been partnering with Sunni factions and the Kurdish bloc — which also might not want to risk losing their quota of ministers within the cabinet — to prevent any parliamentary quorum from being achieved.

**Power Shifts at the Top**

Reforms might result from power shifts within parties’ leaderships more than from democratic mechanisms such as legislative changes or elections. A leadership renewal might progressively occur as political parties maneuver to survive pressure from the street, or from political interventions by the U.S. or Iran, which could favor some figures and disempower others.

Even though the cabinet overhaul would not break parties’ control over the state, it might be a first step to changing the power balance among and within Shiite parties. During the latest cabinet overhaul, the Sadrists replaced their three ministers with technocrats who will likely consolidate al-Ahrar’s power base through the appointments they can effect within their respective ministries. Moreover, the change of minister is less relevant than what will happen to the rank-and-file at each ministry, which is where the parties’ reservoirs of power lie. In the name of reforms, al-Ahrar could purge top officials and rank-and-file personnel affiliated with other parties, or it could reserve this power to use as a trump card in negotiations with other parties.

A power struggle within Abadi’s Daawa party is also escalating. Abadi has tried to use the cabinet overhaul to partner with other groups – as in the deal with al-Ahrar to replace five ministers – and erode the abiding power of former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his allies. The more success Abadi has in replacing ministers, the more likely he is to erode Maliki’s power base. Maliki, now Daawa’s secretary-general, is meanwhile reaching out to parties that oppose a second cabinet overhaul to prevent a parliament vote, thereby further weakening the prime minister while keeping the party under his sway. If Abadi is skilful in navigating the crisis, he could leverage international and regional support to strike a series of temporary deals with Kurdish and Sunni factions, as he did with the Sadrists. This is not likely to reform the quota system for the short term but it will strengthen his position vis-a-vis other Shiite parties and, most importantly, within his own.

**External pressure will be key in determining power shifts within party leaderships. The breakdown of the post-2003 order would pose a challenge for the Iranians as much as for the Americans.** After the recent crisis, the U.S. and Iran have already moved in the same direction because both have an interest in preventing the complete unravelling of the country. Over the past decade, the U.S. has competed with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Iraq within a shared framework of parties and institutions. Now that this system is starting to collapse, the challenge for both powers is to find the right partners to help protect and project their influence. It is this external pressure that could induce new domestic agreements and power shifts among parties’ leaderships, and thereby perhaps dramatically reshape the post-2003 political system.

**Spasms or Solutions**

Domestically, the challenge ahead is how to manage the street’s expectations. Sadr has stirred up protesters’ expectations and left it to others to broker a deal that will satisfy them. If al-Ahrar continues to raise the stakes in order to gain more leverage, then there is little chance parliament will be able to reach a quorum and convene to vote on a change of government. The Sadrists will likely bolster their position as street leaders outside the Green Zone, and political parties will respond by obstruction change from within the Green Zone, practically disempowering the country’s institutional framework. The storming of parliament and calls for the dismissal of the three presidencies risk pushing the country into a void in which parties and their affiliated militias simply slug it out against one another.

**The course of the U.S.-Iran relationship will also factor into the equation.** At this stage, only pressure from Washington and Tehran on political parties could impose the constraints needed to keep the country together. Both sides have an interest in keeping the current framework alive, but this requires entering into day-to-day bargaining to change the power balance within Iraqi political parties. Both the U.S. and Iran might have to shift their approach away from supporting specific parties arrayed against each other towards managing the crisis through a division of labor, in which each would use its economic and military power to put limits on the various Iraqi players. In a volatile regional climate, the risk is that Iran
could push Iraq toward the brink as a way of exerting pressure on the U.S. to make concessions there or on other regional frontlines. Such a dangerous political play might place an even greater strain on the country’s institutional framework. The post-2003 system may no longer be working, but it will prove very difficult to reform. Any abrupt change could generate further instability caused by either excluded leadership or weakening state institutions. We cannot expect Abadi to be able to break the interdependence between political parties and state institutions. At best, the U.S. and Iran will coordinate to manage the crisis and the prime minister will leverage their relationship to institute stop-gap measures that will contain the street and prevent the intra-Shiite power balance – both within the Shiite bloc and within his own Daawa party – from turning against him. In other words, he will have to walk a fine line between managing the street, maintaining the current balance of forces, and preventing the entire institutional framework from collapsing.”

International Crisis Group (ICG), ”Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq’s 'Generation 2000’” Report 169 / Middle East & North Africa 8 August 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iraq/fight-or-flight-desperate-plight-iraq-s-generation-2000, reported, "Beset by political dysfunction, endemic corruption and a jihadist threat, Iraq is squandering its greatest asset: its youth. By failing to provide a vision and concrete prospects for the future, it is pressing young men into the straitjacket of jobs-through-patronage, pushing them into combat with either the Islamic State (IS) or Shiite militias or inducing them to emigrate. Arguably, the government faces more pressing challenges: pushing IS out, ensuring that subsequent governance does not further alienate the local population, instituting overdue reforms and tackling corruption. Yet, it will not succeed if it does not at the same time develop a strategy for creating a meaningful place in politics and society for the young. They are the country’s most important resource; abandoning them could turn them into the most important threat to national and regional security.

The leadership’s inability to forge a future for “Generation 2000”, which grew up after Saddam Hussein’s fall, has turned it into easy quarry for predators, be they IS, Shiite militias or populists preaching Iraqi nationalism. The potential for mobilizing large numbers of young men at loose ends as pawns in violent conflicts has enabled both IS and Shiite militias to gain recruits. In the process, it has compounded sectarian polarization and widened the divide between street and elites. Fed by fresh pools of fighting-age men, local tensions and conflicts proliferate and escalate, destabilizing the country and the surrounding region. The most powerful Shiite militias receive training and advice from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, have an ideological orientation consistent with Tehran’s and can be deployed as proxies outside Iraq as well.

The familiar expression “youth radicalization” distorts the reality that an entire generation is adrift, in need of a dramatically new state-led approach. Young Iraqis whose formative years were in the post-2003 turmoil have much more in common than they suspect, whatever side of local conflicts they are on, but they have been increasingly socialized within communal confines and left to the mercy of radical groups that promote dehumanized, even demonized perceptions of one another. Before violence engulfed Iraq again, with the rise of IS, youth had attempted to peacefully hold the political class accountable for years of dismal governance. Sunni Arabs staged sit-ins in several towns in 2013, questioning national leaders, including senior Sunnis. They met with repression, leaving scores dead, many more in prison. These events paved the way for IS, which seized Falluja, the Sunni town nearest Baghdad, Mosul and other majority-Sunni towns in June 2014.

The collapse of the Iraqi army triggered a Shiite call to arms. Militia commanders quickly tapped into youthful disappointment with the Shiite political establishment, turning it into sectarian mobilization against IS. By summer 2015, IS’s battlefield fortunes had turned, even as it continued to control territory and population. The absence of services, especially electricity shortages in the searing summer, stimulated a popular movement in Baghdad and other majority-Shiite areas reflecting a general sense of frustration with the political establishment.

Youths flocking to either side of the sectarian divide faulted ruling elites on the same grounds but ended up fighting each other. The political class’ response has been to protect its interests by divide and rule, redirecting anger into fratricidal tensions. Iraq’s external supporters compound the problem by boxing a rudderless generation into distinct categories – fighters, protesters or emigrants – and taking a different
undercut demands and an effort to strengthen border controls to keep out migrants. Putting the emphasis on fighting IS, in particular, translates into tolerance of the Shiite militias, whose rise has contributed to sectarian polarization and empowered a militia culture that compels young professionals to emigrate while boosting commanders’ political ambitions.

The government’s reform capacity may be limited, yet it must address its youth crisis as its top priority if it is to hold Iraq together. It will need the help of its sponsors, Iran included, which appear more concerned with the fight against IS. It should start by devising a youth policy, presented as a multiyear plan premised on the notion that young people need avenues for participation and advancement outside the political parties’ discredited co-option via patronage.

A first step would be to acknowledge that, isolated within the Green Zone, it has limited tools to harness youths’ energies, but also to recognize that it has advantages over non-state actors, including ability to legislate. Rather than create new structures and methods, it should embrace those used by the militias and IS and absorb youths into the state’s legal framework, security forces or civilian agencies, including as volunteers in public works. It should convert the volunteer combat groups set up in 2014 (hashd al-shaabi) into a civilian mobilization directed to rebuilding communities within the framework of local administrations. It should likewise recruit Sunni youths in areas IS vacates and engage them in local reconstruction projects. Paying a new cohort of state employees salaries and benefits is a challenge, when reduced oil income forces significant belt-tightening, but the government should build a fund for this purpose and at least give written guarantees of a steady income, a pension and other benefits. It should also organize any further military recruitment strictly under the army.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and UN agencies must ask if their policies actually help the government in such an approach. External aid that reaches youths solely through local intermediaries risks further isolating the government in the Green Zone and reinforcing young people’s isolation in their communities, while driving them toward more dependence on local patrons and militia commanders. Unless such support gives the government a central role, it will contribute to the state’s erosion and encourage local struggles over power and resources without an effective national arbiter. Just as a country’s progress can be measured by the extent to which it engages its youth, so its demise as a viable entity can be predicted by the absence of a forward-looking youth policy and the drift of a generation into self-destructive combat or desperate flight. Iraq’s youth and the country deserve better.

II. Introduction

Two years after the Islamic State (IS) captured major Sunni population centres, Iraqi government forces struggle to regain them in a multi-front war, supported by a U.S.-led coalition and Iranian military advice. As they make halting progress, a largely youth-led protest, which erupted in August 2015, forced Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to announce an ambitious reform program to replace his party-dominated government with a technocratic cabinet and tackle corruption.[fn]See, International Crisis Group, “Iraq: Conflict Alert”, 24 August 2015.[/fn]Hide Footnote In February 2016, the protests surged again, led by Moqtada al-Sadr, an activist cleric able to claim distance from the establishment and with unique appeal to Baghdad’s Shiite slums. The crisis climaxed on 30 April. Sadr’s followers scaled the walls of the Green Zone, the Baghdad area where government institutions are located, and stormed parliament to press Abadi on his promises. Tensions abated only as Abadi announced an offensive in Falluja, under IS control since 2014. Young men recruited into Shiite militias fought an enemy there drawn from the same pool of Iraq’s young, but Sunni. Others fled domestic turmoil for Europe.

These seemingly separate events are different faces of the same phenomenon. A pervasive aimlessness and lack of prospects among youths has fuelled recruitment to IS and Shiite militias, brought protesters into the streets and convinced others to emigrate. Iraqis between fifteen and 24 are nearly 20 per cent of the population.[fn]See “Demographic Indicators”, Central Statistics Organization. A 2014 Index Mundi database reports that the fifteen to 24 age group has been steadily increasing in the last 30 years and is now some 6.5 million out of 32 million. Hide They grew up in the wake of the 2003 U.S. invasion in a deeply dysfunctional state, dependent on local patrons or Baghdad politicians who offered access to jobs, resources and careers. Economically and communally diverse, what unites these youths is a profound sense of hopelessness, disempowerment and lack of direction. A local NGO leader in Baghdad stated

I call them the “wearyed” generation (al-jil al-taabaan) or the generation of chaos (jil al-fawda). The state has untraveled, the family structure is crumbling, and these young people cannot find work. They have come into a world that offers them no points of reference.

This report, which is based on research, including extensive interviews, conducted in Baghdad and the provinces, retraces the phases of this young generation’s emergence over the past fifteen years (outside the Kurdish region, where different forms of these dynamics are at play). While it refers at times to the situation of women, its primary focus is on young men, who are the ones to join fighting groups and the first in their families to go abroad in search of better opportunities. Women are active in some street protests and join settled husbands abroad; while they do not become fighters, they may give important succor to their male relatives who do. It should be clear, however, that the same failing youth policies that have produced a lost generation of young men are also reducing opportunities for young women, whose potential for Iraq’s development – and their own – is thus tragically forfeited.

III. The Degeneration of Iraq’s Youth

A. Pre-2003

The millennial generation’s plight flows from the cumulative impact of decades of state decline and decay. Despite much political turmoil during the first two decades after the monarchy was overthrown in 1958, the military leaders enabled considerable social mobility via land reforms that broke up a semi-feudal system, prompting rapid demographic expansion and urbanization. Oil money helped address a growing urban population’s needs, including by giving students scholarships, social benefits and prospects for public-sector careers.[fn]Between 1958 and 1977 state employees rose from 20,000 to nearly a million, including soldiers and pensioners. After 1991, nearly 40 per cent of households lived on government salaries. Isam al-Khafaji, “War as a Vehicle for the Rise and Demise of a State-Controlled Society: The Case of Ba’athist Iraq”, in Steven Heydemann (ed.), War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East (Berkeley, 2000). The regime benefited from the formula its predecessor negotiated with international oil companies in 1952, which gave it a 50-per-cent profit share of operations, and other agreements that yielded larger sales revenues. Abbas Alnasrawi, The Economy of Iraq: Oil, Wars, Destruction of Development and Prospects, 1950-2010 (London, 2010), pp. 2-3. On modernization, Isam al-Khafaji, “The Myth of Iraqi Exceptionalism”, Middle East Policy (2000). Hide Footnote

The Baath party regime that seized power in 1968 implemented socio-economic policies that aimed to enable careers to which youths could aspire. It also provided housing and access to consumer goods, essential ingredients for starting a family, while keeping prospects for social advancement and political association under tight control.[fn]In Saddam Hussein’s words, “if you catch the youth, you catch the future”. Quoted in Eric Davis, Memories of the State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq (Berkeley, 2005), p. 1. During the 1970s, the youth ministry promoted youth associations and sports clubs. During the Iraq-Iran war, the Baath party launched a literary journal, al-Talia al-Adabia, (The Literary Vanguard), dedicated to young writers praising the war effort. See ibid.

Since the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, however, youths have had neither normalcy nor a sense of progress. That war compelled the regime to shift from redistributive policies to military mobilization and massive arms expenditures. Iraq lost hundreds of thousands of its young men while being saddled with a large financial debt and the burdens of a million-strong army. Cutting benefits and services, the regime fell back on paternalistic measures favoring only loyalists.[fn]In an example of the economic breakdown the war precipitated, university libraries stopped buying new books in 1986, beginning a twenty-year hiatus in education. Meanwhile, soldiers who had killed more than twenty Iranian soldiers were rewarded with 5,000 Iraqi dinars (ID) (nearly $15,000) or more. See Zaid al-Zaidi, Al-Bina’a al-ma’nawi li al-quwwat al musallaha al ‘Iraqiya (Beirut, 1995), pp. 324-325. (Before the UN imposed sanctions on Iraq in 1990, a dinar was worth about $3. After sanctions, the dinar plummeted and at times fluctuated significantly. Today, the U.S. dollar is worth about ID 1,200. Dinar-dollar equivalents cited in the report attempt to reflect the rate at the time of the event or period discussed.) Within two years, it invaded Kuwait, an attempted takeover of a wartime creditor that ended in defeat and was followed by brutally suppressed uprisings.

In the next decade, as state institutions crumbled and living conditions deteriorated under UN sanctions, young people, regardless of education or qualifications, had to get by on meagre government
salaries or devise other means to survive in a ruined country that offered few prospects of return to the prosperity of the 1970s. Saddam Hussein’s regime stayed afloat by naked repression and recruiting young men from destitute areas into its security apparatus, including new militias such as Saddam’s Fighters (Fedayeen Saddam), and giving them status, uniforms, guns and a basic salary in return for blind loyalty.[fn]See Pierre Darle, Saddam Hussein, maître des mots: du langage de la tyrannie à la tyrannie du langage (Paris, 2003). Created in 1994, Fedayeen Saddam was a militia that recruited uneducated men in their twenties. Paramilitary youth organisations subsequently expanded, drawing ever-younger recruits. Founded in 1998, Saddam’s Lion Cubs (Ashbal Saddam) prepared teenagers to become good Fedayeen. Saddam’s Jihaz al-Himaya al-Khaas security guard recruited youths in their mid-twenties from poor areas, most of whom had not finished studies, and trained them in techniques like assassination and recruiting informants. Isam al-Khafaji, “State Terror and the Degradation of Politics in Iraq”, Middle East Report, no. 176 (1994), p. 18 Hide By 2003, society had been degraded materially, apsychologically and organizationally.

B. The U.S. Occupation

Post-invasion blunders, combined with the UN embargo’s devastating legacy, burdened the U.S. struggle to control, rule and rebuild. The invasion and subsequent attempt to remake Iraq reshuffled the ruling elite, empowering regime opponents back from exile with little connection to the population, governing skills or experience.[fn]See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°52, The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict, 27 February 2006. Hide Footnote The cadres trained (typically on scholarships abroad) and empowered in the earlier state-building process had reached retirement age, creating a gap filled by the returnees and those who benefited from the massive U.S. cash influx and resulting social mobility that disrupted hierarchies.

The new leaders inherited an oil-dependent country whose largest employer remained the state. Rather than diversifying the economy, they sought to control ministries to appropriate resources and build a popular base by offering supporters jobs in return for loyalty. The political system the U.S. created with the elected 2005 Transitional Government encouraged political-party appropriation of state institutions. Ostensibly designed to ensure equitable representation of ethnic and religious communities (the muhasasa, “allotment” principle), it encouraged the spread of party-based patronage networks throughout the public sector. Majeeda al-Timimi, a parliamentary finance committee member, explained:[fn]Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 July 2015. After 2005, applicants needed a recommendation letter (tazkiya) from a party to be hired, especially in the bureaucracy’s upper ranks – directors-general (mudir aam) and their deputies (naaib). Crisis Group Middle East Report N°55, Iraq’s Moqtada al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabilizer?, 11 July 2006, p. 15.

Before 2003, the planning ministry was tasked with posting vacancies for each ministry and following up recruitment. After 2005, in order to respect the principle of muhasasa, we decided that each minister should be in charge of employment in his ministry. But each minister represented a political party and would recruit only from within his party.

The public sector remained almost the sole source of jobs, but Iraqis could access and rise in it only through affiliation with the newly empowered parties. This increased the gulf between politicians, ensconced within the capital’s heavily fortified Green Zone, and ordinary citizens. Unable or disinclined to play the party-patronage game, some joined either a budding insurgency organized by ex-regime elements and Islamist radicals – initially mixed but ultimately mostly Sunni – or the Mahdi army (Jaysh al-Mahdi), a militia led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, who recruited youths from impoverished urban areas and turned them into vigilantes. Beyond the prospect of earning an income, what mobilized these youths was a sense of empowerment and ability to confront a foreign occupation.[fn]Ex-Fedayeen Saddam were the most effective fighters against the U.S. in Basra in 2003 and Najaf in 2004 but soon split up into the Mahdi army and various insurgent groups. Sadr, youngest son of a prominent Shiite cleric murdered by the regime, portrayed himself as personifying poor, jobless youths unable to find a place in the new system. Peter Harling, “Iraq’s Lost Generation”, Al-Quds al-Arabi, 11 December 2007.

Over time, these movements grew larger, more sectarian and more violent, engaging young members in a contest over ownership of the capital in particular. The Mahdi army expanded its reach over Baghdad, evolving into a gang-style militia even Sadr could not control.[fn]See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°72, Iraq’s Civil War: the Sadrists and the Surge, 7 February 2008, Section II. Al-Qaeda and other
insurgent groups proliferated and grew in Baghdad’s outskirts and neighboring Anbar governorate, where they found a deep pool of young recruits. Those who faced off in the growing sectarian war were each other’s peers.

Starting in 2007, the U.S. “surge” pushed back these groups and suppressed their appeal, but by largely relying on patronage to co-opt their upper echelons, a resurgent government further strained links between the youths and their nominal leaders. The U.S. military gave large sums of money to Sunni tribal chiefs who organized their youths in tribally-based militias (Majalis al-Sahwa, Awakening Councils) to push al-Qaeda out of their areas. The government replicated this in the south with the Majalis al-Isnaad (Support Councils), heaping money on tribal leaders to undermine the Mahdi army’s appeal among Shiite youth.[fn]On the tribes’ counter-insurgency role, see Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°74, Iraq after the Surge I, The New Sunni Landscape, 30 April 2008; and Iraq’s Civil War, op. cit.

This policy gave Sunni insurgents and Shiite militiamen salaries and prospects of jobs as police or soldiers, but it also funneled enormous resources to tribal figures who often pocketed them. Access to public-sector jobs remained limited to those with connections to political party figures, thus keeping some militia commanders and ex-insurgents off the government payroll. It was a quick fix, perhaps needed at the time to roll back al-Qaeda, but one that reinforced patron-client relationships and failed to reintegrate fighters into civilian life.

C. The Maliki Years

From 2009, the steady growth of oil production (based on new contracts with companies such as BP and Shell) gave Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (2006-2014) and his party sufficient money to buy social peace and project an illusion of stability.[fn]From 2009, oil exports rose to above two million barrels per day at a time when the barrel price exceeded $100. Some 90 per cent of Iraq’s budget derives from oil exports, a sector that, in 2014, employed less than 2 per cent of the population. After 2009, state revenues doubled. “Iraq Budget 2013”, Joint-Analysis Policy Unit, January 2014; and “Republic of Iraq, Public Expenditure Review”, World Bank, August 2014, Chapters I-II. However, Maliki’s bold style concealed a fragile, dysfunctional state.

Maliki’s Islamic Daawa party, an elitist group of middle-class professionals formerly in exile or underground, cleverly managed Green Zone politics but did little more than dispense public-sector jobs and funds to its constituents. Oil-income redistribution was limited to the public sector, including substantial allocations for recruiting youths to the security forces.[fn]Since 2009, defense expenditures have steadily risen, reaching 20 per cent of the state budget in 2013. Joint-Analysis Policy Unit, op. cit. The interior and defense ministries had nearly 700,000 and 300,000 employees in 2012, respectively, matched only by the education ministry, with nearly 650,000. See “Republic of Iraq, Public Expenditure”, op. cit., p. 115. Government youth initiatives merely perpetuated party dominance over local and national institutions. In 2006, Jasem Mohammed Jaafar, youth and sports minister and a member of the Turkmen Islamic Union, a Shiite Islamist party with close Daawa ties, established and funded youth local committees (lijan shababiya) and a Youth Parliament (Barlaman al-Shababi). Both were dominated by members handpicked by Daawa and allied parties. Recruitment favored persons who shared family ties or a social profile with party leaders. Funds were thus redistributed to committees that essentially were a junior adaptation of the country’s leadership.[fn]A former Youth Parliament member explained the selection process: “The [youth and sports] ministry selected local youth committee members through an online selection process based on applicants’ course work, educational degree and experience. A high-school diploma was a minimum requirement. In turn, youth committees elected representatives to the Youth Parliament from among their members. Political parties fully controlled the selection process. Most ... candidates ... had political parties supporting their application, while those competing for the parliament even had parties funding their campaigns”. Crisis Group Skype interview, 12 March 2016. Following the change in government in 2014, the youth ministry had a minister from the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI), who removed Youth Parliament funding. Separately, in 2013, the Sadr-controlled planning ministry signed a four-year National Development Plan in coordination with the U.S. Agency for International Development, which identified youth among its targets. The plan had achieved little when a year later, a new minister from the Mouttahidoun bloc changed priorities and redirected funds to reconstruction in areas recovered from IS. Read text of National Development Plan.
The revenue bonanza accelerated trends that had surfaced during the sanctions decade. Party leaders were the tip of the patronage pyramid, redistributing resources across state institutions and so perpetuating and exacerbating the favouritism and corruption long rife in public administration. Parties' grip on state institutions and administrative corruption were mutually reinforcing. Lower-ranking members gave bribes for senior appointments, enabling them to take kickbacks from subordinates or clients in turn. This disproportionately benefited senior managers with party connections at the expense of mid-rank civil servants, whose salaries stagnated as costs rose, directly affecting the quality of services. Through party connections teachers tried to obtain posts that would give them the chance to demand bribes from students; party-connected officers received senior appointments that allowed them to take a portion of their subordinates' pay. Crisis Group Middle East Report N°113, Failing Oversight: Iraq's Unchecked Government, 26 September 2011. Politicians would sell managerial positions to the highest bidders among their supporters to extract kickbacks. A 30-year-old engineer said, “The position of engineering college dean is highly profitable. To get it, you need to pay some 150 million ID [nearly $135,000]. Any companies that need their projects approved by the dean before submitting them to the government would have to pay him at least 25 million ID [nearly $20,000] for each project; in this way you can earn back quite quickly what you spent for the position”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 July 2015. Also, Zaid al-Ali, The Struggle for Iraq's Future: How Corruption, Incompetence and Sectarianism Have Undermined Democracy (Yale, 2014).

Through party connections teachers tried to obtain posts that would give them the chance to demand bribes from students; party-connected officers received senior appointments that allowed them to take a portion of their subordinates' pay. A teacher explained: “The education ministry decides where to post high-school teachers: in Baghdad or the provinces. Political parties influence the ... choice by appointing their supporters in the capital where students tend to be wealthier and can pay bribes to pass exams or see questions in advance. Parliament will never approve a law to regulate teachers' postings, because parties would lose their power over the process”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 July 2015.

Education exemplified the vicious circle that directly affected youths. Many teachers supplemented incomes by giving private instruction, thus assuming a workload that conflicted with their day jobs. Students whose families could not afford to pay for private instruction in some form were less equipped to pass exams required for the public-sector jobs they coveted. A sixteen-year-old girl from Baghdad’s Sadr City neighbourhood said, “I have continued attending public school, because my family cannot afford a private teacher, who charges 50,000 ID (nearly $45) per class. The boys in our family quit their studies after primary school in or...". Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 July 2015. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 July 2015. The public health system suffers from similar dysfunctions. Only freshly graduated, inexperienced doctors are in public hospitals, working more than ten hours a day, six days a week. Older, more experienced doctors only work for money they earn by establishing private clinics. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, July 2015.

Private-school students have a greater chance to do well in exams. Their teachers know which topics to prep .... If something goes wrong, their families come to me and say, “but we are paying you!”, expecting their children to pass .... So teachers sell exam questions to students to make sure they succeed.

As services deteriorated, many Iraqis felt entitled to loot the state. In one example, some hospitals are known to sell drugs to people with privileged access, who resell them at a personal profit. Crisis Group observations, Baghdad, July 2015. Crisis Group observations, Baghdad, July 2015. Many also turned to state jobs, less from a public duty sense than to ensure a basic livelihood. The survival culture fashioned in the sanctions era became further entrenched, reaching the point of putting a price on inter-personal relationships, as tribal leaders who benefited from state patronage monetized ties with members, losing youths’ respect and loyalty in the process. A tribal leader in Kirkuk complained: Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, 20 October 2015.
After 2003, we had to connect with the stronger parties to get money and weapons to protect our land and satisfy our members. Then insurgent groups came and supplied our young with more money and more powerful weapons than we could. The [*"surge"] temporarily resolved the problem, but as soon as it ended, I had nothing to offer my tribe. Before 2003, the tribal leader was the intermediary between tribe and state. If any problem arose, it was up to him to negotiate and settle it. He was a symbol (ramz). But today the young just want weapons and money. If they can’t get them from us, they get them elsewhere. This has broken the line of allegiance between a tribe’s leader and members.

Even the nuclear family was weakened, to the point that, in some extreme cases, relatives began to abuse each other. Some fathers encouraged or even forced their daughters to marry and divorce repeatedly to collect a bride’s price multiple times; in other cases, parents turned a blind eye to sexual abuse of under-age children to extract compensation from the abuser’s tribe. The OWFI reported a rise in divorces as a result of parents pressing daughters to marry young or girls’ and boys’ haste to marry to escape their household: “In 2015 [w]e have registered at least 4,150 divorces in Baghdad, a record number. A family sees a man with a new car who proposes to their daughter, and they agree to marriage without even checking how he was able to buy the car. Then they discover he is jobless, and problems begin”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 July 2015. Crisis Group spoke with a sixteen-year-old boy from Sadr City who said he had been a victim of sexual abuse. His father threw him out of the house while obtaining financial compensation from the culprits, which he pocketed. Other interviews suggested a wider trend.

IV. Generation 2000

The patronage system that ensured Maliki’s and the political establishment’s survival froze politics around a small network of persons, undermined possibilities for leadership renewal within parties, further eroded governance and, while appearing to have achieved social peace, laid the ground for new turmoil. The millennial generation has grown up with vanishing reference points in both public and private spheres and few prospects. Each task is an encounter with a Green Zone-controlled patronage network whose tentacles spread throughout the corrupt bureaucracy, seeming to envelop the country’s life. What should be simple bureaucratic procedures become interminable processes as a way of generating income throughout the bureaucracy. A 26-year-old man recounted his experience renewing a driver’s license: “I wanted to do it without bribing anyone. I first did an eye exam at a health ministry branch, which I took to the traffic police … in charge of renewing driver’s licenses, and the process became endless. They asked me for an official paper from my neighbourhood administrator proving my residence in Baghdad …. Then they asked me for the signatures of the head of the provincial council and the mayor …. the owner of a nearby barbershop told me the only way to speed things up would be to pay an extra 50,000 ID (nearly $45) to the directorate’s cashier”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 July 2015. A Sadr City teenager was typical: “I was born here in 2000. We grew up with thirteen children in the same flat of 36 sq. meters. When I finished primary school, I began working in the central market for 5,000 ID [less than $5] per day”. Crisis Group observations, interview, July 2015. Entering the job market young, men may rush to marry, but those able to earn enough to pay the bride’s price often lack funds to rent a small apartment. Continuing to live with family can create tensions between spouses and in-laws and other problems. A twenty-year-old woman recounted:

My father was murdered in the 2007 sectarian war. Three years ago I agreed to marry a man I had met only twice. I moved in with him and his mother. My mother-in-law continually asked me for money, and when I did not comply, she incited my husband to beat me. When I gave birth to a boy, my husband divorced me, and I never saw the child again. My family refused to take me back, so I found myself in the
I had no other choice but to work in a night club in Karrada [Baghdad central district], where I got pregnant again. The police raided the club, and I went to prison where I gave birth to my second child.

Lack of prospects also affects the educated middle class. Professionals are no longer at the top of the social pyramid, as salaries have not kept up with costs. New doctors and engineers can hardly afford to rent in their own neighborhoods, so are reluctant to marry on starting income. A university degree, unlike party ties, no longer guarantees that graduates can practice their professions.\[fn\]A schoolteacher’s average monthly salary does not exceed $400; a doctor's average start is $600-$650. Neither is enough to rent an apartment and live in a Baghdad middle-class area like Mansour, Harethiya or Karrada, with $500-$1,000 rents. Crisis Group observation, July 2015.Hide Footnote Regardless of sect or economic background, youths are confronted with a choice: complicity with the patronage system, find a way to circumvent it, join a military group or leave. Many fight with or against IS or try a dangerous journey to Europe because it offers better prospects than trying to navigate a suffocating reality.

A. Isolation, Ghettoization and an Evolving Sectarianism

Generation 2000’s early experience was the 2005-2007 sectarian war, which drew invisible, insurmountable boundaries between cities and provinces and between communities that demarcated themselves by ethnic and confessional identities. The “surge” reinforced isolation of groups in Baghdad, separating them by concrete walls. After the 2011 U.S. troop withdrawal, the Maliki government retained these and imposed restrictions on mobility, in some cases limiting neighbourhood entry to residents. With the heritage of sectarian divide, these steps further restricted young people’s social connections. For many, relationships were limited to their localities, which often overlapped with their ethnic or confessional group.\[fn\]See on the civil war, Crisis Group Report, The Next Iraqi War?, op. cit., on security measures under Maliki, Crisis Group Report, Iraq’s Sunnis, op. cit., and Amin Sade, “Obstructing Reforms”, Sada, 8 August 2013. The divide affects practices, habits and relations. A Baghdad twenty-year-old said, “if you want to go out, you feel you cannot. Even friendship is complicated; you never know who you can trust”. Crisis Group interview, 29 July 2015. Most southern youths have visited only Karbala and Najaf for pilgrimages, never a Sunni area or Baghdad. Those born in Ramadi, have rarely visited Baghdad, not 90 minutes away. Crisis Group observations, 2013-2015.

Those now in their late twenties participated in or saw the street fighting known as al-ahdath al-taefiya (the sectarian events). Relatives or friends were killed or forced to leave neighborhoods depending on their sect. The millennials experienced displacements as children; by teen years, the barriers had solidified.

\[fn\]Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, July 2015. Sunnis are more likely to be on the receiving end of discriminatory practices. While the former generation knew sectarian divisions and participated in the fighting, the present one has grown up with sectarianism as an a priori condition that constrains friendships, mobility, marriage choices and daily practices.\[fn\]An OWFI member said, “the practice of intra-family marriage is on the rise even among middle-class professionals. Parents prefer to marry their daughters to family members or people of the same neighbourhood”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 July 2015.Hide Footnote Elders with civil war memories avoid certain areas, but young Iraqis barely know such localities. A twenty-year-old born and raised in Mahmoudiya, a Shiite town south of Baghdad, said of a neighboring Sunni town he has never seen, "in Latifiya, they have services because they are Sunnis. Here, because we are Shiite, we don't have anything, except the marjaeya. If Daesh [IS] enters Mahmoudiya, the Latifiya Sunnis will transfer allegiance and side with them”.\[fn\]Crisis Group interview, 23 July 2015. A Shiite from Baghdad’s Karrada neighbourhood called Latifiya an “al-Qaeda cradle”. Crisis Group interview, July 2015. The marjaeya is the source of emulation in Shiite religious tradition, in Iraq embodied by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. In a near-mirror image, a 30-year-old Sunni from Baghdad’s Mansour neighbourhood, echoing perceptions rooted in the civil war, said he considered Mahmoudiya dangerous: “you can hardly drive [there] and expect to get out in one piece”.\[fn\]Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, July 2015.

Geographical isolation has nurtured sectarianism by locking youths within the boundaries of their community.\[fn\]Isolation cemented local identities even within the same sect. Thus, the large majority of Mahmoudiya youth have never visited Baghdad’s Sadr City (its largest Shiite neighbourhood) despite it also being Shiite-populated and a mere twenty kilometers away. A Mahmoudiya resident said he considered this “a dangerous trip”. Sadr City residents, in turn, would be surprised to hear of anyone having visited
confronted each other in the streets during the sectarian war, young people from different sects now have competing representations of reality that depend on the narratives to which they are exposed within their localities rather than direct experience. The gulf between those competing representations has become sharper since the rise of IS. A Shiite student from Baghdad comparing 2006 with today said, “there is no longer a difference between Shiites and Sunnis in Baghdad. No one will ask you what you are at a checkpoint”, but this contrasted with the view of a Sunni youth in Baghdad, who perceived sectarian discrimination on the rise: “Now they know immediately who is Sunni or Shiite without even checking your ID or your name as before. They look at the type of car you drive, the way you dress, the way you greet them”.

B. Growing Anti-establishment Sentiment
The degradation of state institutions nurtured feelings among youths of disdain toward political leaders. Asked for an opinion, the answer frequently is “bas yaboog”, a dialect expression meaning “they just steal”. Youths regularly accuse them of pocketing public resources and constraining individual aspirations. In the words of a young man who frequents the park on Mutanabbi Street (a rare Baghdad place where youths still gather Friday mornings):[fn]Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 July 2015.

In Iraq, nowadays, all you need to be a successful politician are weapons and fighters. The only thing politicians know well is how to steal, steal, steal [bug, bug, bug]. They are anti-people: they invade and occupy each corner and aspect of our life. They are the main reason for this [IS] conflict. The state is a failure. When I see a soldier, I do not respect him .... The army is a cowardly bunch.

Though these feelings are widely shared across sectarian lines, young people are divided in expressing them. The sentiments have surfaced within civil society initiatives that sought to broaden their local dimension, but isolation within localities and sects has made youth mobilization on a national scale difficult. The protests that began in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria in 2011 had a unique character in Iraq. Protesters expressed a common theme of fighting corruption and bad governance, but the movements that erupted against local politicians in Baghdad, Basra and even Suleimaniya in Iraqi Kurdistan remained largely disconnected.[fn]See Marina Ottaway and Daniel Kaysi, “Iraq: Protests, Democracy, Autocracy”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 28 March 2011. Civil society initiatives remain largely local. Ahmad Thamer Jihad, “Don’t leave Iraq to thieves and murderers”, Niqash, 5 November 2015.

Youths shared an emotive impulse against the status quo but seemed disinclined to establish a political movement against the country’s leadership.

The millennial generation has an amorphous identity: depending on the context and who seeks to mobilize them, ethnic, sectarian, tribal, locally geographic or other sub-national identity will emerge as the avenue through which members see and challenge the establishment. Iraqi youth were the most vulnerable to deepening sectarian polarization after the Syrian uprising, and this pitted young against young along sectarian lines even as they all shared an anti-establishment animus.

V. Mobilization for Combat
A. A Dying Insurgency’s Revival
In 2012, Syria’s uprising became a full-scale war involving neighboring powers (Iran, the Gulf monarchies and Turkey) that polarized the region partly along sectarian lines. Iraq, the geographic epicenter, was quickly affected, prompting re-mobilization of ex-insurgents and militia members. A protest movement allegedly funded by Gulf sources emerged in Sunni areas. Anti-establishment feelings boiled over in protests whose civil-society character mixed with symbols of a sect or geographic area. Clerics, tribal leaders and branches of the old Islamist and nationalist insurgency organized tent sit-ins and “protest squares” in the main majority-Sunni cities, Ramadi, Samarra, Hawija and Mosul. Twenty-year-old clerics and tribal leaders enlivened Friday prayers, and teenagers joined in, making the protest squares a social gathering as well as expression of political engagement.

Compounded by government failure to offer prospects to especially the masses of idle entrants into adult life, the protests acquired a stronger political overtone. In May 2013, special forces cracked down on a tent sit-in Hawija, killing at least 50 and rekindling revenge sentiments among those in their late twenties who retained vivid memory of the sectarian-driven repression they had experienced the previous decade and whose insurgency had failed to defeat the Shiite-dominated government.[fn]See Crisis Group
Middle East Report N°50, Falluja’s Faustian Bargain, 28 April 2014, p. 9. While elders tried to contain the situation, young and ambitious clerics and tribal leaders incited Friday audiences.[fn]Two clerics in their twenties, Sheikh Saeed al-Lafi from Ramadi and Qusay al-Zein from Falluja, emerged as prominent Friday prayer protest leaders in the squares. For an overview of Sunni youth protests and government response, see Crisis Group Report, Iraq’s Sunnis, op. cit. Their aggressive rhetoric caught on among teenagers who had hardly been outside their own cities and whose experience of the government and Shiites was often limited to unpleasant interactions with security forces.[fn]A former insurgency member taking part in a sit-in said, “we think that the armed opposition did not achieve its goals in Iraq and that America handed Iraq to Iran and the Shiites. Factions of the former resistance have been scattered across the country, but we are counting on the success of the Syrian revolution, which will provide us with a surplus of men and weapons. Maliki’s government fully realizes this. We see in these protests a chance to liberate Iraq from Iran”. Crisis Group interview, Erbil, 14 February 2013; Crisis Group Report, Iraq’s Sunnis, op. cit., p. 23. An elder tribal leader participating in the protests worried: “We have a hard time controlling our young boys in the protest squares. We organize football matches to keep them busy, but tension is growing by the day. They ache to take on weapons”.[fn]Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Majeed, Ramadi, 9 March 2013.

The government’s attempt to end the protests by co-opting Sunni tribal and political figures disrespected by young people consolidated a partnership between ex-insurgents in their late twenties and Sunni teenagers. The former viewed the jihadist cells scattered across the Iraq-Syria desert since the time of the U.S. occupation as a temporary ally. Both groups welcomed the jihadists’ arrival euphorically, if for different reasons. To ex-insurgents, jihadists were a strong military partner in their desire to revenge the lost battle against the government. Teenagers, with no memory of the jihadists’ al-Qaeda in Iraq incarnation, welcomed them as champions of a new order.[fn]In 2005, under Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi’s leadership, al-Qaeda in Iraq proclaimed an Islamic State. Its authoritarian practices challenged local and tribal values, unleashing an indigenous, U.S.-supported revolt that pushed it out of urban centres into the desert; in 2011, it took advantage of Syria’s chaos to move there and grow. Crisis Group, Iraq after the Surge I, op. cit. A resident of al-Qaim, who witnessed the fall of his border city to IS militants in June 2014, recounted:[fn]Crisis Group email communication, al-Qaim resident living under IS, October 2014. Fifteen fighters entered the city. During Friday prayers they announced they had come to end government injustices and terminate the amnesty police and soldiers enjoyed in the city. Young boys took to the street cheering victory. The jihadists recruited a number of these who had no connection to the insurgency and no affiliation with political parties but were supporters of the protests. They tasked them with ensuring protection of public and private property, without asking them to swear allegiance. Only after weeks of testing their potential were the youths asked to pledge absolute allegiance to Daesh.

Jihadist fighters advanced in city after city, village after village, declaring creation of an Islamic State in June 2014.[fn]For background, see Crisis Group Alert, “Iraq after Hawija: Recovery or Relapse?”, 26 April 2013; Reports, Iraq’s Sunnis and the State, and Iraq: Falluja’s Faustian Bargain, both op. cit.; and Middle East Briefing N°38, Iraq’s Jihadi Jack-in-the-Box, 20 June 2014. Key to their success was ability to direct youths’ anti-establishment sentiments against the entire political class and redefine a confrontation that began between Sunni street and Sunni elites as a sectarian one opposing Sunni provinces and the Shiite-dominated Baghdad government.

B. Militia Commanders Return

Something similar swept across the Shiite provinces. As security in Syria deteriorated, the threat against the Shiite sanctuary of Sayyida Zeinab in Damascus revived memories of the traumatic 2006 bombing of the Al-Askari Mosque in Samarra, apparently by al-Qaeda. From late 2012, Iranian Revolutionary Guards began recruiting Iraqis who had been militia commanders during the U.S. occupation and failed to integrate into the political process afterward. These men reorganized militias or built new ones and sent fighters to Syria under the tolerant eye of the Maliki government and the main Shiite political forces.[fn]Already in mid-2013, nearly 50 fighters weekly were flying from Iraq to Syria to join splinter factions of former Iran-backed militias (the Mahdi army of Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, the Badr Brigade and the Hizbollah Brigades) under command of ex-militia cadres who had not re-integrated in the political process. “Iraqi Shi’ites flock to Assad’s side as sectarian split widens”, Reuters, 19 June 2013. Shiite clerics, often militia commanders’ peers who had climbed to authority in Shiite religious seminars (hawza) and been confined to the shadows after the militia fight ended, also found an opportunity to
regain popularity by supporting such recruitment.[fn]For instance, a man known as Abu Zeinab (nom de guerre), an ex-Mahdi army fighter, was reportedly in charge of organizing recruitment, equipment, bookings and security permits for those flying to Syria. Among others with similar roles in Syria were Sheikh Auws al-Khafaji, another Mahdi army splinter figure, and Sheikh Abu Kamil al-Lami, a member of the Mahdi army offshoot, the League of the Righteous (Asaeb Ahl al-Haq). In February 2013, Wathiq al-Battat, ex-Hizbollah Brigades (Kataeb Hizbollah), founded a new corps, the Mukhtar Army, with the purpose of defending Shiites against attack and sending fighters to Syria. “Iraqi Shii’tes flock to Assad’s side as sectarian split widens”, op. cit.

The 10 June 2014 collapse of the Iraqi army in Mosul exposed the dysfunction and corruption of the government and Shiite political leadership.[fn]The government tolerated the smuggling; fighters flew from Najaf, reportedly directed by a Daawa party member. Yet, before 2014 none of the main Shiite political forces sent fighters to Syria, neither the Badr Brigade, formerly the armed branch of the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq (ISCI), an Iran-backed former opposition group fighting Saddam Hussein’s regime, nor the Mahdi army, the armed branch of the Sadr movement, which received some Iranian backing during the U.S. occupation. Crisis Group interview, Basra, September 2015.Hide Footnote Scenes of IS massacring Shiite army cadets at the Speicher military base went viral on social media, further demonstrating Baghdad’s impotence.[fn]See “Iraq: Islamic State Executions in Tikrit”, Human Rights Watch, 2 September 2014; and Tim Arango, “Escaping death in northern Iraq”, The New York Times, 3 September 2014. A 26-year-old Hizbollah Brigade fighter said:[fn]Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 April 2015.

We can no longer count on the army to defend this country. They are not motivated to fight, while we are sleeping in the dust on the front lines, risking our lives every moment. Army officers are corrupt; they spend their time in luxurious hotels with women and leave the jihadists on the loose in return for money. This country is in ruins.

The fear that IS could advance to Samarra, Karbala and Najaf validated for Shiites, teenagers in particular, the argument of militia commanders and clerics that they should rally to defend their shrines, because Shiite politicians had failed to create a functioning army.[fn]A 24-year-old who fought in Syria said, “the [Iranian] Revolutionary Guards are our brothers; we are part of the same axis, which rejects state borders. I consider [Syrian President] Bashar al-Assad a criminal, but we fought for the protection of Sayyida Zeinab”. Crisis Group interview, 4 April 2015. Another, interviewed on his way to fight in Syria, said, “it is my duty to go there and fight to defend Sayyida Zeinab. Should we see Sayyida Zeinab, the Prophet Mohammed’s grand-daughter, captured again?” Reuters, 19 June 2013. Clerics opened Shiite prayer houses (husseiniya) for recruitment, as tribal leaders did with their guesthouses (mudhif). Acknowledging the imperative of fighting IS but also seeing the dangers in attempting to resist a mass call-up of Iran-backed militia fighters, the Shiite political and religious establishment tried to ride the wave rather than stem the tide. Iraq’s highest religious Shiite authority, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, issued a binding religious edict (fatwa) on 13 June, calling on youths to volunteer in defense of the country. The call to sign up spread by word of mouth across the south and resulted in a massive mobilization of young volunteers (mutatawaeen) in what was later called “popular mobilization” (al-hashd al-shaabi). A hashd officer in Karbala recounted:[fn]Crisis Group interview, officer of the hashd Liwa Ali al-Akbar, Karbala, 29 July 2015. Though there is no accurate count of hashd recruits, in early 2015 it was estimated to be between 90,000 and 120,000. See Mustafa Habib, “Are Shiite militias growing more powerful than the Iraqi army?”, Niqash, 29 January 2015.Hide Footnote We were already active before Sistani’s fatwa. Now our militia members with previous military experience and [Shiite army] officers are organizing recruitment and training. We have recruited more than 3,000 fighters from the tribes to defend the holy shrines in Samarra. Now we are focused on safeguarding the Imam Hussein shrine [in Karbala].

The Sistani fatwa was a deft but desperate attempt to save the legitimacy of the Shiite clerics and the political establishment by giving a nationalist sheen to anti-IS operations under the aegis of the Shiite world’s most respected religious leader.[fn]The son and representative of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad al-Hakim in Najaf said, “the state failed to protect the people from Daesh and also could not accommodate the volunteers, and so [Grand Ayatollah] Sayed Sistani had little choice but to call for popular mobilization”. Crisis Group interview, 1zzeddine Mohammed al-Hakim, Najaf, 28 September 2015.Hide Footnote It succeeded to an extent but had the unintended result of giving the Shiite community a
leadership role in defense of the country, with Shiite teenagers eagerly compensating for the political class’ failings by fighting IS in a war against their Sunni peers – in other words, precisely the sectarian conflict IS wanted.

C. Volunteering to Fight

Joining the hashd was the only way for many youths to earn a salary and benefits for their families if they died. Most who enrolled had been working as day laborers or in the lower public sector ranks, with no possibility of a decent living.[fn]The large majority of hashd volunteers have not finished primary or middle-school studies and worked in precarious conditions as day laborers, making a maximum of 25,000 ID per week (barely $20), too little to pay monthly rents in the area of some 200,000 ID (nearly $180). Hashd pay differs from group to group. A member in Baghdad said he received 750,000 ID (around $630) monthly, one in Karbala 875,000 ID (some $735): 500,000 ID as salary, 250,000 as danger indemnity and 125,000 for food. Crisis Group interviews, Baghdad, Karbala, July 2015. Still, while income was an incentive, their motives cannot be reduced to material interest. The hashd attracted many destitute youths in part because recruitment targeted the most densely populated, poorest areas (like Sadr City in Baghdad, Basra, Diwaniya and Amara) or was done near the frontline (for example, Shula and Hurriya neighborhoods in Baghdad and Karbala). Young men continued to volunteer even when the government or militia defaulted on pay. In 2015, volunteers joined training sessions for reservists that offered no remuneration.[fn]Crisis Group observations, Baghdad and the southern provinces, July 2015.

It is likely that youths were driven by enthusiasm and the prospect of heroism, which circulated in their communities, more than by rational motives or religious belief.[fn]The largest proportion of recruits appear to come from the Baghdad and Basra peripheries, while Shiite religious centres, such as Najaf and Khadamiya (in Baghdad), home to religious holy sites, send only a small number. Many come from Karbala, a city with two holy shrines close to the front line with IS in Anbar. After Sistani’s fatwa, hashd symbols spread throughout Shiite towns and neighborhoods. Teachers and parents lauded volunteers and encouraged students and sons to join them. A father who lost his son in battle showed a picture of his body in the hospital and said, “we could not stop him from going. He slipped out to the recruitment center during the night. He was only seventeen. We are very proud of him. After he joined the hashd, he married and brought us his salary”. [fn]Crisis Group interview, Mahmoudiya, 26 July 2015.

Young people were also attracted by the instant fulfilment, even martyrdom, the hashd offered, when no other prospects existed.[fn]A recruitment officer said, “we receive an increasing number of recruits. The problem is with the youngest. Some behave without thinking on the battlefield. The largest problem is with those who join because they want to die”. Crisis Group interview, Karbala, 28 July 2015. Once [Grand Ayatollah] Sayed Sistani issued his fatwa, IS’s sudden arrival produced a sense of unpredictability and collective precariousness that persuaded youths to live for the moment rather than plan. Adnan, a 21-year-old from Mahmoudiya, was an exception in his neighbourhood for finishing high school and entering an engineering college in Baghdad, but the fatwa dramatically changed his direction:[fn]Crisis Group interview, Mahmoudiya, 26 July 2015.

The hashd also gave youths unprecedented symbolic and material power to play a dominant role in their direct environment and a social ladder that bypassed the patriarchal family, tribal groups and patronage networks of Iraqi society. Many Shiite youths perceive themselves as having the role of saving an Iraq that is theirs to own and reshape within an exclusively Shiite identity ever since Shiite parties won the 2005 elections. Unlike the 2005-2007 war, however, when youths killed one another in their neighborhoods, the fight against IS leaves room to demonize a less direct and personal enemy whom many have never seen or met.[fn]A sixteen-year-old volunteer, depicting the enemy he believed the hashd was fighting, said, “this is not a war against Sunnis. What we are fighting is similar to the Mongol invasion”. Crisis Group interview, hashd training center, Basra, 17 September 2015.
D. Genie Unleashed

Neglected for a decade, youths unwittingly became the drivers of a political transformation that the political leadership was ill-equipped to ride or contain. The sharp fall of oil prices, which coincided with IS’s ascendancy, reduced funds and further weakened the political class’ ability to use patronage to broker social peace.[fn]A Badr cadre and provincial council member said of political class unpreparedness, “the problem is that there is no politics. When the situation changes we adjust policy, not the other way around. We are never prepared for the next step”. Crisis Group interview, Basra, 17 September 2015. The government calculated the 2014 budget and expenditures on the 2013 average oil price of $80-$90 per barrel, setting an ambitious export level of 3.4m barrels per day. In June 2014, the price was $70 per barrel, and exports were 2.2m barrels. By September, the country had a $75bn deficit. Al-Arabiya website, 26 September 2014. The 2015 price fell further. The ruling elites began to look to mobilization as the best way to secure political and economic assets.[fn]Parts of the security apparatus...

Iraq crisis: Rebranded insurgents gain whip hand on streets of Baghdad”, The Guardian, 22 June 2014. The governments...

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Crisis Group interview, Basra, 18 September 2015. See also, “Iraq crisis: Rebranded insurgents gain whip hand on streets of Baghdad”, The Guardian, 22 June 2014. Maliki used his position to move money to the hashd, in order to align it within the framework of the state and gain leverage over it. The government ended financial aid for tribal leaders, transferred much of the defense and interior ministry budgets to finance the hashd through Maliki’s office and the national security organization (jihaz al-amn al-watani), and compelled each hashd unit to register with the defense ministry.[fn]Faleh al-Fayyadh, the national security organization’s head and national security adviser, has minister rank and is close to the Daawa party. The organization pays each hashd brigade commander (Abu al-Hashd) according to the registered fighters under his command and distributes their salaries. In November 2014, Maliki’s successor, Haider al-Abadi, proposed to give families of those killed in action the same benefits as those killed while fighting in the army: a pension and plot of land. “We have launched...”

Maliki’s successor, Haider al-Abadi, proposed to give families of those killed in action the same benefits as those killed while fighting in the army: a pension and plot of land. “We have launched...”


Despite government and Daawa efforts to control the hashd within the state, the fatwa’s aftermath saw chaotic attempts by Shiite political and religious figures to protect their support by registering the largest possible number of recruits, each to his own faction. Fatah al-Sheikh, a former parliament member, said, “the government has demanded a list of volunteers to fight Daesh. The politicians today are galvanized to collect lists of names to sell to the hashd”. [fn]Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 29 March 2015.

They engaged in fundraising and redirected money from religious endowments and religious taxes (khums) to secure salaries for their fighters and benefits for the families of those killed in battle, who were deemed martyrs.[fn]Beside the national security organization, religious personalities close to the Sistani marjaeya relied on the religious endowments (awqaf) of the Karbala and Najaf shrines and religious taxes (khums), 20 per cent of a follower’s income. Politicians have also organized fund-raising campaigns by placing collection boxes (sunduq) in shops and mosques. Crisis Group observation, Baghdad and southern provinces, July-September 2015. Thus, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) of Ammar al-Hakim funded its brigades from its affiliated civilian ministries and family benefits through the Hakim family’s charitable association.[fn]A Sadrist militant critically observed: “The youth ministry [held by an ISCI member] has re-directed the youth and its resources toward the war. The minister spends his time inspecting the hashd brigades”. Crisis Group interview, Sadr City, 4 April 2015. The Hakim charitable foundation in Najaf organizes collection of money to compensate families of those killed in battle. Crisis Group observations, Najaf, September 2015. [fn]A Sadrist militant critically observed: “The youth ministry [held by an ISCI member] has re-directed the youth and its resources toward the war. The minister spends his time inspecting the hashd brigades”. Crisis Group interview, Sadr City, 4 April 2015. The Hakim charitable foundation in Najaf organizes collection of money to compensate families of those killed in battle. Crisis Group observations, Najaf, September 2015.

Hide Footnote Charitable entities connected to party figures have proliferated in the south. Ostensibly set up to address the large influx of Sunni displaced (IDPs) or conduct other civil-society activity, they have direct access to international aid, mostly from UN agencies.[fn]The strategy of UN agencies and the World Bank has been to partner with local NGOs to implement stabilization programs and civil society initiatives in the provinces, where organisations receive funding without governmental oversight. A UN official said, “we chose to partner with local organisations to prevent losing reconstruction and stabilization funds to government corruption”. Crisis Group Skype interview, 10 June 2016. However, this procedure has inadvertently invited party figures to establish...
NGOs to attract funding, which they use to maintain constituents’ support and subsidies families of those fighting in their affiliated militias. They redirect part of this to sustain party patronage networks of individuals, families and tribes the state budget had financed and families of militia volunteers linked to the party they support.[fn] A 30-year-old former Daawa-sponsored Youth Parliament member from Karbala began investing in civil society initiatives in 2015, after the new youth and sports minister cut the parliament’s funding. His experience shows the Daawa party’s flexibility in sustaining its network and dexterity in exploiting international organisations’ poor auditing. He said, “political parties have become boring to people. Now is the time of civil society organisations. In 2016 alone, 70 new ones have been established in Karbala. We receive direct funding from UNICEF to help displaced people in Karbala and sustain families in need, with no distinction between Sunnis and Shiites”. Crisis Group Skype interview, 29 May 2016. Another civil society activist said, “I have been part of a youth organization in Diwaniya. We have received one million ID [nearly $861] so far. Poor demographic data complicate the auditing and evaluation of these projects. Unintentionally, the UN and other donors have replaced oil income in the parties’ efforts to dispense patronage”. Crisis Group Skype interview, 27 May 2016.

Yet, overall, parties lack flexibility to reach large numbers of youths. The familiar channels, party offices, co-option of tribal leaders and leverage over local and central state institutions, are no longer effective.[fn] As the pro-government “support councils” (majalis isnaad) faded, tribal leaders lost along with their finances much of their power over younger members, who were now recruited and paid by the hashd. Police and other public-sector employees joined different hashd factions while continuing to receive government salaries. Crisis Group observations, Karbala, July 2015. Hide Footnote Fundraising campaigns can only temporarily cover arms, salaries and benefits. Efforts to attract recruits have exhausted resources and fragmented each main Shiite political party by making their leaders more dependent on external supplies of arms and funding raised through donors.[fn] For instance, militias are dependent on Iran for weapons, vehicles and intelligence. See “Are Shiite militias growing more powerful”, op. cit. This has largely resulted in the crumbling of traditional parties and empowerment of those party figures who secured local control through their affiliated militias and accumulated economic assets via their affiliated charities.

Militias began to splinter as well. For example, a struggle unfolded within the Daawa party, with Maliki, ousted as prime minister after IS captured Mosul and other cities, attempting a comeback by backing one of the militias. Even the Sadrist movement, which has mobilized thousands of youths since 2003, has failed to keep full support in its Sadr City stronghold now that it is part of the political establishment.[fn] A former Mahdi army fighter said, “many of those who would have joined us in the past no longer do so; they are now recruited by other groups. Our former fighters are 30; they have families and children and are no longer inclined to heroism and adventure. Even if we still keep strong in the south, we witness a decreasing capacity for mobilization in Sadr City”. Crisis Group interview, Sadr City, 7 April 2015. Hide Footnote It experienced a sharp fall in supporters for its militia, the Brigade of Peace (Sarayat al-Salam), while former Mahdi army fighters established a myriad of splinter groups, in addition to the League of the Righteous (Asaeb Ahl al-Haq), which broke from the Sadrists’ Mahdi army in 2008 over leadership and funding. Hosham al-Thahabi, an ex-Sadrist militant, commented: [fn] Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 5 April 2015.

The Sadrist forces are poorly managed; defections are accelerating, and new militias acting independently from Sadr are appearing. Akram al-Kaabi, a former Sadrist “defector”, joined the League of the Righteous and later established his own militia with Iranian funds. This is bad news, because Sadrist constituents make up the largest recruitment pool for all militias.

Shiite parties’ attempts to recruit members through their offices were overtaken by militias, which reached youths especially by recruiting at the local level via prayer houses. The militias promise swift promotions and responsibilities, allowing recruits to express their identity in ways unimaginable in the army, police or Shiite parties and so boost their social standing in their home areas. In contrast to middle-age Green Zone politicians in suits and ties, the militias promote a new generation of military and religious leaders with whom young Iraqis can identify.[fn] In Karbala, the police leadership forbade the militias to recruit in police stations, forcing them to use Shiite prayer houses (husseiniya). Crisis Group observation, Karbala, July 2015. A young man from Sadr City observed: “Each militia has its own way of cutting their eyebrows, or keeping their hair long or short. The most successful recruiters in Sadr City have adapted to the district’s style. Sadr City boys like to peel off their eyebrows, apply tattoos and wear tight trousers. In
2004, Mahdi army fighters would not allow such styles; now each militia in Sadr City accepts it and adopts its own distinct symbol”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 26 July 2015. Abu Azrael (“the angel of death”), a former Mahdi army fighter, now a member of the Kataeb Imam Ali militia, is an iconic figure with more than 150,000 followers on social media. See “Iraqi fighter gains social media following in fight against ISIS”, Al-Arabiya (online), 12 March 2015.

Most hashd elements have close links to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, whose military advisers train their affiliated militias into reliable fighting forces that have an ideological orientation consistent with Tehran’s and can be deployed even outside Iraq. An ISCI member said there are two types of Shiite hashd:

Crisis Group interview, Alaa Mousawi, Baghdad, 17 September 2015.

There are the marjawi and the walayi, the first under the leadership of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani and the second under [Iranian Supreme Leader] Ali Khamenei. For us, supporters of the marjawi, the hashd is only a temporary project; it should reintegrate into the state, obtain funding only from the defense ministry and operate under the prime minister as a future National Guard, a force with power and training similar to the federal police. For the supporters of the walayi, the hashd should be a force that can be deployed in Syria or anywhere else where it is needed.

As the hashd evolved into a forum for intra-Shiite political competition, each faction developed its own icons, symbols and names, complicating any government effort to merge them under a single command within the state. With the government unable to produce an alternative plan for youth, the struggle against IS dragging on and provincial elections anticipated in April 2017, militias leaders and politicians supporting them may leverage external financial and military support to consolidate their power and undermine the Abadi government.

An Asaeb Ahl al-Haq member explained the group’s aspirations: “We are not only a military organization. We have a project of building a state. We want to reform state institutions and transform the hashd into a civilian hashd (hashd al-shaabi al-madani). Political parties’ governance has failed in Basra, and in Iraq generally. We have achieved military victories; we have participated in demonstrations calling for change, and we are now ready to become part of the governorate’s and country’s leadership”. Crisis Group interview, Basra, 28 September 2015.

E. Disaffected Sunni Youth

Mobilizing youth became equally vital for Sunni provincial and tribal leaders intent on countering IS. Without direct access to weapons, they had to give lists of fighters to the national security organization in Baghdad or Kurdish parties in Erbil so as to claim funds and arms. Unlike at the time of the U.S. “surge”, they could not recruit in insurgent-controlled territories and trigger an indigenous reaction against the movement. Though they tried to blame youths’ turn to IS on the Shiite-dominated government’s failure to provide jobs, they themselves had prepared the way for the jihadists’ advance by their embrace of the credibility-destroying patronage system. IS military successes exposed them as persons with no anchor in their own societies and no authority over Sunni areas.

They never led but rather fled the Sunni uprising. Once protests began in 2013 and IS advanced, Sunni leaders moved to safer ground (Baghdad, Erbil, Amman), providing additional evidence to constituents of their self-serving policy. Their cooperation with Kurdish or Shiite militias, which they had condemned for years, undermined their legitimacy even more.

A Mosul resident, expressing disenchantment about Atheet al-Nujayfi, the Ninewa governor, having called on the population to resist, then leaving before IS entered, asked: “Why did Nujayfi not defend us? Why he did not warn us? He accused the army so as to blame all on Maliki. He just used us!” Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 3 April 2015. A Falluja resident living under IS expressed similar feelings: “Young people see their tribal leaders as merchants (tujjar). They went to various countries, including Iran, to increase their fortunes and sell them out. As IS advanced, [young people] are on the ground dealing with the situation, while their elders sit in Baghdad hotels”. Crisis Group telephone interview, 20 June 2015.

Hide Footnote Away from IS-controlled territory, provincial officials and tribal leaders could rely only on a limited number of individuals who benefited from their patronage (e.g., senior police) or close family (ayyan al-ashira). Sheikh Ahmad al-Jibouri, a former sahwa member, noted:

In 2006, I recruited more than 6,000 fighters and cleaned al-Doura [a Baghdad neighbourhood] of al-Qaeda. Sunni recruitment to the hashd is a masquerade! Some tribal leaders, who promise to deliver a certain number of fighters, submit names to the government only to obtain funds, then flee to Amman.

Once safe, Sunni leaders made little effort to assist those living under IS. Instead, like Shiite politicians, they have tried to rebuild patronage networks via externally-funded charities for IDPs, who need guarantors to access safer areas, obtain documents enabling them to resettled and obtain services in the areas of their displacement. These leaders hope outside powers will restore them to their old positions when IS is driven out – as a reward for not joining – and allow them to lead internationally-funded reconstruction.[fn]In Tikrit, a city taken back from IS in April 2015, members of the Jibouri tribe have set up NGOs to work in reconstruction. Crisis Group Skype interview, NGO worker, June 2016.

On the other side of the front line, IS took advantage of the generational divide. As soon as it controlled a territory, it assigned responsibilities to local youths, recruiting them as fighters or giving those with low-ranking jobs a path to reach positions previously reserved for party members.[fn]In Rawa, Anbar governorate, top public jobs (hospitals, public administration, electricity) were in Islamic Party hands. When IS arrived, senior party figures fled, and IS promoted young, low-ranking employees. Crisis Group, telephone interview, al-Qaim resident, 20 June 2015. Hide Footnote One of its most effective policies was to give leadership posts to the youngest members of a tribe aligned with the government. Ramadi, which IS captured in June 2015, is an example. Its central districts resisted until elders of the Abu Alwan tribe fled to Baghdad, leaving younger members in charge. The latter struck a deal with IS, which included a general amnesty and their elevation to tribal chiefs.[fn]A Ramadi resident said, “each tribal leader has a younger cousin (ibn ammi) who can claim noble blood and become sheikh of the tribe. There is a new generation of sheikhs in Anbar. Often those appointed to high-profile positions are younger members of tribes whose elder sheikhs sided with the government”. Crisis Group telephone interview, al-Qaim resident, 29 July 2015. Hide Footnote

The post-IS phase in Sunni areas will be especially challenging, because social hierarchies are developing under IS rule that are parallel with and disconnected from those in areas under government control. The two will be difficult to reconcile. Tribal leaders empowered by IS may be unwilling to step down and could challenge both Sunni political officials and the legitimacy of tribal elders. This, and because they may be vulnerable to retributive violence, might provoke new generational power struggles within tribes. National leaders will need to devise a non-discriminatory policy that targets youths in areas recovered from IS and prevents a Sunni leadership struggle that would exacerbate the generational divide. Otherwise, people will face a stark choice between collaborators with IS and a discredited political clique that out-sourced recovery of Sunni areas to the hashd or the Kurds and intends to use reconstruction funds to rebuild its local support.

VI. The Desperate Alternative: Emigration

Rather than devise a policy that might spare a new generation another conflict, the Shiite political class has attempted to use the hashd movement to contain discontent among Shiite youths and redirect it toward the confrontation with IS. Throughout 2015, hashd factions sought to absorb the growing numbers of volunteers without affecting military operations by creating reserve forces (qwwat ihtiyatiya) that gave students and day workers basic training but often made no other use of them. Under severe financial pressure, the government focused spending on youth mobilization against IS, diverting it from jobs creation and other purposes. In June 2014, for the first time in a decade, ministries did not post new openings and have posted few since.[fn]Majeeda al-Timimi, a member of parliament’s finance committee, said, “in June [2014], more than 16,000 new jobs were unassigned for lack of funds, while 30,000 new positions were issued by the national security organization and nearly $3 million was allocated to [Maliki’s] office to pay the hashd”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 28 July 2015. Party disinvestment from state institutions was apparent. An employee of the higher education ministry observed: “Since Mosul fell, the ministry has not had resources to complete projects and resume recruitment. The minister asked employees to donate blood for injured hashd fighters, and pictures of the hashd are on show in the ministry building”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 27 July 2015.

Educated young people, the future professional middle class, are at the margin of political leaders’ attention, hard hit by the budget crisis and society’s militarization and facing a choice of adjusting to rule by armed groups or emigrating. IS successes have deepened the divide between them and destitute

We tolerated many things after 2003, but we reached saturation point. After [the IS conflict], I decided to leave in order to complete my studies abroad. Here I have only a 20 per cent possibility to succeed in what I am doing compared to the previous generation, and we are no longer respected in this society.

Government policy coupled with the economic crisis have helped further marginalize the middle class. In areas the government controls, its fading ability to enforce the law in a militia-dominated environment compels young professionals to ask militias for protection. Armed groups (militias and IS alike) in need of their skills, in particular those of doctors, increasingly try to recruit them, either forcibly or by creating professional associations parallel to the state’s.[fn]Militia factions have established associations of doctors who volunteer to treat injured hashd fighters on the front lines. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjydjiBo5dg

Other strains result from the higher education ministry’s decision not to recognize diplomas from universities in IS-controlled areas. It has attempted to relocate those institutions to areas controlled by Baghdad or the Kurds, but professors and students have difficulty accessing the new sites due to movement restrictions and fear of retaliation.[fn]The higher education ministry has attempted to transfer Mosul College of Medicine to Kirkuk, currently under Kurdish control. Students displaced in Baghdad cannot easily access Kirkuk due to restrictions imposed by the Kurdish regional government. The ministry’s alternative proposal to move the college to Baghdad has also failed, since most Mosul professors have relocated to the Kurdish region and avoid the capital due to the Shiite militias’ control. A practicing doctor said, “whatever will be decided, we risk having a university either without professors or without students”. Crisis Group interview, Baghdad, 20 July 2015.

As a result, a perception has grown among medical and engineering students that they can escape the destructive cycle only by leaving. Syria’s conflict pulled the trigger. Starting in 2015, as Turkey’s smuggling roads to Greece opened, Iraqis followed Syrians to Europe. The pattern of flight resembled that of militia mobilization: contagious, spreading by word of mouth and social media, often within small circles of friends in a neighbourhood. But these professionals (particularly doctors) face special challenges. Those trying to leave IS-controlled areas often must pay smugglers heavily. Faced with a massive brain drain, the government has tried to make it difficult for young graduates to obtain the original copy of their diploma, which they need to prove their degree and practice abroad.[fn]Doctors can still obtain a copy of their diploma by paying as much as 70 million ID, nearly $60,000. Crisis Group interviews, Adhamiya hospital, Baghdad, 25 July 2015.

In July 2015, Iraq’s youth found a third way to express discontent: rather than taking to arms or voting with their feet, they staged mass demonstrations to protest poor governance. It started in Basra in July, where resentment against the political establishment intersected with local anger at the provincial governor’s repeated failure to improve services.[fn]Waheed Ghanim, “Basra’s beleaguered governor under fire”, Niqash, 30 July 2015.

Though the protests were in majority-Shiite areas, they assumed a kaleidoscopic rather than sectarian character, reflecting the rich diversity of society. Protesters hailed from different class backgrounds, raising community symbols alongside nationalist ones. The latter revealed Shiites’ appropriation of a nationalist discourse that urban Sunni elites had defined prior to 2003. What started as an anti-corruption campaign soon evolved into an array of demands focused on the end of the post-2003...
political system based on ethnic and sectarian quotas (muhasasa) and the establishment of a “civil state”
(dawla madaniya). The insistent appeal for reform reflect young people’s rejection of the status quo and
their search for a new status and role not currently available. A protester said:[fn]Crisis Group Skype
interview, 28 May 2016. Another 30-year-old, who did not join the protests, said, “people don’t know
what they want or where the country is headed. The demonstrations are merely a channel to express a

[1] See “Iraq: Conflict Alert”, op. cit. Tim Arango, “In bid to counter Iran, Ayatollah in Iraq may end

We are for reform: general, total reform! It has been fifteen years now with these same people. We should
have popular committees instead of parliament, or a prime minister without a parliament, or a technocratic
cabinet. I am not sure what the right formula is. I only know that we should start from scratch.

Like Sunni protests two years earlier, the inchoate nature of demands for radical change created
room for radical politicians to capitalize and take charge.

B. Riding the Wave

Youths found in the new movement a platform for expression more than an avenue for political
participation and change. Its hybrid identity made it easy to manipulate. The first to step into the vacuum
in August 2015 were some Shiite militias that had led the fight against IS; with battlefield experience, they
presented themselves as potent challengers to the faltering Abadi government. The country might have
slid into chaos or a militia-led coup except for a second intervention by Grand Ayatollah Sistani, who
expressed support for Abadi if he carried out important reforms, including replacing his cabinet with
unaffiliated technocrats.[fn]See “Iraq: Conflict Alert”, op. cit. Tim Arango, “In bid to counter Iran, Ayatollah
in Iraq may end up alienating it”, The New York Times, 1 November 2015. Hide Footnote This was but a
stop-gap, however, and quieted things only temporarily. Weak within his Daawa party and unable to gain
support from other blocs, Abadi failed to join the energies unleashed in the streets to his broader reform
agenda. Purging top officials accentuated intra-Daawa rivalries without bringing sensible change to
everyday lives or answering youth’s thirst for direction. Embodying the ruling system, the political class
was incapable of effecting genuine reform.[fn]On 11 August, parliament backed the first stage of Abadi’s
reform program, cancelling the positions of deputy prime minister and the three vice presidencies, one of
which was held by his predecessor, Maliki. The parties dominating the parliament could not agree on
replacing ministers with technocrats, however. A Baghdad resident said, “Abadi changed some top-level
figures, but our lives have not changed at all in the past months. So people found in Moqtada al-Sadr a new
hope for change”. Crisis Group Skype interview, 27 May 2016.

As the opportunity slipped from the prime minister’s hands, Moqtada al-Sadr, an activist with a
clerical pedigree and history of resistance to the U.S. occupation, stepped into the breach. In February
2016, his political bloc, al-Ahrar (Liberals), took charge of the protest movement. Through a meticulously
planned youth mobilization strategy, it attracted segments of youth beyond Sadr’s close supporters. For
three months, he commanded the street. On 27 February, he organized a mass demonstration in
Baghdad’s Tahrir central square; a month later, he began a sit-in inside the Green Zone, while his
supporters stayed outside, primed to follow him. On 30 April, they scaled the walls and broke into
parliament and the council of ministers. According to a participant, “the al-Ahrar bloc set up demonstration
committees (Lijna Tandhim al-Tadahur) in all Baghdad districts and the provinces, registering protesters’
names and giving them a special budget allowing them to participate in the demonstrations”. [fn]Crisis
Group Skype interview, 28 May 2016.

Sadr turned the street into a dynamic variable in politics, even a risky one vulnerable to misuse.
Appeals for reform quickly became a populist call for the end of the entire political establishment and
framework. Yet, his actions seemed mainly to benefit his own bloc in its bargaining with other Shiite
parties.[fn]On 26 April, Abadi struck a deal with al-Ahrar, replacing five ministers with technocrats. Three
of the five, who had been affiliated with Ahrar, were replaced with new figures who, though technocrats,
are close to Ahrar and could work to increase the group’s influence. On the political crisis, see Maria
Fantappie, “Iraq on the Edge of Chaos”, Crisis Group blog post, 14 May 2016. They consolidated
polarization between mobilized youth and elites rather than building a bridge to overcome deep social rifts.
Abadi’s announcement of the offensive against IS in Falluja at the end of May defused the protest by
rallying the nation, but the monster only slumbers, ready to be awakened by a crisis in services and politicians seeing an opportunity for advancement.

VIII. Fixing Iraq's Youth Challenge

Non-state actors have been the most successful in mobilizing and framing young people's lives. While the agendas may differ, they have recruited directly within localities (neighbourhood or village); provided a sense of belonging to a collective inspired by ideals (IS: establishing a caliphate; Sadr: fighting corruption); and given opportunities for advancement within informal structures (IS, Shiite militias, the Sadr bloc's demonstration-organizing committees), allowing youths to gain prestige in their home environments (family, tribe, neighbourhood).

The government and political parties have been unable to reproduce successful mobilization and social mobility in their structures. Bewildered and in disarray, the political establishment appears to have opted for a default strategy, counting on the cost of prolonged conflict becoming so high that it may yet recoup some of its legitimacy. Shiite parties that oppose the militias' de facto rule hope growing casualties will exhaust their support.[fn]Asked about future policy, an ex-lawmaker close to Abadi said: “Sooner or later people will tire of seeing their children die as martyrs”. Crisis Group Skype interview, 28 October 2015.

The conflict against IS has reshuffled social hierarchies and empowered and legitimized new leaders, creating a fresh reality with which the political class will have to contend sooner or later. In Sunni-populated areas, establishment politicians could try to regain legitimacy by distributing foreign aid and engaging local youths in reconstruction, but this is likely to resurrect the very patron-client relationships that proved unsustainable after the U.S.-led “surge”. And if they fail to engage young people beyond the patronage networks, they will be strongly resisted by commanders who fought for IS and could thus recoup a measure of local support. Shiite militia commanders and political figures supporting them, such as Maliki or Hadi al-Ameri, the foremost militia commander, could try to capitalize on the popularity they gained in fighting IS to bid for political power and turn their young fighters into supporters in future elections.

Lack of agility in adjusting to rapid change has enabled a cycle of escalating conflict that could precipitate political class demise. It might also destroy the state's capacity to govern and foreign powers' ability to safeguard their strategic interests through an Iraqi government they need to confront the transnational IS threat. A society increasingly drained of its middle class and populated by armed actors who are eclipsing law-enforcement agencies may cause a growth in micro-conflicts – intra-tribal disputes and gang fighting – that will increase young people's dependence for protection and economic resources on local patrons or militia commanders, or both. Even when these actors are not fighting, their mobilization efforts may undermine the state's legitimacy and coherence. By calling youths to join street protests while blocking parliament from convening and legislating reforms in May, Sadr already exacerbated the divide between the street and political elites without providing a workable alternative.

Young people whose anti-establishment sentiments are being directed toward opposite poles of a sectarian agenda might become even more susceptible to crass political manipulation by actors intent on fuelling domestic and regional conflicts. Shiite youths have proved a critical resource for Iran, which has recruited them to fight its war in Syria, where one of its principal enemies is IS, which has a significant Iraqi component in both leadership and rank and file. As fighters or emigrants, Generation 2000 could become a transnational challenge.

The generation’s grievances and loss of hope can no longer be disregarded. The Abadi government and the international community must, at the eleventh hour, pre-emptively devise a youth policy grounded...
in the notion that young people need avenues for political participation and social advancement outside the parties’ discredited co-option by patronage. Any post-IS reconstruction and stabilization campaign, even if implemented locally, requires a national vision for addressing the youth problem and a multiyear plan that targets this age group. Offering youth a clear direction is a greater priority than merely providing funds and jobs.

Until now, the government has used state legitimacy and institutional benefits to boost a mobilization into militias it did not call for and could neither prevent nor control, and which is undermining state institutions. It should do the opposite: use the same legitimacy and benefits to “civilianise” the hashd al-shaabi into a hashd al-madani (civilian mobilization) under its direct control, recruit youths in their communities and organize them within the administrative framework of provincial administrations. This would involve refocusing hashd neighbourhood-based recruitment centres from defense to local governance, thus filling a gap left by local authorities who have failed to provide adequate services or security.

Such an effort could resonate with fighters who profess political aspirations. It might allow Iran to preserve its interests in southern provinces, while giving the central government a measure of leverage against it. Most importantly, it could be replicated in areas freed of IS control, where a stability plan involving Sunni leaders should avoid repeating mistakes, including use of state resources to “purchase” local legitimacy. Local leaders should engage youths directly in reconstruction, regardless of tribal affiliation or who fought with or against IS.

More immediately, the government should tackle the militia problem and prospects for the young by organizing any further military recruitment under the army, supervised by the defense ministry; developing a plan to provide these new state employees with the usual benefits, or at least guarantee a right to them once funds are available; compelling non-governmental entities to register with the planning ministry, while urging donors to fund only those that are registered and to assist in monitoring use of such funds; and developing a jobs plan for high-school and university graduates and/or a professional-training, apprenticeship scheme, with guaranteed income and pension rights as funds become available.

International institutions that manage financial and development support for Iraq, such as the IMF, the World Bank and UN agencies, should consider whether to revise their approach. By giving financial help to charitable organisations and initiatives linked to party figures and affiliated militias that operate outside the law, or demanding to reduce state benefits and allowances, they contribute inadvertently to these groups’ active undermining of the state. This is something neither they nor the prime minister’s other external supporters who profess a desire for a stable, functioning Iraq have an interest in doing.

IX. Conclusion

The plight of Iraq’s young people is perhaps the gravest result of the turmoil of the past few decades; unless it creates viable prospects for them, the country is unlikely to escape further cycles of instability. The current vacuum sucks youths into one of three directions: protests (with aspiration to dramatically transform a non-functioning system seemingly immune to reform); fighting groups on either side of a sectarian divide; or migration toward Europe.

The issue is not one of youth radicalization, as conventional wisdom suggests.[fn]UN Security Council Resolution 2,250, 9 December 2015.Hide Footnote Young Iraqis are not radicalized so much as recruited into organisations that provide community and direction, regardless of ideology. The solution lies not in de-radicalization programs, with heavy emphasis on counter-narratives, as if the problem was addiction, requiring detox, but in giving them viable alternatives that can reduce fighting groups’ ability to attract them in the first place.

A fresh, state-based, internationally-backed approach by the Abadi government aimed at reconnecting young people to the society in which they live and breathe is the best formula to prevent destructive exploitation. The past has shown that fighting youths deemed “radicals” and co-opting the others through the usual patronage channels is not a sustainable solution and indeed worsens the problem, if only by pushing fresh waves of desperate emigrants toward distant shores.”

The U.S. government stated in July that it was sending 560 additional troops to support the Iraqi government and allied militias in retaking Mosul (Michael S. Schmitt and Mark Landler, "U.S. Will Deploy More Troops to Iraq to Help Retake Mosul," The New York Times, July 12, 2016).

After the Taliban ambushed police forces guarding a stretch of the national Ring Road in Baghlan Province on Thursday, fighting continued through Saturday and appeared likely to last longer, according to officials in the area. The northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif was cut off, as were road connections to eight northern provinces."


While the Taliban made major inroads in Helmand last year, the violence had seemed relatively contained in recent months, after broad changes by the Afghan Army there and a new influx of American troops and advisers. But the fighting has again intensified, with an increased tempo of attacks in the districts of Nad Ali, Gereshk, Sangin and Marja, as well as in Babaji, a suburb of the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah."


The Afghan Health Ministry said that a security guard was killed in the attack and that at least 26 people had been wounded.

Sediq Sediqqi, a spokesman for the Ministry of Interior, said early Thursday that police operations at the university were completed about 10 hours after the attack began, though officers remained on campus."

"Later on Thursday, Fraidoon Obaidi, chief of the Kabul police Criminal Investigation Department, told Reuters that 12 people had been killed, including seven students, three police officers and two security guards, and another 44 people were wounded.

"The university opened for enrollment in 2006 to both men and women, and quickly became a prestigious education choice for some of Afghanistan’s elites, offering undergraduate and graduate degrees taught in English.

It was praised by senior American officials as a sign of Afghanistan’s bright future, and as such was an obvious symbol of Western ambitions for the country — and exactly the kind of symbol the Taliban and other militants have come to pursue as targets."


The Islamic State claimed a bombing that left at least 80 people dead Saturday at a peaceful demonstration in the Afghan capital of Kabul, raising fears that the group may be extending its reach beyond the country's eastern pockets, where it generally operates.

The Afghan Interior Ministry, in a statement, said the attack on thousands of Hazaras, an ethnic minority group staging the protest, had been a suicide mission. "At least 231 people at the protest were wounded. The demonstrators had gathered in the west of Kabul to demand that a proposed electricity transmission line be routed through Bamian, a Hazara-dominated province in central Afghanistan."

"Officials saw the Islamic State's first assault on the Afghan capital as retaliation for operations by Afghan ground forces and American airstrikes that have intensified in recent weeks, targeting the group’s stronghold in eastern Nangarhar Province."


The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, which has been recording civilian casualties since 2009, reported 1,601 civilian deaths and 3,565 injuries in the first six months of 2016, up 4 percent from a record figure last year. Child casualties also reached the highest number since 2009, with 388 children killed and 1,121 wounded so far this year."

"And in the first six months of 2016, more than 150,000 people were forced to leave their homes — a 10 percent increase in newly displaced people over the same period last year."

The United Nations report blamed antigovernment forces — largely the Taliban and new affiliates of the Islamic State who claimed a deadly bombing in Kabul last week — for 60 percent of the casualties. But casualties caused by pro-government forces, totaling 23 percent of the overall figure, increased by 47 percent. Most of the casualties were caused by ground engagements, followed by improvised explosive devices."

The number of Afghans internally displaced reached a 15 year high in the first half of 2016 (and may well have continued to rise as the fighting increased). By end of May 2016, it was double the number in 2013, with some 1000 a day forced from their homes. Many live in very poor conditions in camps (Mujib Mashal and Zahra Nader, "1,000 Afghans Each Day Are Fleeing Their Homes," The New York Times, June 1, 2016).


Among the changes was creating three new administrative districts to help improve government support in the province. But nearly eight months later, those three districts are firmly under the control of the Taliban — and, in fact, government forces were never able to clear them and install the new officials. It is the same story in much of the rest of Kunduz Province, where the Taliban control or have mined many roads and have enforced their ban on smoking and listening to music in several areas.

Even in some of the Kunduz districts nominally under government control, officials’ true reach remains limited to the bazaars and the administrative buildings, with the Taliban having free movement in the villages, according to local residents. And last week, the government all but lost control of another district in the province, Qala-i-Zal."

"Taliban Overrun Afghan Border District, Opening a New Front," The New York Times, August 27, 2016,

The Afghan intelligence agency said Sunday that the Taliban leader, Mullah Akhtar Muhammad Mansour, had been killed in the strike in the restive Pakistani province of Baluchistan. The United States announced the strike Saturday but could not confirm that Mullah Mansour had been killed."

Pakistan continued to suffer violence in the summer of 2016, as exemplified by a suicide bombing at a hospital in the southwest city of Quetta, that killed at least 74 people after a rally by lawyers protesting the shooting death of a prominent colleague. Both ISIS and the Taliban claimed responsibility (Salmon Masood, "Suicide Bomber Kills Dozens During Rally at Hospital in Pakistan," The New York Times, August 9, 2016).

Asian (including Middle East) Developments

Max Fisher, "Syria’s Paradox: Why the War Only Ever Seems to Get Worse: Experts on civil wars say there are several reasons Syria is "a really, really tough case" that defies historical parallels," The New York Times, August 27, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/27/world/middleeast/syria-civil-war-why-get-worse.html?ref=todayspaper, provides analysis showing that the Syrian civil war is one that is extremely difficult to settle, and is likely to get worse. Fisher notes that the U.N. has found that it is easiest to settle civil wars with no outside intervention that involve only two parties. In civil wars with only two parties and no outside support, the parties usually rely on local populations for support and tend not to harm civilians. Settlement usually comes when one or both parties are exhausted or run out of resources. In Syria, the numerous weak parties are supplied by several strong outside interests, so the combatants usually are not concerned about running short of resources, and have little if any restraint about protecting civilians. Indeed, there are advantages to killing, injuring and destroying the property of civilians linked to opponents. In the current situation the war cannot be won by any party. The main goal is to keep from being eliminated, even if that makes one’s position worse in the long run. With multiple combatant parties who do not trust each other, even if there is a will to settle the war, it is extremely difficult to find a way to do that.

ICG, Joost Hiltermann, "The Kurds: A Divided Future?, May 19, 2019, http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/05/19/kurds-syria-iraq-divided-future/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=a0c4e9bea3-Weekly_Update_13_20_May_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-a0c4e9bea3-359871089, commented, "The Kurdish regions of Syria and Iraq are linked by a thin and fragile thread, a two-lane highway that passes camps filled with refugees from the wars ravaging these lands. The road is bisected by the Tigris, the international frontier that separates not only Syria from Iraq but also Kurds from Kurds. This was the border that first took shape one hundred years ago this week with the Sykes-Picot agreement between Britain and France—the first of a series of negotiations aimed at dividing the former Ottoman territories of the Levant between the two European powers. And while ISIS has made its hostility to the Anglo-French map well known, it is arguably the Kurds who have been most affected by the modern state system that has emerged from it.

Just how divided the more than 30 million Kurds continue to be was made clear to me this spring, when I crossed this border from Iraq to Syria. The crossing itself is not difficult: on the Iraqi side, an immigration officer of the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil checks with her supervisors, fills out a form, and gives the green light. The whole procedure takes less than fifteen minutes. A small boat then
ferris you across to Syria, where an employee of the newly-minted Autonomous Administration of the Syrian Kurdish region enters your information, and gives you a stamped piece of paper attesting to your right to enter. You are then free to drive westward to Qamishli, the first major Syrian Kurdish town. On neither side of the border can one find evidence that the sovereign governments in Baghdad and Damascus are exercising their authority here.

Easy procedures, yet complex politics. The Kurds may have thrown off central rule in Iraq and Syria but the border is still there: despite the Kurds or, perhaps more accurately, because of them. The Kurds have long talked of uniting their people in a greater Kurdistan, but today their population is carved up between not only Syria and Iraq, but also Turkey and Iran, which have sizable numbers of their own. These different national populations have discovered over time that what sets them apart may be more significant than what they have in common: differences in dialect, tribal affiliation, leadership, ideology, historical experience.

And Kurdish parties on both sides of the Syria-Iraq border are reaffirming these differences every day with remarkable bureaucratic fastidiousness. What’s more, the Kurdish parties seem to have internalized the very nation-states they scorn: in Syria, their leadership and members are almost exclusively Syrian Kurds; in Iraq, Iraqi Kurds; and in Iran, Iranian Kurds. Only the Kurdish movement in Turkey, which has pan-Kurdish ambitions, includes Kurds from neighboring states, though the top leadership is from Turkey (and some only speak Turkish).

All this is apart from the deep political divisions that exist among the respective national populations. In Iraq, for example, the Kurdish leadership has developed strong relations with Turkey, which has become a principal source of investment and trade; while in Syria, the dominant Kurdish party, the PYD, is a sworn enemy of the Turkish government through its close links with the PKK, the militant Kurdish movement in Turkey that is now at war with the government. And within both Kurdish regions, the dominant parties face strong opposition from a number of other factions.

Here is the quandary in which the Kurds find themselves when they make their claim for independence: Whose claim exactly? And how to realize it? To what territory, and under whose authority? As these questions remain unanswered, the old borders are proving stubbornly persistent—by the Kurds’ own hands.

In many ways, Syria’s Kurds today appear to be reliving what their Iraqi counterparts experienced at the end of the Gulf War in 1991: the same economic desolation; the same combination of military control and security provided by rebel Kurdish parties that are prized for their ability to maintain law and order but enjoy only lukewarm local support; the same deep relief that a hated regime no longer has much say in their affairs; in both cases, a measure of unexpected support from the US; the same upswell of hope now that they are finally achieving some autonomy; and the same nagging fear that an oppressive central government—whether the current one in Damascus or a future incarnation—will return to impose its will.

But looking across the Tigris, Syria’s Kurds regard their Iraqi compatriots’ twenty-five-year-old experiment in self-government as only a partial success. The Iraqi Kurds’ opportunity arose from serendipity: Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait and subsequent defeat there left a political vacuum, but the regime rebounded, brutally suppressing their rebellion. Then, the United States and its Gulf War allies bailed them out, establishing a safe haven. Freed of the regime, the Kurds ruled their quasi-independent enclave for twelve years. After the 2003 invasion, Washington compensated them for their loyal support by securing them a place in Baghdad and helping them consolidate their autonomy. Oil and gas exploration and trade with Turkey and Iran gave the Kurdish region’s economy an enormous lift. Looking at the troubles to their south, Kurdish leaders called themselves “the other Iraq.”

But amid this remarkable progress, there have been continuous setbacks. Between 1994 and 1998, the two main Iraqi Kurdish parties, Masoud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani’s Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), fought a civil war in which Barzani opened the gates of Erbil, the region’s capital, to Saddam’s forces in order to defeat Talabani. The conflict was brought to an end by US mediation in 1998, and the two parties agreed to form a unity government in 2005. This brought stability and prosperity, but also allowed the two ruling families to split up the oil bonanza between them. Economic growth came with rampant corruption, which, when oil prices plummeted a year ago, has landed the two parties in a profound crisis of legitimacy. Instead of progress, Kurds have suddenly faced drastic reductions in public-sector salaries, while their protests have been suppressed or preempted through
intimidation by the KRG’s party-led security police.

Meanwhile, Barzani has clung to power as the region’s president, even though his term in office has expired (twice)—and despite his failure to institute reforms. At the same time, the prospect of true independence for Iraqi Kurdistan looks agonizingly remote. This may explain Barzani’s recent renewed call for an independence referendum: more a gambit to shore up his flagging popularity than a concrete step toward fulfillment of the Kurdish dream.

For Syria’s Kurds, the lessons of Iraqi Kurdistan are in any case far from the immediate concerns of war. Unlike its counterpart in Iraq, Syria’s Kurdish population is separated into three cantons in two non-contiguous areas in the country’s north, and continues to face a constant threat from ISIS forces nearby. Also unlike the Iraqi Kurds, they are aided by their alliance with Turkey’s militant PKK, but this has brought challenges of its own. The civil war in Syria has revitalized the PKK, allowing it to effectively seize control of Syrian Kurdish areas through its Syrian affiliate, the PYD, expanding the territory under its command. But the collapse of peace talks between Ankara and the PKK last summer has meanwhile precipitated a new violent conflict in Turkey, causing the Turkish government in turn to put more pressure on Syrian Kurdish areas. (Since the peace talks broke down, Turkey has accused the PYD of sending arms across the border to support the PKK’s insurgency.) Today, the Turkish-PKK war is causing large-scale displacement in southeastern Turkey and giving no sign of letting up. It seemed paradoxical, standing safely in Qamishli in a Syria at war, to listen to the sounds of gunfire just across the border in Turkey.

Complicating matters further, while the Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish leaderships have diametrically opposed relations with Turkey, both are now allied with the US in a joint struggle against the Islamic State—a struggle in which both Kurdish regions have proven notably effective. This has presented the Syrian Kurdish PYD with a tricky strategic choice: Should it seek to replicate the Iraqi Kurdish model of using American power as a vector for Kurdish ambitions? If it does so, it knows that Washington seems likely to limit those ambitions, providing some degree of Kurdish autonomy within a Syrian state that Washington hopes to rebuild through a peace process sponsored by the US and Russia. Or should Syria’s Kurds exploit the country’s disorder to expand the territory under their control and simultaneously escalate the war in Turkey in overall pursuit of the ultimate Kurdish goal: to gather up the four severed Kurdish parts and reconstitute them into a single “Greater Kurdistan”?

Though the motivations are very different, the long-term geographic aspirations of the Kurds are oddly similar to those of the jihadists they are fighting: both seem equally intent on erasing the old borders of the post-Ottoman order. When I drew this somewhat audacious parallel in conversation with a PYD official in northern Syria during a visit in March, there was a brief, uncomfortable silence. Then he flashed a bright smile and said: ‘Daesh threw the first bomb. We will reap the result.’

Syria’s Kurdish leaders are frank about their willingness to use conflict and chaos to their own advantage. The PYD’s fighting force, the YPG, having gained a sense of its value, and therefore leverage, as an indispensable ally in the fight against the Islamic State, doesn’t shy away from playing the big powers in the region—the US, Russia, Turkey, the regime of Bashar al-Assad—against each other, regardless of the cost. If Washington continues to treat the YPG as little more than a private security company, a hired hand to help it dislodge ISIS from the banks of the Euphrates, and refuses to help the YPG in its territorial ambition to unify the three Kurdish cantons (which are interspersed with Arab, Turkoman, and Christian populations), then the YPG believes it can use the prospect of a de facto alliance with Russia to get more support from the US.

Kurdish leaders say that Russian officials have told them that if the YPG tries to extend the area of northern Syria under its control all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean (where, incidentally, few if any Kurds can be found), Russia will not prevent it. This may help explain the PYD’s announcement of a federal region (under its control, and with boundaries not yet established) on the eve of the Kurdish New Year in March, a statement that lit up social media and electrified opinion throughout the dismembered Kurdish realm. Another reason for the timing of the announcement may have been the PYD’s wish to draw attention to its cause after it was excluded from the Geneva talks about Syria. Of course the announcement does not create a unified region—to unify the Kurdish areas would require a major military effort against both ISIS and Turkey, and US-backed rebels north of Aleppo. But the YPG is a disciplined and accomplished military force and, unimpeded by a major power, could make significant headway in realizing this goal.
What makes such consolidation of territory particularly dangerous is the possibility that it might draw in the Turkish military. Turkey has already warned that any move to connect the Kurdish canton of Afrin north of Aleppo with other Kurdish areas further east along Turkey’s border would be unacceptable. This is not only because it cannot countenance a large area of Syria’s border with Turkey controlled by Kurds allied with the PKK. It is also because such a move would sever the only remaining supply line to rebel groups in Aleppo that are backed by Turkey. A Turkish military counter-move against the YPG, if not done by proxy, might in turn trigger Russian airstrikes, and from that point on, given Turkey’s likely invocation of its NATO membership, further international intervention could derail efforts to wind down the Syrian war.

It need not come to this. If it does, it will be because the Obama administration, the one power that has leverage with both Turkey and the YPG, is so internally confused that it cannot accomplish either one of its strategic goals: a political transition to a post-Assad era in Syria and the defeat of the Islamic State. It is pursuit of these two aims that has seen some factions in the Obama administration pressing for greater support for Turkey-backed Syrian rebels in Aleppo and along a corridor to the Turkish border; and other factions that are championing a strengthening of the YPG as the US’s most effective auxiliary in the fight against the Islamic State, which it sees as the top US priority. The two approaches cannot be successfully pursued simultaneously.

The sensible way forward would be for the Obama administration to condition its support for the YPG on the latter’s willingness to rein in its territorial ambitions; the quid pro quo could be a promise of US support for Kurdish rights in Syria during a political transition and beyond. At the same time, the administration would need to nudge Erdoğan to return to peace talks with the PKK in exchange for US support of Turkish interests in northern Syria, including prevention of a unified PYD/YPG-run Kurdish region and an end to the YPG’s provision of weapons and other assistance to the PKK in southeastern Turkey.

Such a deal, a tall order by any reckoning, is further complicated by two issues. One is Erdoğan’s increasing authoritarianism, including, in recent months, the intimidation, censorship, and detention of journalists and other critics, and the use of the fight against the PKK to try to push through constitutional amendments in Turkey to create a presidential system. The Turkish head of state may prove difficult to dissuade from the effort to erode his country’s democratic institutions, unless either military failure in the southeast or a popular uprising against his rule provides the necessary counter-pressure. The other issue is the Turkish perception that the PKK’s resurgence is part of a larger regional competition involving Iran. According to this view, Iran has stoked Kurdish irredentist nationalism in Turkey, Iraq, and Syria (but not at home) against those Kurds who are supported by Turkey and who are willing to work within the existing state system. The area in which this struggle has unfolded most dramatically is northern Iraq.

'We are in a chess game in which we are the pieces, not the players,' observed Shaho Saeed, a philosophy teacher at the University of Sulaimani, in northern Iraq. In the past, the Kurds’ four hosts—Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria—used the Kurds’ geographic and ideological divisions to limit their aspirations in their own territory. Now, with Damascus preoccupied with greater threats and the government in Baghdad effectively neutralized, the Kurds have two enemies fewer to cope with, more time, and more terrain in which to lay the foundations of a future unified state. Their two other hosts, Turkey and Iran, remain strong, however, and despite their quarrel over who should rule Syria, both seek to prevent the emergence of an independent Kurdish state.

Turkey’s proven method of influencing Iraq’s Kurds is economic: it uses its weight as an economic powerhouse to offer favorable trade, investment, and business contracts to northern Iraq. In return for their pliancy, Iraqi Kurds gain an export channel for their oil through Turkey, which secures what has become their principal revenue stream. This arrangement, in place since 2008, has worked well for both sides and has survived regional upheavals, at least until now. But neither Turkey nor Iraq’s Kurdish leadership has much to offer Syria’s own Kurds, at least as long the PYD remains in charge and subordinate to the PKK.

Iran’s method is to rule by dividing: to support one Kurd against another, and Baghdad against the Kurds. The main dividing line in northern Iraq lies between pro-Barzani Kurds near the Turkish border, who speak the Kurmanji dialect, and Surani-speaking pro-Talabani Kurds in areas closer to Iran. Notwithstanding the two parties’ strategic partnership and common enmity toward the Islamic State, Iran has handily exploited the historic competition between them, and has tried to bring its own favored Kurds—the PKK in
Turkey, the PYD/YPG in Syria, and Talabani’s PUK in Iraq—into a broad alliance against Barzani’s KDP. For its part, the PUK is torn between its ideological predisposition and its economic interests: 'Its heart belongs to the PKK but its pocket to the KDP,' as Shaho Saeed put it memorably.

In short, the Kurdish political landscape is no less fractured than the region around it. Iraqi Kurdistan may have ended its economic dependence on Baghdad but any notion it harbors of breaking away from Iraq can never amount to more than quasi-independence—shibeh istiqlaal in Arabic—as an opposition leader put it, as long as the region, floating on a sea of corruption and adrift in economic misery, lacks the economic resources, military power, and international recognition it would need. Were Barzani to press ahead with formal statehood, the Kurds, who would be a late addition to the family of nation-states, would be living in a newly independent failed state on the model of South Sudan. Heavily indebted to the oil companies that came in search of its riches, the new entity would be choked off economically by Turkey and wracked by internal conflicts stoked by Iran.

Having been denied a state for the last one hundred years, and now facing a collapse of the old post-Ottoman states in Baghdad and Damascus, many Kurds may dream of destroying the modern borders of the Middle East to finally create one. Yet they first have to contend with ISIS, which wants not just to erase the borders but to bring down the entire Middle East as we know it. Nor have the Kurds been very effective at changing any of the borders that obstruct them. What comes next may be determined less by Kurdish dreams and schemes than by what remains of Syria once Daesh leaves, and what protections for Kurds might be wrung from that. Paradoxically, to guarantee their autonomy—and their survival—the Kurds may end up needing Sykes-Picot just as much as their old overlords did.


The movement of the senior Qaeda jihadists reflects Syria’s growing importance to the terrorist organization and most likely foreshadows an escalation of the group’s bloody rivalry with the Islamic State, Western officials say."


Secretary of State John Kerry, after talks with his Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov, said an internationally brokered cease-fire in Syria had been undermined by two problems: bombings by the Syrian government and attacks by the Nusra Front."

David E. Sanger, "In Syria Talks, U.S. and Russia Propose Airdrops if Assad Forces Block Aid," The New York Times, May 17, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/18/world/europe/syria-truce-kerry-assad-aiddrop.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Secretary of State John Kerry and his Russian counterpart, Sergey V. Lavrov, said on Tuesday that if President Bashar al-Assad of Syria continues to block access of humanitarian aid to besieged cities and towns, they were prepared to help the World Food Program airdrop food and emergency supplies.

The very fact that they had to threaten the airdrops — which are expensive and often inaccurate — amounted to an admission of how little progress has been made in achieving either the lasting cease-fire or the regular humanitarian relief that European and Arab nations, along with Iran, laid out as the first steps toward a broader peace agreement."

signed an internal memo sharply critical of the Obama administration's policy in Syria, urging the United States to carry out military strikes against the government of President Bashar al-Assad to stop its persistent violations of a cease-fire in the country's five-year-old civil war.


Russian use of the base, with Iran’s obvious support, appeared to set back or at least further complicate Russia's troubled relations with the United States, which has been working with Russia over how to end the Syria conflict."

Anne Barnard and Andrew E. Kramer, "Iran Revokes Russia’s Use of Air Base, Saying Moscow 'Betrayed Trust'," The New York Times, August 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/23/world/middleeast/iran-russia-syria.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Iran on Monday annulled permission for Russian planes to fly bombing runs into Syria from an Iranian base, only a week after having granted such extraordinary access, saying that the Kremlin had been unacceptably public and arrogant about the privilege.

The about-face and the explanation for it from Iran’s foreign and defense ministries appeared to reflect deep-seated and longstanding suspicions of Russia despite their tactical alliance in the Syria war."


The strikes appeared to have been a mistake, with the civilians taken for Islamic State (IS or ISIS) militants, the U.K.-based human rights group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights group told the AFP news agency.

Fifty-six civilians were killed on Tuesday by coalition forces, and 21 civilians were killed by the coalition on Monday. The 77 civilian deaths included at least 11 children."

"Airwars estimates that the total number of civilians killed in Syria by the U.S.-led coalition is 1,422, at minimum, to date."


The abductions began shortly after the Syria Democratic Forces, a Kurdish-dominated coalition of Kurds fighting the Islamic State and backed by the United States, began an offensive on May 31 to capture the town of Manbij from the militants."


The cease-fire, reached after days of deadly fighting with government forces in the province of Hasaka, brings the province closer to becoming the third to slip from the grasp of President Bashar al-Assad in the country's five-year-old war.

The neighboring province of Raqqa has been under the control of the Islamic State militant group
for the past few years. Idlib, a northwestern province, fell to other insurgents last year.

The battle for Hasaka was the first time the Syrian government had used airstrikes on Kurdish areas. It signaled a new, volatile period in the northeast, where fighting had mainly been between Kurdish-led, American-backed forces and the Islamic State.

Kurdish control of the province and its capital, also named Hasaka, could shift some important allegiances in the conflict. Neighboring Turkey, which opposes Mr. Assad, could make an about-face and seek a partial reconciliation with him if it sees him as less of a threat than a Kurdish attempt to build a semiautonomous region along the Turkish border.

Early on Wednesday, the Turkish prime minister’s office said that Turkish and American-led coalition forces had begun an operation to clear Islamic State forces from the border town of Jarabulus, in Aleppo Province. The operation seemed intended, in part, to prevent Kurdish forces from reaching the town first.”

In early August, after the government had been making advances against non-Islamist forces in Aleppo, cutting off most of their supply and reinforcement routes, the opposition forces in and around Aleppo counter attacked making significant advances (Ben Hubbard and Maher Samaan, “Rebel Forces Make Gains in Fight for Aleppo,” The New York Times, August 8, 2016).


"At 4am this morning, operations started in the north of Syria against terror groups which constantly threaten our country," said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Ankara on Wednesday, according to the Guardian. Turkey's government classifies Kurdish nationalists as terrorists, although Erdoğan also pointed to a bomb attack that killed 54 in Southern Turkey, which the Turkish regime blamed on ISIS, as justification for Wednesday's siege in Syria.

Turkey’s onslaught is backed by the U.S., while the Kurdish group that Turkey is targeting, the leftwing Kurdish nationalist YPG, is also backed by the United States.

"If Turkey's forces drive out ISIS,' observes the Christian Science Monitor, 'it could lead to a messy confrontation between the Turkish government and the U.S.-backed YPG.'

And while Turkey has long battled against Kurdish nationalists both within and outside of its borders while the West turned a blind eye, Wednesday marks the first large-scale Turkish military operation against Kurdish militias in Syria.

It appears the military operation is in part to prevent the creation of a Kurdish-controlled territory on the other side of Turkey’s border. Just days ago, U.S.-allied Kurdish forces successfully overtook the former ISIS stronghold of Manbij—after U.S. bombs killed up to 28 civilians in the northern Syrian city.

"If the YPG took Jarabulus, it would be in a position to close the gap between two Kurdish cantons in the north of Syria and create a united strip of Kurdish control along the Turkish border, which Syrian Kurds refer to as Rojava,' writes Middle East expert Juan Cole. "Turkey is desperate to halt that attempt at Syrian Kurdish consolidation of territory." There have already been reports of Turkish airstrikes on Syrian Kurds, Cole notes.

"Kurdish gains along the Turkish border have been anathema to Erdoğan’s government, which had restarted its war against the Kurdish population inside Turkey as well as against [Kurdish] PKK camps in Iraq,' argues commentator Vijay Prashad. "It was this war that opened up tensions between Washington and Ankara, with the former uneasy with the Turkish assault on some of the main groups that had been fighting [ISIS]."

Vice President Joe Biden is also currently in Ankara, reportedly to assure Erdoğan that the U.S. is not behind the country's recent failed military coup, and to request that Turkey 'step up to do its part' against ISIS, Cole notes.

If Turkey has agreed to target ISIS to assuage D.C. politicians, it seems that Washington may be
threatening to pull support from the Kurds in order to assuage Turkey: the AP reported Wednesday that Biden has ordered U.S.-backed Kurdish militias to give up territory and 'move back across' the Euphrates River, as Turkey desires, or risk losing U.S. support.

Indeed, the Middle East Eye quotes a Turkish official saying that the U.S. 'promised' Turkey that the U.S.-backed YPG will not try to consolidate more territory near the Turkish border—and if the group did, Turkey would 'take the requisite action':

Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a press conference in Ankara that the Turkish army would continue its efforts against the YPG, saying they were "no different" from the PKK[, which is recognized by the E.U. and U.S. as a terrorist organization].

'Why did Salih Muslim and the YPG get upset by our operation against [ISIS]?’ he asked. [...] 'They have their own hidden agenda.'

He added that the YPG should 'not cross west of the Euphrates'.

'The U.S. promised this to us,' he explained. 'If they cross we will take the requisite action.'

With Wednesday's developments, President Barack Obama's much-criticized policy in Syria grows increasingly incoherent, critics argue.

Indeed, Turkey's military assault also comes on the heels of news that U.S.-backed Kurdish forces are currently attacking Syrian President Bashar Assad's militias in the northern city of Hasakah. The Daily Beast notes: 'In a conflict where alliances shift kaleidoscopically and the potential consequences of unwanted clashes are apocalyptic, this battle has raised the possibility Washington will be drawn into a direct conflict with the Syrian regime even as the Obama administration continues to focus its war effort on [ISIS].'

And while alliances shift and U.S. policy becomes more and more contradictory, the horrific Syrian war is now in its sixth year: '[... ] the kaleidoscope continues to turn, and the war goes on,' as the Daily Beast writes:

Note, If what is presented in the above Common Dreams article is accurate, the U.S. policy (whether appropriate or not) is quite clear, support two opposing allies in fixes, but limited goals, to try and keep both reasonably happy, and make it easier to end the conflict between them, while keeping a united front against ISIS. - Steve Sachs


Some of the stolen weapons were used in a shooting in November that killed two Americans and three others at a police training facility in Amman, F.B.I. officials believe after months of investigating the attack, according to people familiar with the investigation."


The Yemen peace talks were suspended, August 8, 2016, after three months of negotiations, but were to be restarted in September. The suspension raises doubts about continuation of the shaky ceasefire in the country (Rod Nordland, " Suspended Yemen Talks Leave Cease-Fire in Doubt," The New York Times, August 8, 2016).

The increasingly violated ceasefire essentially collapsed, August 12, with Saudi Arabia launching heavy air attacks. The U.N. Office of Human Rights reported that from May to early August, 2016, more than 200 Yemeni civilians and killed, and more than 500 wounded, in the conflict ("Yemen Fighting," San
And once again a hospital was bombed, Shauaib Almoswa, "Bombing of Doctors Without Borders Hospital in Yemen Kills at Least 15," The New York Times, August 15, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/world/middleeast/yemen-doctors-without-borders-hospital-bombing.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "At least 15 people were killed on Monday in northern Yemen when warplanes bombed a hospital supported by Doctors Without Borders, according to hospital and local health ministry officials."

Tim Arango, Sabrina Tavernise and Ceylan Yegensu, "Istanbul Airport Attack Leaves at Least 41 Dead," The New York Times, June 28, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/29/world/europe/turkey-istanbul-airport-explosions.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "Three suicide attackers killed at least 41 people and wounded dozens more at Istanbul’s main airport on Tuesday night, in the latest in a string of terrorist attacks in Turkey, a NATO ally once seen as a bastion of stability but now increasingly consumed by the chaos of the Middle East.

Hours after the assault, Prime Minister Binali Yildirim of Turkey said that early indications pointed to an operation carried out by the Islamic State, but as of early Wednesday, the group had not claimed responsibility for the attack.

The airport attack in Istanbul follows Turkey’s tightening up against ISIS, many of whose fighters reached Suria through Turkey, and often had obtained cell phones and numbers, as well as other needs in Turkey (Rukmini Callimachi, "Turkey, a Conduit for Fighters Joining ISIS, Begins to Feel Its Wrath," The New York Times, June 29, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/30/world/middleeast/turkey-a-conduit-for-fighters-joining-isis-begins-to-feel-its-wrath.html?ref=todayspaper).

ICG, Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, Nigar Göksel and Berkay Mandiraci, "The Struggle with Islamic State that Turkey Hoped to Avoid," July 4, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/2016/07/04/the-struggle-with-islamic-state-that-turkey-hoped-to-avoid/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=acd55f2d88-Turkey_Q_A_4_June_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-acd55f2d88-359871089, discussed, "Turkey has blamed the so-called Islamic State (IS) for the triple suicide gun and bomb assault on Istanbul airport on 28 June that killed 45 people. Some of the gunmen had family links to Russia’s troubled North Caucasus, from where many people have moved to and through Turkey. More broadly, the assault brings into the open a struggle with IS that Turkey had hoped it could avoid. In this Q&A, Crisis Group tapped the views of its Project Director and Analyst in Turkey, Nigar Göksel and Berkay Mandiraci, as well as its Russia and the North Caucasus Project Director, Ekaterina Sokirianskaia.

How much do we know about the North Caucasus jihadists who carried out the Istanbul attacks and their links to Turkey?

Turkish police declared that two of the bombers are Russian citizens, at least one of them with links to the North Caucasus. According to the Turkish media, one or more had travelled to Turkey from Raqqa, one of the main strongholds of IS in northern Syria. It is not yet clear if they previously resided in Turkey.

The raid’s organizer is thought to be Akhmed Chatayev (also known as Akhmad Shishani), a highly positioned Chechen in IS. Chatayev had previously fought against Russia in Chechnya, where he was injured and lost one arm (for which he is better known as “One-handed Akhmed”), and subsequently fled the country in 2002. A year later he was granted asylum in Austria.

In 2007, he became a “representative”, recruiter and fundraiser in Europe for the newly founded Caucasus Emirate, a group loosely associated with al-Qaeda which used terrorist methods during operations in the Russian North Caucasus. In 2013, Chatayev swore allegiance to IS and reportedly played an important role in the incorporation of the North Caucasus jihadist groups into IS.

Since the nineteenth century, Muslims from the North Caucasus and other areas under Russian rule have moved or were forcefully resettled to Turkey in significant numbers. In the last decade, thousands more moved to Turkey to escape pressure from the Russian government. Most are North Caucasus Salafis, believers in a purist Sunni orthodoxy. The overwhelming majority of them are non-violent.
Why would persons from the North Caucasus take part in a terrorist attack against a mainly Turkish target like Istanbul airport?

There are many signs of rising Muslim radicalization in the former Soviet space, not just in the North Caucasus but also in Russian cities and in Central Asia. This has resulted in young people travelling to IS, prompted by a wide array of grievances and motivations. These are not just fighters, but individuals and families seeking a different way of life.

For North Caucasians, ultra-radical ideology feeds on memories of brutal wars in Chechnya over the past two decades, heavy subsequent counter-insurgency operations across the region, unresolved intra-confessional and ethnic conflicts, social inequality, corruption, failing social services and lack of democratic procedures.

Istanbul became the main transit hub for jihadists who wanted to go to Syria.

A first sign that this posed dangers to Turkey came when a female Dagestani suicide bomber staged an attack in Istanbul in January 2015, killing one police officer. After the attack on Istanbul airport, neighbourhood searches and arrests are now under way targeting North Caucasus and Central Asian communities all over the country.

Do you think the IS choice of attackers with links to the North Caucasus was deliberate?

The attackers’ identity could be coincidental, that is, the Russian-speakers could be just implementing the plan of IS commanders, without additional calculations. But in many places IS appears to be deliberately aggravating and exploiting divisions between communities. In Turkey, it has been working hard to radicalize the Russian-speaking communities, and has won over some, including several leaders.

North Caucasus fighters are also highly valued in IS ranks.

The tactic of staging attacks with the aim of provoking state repression, which will then be a push-factor for new recruits – a common purpose of terrorist attacks in many places – has been used by jihadist groups in the North Caucasus for years. After the wave of arrests that followed the 2015 suicide bomb attack by a Dagestani woman, there was a new wave of recruitment to jihadi groups in Iraq and Syria.

In recent months, Russia has reportedly given Turkey the names of those whom they suspect of fighting in or links with jihadist groups in Syria. Human rights organisations have received numerous complaints from the Russian Muslims in Turkey that Russia puts them on wanted lists on suspicion of involvement in the Middle East conflicts, but that they have never crossed the Syrian border. Turkish authorities have arrested a number of people from these lists, for instance when they came to extend their residence permits in Turkey. As a result many in North Caucasian communities in Turkey are afraid to extend their permits, which means they will become illegal and hence more vulnerable to recruiters. If Turkey starts to deport suspects to Russia, there could be a significant outflow from these communities to Syria.

How open is the conflict between Turkey and IS?

This is a conflict that Turkey did not want, but is becoming steadily more violent. Since July 2015, Turkey has also suffered six major bombings blamed on IS that have killed around 200 people. According to official figures, in the first five months of 2016, 989 individuals in Turkey were detained on suspicion of having links to IS, of whom 228 were arrested. The numbers were not broken down by national origin.

Also since January, apparent IS rocket attacks on Turkey’s border province of Kilis have killed more than twenty people. In response, the Turkish military has in recent months also engaged in heavily shelling of IS positions across the Syria border.

Since Turkey officially joined the coalition against IS in August 2015, it has become an explicit target of domestic IS mobilization, IS leaders’ rhetoric and IS publications. In January, IS hardened its position toward Turkey, branding it as an “infidel” Muslim nation because of its secular democracy, calling its ruling pro-Islamic party a “hostile regime”, and using the word tağut to demonize a state that had supposedly “transgressed” the path of true faith. IS social media campaigns #tağutnedir (“what is tağut?”) and #tağut are in circulation since last September, and have recently focused on top officials like President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Even so, Turkey remains a critical, informal logistical base for IS. One reason IS has not made claims of responsibility for its apparent attacks in Turkey may be that the group hopes to dodge or mitigate Turkish reactions, and to give more space to a small minority of Turkish Sunni Muslims who may
support or sympathies with it. It needs to protect its access to the outside world as it faces mounting challenges on its southern fronts. According to Turkish intelligence reports, sermons delivered in IS controlled mosques in Syria reveal that the Turkish towns and provinces of Gaziantep, Nizip, Karkamış and Kilis are among IS’s primary targets.

IS’s official propaganda magazine in Turkish, *Konstantiniyye* (“Constantinople”, an Ottoman-era name for Istanbul), has targeted the Turkish security forces. January’s edition opened with a section called “The Pharaoh’s Soldiers” that called members of the security forces “blasphemous”. Posts on the *Konstantiniyye* Twitter account have emphasized that IS will take action against soldiers or employees at any level of the Turkish military apparatus.

In *Konstantiniyye’s* April edition, IS adroitly tried to find favor in Turkish public opinion, which is traumatized by the past year’s upsurge in the three-decade-old conflict with the insurgent Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). It highlighted what it said was a Turkish policy that “sacrifices soldiers to support the PKK in Syria” in the name of its Western allies while waging war against the PKK within its own borders. “There will be no rest for Turkey until the establishment of the Islamic State [in the country]”, the magazine said.

**Turkey has seemed reluctant in the past to put all its resources in the fight against IS. Its main effort has been to eliminate the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a principal domestic threat. Do you think this will change?**

During the early years of the Syria war, Turkey tolerated many kinds of people transiting its territory to Syria, partly because it believed volunteer fighters would speed the fall of President Bashar al-Assad. Even if there was no active assistance from Ankara, this situation made life easier for IS. Another reason for Ankara’s lack of overt hostility was that IS was locked in combat with Syrian Kurdish groups loyal to the PKK. Ankara perceives the PKK as its main enemy, especially since a ceasefire and peace talks broke down a year ago. Since then, fighting related to the PKK insurgency has killed at least 1,600 people, according to Crisis Group’s open source casualty tally.

For sure, the Istanbul airport attack is notable for being the IS action most directly aimed at Turks or a Turkish institution so far. But if Turkey is going to turn toward an all-out focus on IS, it has not happened yet. In the days after the attack, there was still as much focus on the PKK as on the IS in Turkey’s official statements. Ankara’s discourse about the two terrorist organisations being the same is unchanged, with consistent criticism of its Western allies for applying double standards in urging a negotiated resolution to the PKK conflict. Turkey has even tried to use the international sympathy generated by the IS attack as a platform to draw attention to PKK-related attacks.

**Given that some of the attackers may have links to Russia, what impact will the Istanbul airport attack have on the apparent warming of relations between Ankara and Moscow?**

Since 2012, Moscow and Ankara have had deep differences over Syria. Russia firmly supports President Bashar al-Assad, and Turkey resolutely opposes him. The relationship soured further in November 2015 when Turkey shot down a Russian warplane on its Syrian border, and Russia reacted by imposing bans on trade and once-popular visits to Turkey by Russian tourists.

The two sides had already begun a rapprochement before the Istanbul airport attack, and the trend is likely to improve strongly. This is evidenced by a condolence call after the outrage from Russia’s President Vladimir Putin to Erdoğan and an end to Moscow’s Russian tourism ban. Russia is Turkey’s principal supplier of natural gas and a major trading partner, so this is a gain for Ankara, but wariness toward its historic regional rival will not disappear anytime soon.

It may be that IS chose suicide bombers from these nationalities to send a message to Ankara not to join Russia’s alliance with the regime in Damascus against them. But given Turkey’s feud with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, that would be a long shot. Privately, officials are signaling that Ankara’s hard line against Assad may be changing, but this will be limited and not go so far as allying itself with Russia. **Where does the Istanbul airport attack leave Turkey?**

The speed that Istanbul airport got back up and running symbolizes the resilience of a country accustomed to crisis and conflict. But this comes after several years in which several pillars of Turkish prosperity have been badly damaged.

Political differences within Europe, democratic regression in Turkey and other factors have gravely undermined faith in Turkey’s European Union accession process, once a major locomotive of reform. The
Syria war has tested both its longstanding alliance with the U.S. and also its formerly strong commercial partnership with Russia. Foreign investment and tourism have plummeted as turmoil has spilled over its borders with the Middle East. At the same time, Turkey has had to deploy massive resources to offer refuge and support to several million of people fleeing the conflict in Syria and beyond. In short, Turkey will need all the hardiness it can muster to withstand the new front IS has opened against it.

An attempted Coup by a faction in the military in Turkey failed, in mid July. Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu,"As Turkey Coup Unfolded, ‘the Whole Night Felt Like Doomsday’"  The New York Times, July 16, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/17/world/europe/as-the-coup-in-turkey-unfolded-the-whole-night-felt-like-doomsday.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, "Thousands of soldiers and officers purged from the military. A helicopter shot down over the capital. Hundreds of people lying dead on city streets. As dawn broke Saturday, the citizens of Turkey emerged sleep-deprived and angst-ridden after a night of violence that felt more like life in war-stricken neighbors like Syria or Iraq. And trying to assert control was President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, targeting plotters in the previous night’s coup and other perceived enemies of the state.
The embattled president, after a confusing absence in the early hours of the coup, appeared to speak to the nation early Saturday. He exhorted his followers with the FaceTime app from his cellphone, resorting to the kind of medium he has long sought to suppress."

Zvi Bar'el, "The Failure of Turkey’s Coup: Now It’s the Omnipotent Erdogan’s Turn for a Revolution," Haaretz, July 16, 2016, http://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/turkey/.premium-1.731359, commented, "The conspirators have underrated the extent of support Turkey's president enjoys, and it appears the public preferred undemocratic democracy to military rule. For Erdogan, the failed coup could be an important leverage on the way to change the constitution.
The attempted coup in Turkey might be just the powerful leverage Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan needs to fulfill his aspiration to become an omnipotent president and carry out a constitutional coup. After two elections last year, in which he was unable to attain a large enough majority in parliament, the third such campaign, which will take advantage of the anti-coup sentiment of the public and popular anger over the attempt, will finally allow Erdogan to amend the constitution as he wishes. This would mean broad executive powers that would turn the president into the executive arm of the state. He would no longer be the ceremonial figure he is now - albeit one who enjoys important powers such as the right to appoint the prime minister and the army chief of staff, but still a far cry from the American model."

Tim Arango, Ceylan Yeginsu and Ben Hubbard, "Vast Purge in Turkey as Thousands Are Detained in Post-Coup Backlash," The New York Times, July 18, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/19/world/europe/turkey-erdogan-crackdown.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "The Turkish government’s crackdown after a military coup attempt widened into a sweeping purge on Monday, cutting a swath through the security services and reaching deeply into the government bureaucracy and the political and business classes. The sheer numbers being detained or dismissed were stunning: nearly 18,000 in all, including 6,000 members of the military, almost 9,000 police officers, as many as 3,000 judges, 30 governors and one-third of all generals and admirals, as well as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s own military attaché.  The magnitude of the backlash by Mr. Erdogan suggested that the depth of support for the coup was far greater than it initially appeared, or that the president was using the opportunity to root out all perceived adversaries, or both." Erdogan's recent history indicated that he is using the coups as an opportunity to get rid of or silence any one who might possibly criticize him.
Since the breakdown of a two-and-a-half year ceasefire in July 2015, the PKK conflict in Turkey has entered one of its deadliest chapters in more than three decades, devastating communities in Turkey’s majority Kurdish south east and striking at the heart of the country’s largest metropolitan centres.

International Crisis Group has worked to track the rising cost of violence using open-source data, including reports from Turkish language media, local Kurdish rights groups, and the Turkish military. According to Crisis Group’s open-source casualty tally, last updated on 3 May 2016, at least 1,761 people have been killed in clashes between security forces and the PKK since 20 July 2015. This includes:

**Civilians**

Confirmed by Crisis Group as non-combatants, these individuals have overwhelmingly been killed in urban clashes in the south east or in PKK-affiliated bomb attacks in metropolitan centres. (The Kurdish movement alleges that more civilians have died in the south east, but remain unidentified. Crisis Group includes only named casualty claims confirmed through its open-source methodology).

**State Security Force Members**

Casualties include soldiers, police officers and village guards (ethnically Kurdish paramilitaries who are armed and paid by the Turkish state). For a detailed breakdown of casualties within the security forces,

**Youth of Unknown Affiliation**

Individuals aged 16-35 killed in areas of clashes, overwhelmingly in curfew zones. These individuals cannot be positively identified as civilians or members of plainclothes PKK youth militias due to the blurred line between civilian and militant in an urban conflict setting.

**PKK Militants**

Members of the PKK - listed internationally as a terrorist organization - and affiliates active in Turkey. Crisis Group assumes that total PKK casualties are higher than its public tally, Ankara says that thousands of militants have been killed since the resumption of hostilities in July 2015.

"Clashes between state security forces and PKK militants peaked in the winter of 2015/2016, when security officials enforced weeks or months-long urban curfews to "restore public order" in districts and towns where PKK-backed youth militias had erected barricades and trenches to claim control."

More data is available via: http://www.crisisgroup.be/interactives/turkey/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=af9a78dc96-Turkey_commentary_20_July_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-af9a78dc96-359871089.

Turkey was diplomatic fences at the end of June 2016, reaching an agreement with Israel to restore diplomatic relations (with Israel compensating families of Turks killed by Israeli commandos when their ship attempted to bring relief supplies to Gaza - an ongoing struggle), and Turkey apologizing to Russia for shooting down a Russian fighter plane that violated Turkish air space at the Syrian border (Sabrina Tavernise, "Seeking to Improve Ties With Russia, Turkey Apologizes for Downing Warplane," The New York Times, June 27, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/28/world/europe/russia-turkey-erdogan-putin.html?ref=todayspaper).

ICG, April Longley Alley, "Can the Kuwait peace talks break Yemen’s deadlock?" April 6, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/worldwide/2016/04/16/can-the-kuwait-peace-talks-break-yemens-deadlock/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=f6c36a8fe8-syria_q_a_4may16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-f6c36a8fe8-359871089, commented, "Since fighting broke out in March last year, Yemen’s war has taken a devastating toll on this poorest country on the Arabian Peninsula. The conflict between the insurgent Huthi movement on the one side and the government of President Abed-Rabbo Mansour Hadi, supported by a Saudi-led international coalition on the other side, has cost the lives of more than 6,000 people, half of whom were civilians. It has forced more than two million people to flee and has brought the largest part of the population on the verge of famine. All hopes are now directed at UN-brokered peace talks due to start on Monday 18 April in Kuwait."
In this Q&A, Crisis Group’s Senior Analyst for the Arabian Peninsula, April Longley Alley, assesses what can be expected from the talks.

Crisis Group: You have been observing the situation for many years. How hopeful are you that the upcoming talks will finally break the deadlock between the main warring parties?

April Longley Alley: I am cautiously hopeful. What we can say for sure is that this is the best chance that Yemen has had since the beginning of the war to return to a political process. For the first time, the two protagonists with the capacity to end major combat, the Huthis and the Saudis, seem more willing than ever to do so.

The Huthis have been pushed back on several fronts and are facing serious economic challenges, which has put them under pressure. Since October of last year, when they were pushed out of the south, they have been more willing to take the demands of the opposing side seriously. The Saudis are under pressure, too, from the media, from rights groups and from their international allies who want the war to come to an end, given the appalling destruction and humanitarian crisis in the country. Moreover, the Saudis are experiencing increased fighting close to their own border. Plus, this war is costing them a lot of money at a time of belt-tightening at home.

So both sides have strong incentives for compromise and this has created valuable space for talks. Having said that, the road to a viable Yemeni power-sharing agreement is long and extremely difficult.

What are the main challenges?

The list of obstacles is long. Let’s start with the UN-brokered ceasefire: it came into effect on April 11 but was broken several times in its first five days by both sides. Still it seems better respected than previous ones. Making a ceasefire hold is a critical part of the peace process but difficult to implement.

Neither side controls all combatants that come under their overall umbrellas and there are spoilers on both sides. On the Huthi side, for example, it is not clear how committed their military commanders really are to implementing a ceasefire or how committed the group is to making significant compromises and implementing them in political negotiations. The Huthis are aligned with former President Ali Abdullah Saleh, but so far he has been left out of some of the talks between Huthis and Saudi Arabia that had led to the current ceasefire and the opportunity to relaunch the political process. As long as he is left out, he has the incentive to be a spoiler – a dangerous one.

On the government side, things are not any easier. President Hadi said last week that he will go to Kuwait to achieve peace. But his insistence that a political process can proceed only if the Huthis fully implement UN Security Council Resolution 2216, including disarming and withdrawing their forces from seized territory, is unrealistic. Hadi’s government and the various groups loosely fighting under its umbrella have few incentives to end combat as long as Saudi Arabia is willing to support their war effort. The government’s willingness to compromise in the UN talks in Kuwait is directly linked to how much pressure Saudi Arabia is willing to apply towards a negotiated settlement.

Fighting increased significantly in the weeks leading up to the ceasefire and has continued along several key fronts even after it was announced. This might have been an attempt by both sides to strengthen their pre-talks bargaining position but it certainly clouded the atmosphere at the outset of the talks.

Another reason to worry is the recent cabinet reshuffle. President Hadi just replaced his prime minister and vice-president Khaled Bahah with General Ali Mohsen. While Bahah favored a political settlement, Mohsen is seen as a hardliner who is a long time enemy of the Huthis and Saleh’s arch-rival. The timing and substance of this appointment send a negative message to the Huthi/Saleh group at a time when Yemenis should be meeting to discuss a more inclusive government through UN talks.

How do you evaluate the set-up of the talks?

For the moment, these talks are designed to be between President Hadi’s government and, on the other side, the Huthis and former President Saleh’s General People’s Congress party, the GPC. Neither faction represents all of the different interests that matter inside Yemen. It would be necessary to widen the discussion around a number of issues, including interim security arrangements in order to make a ceasefire hold and unresolved political issues, such as the timing of elections, transitional justice and state structure.

The talks won’t be easy. In an ideal scenario, both sides would agree to compromises that can
build trust, strengthen the ceasefire and allow for an inclusive government to return to Sanaa and restart the political process. But that's a long way off. It's not clear that President Hadi's government will make any significant concessions regarding the implementation of UN Resolution 2216 or that the Huthis will agree, for example, to a timely framework for disbanding their revolutionary councils and allowing for the return of the government, albeit a more inclusive one, to the capital.

**What are the main points on the agenda of the talks?**

The UN has specified five focus points: the withdrawal of militias and armed groups, the handover of heavy weapons to the state, interim security arrangements, the restoration of state institutions, the resumption of inclusive political dialogue, and the establishment of a committee on prisoners and detainees.

All of them are crucial, of course. What I see as the most urgent priority is an agreement on mutually acceptable interim security arrangements. This would be essential to strengthening the ceasefire, providing an environment that facilitates other actions like the return of a government, disarming armed groups and having them withdraw. It is also critical to start delivering humanitarian aid and commercial goods to a population that desperately needs them.

Ultimately, to be successful, the talks must address all the issues that triggered the conflict in the first place and have now been complicated and inflamed by war: the structure of the state and national-level power sharing in both the military and the government.

**What if this chance is missed?**

That would be tragic. Yemen does not have the luxury of time to wait until another such chance arises. I see these talks as a small glimmer of hope that needs to be taken advantage of quickly – not least because of the political calendar. For example, President Obama will be traveling to Saudi Arabia on 21 April for the GCC summit and this will put a greater spotlight on Yemen and the need to have an effective ceasefire in place ahead of his visit. Now is the moment for compromise in part because the U.S. and Saudi Arabia's other allies, who are themselves under increasing pressure from rights groups, are more and more calling for a wrap-up of military operations. If this chance is not seized, we might be back to a situation where Yemen is off the radar again, even more than usual, with continuing devastating consequences for the civilian population."


Prime Minister Manuel Valls of France is scheduled to arrive in Israel this weekend, a week after the French foreign minister, Jean-Marc Ayrault, visited Ramallah to update the Palestinians, and Jerusalem to try to get the Israelis on board."

"Details of the French initiative to move beyond the current stalemate have emerged slowly: There was a plan for a meeting of interested foreign ministers to be held in Paris, without the Israelis or Palestinians in attendance. That meeting was intended to lead to an international conference to establish new parameters for negotiating a Palestinian state alongside Israel. President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority has welcomed the idea.

But that plan has already been complicated by competing interests. These include internal Israeli political machinations as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu seeks to broaden his right-wing government, which rules with a majority of one in the Israeli Parliament; regional considerations of neighboring states, including Egypt; and an apparent ambivalence by the Obama administration, which has facilitated previous rounds of Israeli-Palestinian talks without success."

Isabel Kershner, "Debate Over Role of 'People’s Army' in Israel Reflects Wider Fissures," *The New York Times*, May 29, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/30/world/middleeast/israel-idf-netanyahu-lieberman-yaalon.html?ref=todayspaper&r=0, reported, "In a politically fractious country troubled by monumental security challenges, Israel’s military has long served as an equalizer and unifier, a "people’s army" that, at least in the eyes of the Jewish majority, reflected the general interest."
But the Israeli people, and with them the government, have shifted to the right amid an upsurge of Palestinian stabbings and other attacks. Now the military finds itself at the center of a tumultuous debate about its role as the nation’s conscience and most trusted institution.

Some government ministers and an increasingly shrill segment of the public have been pushing for tougher action in the face of months of Palestinian attacks that have killed about 30 civilians and soldiers. Other Israelis want the military to remain a moderating force and a bulwark against extremism.

The debate about the military’s role has been highlighted by a series of clashes among its high command, the government and an aggressive segment of the public in recent months. The pressure on the military is also growing in light of the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman, a hard-liner, as defense minister. Mr. Lieberman has been among the harshest critics of Israeli security policies and will now serve as the army’s overlord.


The legislation, which was approved by a vote of 62 to 47, with several members absent, after a stormy debate, requires the support of 90 out of the Parliament’s 120 lawmakers to oust someone. Setting such a process in motion requires the votes of 70 lawmakers, including 10 from the opposition, which makes the process difficult to carry out. Lawmakers voted out of Parliament would be able to appeal to the Supreme Court."


Isabel Kirshner, "Israel Quietly Legalizes Pirate Outposts in the West Bank," The New York Times, August 30, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/31/world/middleeast/west-bank-israel-west-bank-outposts-mitzpe-danny.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "Unauthorized settlements dot hilltops in the West Bank, and anti-settlement groups and Palestinians say retroactively legalizing them is a methodical effort to change the region's map." (funding for settlement expansion by Israel also continues to increase)

ICG, Ofer Zalzberg, "Ramadan Confrontations Test Restraint on Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade," June 30, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/Israel-palestine/2016/06/30/ramadan-confrontations-test-restraint-on-jerusalem-s-holy-esplanade/, commented, "For the first twenty days of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, an unusual calm prevailed on Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade – known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary or the Al-Aqsa Mosque. This was largely a result of Israel and Jordan implementing four commitments agreed eighteen months ago to keep the peace through mutual limits on access.

Yet on 26 June, the beginning of the most sacred and sensitive part of Ramadan, Israel changed an informal, recent additional restriction on access to the site. Violence broke out. It exposed once again the root of the controversy: diverging perceptions between Israelis, Jordanians (whose Waqf charitable foundation administers the Esplanade) and Palestinians over who should be able to visit the site and when.

In the last five years Israel had prevented the entry of Jews and other non-Muslims during precisely the last ten days of Ramadan. This was in order to reduce the risk of escalation when Muslims worshippers often number many tens of thousands. This year, however, Israel’s Internal Security Minister Gilad Erdan allowed non-Muslim entry on the 10th day before the end of Ramadan.

Erdan was not just facing pressures to reverse the ban on access after a quiet start to the month. Israeli decision-makers also saw it as correcting of a temporary and self-imposed constraint. They feared
that the de facto ban would become part of the informal status quo. Jordanians and Palestinians, for their part, saw it as a violation of what had become an established norm.

The first group of Jewish Temple activists had barely entered the compound through the Mughrabi Gate at 7:30 AM on Sunday 26 June when clashes began. Shouting by young Palestinians soon turned into fisticuffs, stones and firecrackers. By the end of the day five Palestinians had been wounded; three Muslim British citizens who joined the protests and two Palestinians were arrested. The Palestinian Authority’s Mufti of Jerusalem, Muhammad Hussein, called on all Palestinians to rally at the al-Aqsa Mosque to defend it.

Not wanting to appear weak or to cave into the violence, Israel again permitted non-Muslims to enter the following day, 27 June. The outcome was worse. Israeli police clashed for hours with masked young Palestinians who attacked from within the mosque, ultimately locking them inside to allow non-Muslims to make a shortened, rapid visit of the Esplanade. Live on broadcast and social media, Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews saw the holy site turn into a battle zone. Rocks and fire crackers flew in one direction, stun and smoke grenades in the other.

On the morning of Tuesday 28 June, Israeli police backtracked and announced that the site would be closed to non-Muslims until the end of Ramadan. But with the atmosphere so tense, the situation continued to deteriorate. By the end of another day of violent clashes at the Esplanade the Israeli police had arrested seventeen Muslims, including a Waqf official. A few stones reached the Western Wall prayer plaza and injured a 73 year-old Jewish worshipper.

The violence showed how Ramadan complicates not only the established access regime but also the range of responses available to the Israeli and Jordanian authorities. Because the Western Wall plaza, located just below the Esplanade, is Israel’s most significant place of prayer, often occupied by thousands of Jewish worshippers, the Israel Police typically take no chance with stone-throwing: they storm the Esplanade as soon as a risk manifests itself. However, given the dense crowds in the compound during the holy month, it is difficult to identify potential stone-throwers quickly.

The four commitments were reached in 2014 between Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Jordan’s King Abdullah. Netanyahu committed to keep all Knesset members, some of whom had made incendiary statements about Israeli sovereignty and replacing the Dome of the Rock with a Jewish Temple, off the Esplanade; to refrain from categorical age or gender limitations on Muslim access, as the police frequently had imposed as a security measure, that backfired; and to keep provocative activists from the site and limit religious Jewish groups permitted to enter. Abdullah’s single, crucial commitment was to keep the young Palestinians who became the next day’s stone-throwers from surreptitiously entering the compound at night.

Since then, the Jordanian Waqf successfully prevented young Palestinians from spending the night inside the Mosque – purportedly for conducting the night prayer, but then throwing stones in the morning in order to prevent the entry of Jewish groups. But during Ramadan, this is almost impossible for the Waqf, given the deeply rooted religious custom of performing the night prayer during the last ten days of Ramadan.

So long as Temple activists do not enter during the remaining days of Ramadan, the chances are better, though by no means guaranteed, that calm will prevail. Some young Palestinians at the site seem encouraged by the way the violent protest persuaded Israel to back down. They may seek further achievements like forcing the Israeli police to withdraw its presence from the Mughrabi Gate. If this happens, and particularly in the event of injuries, clashes may spill over into the Old City and beyond. Moreover, if the violent attacks over the last nine months are any indication, vivid images of clashes at the al-Aqsa Mosque could lead a West Banker or Arab Palestinian citizen of Israel to perpetrate an attack against Israel civilians.

Any change imposed by Israel that appears to endanger core Palestinian interests at the Esplanade – especially the division of the Esplanade between Jews and Muslims through different visiting hours or segregated areas – will likely encounter a spontaneous violent reaction from non-organized Palestinians. The recent absence of violence was the result of sticking to past access-related commitments and exercising restraint in a manner that alleviated Palestinian threat perceptions while allowing regular access to non-Muslims.

Discipline and restraint, again and again, have proven to be the best way to keep the calm. Israel
and Jordan should honor their promises to each other. Above all, Israel should avoid reinstating categorical age-based restrictions on Muslim entry and instead target stone throwers on an individual basis. Jordan and the Palestinian Authority (PA) should criticize violent protestors for turning a holy site into a battle ground.

Doing any of this will be hard. Israeli leaders would have to overcome growing criticism from right-wing politicians regarding their U-turn on the Temple Mount – while they are simultaneously criticised for an unpopular, purportedly overly dovish new reconciliation deal with Turkey. Jordan and the Palestinian Authority would need to overcome the passions of tens of thousands of worshippers collecting at the Mosque during the most portentous days of Ramadan.

To head off conflict and further escalation after Ramadan ends, Israel and Jordan need to find ways to negotiate the modus vivendi based on dialogue, not unilateral deeds. Israeli decision makers should withdraw their initiative to reinstate Esplanade access to Knesset members, both Arab and Jewish, since the latest escalation shows the dramatic risks of such mediated visits.

Any change to the established norms exposes, usually violently, the tremendous sensitivities and tensions about this sacred site that are always present, even at times of relative calm. It may be helpful for allies of both countries, first and foremost the U.S., to prod the various sides to cooperate and coordinate, entirely avoiding surprise moves, notably in advance of religious holidays.

Israeli and Jordanian officials had hoped a calm Ramadan would allow them to improve management of the site, including by renewing tourist entry to the buildings to those purchasing tickets from the Waqf – a move which would simultaneously decrease tensions by rendering the site more touristic, and strengthen the Waqf and its capacity to handle violent protests. The current crisis only proves how necessary and urgent exploring such improvements has truly become."

James Glanz and Rami Nazzal, "Solar Project Pairs Muslims and Jews to Aid West Bank Farmers," The New York Times, May 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/world/middleeast/solar-project-pairs-muslims-and-jews-to-aid-west-bank-farmers.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Samer Atiyat, a Palestinian farmworker, had climbed halfway up a 20-foot date palm and was trimming stalks that held rich clusters of the fruit, still green and unripe. Working near the Dead Sea on land that still evokes its biblical past, Mr. Atiyat, 28, grew animated when asked about a 125-foot bank of solar panels, whose power draws water from deep underground to irrigate the grove."

"Solar panels dot some of the poorest Arab villages in the West Bank and Israel, often donated by European governments. But experts in the field say the $100,000 project here in Auja is the first substantial one to be financed by a group involving both Jews and Muslims in the United States, and to have both Israeli Jews and Palestinian Muslims on its technical team. In addition to its environmental benefits, the solar project gives an economic push to farmers who struggle with unreliable and expensive electricity.

In a place of nationalistic, religious and political animosity, Palestinian farmers embraced the project on one condition. The community, said Ben Jablonski, who is Jewish and from New York and who led the initiative, insisted only that the collection of donors and engineers be free of any connection to the Israeli settlements scattered across the West Bank on land Palestinians consider their own."


But it touched a nerve in Beirut's municipal elections this week, gaining unexpected traction with voters and fueling the upstarts' conviction that it is possible to buck the Arab world's trend toward authoritarianism."

refugees.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "The mourners packed the vast hall behind the Mar Elias Church and crowded around five white coffins, some clutching flowers or photographs of the dead. A marching band struck up a dirge, and relatives of the deceased raised their arms, wailing and swaying with the rhythm.

Outside, armored vehicles rumbled through the streets, and soldiers, police officers and militiamen stood on rooftops and guarded intersections, seeking on Wednesday to prevent further catastrophe from striking this ordinarily sleepy, predominantly Christian town.

Two days earlier, two waves of suicide bombers — four who carried out nearly simultaneous attacks in the morning and four who attacked in close succession in the evening — had blown themselves up here, killing five men and wounding dozens.

The attacks were a new, terrifying spillover from the civil war in neighboring Syria, and they fractured the tenuous coexistence that had developed in Al Qaa and beyond between Lebanese residents and the Syrians who have flooded their towns seeking refuge from the violence at home.

ICG, "East China Sea: Preventing Clashes from Becoming Crises," Asia Report N°280, June 30, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/280-east-china-sea-preventing-clashes-from-becoming-crises.aspx?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=6424bd5a01-east_china_sea_30Jun16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-6424bd5a01-359871089, commented, "As China-Japan relations oscillate between hostility and détente, a credible crisis management protocol is urgently needed to manage the increasing, unplanned contacts between their military aircraft and ships. Despite intermittent negotiations, the two have been unable to agree on a maritime and air communication mechanism to help fill this gap. After suspension due to the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, China agreed to resume talks on the mechanism, comprising a hotline, meetings between defense authorities and communication protocols between forward military units in 2014. Dangerously close military aerial encounters appear to have played a fundamental role in the decision, but negotiations soon stalled over the area the mechanism would cover, an issue with implications for the dispute over the islands’ sovereignty. Resentment arising from other aspects of the relationship hardened China against compromise. With a prickly bilateral détente now in place, however, the two governments should prioritize crisis management and insulate the negotiations from their broader rivalry.

The need for crisis management is growing. The air forces are coming into contact more frequently, as each attempts to administer the overlapping Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ). Several close calls have already occurred. The navies are also increasingly in contact, as China sends ships further from its shores with greater regularity. Encounters around the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands, East China Sea and Western Pacific will continue. Different national operating guidelines, applied in an atmosphere of mutual mistrust, exacerbate the risks of miscalculation. Nationalism, increasingly institutionalized distrust on both sides and limited opportunities to build trust through military exchanges make it harder to prevent rapid escalation of hostilities should a deadly incident transpire.

Meanwhile, both sides are enhancing their military capabilities in the East China Sea. China is expanding its naval and air operations further into open waters in a bid to extend its maritime footprint to the Western Pacific, and Japan is shoring up the defenses of its south-western island chain in response. Bolstered by the Diaoyu/Senkaku dispute, the Abe administration pushed through more proactive security legislation – the most significant shift in Japan’s defense posture since the end of the Second World War. Against this backdrop, China and Japan need to seize the opportunity proffered by their current fragile reconciliation to establish crisis management ties. China should delink the subject from the political relationship and sovereignty questions: an unplanned clash with Japan would neither benefit its goal of achieving peripheral stability nor safeguard its rights. Japan should continue to engage and avoid inflammatory remarks that increase political risks for moderates in China. Staged implementation of the proposed mechanism, beginning with the hotline, could be a near-term confidence-building measure.

Fundamental mistrust makes true reconciliation unlikely in the near future, but there is common interest in preventing or limiting an accidental crisis that would harm the political, security and economic interests of both. China and Japan should thus launch the maritime and air communication mechanism as soon as possible.
RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable agreement on the Maritime and Air Communication Mechanism

To the governments of China and Japan:
1. Instruct front-line personnel, in the mechanism’s absence, to adhere to protocols in the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), to which both are party.
2. Discuss concerns about risk of collision by fishing boats and/or coast guard vessels in waters around the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the High-Level Consultations on Maritime Affairs, a multagency forum that includes the coast guard.
3. Restart vice-ministerial-level defense exchanges and resume exchanges between defense universities and research organizations.
4. China should delink Diaoyu/Senkaku sovereignty from the mechanism negotiations.
5. Japan should refrain from comments or actions which suggest revisionist views of history and a departure from the Murayama Statement, its 1995 official apology for wartime aggression, and immediately distance itself from provocative statements made by officials and politicians.
6. Japan should maintain an open dialogue with Beijing over the enhancement of its southwestern defenses and refrain from negatively publicizing China’s lawful military activities, such as legitimate overflights and naval transits.

To ensure effective implementation

To the governments of China and Japan:
7. Keep the hotline open at all times and ensure responsible persons/units have authority to reach decision-makers and front-line personnel quickly in an emergency and to make decisions to contain and de-escalate the crisis; and utilize the hotline in case of an incident before resorting to public criticism.
8. Give front-line operators adequate training and hold those who violate the rules accountable.
9. Increase direct contact between front-line troops and personnel by:
   a) organizing a second round of mutual naval visits; and
   b) stepping-up participation in multilateral training forums based on CUES, such as the Western Pacific Naval Symposium and others.
10. Agree to address violations first bilaterally, including in defense authority meetings, so as to maximize space for resolution, rather than arguing them in the media.
11. Consider incorporating guidelines for behavior other than communications within the mechanism later, possibly based on those included within the 2014 U.S.-China defense memorandums or CUES.

To third-party governments and non-governmental institutions, such as research organisations, private groups and think-tanks with ties to both parties:
12. Host forums that bring the parties together for discussions on crisis management and mitigation, including by:
   a) organizing workshops to review CUES and other international naval and air agreements containing guidelines on rules of behavior;
   b) facilitating the sharing of best practices to avoid incidents at sea, whether in forums, symposia or joint research projects; and
   c) encouraging participation by both coast guards and militaries, especially commanders in charge of front-line operations.
13. Organize multilateral naval exercises on CUES implementation involving both China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF)."

ICG, Yanmei Xie, "Landmark South China Sea Ruling Could Revive Negotiations," July 12, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/worldwide/2016/07/12/landmark-south-china-sea-ruling-could-revive-negotiations/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=7f756c1d24-2016_07_12_South_China_Sea_commentary7_12_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11e-a-7f756c1d24-359871089," commented, "An international tribunal has issued a sweeping ruling against China in a landmark case brought by the Philippines over disputed claims in the South China Sea. Beijing rejected the ruling, but the judgment’s legal clarity could ultimately provide the basis of a better, durable, negotiated outcome for the many parties involved."
The most significant part of the 12 July award by the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea under the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague is the judgment that "there was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources within the sea areas falling within the 'nine-dash line' ". The decision delivers an unequivocal rebuke to the most controversial component of China's claims.

The Nine-Dash Line, which appears on official Chinese maps, includes most of the South China Sea and slices into the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claimed by the Philippines – as well as into those claimed by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. The Tribunal said Beijing had forfeited those rights when it signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The Tribunal also ruled that none of the features in the Spratly chain are legally "islands", and so do not generate EEZ entitlements. The two decisions combined will significantly limit the size of the maritime zone and scope of maritime rights that China can legally claim.

Following from this, the Tribunal ruled that China has violated the Philippines' sovereign rights in its EEZ by interfering with Philippine fishing and petroleum exploration, constructing artificial islands and failing to prevent Chinese fishermen from fishing in the area.

Arguably even more negative for China's international reputation is the Tribunal's ruling that Chinese activities have severely harmed marine ecology and the environment by destroying coral reefs and failing to prevent the harvesting of endangered species.

China repeated its refusal to accept or comply with the ruling. It also restated its claims in the South China Sea, including land features, internal waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone, continental shelf and historic rights. Early signals indicate that China does not plan to retreat from claiming historic rights within the Nine-Dash Line, which likely include entitlement to fisheries and hydrocarbon resources. Its claim to internal waters suggests China may consider drawing a baseline around the entirety of the Spratly island chain, claiming internal waters within the baseline and maritime entitlement outward from it, despite the Tribunal's decision that 'the Spratly Islands cannot generate maritime zones collectively as a unit.'

While the ruling is likely to provoke heated rhetoric in the short term, it could ultimately help reverse recent trends toward confrontation. Despite Beijing's public rejection, the ruling is binding on China and the Philippines. The process could set an example for other claimants to follow and thus provide incentive for China to negotiate. By providing greater legal clarity and generating international attention, it could reduce the asymmetry between China and other claimants in negotiations.

To mitigate the damage to its reputation and demonstrate respect for international law, China could take some incremental and face-saving steps towards compliance. It could reopen Scarborough Shoal to Filipino fishermen; stop interference with fishing and exploration activities by other claimants in their lawful EEZs; and prevent its fishermen from poaching endangered species.

Finally, it could make substantive progress on formulating a code of conduct with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. This would commit all parties to binding norms of behavior, reduce the risk for clashes and restore South East Asia's faith in China's pledge for peace and cooperation."

Michael Forsythe and Alan Wong, "Thousands Rally in Hong Kong to Mark Tiananmen Anniversary," The New York Times, June 4, 2016, reported, "Tens of thousands of people gathered in a Hong Kong park on Saturday evening to do what people across the border in mainland China could not: commemorate the anniversary of the bloody crackdown on pro-democracy protesters in Beijing's Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989."

David E. Sanger and Michael Corkery, "Treasury Imposes Sanctions on North Korea, Cutting Access to Banks," The New York Times, June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/02/world/asia/treasury-imposes-sanctions-on-north-korea.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "With private cybersecurity firms linking North Korea to recent computer attacks that absconded with at least $81 million, the Treasury Department moved on Wednesday to choke off Pyongyang's remaining access to the global financial system, designating the country a "primary" money launderer.

The Treasury, employing sanctions techniques that helped pressure Iran to give up much of its nuclear program, said it would seek to impose what are known as secondary sanctions against the..."
reclusive communist country. That means that it could cut off from the American financial system any bank or company that conducts banking transactions with Pyongyang.


At a previously scheduled meeting in Tokyo, the foreign ministers of the three nations — China, Japan and South Korea — criticized the missile test, which appeared to demonstrate a significant advance in North Korea's efforts to build a harder-to-detect means to strike American and allied forces. The missile flew 310 miles toward Japan, much farther than previous tests."

Nida Najar and Hari Kumar, "News Crackdown in Kashmir Leaves Locals ‘Surrounded by Rumors’," The New York Times, July 18, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/19/world/asia/news-crackdown-in-kashmir-leaves-locals-surrounded-by-rumors.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "The authorities imposed a clampdown and curfew throughout the Kashmir valley as they fought violent protests that erupted on July 9. The upheaval began after the killing of Burhan Muzaffar Wani, a commander for the Hizbul Mujaheddeen, a Kashmiri militant group fighting to separate Kashmir from Indian rule. More than 30 people have been killed in the unrest, and thousands have been injured, though the protests have decreased in recent days.

In interviews, Kashmiris described themselves as feeling cut off: In addition to a curfew, the authorities blocked the mobile internet and prepaid cellphones. Several Srinagar residents said that only postpaid mobile connections through the state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited, or BSNL, were working. Cable television stations were also blocked, the Press Trust of India reported on Saturday.

Equally troubling was the crackdown on newspapers on Saturday — the first of its kind, editors said, despite years of turmoil."

Killings were continuing in Bangladesh in May. Julfikar Ali Manik and Nida Najar "Buddhist Monk Is Slaughtered at Temple in Bangladesh," The New York Times, May 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/world/asia/buddhist-monk-is-slaughtered-at-temple-in-bangladesh.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "A Buddhist monk was found hacked to death in his temple on Saturday in a remote region of southeastern Bangladesh. The killing appeared to bear some similarities to recent attacks claimed by Islamist extremists, but the police said it was too soon to determine whether it was another such murder."


Geeta Anand and Dharish Bastians, "Can a New President Lead Sri Lanka Into an Era of Peace?" The New York Times, May 12, 201, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/world/asia/sri-lanka-maithripala-sirisena.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Long plagued by ethnic strife, Sri Lanka became embroiled in a civil war with the Tamils that lasted 26 years. The government finally crushed the secessionist group leading the fight in a brutal battle in 2009, in which tens of thousands were killed, most of them civilians. That government, accused of human rights abuses then and in the ensuing years, was toppled by the coalition that brought Maithripala Sirisena to power in January 2015.

Chosen by the coalition because he was so agreeable and self-effacing as to have offended practically nobody, Mr. Sirisena has pledged to persuade his Sinhalese people to support a new Constitution that devolves the powers of the central government that they dominate. A referendum is expected later this year.

But questions abound about whether this 64-year-old son of a paddy farmer, has who spent his political life shunning the limelight despite holding top ministerial posts, could be the one to finally lead this country into an era of peace.
"We will devolve power to the people as a whole," Mr. Sirisena said in an interview last week. "Nobody is trying to take something away from the Sinhalese to give it to the Tamils. What we are trying to do is to give something more to everyone."

'Nobody doubts Mr. Sirisena's sincerity, but some fear the opportunity may be slipping away. 'The ruling coalition has proven unable to generate internal consensus on key issues of public policy,' Verité Research, a Colombo think tank, said in a report last week, warning that the 'moderate consensus remains deeply vulnerable.'”

"Mr. Sirisena, in the interview in his seaside office, where he keeps the air-conditioner off in the stifling summer heat, insisted he would not only get a Constitution adopted, but also lead his country through the process of truth and reconciliation that his government committed to in a United Nations resolution last year.


ICG, "Sri Lanka: Jumpstarting the Reform Process," Asia Report N°278, May 18, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/278-sri-lanka-jumpstarting-the-reform-process.aspx, commented, "The unexpected chance for lasting peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka that followed President Maithripala Sirisena's January 2015 election faces increasing turbulence. Initial moves by Sirisena’s government halted and began to reverse the slide into authoritarianism and family rule under Mahinda Rajapaksa. Its reform agenda is ambitious: restoring the rule-of-law and ending impunity for corruption and abuse of power; a new constitution; a complex package of post-war reconciliation and justice mechanisms agreed with the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC); and major policy changes to jump-start a beleaguered economy. Progress, however, has been slower than key constituencies expected and lacks the coherence and resources needed to sustain it. The “national unity” government expanded the political center and isolated hardline nationalists, but the window for change has begun to close. Seizing Sri Lanka's unprecedented opportunity for reform requires bolder and better coordinated policies, backed by a public relations campaign to restore sagging popular support.

The stuttering progress strains ties between the government and the constituencies that brought it to power. Tamils in the north and east voted overwhelmingly for Sirisena but are increasingly doubtful he will fulfil his reconciliation and justice promises. Many Sinhala “good governance” activists criticize the failure to follow through on rule-of-law measures, continued cases of alleged nepotism and corruption and what they consider the lethargic pursuit of corruption and criminal investigations. As the budget deficit grows and currency reserves dwindle, belt-tightening has been blocked or scaled back due to protests. At the same time, strains are growing between Sirisena’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. The small window for threading the political needles essential for reforms is shrinking.

Institutional factors hamper progress: too few staff and too little expertise, particularly on reconciliation and transitional justice issues, multiple power centres and unwieldy, often overlapping ministries, and the different priorities and governance styles of president and prime minister. Governance reforms are slowed by need to work through bureaucrats and politicians implicated in past abuses, some of whom were given cabinet posts to help the government achieve the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed to approve a new constitution.

Boldness is limited by Sirisena's struggle to counter the faction loyal to ex-President Rajapaksa within his SLFP, especially in upcoming local elections. Reacting defensively to Sinhala nationalists' attacks against Sirisena’s relatively modest reconciliation gestures and proposed constitutional reform and scared of giving opponents ammunition or angering the military and security services, the government has returned only a small portion of military-occupied land and released few Tamil detainees.

Seven years after the end of the civil war in May 2009, issues of reconciliation and accountability remain largely unaddressed. The government appears to be backtracking on transitional justice plans, particularly the role of foreign judges and experts. The enormity of the crimes, especially in the final weeks
of the war, makes them impossible to ignore but hard for the military and most Sinhalese to acknowledge or accept responsibility for. Mechanisms promised to the UNHRC feed Sinhala nationalist suspicions, while attempts to reassure Sinhalese and the military encourage doubts among Tamils about government willingness to pursue justice for wartime atrocities or back constitutional changes that satisfy legitimate Tamil aspirations for meaningful autonomy.

To hold its coalition together and meet UNHRC obligations, the government must sequence reforms carefully, speeding progress on some fronts to rebuild public confidence, while committing resources to build support and institutional capacity for deeper and harder steps, particularly making progress on the critically important special court for prosecuting war crimes. Better communication and cooperation between president and prime minister, more transparent policymaking and clearer lines of authority are essential.

To rebuild confidence among Tamil communities in the north and east, the government must quickly release detainees and military-occupied land, begin credible inquiries into the fate of the disappeared, investigate and end abuses and repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). For these and other reforms to be sustainable, the president and prime minister will have to assert authority over the military and national security apparatus, including by developing a credible security sector reform plan. If they are serious about constitutional changes that will contribute to a lasting solution to the ethnic conflict, Sirisena and key ministers must make a much stronger public case for greater devolution of power.

Ending impunity and restoring rule-of-law are concern to the whole country, as seen in the popularity of good governance and anti-corruption citizen movements in the Sinhala south. To resonate more broadly with all ethnic groups and regions, measures for addressing the war’s legacy should be presented by the government and civil society as an integral part of the rule-of-law and good governance agenda. Moves to prosecute key cases of corruption and political killing under the Rajapaksa regime need to be backed by a sustained public relations campaign that articulates a broad vision of a reformed state, the links between the various initiatives and the benefits they bring all communities. As longstanding dysfunctional political dynamics reassert themselves, the government’s ability to distinguish itself from the Rajapaksa era, which is essential to its political survival, has begun to fade. If ethnic and religious chauvinists in all communities are not to grow stronger and belief in democratic reform that Sirisena’s election reflected and encouraged is to be rekindled, the government must make a concerted push to jump-start the flagging reform process.

RECOMMENDATIONS
To strengthen rule-of-law and democratic governance

To the government of Sri Lanka:
1. Ratify the UN Disappearances Convention and pass enabling legislation criminalizing disappearances; terminate the Paranagama commission on missing persons and transfer its investigation files to dedicated police investigation units.
2. Pass the pending Right to Information (RTI) Act and legislation to establish a well-resourced and empowered Audit Commission.
3. Repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and replace it, in consultation with lawyers and human rights defenders, with legislation in line with Sri Lanka’s international human rights obligations; and develop and publish guidelines for expediting cases against existing PTA detainees and releasing those against whom there is insufficient evidence to bring charges.
4. Overhaul the Victims and Witness Protection Act, in consultation with human rights activists, to establish a well-resourced witness protection authority fully independent of police and security forces.
5. End the longstanding conflict of interest in the Attorney General’s Department by establishing a permanent, independent special prosecutor for serious human rights cases in which state officials are alleged perpetrators.
6. Establish a clear focal point in the Attorney General’s Department, staffed by state counsels vetted for conflict of interest or involvement in past cover-ups, to oversee and prosecute emblematic cases of political killings and abduction currently under investigation.

To promote reconciliation, reestablish effective civil administration in the north and east and begin security sector reform
To the government of Sri Lanka:
7. Take immediate steps to end remaining military involvement in civil administration; remove the military from all shops, farms, hotels and other commercial businesses; and immediately suspend construction or expansion of military camps in the north and east.
8. Establish, in consultation with communities and the military, transparent principles, processes and timetables for the return of military-occupied land or payment of compensation for land that is not to be returned.
9. End intimidating monitoring of civil society activists and ex-detainees by security services and appoint an independent, multi-ethnic, well-resourced internal affairs unit to investigate credible allegations of arbitrary detentions, abductions and torture in custody.
10. Begin developing a longer-term plan for comprehensive security sector reform that includes job training for demobilized personnel; and devise and implement in the short term policies for handling individuals credibly alleged to be responsible for serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

To support constitutional reform needed for lasting political stability

To the government of Sri Lanka:
11. Launch a public outreach campaign, led by the president and prime minister, in support of expanded devolution of power to provinces.
12. Support a mixed electoral system that maintains proportionality and the influence of smaller, regionally-dispersed parties through use of double-ballots.

To address the complex demands of transitional justice processes

To the government of Sri Lanka:
13. Reaffirm publicly the government’s commitment to full implementation of the 1 October 2015 UN Human Rights Council resolution and take initial steps to build capacity and public support for effective transitional justice, by:
   a) launching a coordinated public outreach campaign – involving the offices of the president and prime minister, the Reconciliation Secretariat (SCRM), National Unity Office (ONUR) and national dialogue ministry – to promote the value of transitional justice mechanisms and highlight links to broader rule-of-law measures, beginning with immediate distribution of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL) report in all three languages once Tamil and Sinhala translations are available;
   b) giving the public consultation process adequate resources and endorsement and presenting draft legislative proposals to it for popular input, with a transparent timeframe for final submission to the parliament;
   c) publishing draft legislation for the Missing Persons Office and inviting active input from families of the missing and disappeared and other stakeholders;
   d) establishing a timeline for training judges, lawyers and investigators for participation in the special war crimes court and for passing legislation establishing command responsibility as a mode of criminal liability and incorporating war crimes and crimes against humanity into national law; and
   e) requesting the OHCHR to recommend international prosecutors and judges for participation in the special court as committed to in the resolution."


Resolution 30/1, adopted in October, was a major achievement for the Council – and an important milestone in Sri Lanka’s journey toward lasting peace and a just settlement of its decades-old ethnic conflict. Following years of bitter resistance by the previous Sri Lankan government to international efforts to encourage post-war reconciliation and accountability, the new government led by President Maithripala
Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe displayed admirable political courage in negotiating a consensus resolution containing many of the elements needed for a sustainable peace.

However, Sri Lanka today is not yet the success story that many in the international community claim it to be. Progress on implementing the Council resolution has been slow and often grudging, and there are growing doubts about the government’s political will and ability to see the complex process through. For Sri Lanka to stay on the path toward recovery, it needs sustained international support and engagement.

Speaking at this critical juncture, High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein this week encouraged the government to prepare a comprehensive strategy on transitional justice with “inclusive and meaningful engagement from all Sri Lankans”. As Zeid prepares to report to the Council on 29 June on progress toward implementation of the resolution, member states should send strong public and private messages to the Sri Lankan government, offering financial, capacity-building and other tangible support for its efforts – as well as clear suggestions for improvement.

The Reform Agenda

The government has adopted an ambitious reform agenda to address the many challenges the country faces: keeping a beleaguered economy afloat, strengthening the rule of law, tackling corruption, drafting a new constitution, promoting reconciliation efforts with the Tamil population in the north and east, and establishing a multi-pronged set of transitional justice mechanisms agreed with the Council.

Unfortunately, the entire program risks collapse unless new energy, focus and resources are brought to bear. A weakening economy and slow going on most other fronts have led to waning support from the key constituencies that brought the government to power – Tamils, Muslims and reform-minded Sinhalese. Belief in the possibility of meaningful progress is fading across the board.

Efforts of the national unity government – a coalition between President Sirisena’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe’s United National Party (UNP) – have been weakened by a variety of factors. First, the government lacks technical capacity and trained personnel on key issues. Second, there is no unified strategy for advancing reforms – with the SLFP split between Sirisena’s wing and supporters of ex-President Mahinda Rajapaksa, and often at odds with the UNP, particularly on economic policy. Third, the administration has not mounted a coherent public relations campaign to sell its successes and build support for the more politically controversial aspects of its program, including transitional justice.

The most critical element of the reform agenda is how to tackle the entrenched culture of impunity, which has fed multiple bloody insurgencies over the past 40 years. Sri Lanka must seize this narrow window of opportunity to address the problem. Failure to succeed in this effort will undermine virtually all the other reforms the government says it wants to achieve. Progress toward ending impunity is essential to reestablishing the rule of law for all ethnic communities, reasserting civilian control over the military and building the trust needed for a lasting political solution.

Notable progress has been made toward a new constitution, as parliament has begun to meet as a constitutional assembly. The report of the Public Representations Committee, tasked with gathering ideas from the public, was issued at the end of May. It endorsed a range of bold reforms, including the incorporation of a bill of rights. The committee failed to reach agreement, however, on expanded devolution of power for Tamil-majority regions in the north and east, a key issue noted in the Council resolution. With parliamentary consensus likely to fall well short of long-standing Tamil demands for federalism and national self-determination, the government and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) could face a major challenge in winning Tamil backing in the referendum needed to approve the new constitution, with the pro-engagement leadership of the TNA weakened as a result.

Transitional Justice

Sri Lanka has made only halting efforts toward developing the four transitional justice mechanisms pledged to the Council – a truth commission, reparations and missing persons offices and, most controversially, an independent special court for war crimes with international participation. The national unity government should be encouraged to design and sell its Council-mandated transitional justice efforts as part and parcel of its larger agenda to promote “good governance” and the rule of law, which has widespread public backing in all communities. Meanwhile, donors should deepen their support – through training, equipment and personnel – to build the Sri Lankan state’s capacity to establish effective justice
mechanisms, strengthen criminal investigations and improve witness protection.

In advance of this month’s Council sessions, the government has scrambled to finalize a package of reforms it can present as evidence of progress. At the top of the list is the Office of Missing Persons (OMP), legislation for which was approved by the cabinet on 24 May and is expected to be presented to parliament in the coming days. While the proposed office would likely help thousands of families seeking information about their loved ones who went missing during the civil war, it has been criticised for lacking any effective link to criminal investigations and thereby potentially maintaining impunity for large-scale enforced disappearances. The government has also been criticized for its hurried and minimal consultation with victims’ families prior to finalising the proposed legislation. Council members should encourage the government to submit the draft bill, prior to parliamentary approval, to the national consultations process that is due to get underway by the end of June – both to improve the quality of the legislation and to win back flagging confidence among victims’ groups and civil society.

The government’s recent ratification, in May, of the UN Convention on Disappearances is a welcome move. Incorporating the treaty in domestic legislation, as promised to the Council, will be even more significant. These steps will mean very little, however, if the government remains unable or unwilling to prosecute cases of abduction and murder, particularly those for which they already have substantial evidence.

Council members and the High Commissioner should press the government to follow through on its commitment to meaningful forms of international participation on the proposed special court for war crimes. The Council resolution specifies the importance of including “Commonwealth and other foreign judges, defense lawyers and authorized prosecutors and investigators” in a Sri Lankan judicial mechanism. Under domestic pressure, the president and prime minister backed away from promises to the UN and announced there will be no foreign judges. Given the decades-long failures of government commissions and judicial processes, international participation is essential to the credibility and effectiveness of the special court. Council members should insist that the government holds the line on the involvement of international judges, at least in observer roles, and devises concrete plans for outside experts to be included in investigations, prosecutions, forensics and witness protection.

Prosecution of military personnel, particularly with foreign legal involvement, was always sure to be the most controversial aspect of transitional justice for many Sinhalese. There needs to be a clear strategy to address Sinhala nationalist resistance, including by actively promoting the benefits of transitional justice for all communities. Instead, the president, prime minister and other key officials have regularly retreated when criticized by Rajapaksa and his nationalist supporters.

Even the most optimistic assessments of the government’s transitional justice policies suggest the government intends to postpone any moves to establish the promised special court until after March 2017, when the High Commissioner is due to issue his final report on implementation of the Council’s 2015 resolution. While justice for crimes committed by both sides during the war will necessarily take a long time to achieve, further delays in even initiating the process will only confirm suspicions that the government is merely buying time until the international community loses interest.

Council members should press the government to begin building the legal, institutional and staffing capacity needed for all the promised transitional justice mechanisms. The High Commissioner should insist that legislation needed to establish these mechanisms must be on the books by March 2017, in advance of that month’s Human Rights Council session. These measures should include legislation to criminalize war crimes and crimes against humanity, and to establish command responsibility as a mode of criminal liability.

Rule of Law and Anti-Corruption

Confidence is faltering in the government’s commitment to restore the rule of law. a pledge that was central to the January 2015 election of Sirisena. Investigating complex financial crimes and political killings under the former regime is undoubtedly a slow, difficult and dangerous work. The challenges are made more acute by the involvement of key figures from the old regime still serving as ministers, bureaucrats and law enforcement officials, some of whom are known to be actively obstructing progress. There is increasing evidence that senior officials in the Attorney General’s department and in the military have blocked important criminal investigations.

The government must take steps to dismiss or discipline obstructionists. Officials who lobbied to undermine UN efforts to support justice and accountability under the Rajapaksa regime should also be
removed from policymaking positions. In order to address long-criticised conflicts of interest in the Attorney General’s department, it is necessary to establish a permanent, independent special prosecutor for serious human rights cases in which state officials are alleged perpetrators.

Meanwhile, credible reports indicate that witnesses in criminal cases implicating the security forces are facing serious threats. The government has yet to establish an effective witness protection program or revise its weak witness protection law, in compliance with a clause in last year’s Council resolution promising to do so.

Progress on key criminal cases is needed to reverse the growing sense that the national unity government is not substantially different from previous corrupt and inefficient governments. Progress on less politically controversial cases is also essential to rebuild confidence that the government is willing to tackle impunity and can establish a credible process of accountability for war-related crimes.

Adoption of some important legal and institutional reforms is said to be very close – including legislation to replace the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) with new laws consistent with human rights standards, as required by the Council resolution. However, recent arrests under the PTA have violated due process and reawakened fears of a return to “white van” abductions, which were a primary means for hundreds of enforced disappearances under the Rajapaksa government. Detainees are still being held under the sweeping provisions of the law.

Council members need to press the Sri Lankan government to end abuses by the Terrorism Investigation Division of the police (TID), which continues to detain suspects without charge, often in aggressive and humiliating ways. TID must be made to follow established procedures – recently reiterated by Sri Lanka’s Human Rights Commission – on detentions, and personnel suspected of involvement in serious abuses must be suspended, investigated and prosecuted. The government should not wait for repeal of the PTA and the establishment of a new system before acting to end current violations.

Confidence Building and Military Reform

On ethnic issues and the legacy of the war, the president and other senior officials have set a more conciliatory tone – seen most recently in the much less triumphalist commemoration of the seventh anniversary of the end of the civil war. Nonetheless, the past six months have seen very little progress on the key issues of concern to Tamils in the north and east – concerns reflected in the text of last year’s Council resolution: the release of hundreds of detainees held under the PTA, the return of land held by the military, investigations into the tens of thousands of forcibly disappeared people, and the removal of the military from civilian affairs in the north and east. Indeed, progress has been so slow and grudging that what were intended to be confidence-building measures have become confidence-weakening measures.

Trust in the government’s good intentions has also been damaged by the tight and often intimidating surveillance of Tamil civil society activists by military and police, and by unwarranted arrests. The president and prime minister appear wary of asserting their authority over the military, and there has been little movement toward developing a longer-term plan for security sector reform. The inability to gain effective civilian control over the military is one factor behind the government’s slow implementation of its other Council commitments. This in turn undermines public confidence, especially among Tamils, in the government’s political will to guarantee justice for all.

The government should be encouraged to start developing a comprehensive plan for security sector reform. Such a plan should aim to reduce the military’s social, political and economic footprint in the north and east, as well as to include job training, re-employment programs and psycho-social support for demobilized soldiers. Many ex-soldiers are severely traumatized and caught in continued cycles of violence – in the home and on the street, sometimes as hired thugs for politicians. Foreign militaries now working more closely with Sri Lanka should make offers of technical support for security sector reform a central component of their re-engagement. Donors should use their leverage – including the prospect of additional deployments of Sri Lankan troops as UN peacekeepers – to encourage the long hard work of restructuring the military for peacetime duties.

As the past nine months of fitful and partial implementation of last year’s consensus resolution make clear, the political challenges ahead in Sri Lanka are considerable. For there to be a realistic chance of ending the culture of impunity and establishing effective forms of transitional justice, the Human Rights Council and other UN mechanisms will need to remain engaged beyond March 2017. Consideration of Sri Lanka by the Council remains one of the primary factors driving action – as is evident by the flurry of
activity in recent weeks. Member states should begin discussions now about what form continued engagement can take. Among other options, Council members should encourage the Sri Lankan government to invite an expanded presence of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, whose resources in Sri Lanka remain insufficient to meet the many pressing demands.

Sri Lanka’s much-improved engagement with UN agencies and human rights mechanisms is to be welcomed. But it is not enough. What all of Sri Lanka’s communities need and deserve now are tangible changes in legislation and concrete implementation of its international promises and obligations on the ground.”


Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of Myanmar’s first democratically elected government since 1962, embraced that view last week when she advised the United States ambassador against using the term “Rohingya” to describe the persecuted Muslim population that has lived in Myanmar for generations."


The state-owned Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper said security forces in Hpakant in Kachin State had been unable to control the attackers as they set fire to the mosque on Friday. The attackers were armed with sticks, knives and other weapons, the newspaper said. It said the mosque’s leaders had failed to meet a June 30 deadline set by the local authorities to tear down the structure to make way for construction of a bridge.

On June 23, a mob demolished a mosque and a Muslim cemetery in a village in Bago Region, about 36 miles northeast of Yangon, reportedly as a consequence of a personal dispute.

Sporadic but fierce violence against Muslims in Myanmar, which is predominantly Buddhist, has been reported since rioting in 2012 forced more than 100,000 members of the Muslim Rohingya minority to flee their homes in western Rakhine State.

Discrimination against the Rohingya is widespread, and the government refuses to recognize most of them as citizens, treating even long-term residents as illegal immigrants.

The United Nations’ special human rights envoy to Myanmar, Yanghee Lee, who ended a 12-day tour of the country on Friday, urged the recently seated government led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi to clamp down on such attacks."

ICG, "Myanmar’s New Government: Finding Its Feet?" Asia Report 282, July 29, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/myanmar-s-new-government-finding-its-feet?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d5e8d72ecd-Weekly_Update_22_29_July_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d5e8d72ecd-359871089, commented, "Four months into the new government’s five-year term is too early to come to definitive judgments about its performance. Nevertheless, its priorities and approach are becoming clearer, and there are some initial indications of how national politics is adjusting to changed realities. These provide the basis for an initial assessment as Myanmar’s transition enters a new phase under a democratically-elected government that has set a positive initial tone and taken important steps to address the authoritarian legacy. Some of the remaining political detainees were quickly released, and several oppressive and outdated laws have been repealed or are being amended.

Perhaps the most important observation, however, is that Myanmar has passed through a year of considerable uncertainty and change with no major political turmoil. Aung San Suu Kyi’s National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in a broadly credible election with almost no violence; there was an orderly handover of power from the military-backed government, and the new administration has now entered an awkward cohabitation with the military, as dictated by the 2008 constitution, without
significantly compromising key principles or prompting any fundamental rift with the soldiers. Navigating these difficult waters has been a key early success for all concerned.

The difficulty and uncertainty of that task has left its mark. Suu Kyi, the leader of a long-repressed grassroots change movement, has only partial executive authority under the constitution – both because she is formally barred from the presidency, and because of the military’s significant constitutional power. This appears to have amplified longstanding tendencies, leading her to concentrate power in her own hands and delegate little. She is state counsellor, foreign minister, president office minister and in personal charge of the peace process and addressing the situation in Rakhine state.

While there have been no major failures, there have been missteps, including on the peace process and Rakhine state, both of which relate to a failure to appreciate the complex details and a lack of consultation in advance of announcing important decisions or initiatives. Relations with the military have not always been sensitively handled. Though there appears to be good cooperation and a convergence of views on the peace process – even to the extent that armed group leaders are worried they may have to negotiate with a formidable united front of Suu Kyi and the military – relations in other areas have been strained, particularly around Suu Kyi’s appointment as state counsellor and the manner in which that bill was pushed through the legislature in April. It is essential for the success and stability of the transition that cooperative relations with the military are maintained, and more broadly that the military sees some benefits from the substantial concessions it feels it has made.

The government faces daunting tasks. After decades of authoritarian rule and civil war, many key challenges are structural problems – some dating back to independence in 1948 and the incomplete process of state-building – that cannot be fixed simply by adopting more enlightened policies. The government must find ways of moving the peace process forward, addressing the situation in Rakhine state and continuing the delicate process of rebalancing external relations, particularly vis-à-vis China. As state counsellor, foreign minister and chair of the high-level committees in charge of the peace process and Rakhine state, leadership on all these fronts falls on Suu Kyi’s shoulders, a huge responsibility and potentially overwhelming workload. Success depends on twin policy and personal challenges: developing not only considered and consultative approaches, but also her ability to delegate.

The international community can help in several ways. Western countries are rightly giving the government strong political backing, but should not shy away from offering frank and honest advice. Financial and technical support are much needed, though there is significant risk of uncoordinated aid projects and overlapping and inconsistent technical assistance overwhelming government capacity and potentially doing harm. Donors also need to keep in mind that projects should be carefully designed and closely monitored to reflect that the state and government remain absent or contested in many conflict-affected areas. For two reasons, it is also vital that the West in particular explores appropriate avenues of military-to-military cooperation. It is essential for sustainability of the transition that the military sees institutional benefits from its decision to give up significant power; and socialization of a generation of military officers with their peers in democratic countries can make an important contribution to reform of the institution.

I. Introduction

This report, Crisis Group’s first on Myanmar since the transfer of power at the end of March 2016, provides an initial assessment of the new democratic government’s record after four months in office. While this is a very short period to make any definitive judgment, there is now sufficient information available to give initial indications of the tone and general approach of the administration. Future reporting will examine in more detail some of the key challenges that the country faces – the peace process, the volatile situation in Rakhine state, and the rebalancing of relations with neighboring China – and the success of the government in addressing them.

The report is based on extensive research, including interviews conducted over the course of 2016 in Yangon, Mandalay, Naypyitaw and Rakhine state with current and former ministers and government officials, legislative representatives, ethnic armed group and political party leaders, local analysts, civil society organisations and diplomats, among others.

II. Transition to a Democratic Government

A. Formation of the New Administration

The new administration took power at a formal handover ceremony on 30 March 2016. This
marked the end of a transitional period of nearly five months following the 8 November 2015 elections, in line with constitutional provisions.

The elected legislators, who had already taken their seats on 1 February, convened as an electoral college from 10-15 March to select the president. Aung San Suu Kyi is constitutionally barred from that office due to her sons and a daughter-in-law being foreign (UK) citizens, but the National League for Democracy (NLD) has a large majority, and its candidates were easily nominated in both houses. Pursuant to the constitution, the military selected a third candidate, and the electoral college then chose a president from among the three candidates, in a single vote, with the unsuccessful candidates becoming vice presidents. The NLD’s large majority was able to determine the president, Htin Kyaw, a long-time confidant of Suu Kyi; retired Lt.-General Myint Swe, the chief minister of Yangon region under the former government, became vice president 1, and Henry Van Thio, a little-known Chin legislator with no prior links to ethnic politics became vice president 2. President Htin Kyaw is a low-profile but widely respected individual with long NLD links and the son of a famous poet.

Suu Kyi had made clear before the election that she would be the key decision-maker in the new government, with Htin Kyaw, the first elected civilian head of state since 1962, serving as a proxy – thereby circumventing the constitutional bar. Vice President Myint Swe is considered a hard-line officer who, though retired, is likely to continue representing the interests of the military and old political elite. The vice presidents mainly carry out ceremonial and diplomatic functions, though the constitution does assign them positions on key bodies such as the National Defense and Security Council and the Financial Commission (see Section II.C below).

On 17 March, the president-elect submitted to the legislature a list of the 21 ministries that would make up his administration, and on 22 March a list of eighteen nominated ministers. It is within the president’s constitutional power to decide the number and scope of ministries and appointment of ministers, except for defense, home and border affairs, whom the commander-in-chief nominates. There is a formal confirmation process for designated ministries and ministers, but the legislature has little authority to reject the proposals. The cabinet is a mix of senior NLD members and independent technocrats, but with a strong focus on loyalty to Suu Kyi and the party.

The legislature approved the proposals, which reduced the number of ministries by about one third from the previous government. The president highlighted efficiency and cost-savings as the main reasons for the reduction. The reorganization mainly involves a merger of ministries rather than a significant cut in the number of departments or functions; the government has pledged that no civil servants will lose their jobs. The current cabinet line-up (changed slightly since the initial appointments) is at Appendix B below. The president also appoints the chief ministers of the fourteen state and region governments. This means that the leadership and composition of these regional executives do not necessarily reflect the results of the elections in those areas and the corresponding make-up of the state/region legislatures. Indeed, the president appointed NLD legislative representatives to all positions, even in Shan and Rakhine states, where the NLD did not win the most seats.

B. Transfer of Power

The NLD’s election victory set the stage for the first orderly handover of power to an elected government since independence in 1948. The process went surprisingly smoothly. President Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi agreed on 2 December to set up transition teams to ensure smooth and efficient handover of responsibilities. The government team was headed by President’s Office Minister Hla Tun and the NLD team by senior party member Win Htein. They met on a number of occasions between December and March. Thein Sein also instructed each ministry to prepare a detailed document setting out its main priorities and achievements over the previous five years, key ongoing activities and goals.

During this period, Suu Kyi met three times with Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, who retains considerable autonomous powers under the constitution. Both have a strong interest in building a constructive working relationship. On 2 December, they held their first ever one-on-one session, without aides, and appeared to go quite far to make sure the optics were positive; Min Aung Hlaing greeted Suu Kyi at her car and waved her off at the end, a strong public signal in a country very conscious of status and protocol. They also posed for photographs after the meeting, smiling and making positive comments to the media, without disclosing any content. Subsequent meetings followed, with aides present, on 25 January and 17 February. According to the NLD, there were “friendly, open discussions about the
formation of a new government, the transition, post-election peace and stability, the parliament and peace process”.

A more surprising meeting was between Suu Kyi and former strongman Than Shwe, on 4 December, arranged through the latter’s grandson. While content has not been revealed, the grandson reported that Than Shwe had endorsed Suu Kyi as the “future leader of the country”. But it was not so much the substance as the symbolism that was important. While he no longer wields significant day-to-day power, Than Shwe is at the apex of a powerful patronage network, and many perceive him to be still very influential. His endorsement means his network and others who feel loyal to him are much less likely to be obstructive to Suu Kyi’s administration, which can be very important for stability and progress. The formal handover of power took place at a ceremony on 30 March at the legislature, followed by a dinner attended by the outgoing and incoming administrations at the Presidential Palace.

C. Initial Steps

Following the transfer of power, Suu Kyi quickly set about implementing her pre-election pledge that she would take a position “above the president” and “make all the political decisions”. The president-elect had already named her to be foreign minister and president’s office minister. The first is important not only in giving her direct authority over external relations, but also because it includes a seat on the National Defense and Security Council, the peak decision-making body on security matters, whose membership is constitutionally defined. (She initially also took on two additional portfolios, energy and education, but other ministers were appointed to these positions on 5 April.)

In its first law-making action after the transfer of power, the legislature on 5 April approved a bill creating a new position of “state counsellor” for Suu Kyi by name. Its responsibilities are vaguely defined, but it provides legal authority for her to advise both executive and legislative branches, sidestepping the strict separation of powers enshrined in the constitution – a point strongly criticized by military and some opposition lawmakers. On 10 May, a new ministry was created to support Suu Kyi in her state counsellor role, and a veteran diplomat was appointed to head it. The ministry was approved by default, after no lawmakers registered to discuss the request. Opposition and military representatives reportedly declined to do so as they believed the result of any vote was a foregone conclusion, and any views they gave would not be considered.

Her twin roles as state counsellor – de facto head of state – and foreign minister, in addition to several thematic committees that she chairs, amount to an enormous workload. She has appointed an experienced retired diplomat, Kyaw Tin, as deputy foreign minister and designated him “minister of state”, which is intended to elevate his rank and authority to that of a minister, so he can carry out many of the functions of foreign minister. Suu Kyi herself continues to perform many of the more high-profile functions, however, including attending the Association of South East Asian Nations meeting of foreign ministers and dialogue partners in July.

The new administration has given some broad brushstrokes, but few details, about policies and priorities. In her Myanmar New Year speech on 18 April – her first detailed address to the nation – Suu Kyi indicated five broad priorities: national reconciliation, internal peace, rule of law, constitutional amendment and further democratic development, among which, she stated, national reconciliation was most important.

By this, she appears to mean healing past deep divisions, particularly between the military and the civilian population and between supporters and opponents of the NLD.

The government has made efforts to show it is different in tone and substance from its predecessor. In terms of substance, on 8 April it dropped charges, mostly of unlawful demonstration, against 199 people and released them from pre-trial detention, on Suu Kyi’s initiative. On 16 April, the president pardoned 83 imprisoned for political activities. The legislature repealed a number of measures long used to target political activists, including the Law to Safeguard the State against the Dangers of Those Desiring to Cause Subversive Acts. A proposal to remove the requirement to register all overnight guests from the Ward or Village Tract Administration Law is being debated and was approved by one chamber on 3 June.

As regards tone, the administration is projecting a sense of austerity and discipline. For example, a main reason the president gave for reducing the ministries was savings in ministerial salaries and benefits; a similar reason was given for eliminating nearly all deputy minister positions. The NLD requires all its legislative representatives to stay at the spartan government guest house in Naypyitaw when the
legislature is in session, even if they have their own houses or means to rent better accommodations; the rooms are small, concrete cubicles with low-quality beds and blankets, described by a 72-year-old ex-political prisoner as “just like a cell, except now my family are with me”. No alcohol was served at the president’s inauguration dinner, and receptions for visiting dignitaries have been notably frugal.

Again, this partly to demonstrate that it is different from the last administration. The main concern does not appear to be fiscal; rather, it should be seen in the light of where the NLD has come from and where it now finds itself. For more than two decades, it was a grassroots movement for change, with limited resources and under huge political and socio-economic pressure from the military regime. It now finds itself occupying the grandiose halls of power in Naypyitaw constructed by that regime at huge cost. Austerity is a way of demonstrating to the country – and perhaps reaffirming to itself – that it will remain uncorrupted and true to its origins and its election pledge to work on behalf of the ordinary people of the country. This has also given rise to a refreshing sense of approachability and humility.

III. The State of Elite Relations

A. An Uncomfortable Cohabitation

The NLD’s landslide victory in 2015 transformed the political landscape. Though barred from the presidency, Suu Kyi is the country’s undisputed political leader, formalized through her state counsellor role. The constitution’s separation of powers means she has automatically resigned her seat in the legislature and may not take part in party activities while in office (the same applies to other legislators and party members appointed to executive positions). Nevertheless, she continues to wield huge authority over the NLD and thus over law-making.

That authority is not unchecked. The constitution gives the military considerable powers, including control of the three key security ministries (defense, home affairs, border affairs), a 25 per cent bloc of unelected legislators (thus a veto over constitutional change) and control of its own affairs, including military justice. Suu Kyi’s administration thus is in an uncomfortable cohabitation with the military. The quality of that relationship will be a key determinant of its success.

B. Relations with the Military

Relations with the military have been decidedly mixed. The optics of Suu Kyi’s transition meetings with the commander-in-chief were positive, though little is known about the content. Suu Kyi cannot govern effectively without support, or at least acquiescence, of the military. Conversely, the military is reliant on her to achieve such key objectives as a better domestic and international reputation and improved military-to-military ties with the West. More fundamentally, the military is invested in the transition’s success: if the government fails, it will be a failure for the country and of the transition process that the military itself initiated.

Yet, shared interests do not automatically translate into positive relations. There have been a number of points of tension. The military was particularly upset with the State Counsellor Bill, which was introduced only a few days after the transfer of power. On substance, it was concerned that the bill unconstitutionally created a position that undermined the president’s authority and was accountable to both the executive and the legislature, a view shared by some opposition representatives. The military is particularly sensitive on constitutional matters, as the prerogatives that charter grants it were essential in creating confidence to hand over many powers. On form, it was aggrieved at how the bill was rammed through quickly, without due consideration of its objections.

Unable to prevent passage, the military bloc in the lower house staged a symbolic protest on 5 April, with one of its legislators stating: “As the Hluttaw [legislature] did not consider our proposed amendments, we refused to vote” on the bill. At the end of the session, the bloc stood in silent protest, and subsequently denounced passage as “democratic bullying” by the majority. Since the NLD appointed all members of the Constitutional Tribunal, the military likely felt a formal legal challenge would be unsuccessful and risked further demonstrating its legislative impotence.

There have been a number of other contentious points in the legislature, but also examples of military concerns being accommodated. An Arakan National Party (ANP) legislator introduced an urgent motion in the upper house calling for an end to fighting in Rakhine state between the military and the Arakan Army (AA), and for the armed group to be included in the peace process. During the 3-4 May discussion, the defense minister and military legislators rejected both points, saying the AA was the aggressor and should “end its armed struggle and cooperate with the government elected by the people”.

196
The military strongly opposed the motion, whose passage could have soured government-military relations in the peace process; if the NLD had blocked it, this would have defied opinion in Rakhine and many other ethnic areas. The speaker’s compromise, to put the motion and discussion on record rather than having a vote, was agreed, 195 to six, defusing the situation.

The military and the government also seem to be collaborating effectively on the peace process with ethnic armed groups. The process provides a forum where senior government and military officials meet on a regular basis and discuss concrete issues, so is a potential trust-building venue. As it proceeds, however, there are several issues on which views could strongly diverge (see Section IV.A below).

There has been speculation for more than a year whether the commander-in-chief’s tenure might be a point of contention between him and Suu Kyi, since he reached the normal retirement age of 60 in 2016. However, in a meeting with the media on 13 May, he asserted that the constitution allows him to decide on his retirement; that military rules specify mandatory ages for different ranks, but not for his rank of senior general; and that he intended to continue in service “as long as I am still fit for the post”. This has important implications for the peace process, where relations with the military will be critical.

C. Ethnic Politics

The NLD’s election sweep sidelined parties representing ethnic minorities. Collectively, they have only 9 per cent of seats in the national legislature, and only two parties, the ANP and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), achieved any real success; the rest won just a few seats or none at all.

Relations between the NLD and these two parties got off to a rocky start. Neither Suu Kyi nor the NLD reached out to them or other ethnic parties during the long period between the elections and the transfer of power; nor were there attempts to negotiate power sharing in these states or who would be appointed as chief ministers. The ANP was upset with the NLD for announcing in January without consultations the nomination of ANP Vice Chair Aye Thar Aung as deputy speaker of the lower house. Relations became more strained once it was confirmed that the NLD would use a much-criticised provision of the constitution to appoint its members to all fourteen chief-minister posts. Both the ANP and SNLD then refused to take any position in the national or regional governments.

The rift culminated in a strong public statement from one of Myanmar’s most respected politicians, SNLD leader Khun Tun Oo. Addressing a meeting of the United Nationalities Alliance – a grouping of ethnic minority parties that has always staunchly backed the NLD – he said they now had to rely on their own strength, as “ethnic people can no longer rely on the NLD”.

Distrust between ethnic leaders and the new government has extended to the peace process. Suu Kyi’s 27 April announcement of a vaguely defined new “Panglong-21” peace conference within two months, with no advance consultation with ethnic armed group or political leaders, raised concerns both about what the substance of the new proposal would be and how it was announced. A month on from the announcement, the leader of the Shan State Army-South – one of the largest armed groups that signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) – said:

I do not know in detail how this conference will be…. I have no idea which points [Suu Kyi] will work on and how she will deal with it…. I am also worried that she might misunderstand and do it in a wrong way. If this conference is wrong, it will affect the future of the union.

The commander of the AA, currently fighting the military in Rakhine state and elsewhere, expressed a lack of trust in the Panglong-21 initiative. His concerns were related to both the government’s handling of consultations and a perception it was acting unilaterally in Rakhine state: “currently the central government is not managing the states in a federal manner…. So, we are not fully confident that a peace deal could be signed during the term of this government”. Senior Kachin Independence Organization representatives, while cautiously welcoming the initiative, have also expressed doubts and concerns that Suu Kyi has not spoken out about escalating fighting in Shan and Kachin states.

Part of the underlying worry among armed group leaders is a perceived convergence of views between Suu Kyi and the military on the peace process, despite tensions between them on other issues. This should not automatically be a problem – indeed, a lack of cooperation or any significant divergence of views could be fatal to the process. The fear among armed group leaders, however, is that it would be impossible to negotiate with a united front of Suu Kyi and the military, with their combination of popular legitimacy and power. This has not, however, prevented generally positive momentum on the process. The Panglong-21 conference is slated for late August, though dates have not yet been fixed, and the timing
could slip further.

D. Other Elite Relations

Relations between the new government and the old political elite have also been mixed. The previous government’s Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) was routed in the elections, securing only 6 per cent of seats in the national legislature.

The USDP had already ousted its chair, the then-speaker Shwe Mann, in a midnight putsch in August 2015, though he remained a party member and electoral candidate. This was the result of longstanding tensions between its main factions headed by Shwe Mann and President Thein Sein, respectively – mirroring legislative-executive tensions. The situation had come to a head when Shwe Mann rejected many applications from Thein Sein allies, as well as retiring military officers seen as supportive of the president, to stand in the election. Many USDP members had been uncomfortable with the close relationship Shwe Mann had built with Suu Kyi, which they saw as intended to further his ambition to be her presidential nominee, at the USDP’s expense. The military was also angered when he pushed proposals for constitutional change Suu Kyi championed, knowing they would not pass, but embarrassing the military by forcing it to veto.

Suu Kyi and Shwe Mann maintained their alliance after the elections. While his presidential ambitions were not realized, the lower house speaker on 5 February appointed him to head the Legal Affairs and Special Issues Assessment Commission, a powerful legislative advisory body. Given his personal authority and the loosely-worded mandate of the commission, there was concern in the USDP and military about how much power over legislation this gave him, and how much influence he had over Suu Kyi. These concerns were heightened when President Htin Kyaw included two of Shwe Mann’s close USDP allies in the cabinet. came to a head on 22 April, when Thein Sein – who resumed his position as USDP chair shortly after his presidential term ended – expelled Shwe Mann and sixteen others from the party, including both USDP cabinet ministers (see Appendix B below) and all USDP members of Shwe Mann’s special commission. In addition to previous concerns, the immediate trigger appeared to be worries that Shwe Mann was building support to retake the party leadership.

There is a risk that the animosity between Shwe Mann and the opposing USDP faction could further complicate Suu Kyi’s relations with the old elite. It is important she avoids this: though the USDP is now legislatively impotent, it retains considerable spoiler power. More crucially, Suu Kyi’s support for Shwe Mann could possibly damage her relations with the commander-in-chief. This risk currently appears to have eased, with indications that she has put slightly more distance between herself and the former speaker. This has been particularly so on the peace process, where Shwe Mann was building support to retake the party leadership.

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IV. Key Challenges

The government must urgently address a number of key challenges. After decades of authoritarian rule and civil war, some are long-term structural problems that cannot be fixed by merely adopting more enlightened policies. These include moving the peace process forward, addressing the situation in Rakhine state and continuing the delicate process of rebalancing relations with China.

A. Peace Process

The previous administration took significant strides toward ending the six-decade civil war, signing bilateral ceasefires and initiating joint negotiations on a national agreement. However, a lack of trust, exclusion of some armed groups from the process and pre-election political dynamics complicated the process. The text of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) was agreed between all groups, but only eight signed in October 2015. This lack of inclusivity resulted in intra- and inter-armed group divisions, making it at best a partial success.

The new government has a number of advantages that could allow it to overcome previous obstacles. It has a powerful electoral mandate, including in many ethnic areas, and strong domestic and international legitimacy. Suu Kyi enjoys considerable public trust and confidence. The government also has the possibility to learn from its predecessor’s experience and refine its approach accordingly. It is at the beginning of its term, giving it some room for maneuver. Yet, it faces huge challenges. It has inherited a process that is part-way through and with which its leaders have had only limited involvement; the learning curve is steep. The process is also fragile and has been languishing for several months without direction, because the signing of the NCA was followed quickly by the elections and subsequent long lame-duck
The situation in Rakhine state remains volatile. Politics has become more polarized as a result of the perceived sidelining of the ANP, which has led the party to adopt a more radical position and put it in opposition, or confrontation, with the NLD-led Rakhine state government. This has coincided with an upswing in radical Buddhist nationalist activity nationally, after several months of relative quiet. During the campaign, there were repeated efforts to use Buddhist nationalist narratives for party-political ends, but parties and candidates standing on a Buddhist nationalist platform won no seats or significant numbers of
votes. Once the new administration was in power, nationalists began to reassert themselves, though they have started to face more push-back from government than they did under its predecessor.

In Rakhine state, this assertiveness took the form of demonstrations by Rakhine nationalists outside Aung Mingalar, the last Muslim enclave in urban Sittwe. Protesters demanded a headcount of residents, amid implausible claims that its population had tripled; Aung Mingalar residents were concerned about possible attacks. In an effort to defuse the situation, the chief minister agreed to the proposal, carried out by immigration officials with observers from both communities, on 22 May; it showed the population unchanged. However, calls to verify the Aung Mingalar population are linked to broader political objectives of their advocates, related to segregation and moving Muslim populations out of urban areas. Further tests of the authority and resolve of the new state government by Rakhine nationalists are likely to follow.

At the national level, the first significant test of the new government was an unauthorized street protest outside the U.S. embassy in Yangon on 28 April against use of “Rohingya” in an earlier embassy statement. This prompted a request from the foreign ministry to the embassy not to use the word, a subsequent instruction from Suu Kyi to her own officials to avoid both the terms “Rohingya” and “Bengali” and discussion with visiting U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on eschewing “emotive terms”.

Suu Kyi had signaled on several occasions that she did not consider the Rakhine state situation the biggest or most difficult facing the country and had urged the international community, and UN agencies in Myanmar specifically, not to “exaggerate” it. But her position has shifted in light of political realities in Rakhine state, and as nationalist groups across the country have come to focus on the “Rohingya issue”. On 31 May, a “Central Committee on Implementation of Peace, Stability and Development of Rakhine state” was formed, chaired by her – signaling that the situation will be one of her top priorities, along with the peace process. The committee includes all cabinet members plus the Rakhine chief minister and the state secretary. Sub-com-mittees were also formed, on security, citizenship, development and relations with aid agencies.

It signals that the center of gravity on Rakhine policy formulation and implementation has shifted from Sittwe to Naypyitaw, something the ANP has objected to, as well as its non-inclusion on the committee. This lack of representation of the two communities on the committee will present challenges but was probably unavoidable given the extremely polarized politics.

An early focus of the Rakhine committee has been citizenship verification of Muslims in the state, one of the most difficult and contentious issues to be addressed. The first steps – including roll-out of temporary identification documents for Muslim residents and attempts to find a compromise term between “Rohingya” and “Bengali” – have raised objections from both sides. In particular, there has been strong reaction by Rakhine nationalists to the government’s preferred phrase, “the Muslim community in Rakhine state”, which may make it much harder to compromise on nomenclature. Success in addressing the complex situation in Rakhine state requires a solid understanding of the nuances – including deep distrust of government by both Buddhist Rakhine and Muslims – together with a willingness to consult broadly to obtain buy-in (or at least reduce opposition) of hardliners in both communities.

On the broader question of anti-Muslim sentiment, Suu Kyi met on 14 May with the chief monk of the Buddhist regulatory body, the State Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee. She committed her government to fulfilling “the rational wishes and ambitions of the people of all different races and faiths” and “highlighted the need to establish trust and understanding to ensure peaceful coexistence among different ethnic groups and faith groups residing in the country”.

The implementation challenges were demonstrated by the first incident of anti-Muslim violence to occur under the new government’s watch – an attack on a Muslim shop in Bago region on 23 June, followed by destruction of a nearby mosque and madrasa. However, steps are being taken to translate the vision into action. The Yangon chief minister, who is close to Suu Kyi, has publicly criticized the Buddhist nationalist “Association for the Protection of Race and Religion” (MaBaTha). It called off plans to demonstrate against him once it was clear he had the backing not only of the government, but also of the Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee, which issued a statement, reported in state media, saying that MaBaTha had no official Buddhist status. Also, prominent MaBaTha monk Wirathu faces possible prosecution for insulting comments in 2015 against the UN Special Rapporteur for human rights in Myanmar. These are developments that would have been hard to imagine under the previous government.
C. Rebalancing Relations with China

As the transition continues, the government faces the task of reshaping and re-balancing international political and economic relationships. The challenge that looms largest is how to craft a new relationship with China, its largest trading partner by far and a key source of foreign direct investment.

The importance of the relationship was underscored by the fact that Suu Kyi's first official engagement as foreign minister was to host Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on a two-day visit, 5-6 April. China had pushed hard to ensure he would be the first foreign dignitary to meet Suu Kyi. However, this was largely symbolic; no major outcomes were announced, including on the controversial Myitsone dam project, suspended by former President Thein Sein and which Suu Kyi said she had not yet been able to study in detail. Suu Kyi's likely visit to the U.S. in September, possibly before any visit to China – and only her second major foreign trip, after Thailand in June – will no doubt be scrutinized closely in Beijing, especially given longstanding concerns over her closeness to the West. Her only prior visit to China was in June 2015, as NLD leader.

Thein Sein's 2011 suspension of the Myitsone dam construction, one of China's flagship projects in the country, shocked Beijing and marked the start of concerted re-engagement between Myanmar and the West. Though China is keen to restart construction, it understands that negative public opinion on the project in Myanmar may make that unfeasible. Nevertheless, it is keen to protect its other major projects, in particular, development of a large deep-sea port and special economic zone on the Indian Ocean coast at Kyaukpyu – and extract a quid pro quo for any cancellation of Myitsone. China is also using its considerable leverage over armed groups on the border to show Naypyitaw that it has in effect a veto on the peace process and to register concerns about the involvement of some other countries in the process. Resolving these issues will require more than project-specific guarantees and peace process reassurances; it will necessitate developing a broad, mutually-acceptable vision of bilateral relations.

A specially delicate aspect is enhanced military-to-military cooperation between Myanmar and the West, something of significant interest to the Myanmar military as it seeks to broaden defense cooperation. It is of great importance that Western militaries in particular explore appropriate avenues. First, it is essential for sustainability of the transition that the military sees institutional benefits from its decision to give up significant power. A driver of change has been its desire for Myanmar to build strategic relationships with the West, particularly the U.S., and access high-quality training. Secondly, socialization of a new generation of officers with peers in democratic countries can make an important contribution to reform of the institution. The West will have to be careful what kinds of training it provides, since Myanmar's military is still engaged in domestic armed conflict and has a grim human rights record. Myanmar will need to ensure it is cognizant of possible Chinese concerns as it builds a broader framework of constructive relations with Beijing.

V. Assessing the Record So Far

Though it is too early for definitive judgments about performance, the government’s priorities and approach are becoming clearer, and there are some preliminary indications of how national politics is adjusting. These provide the basis for an initial assessment. Overall, the government has set a positive initial tone and taken some important steps to address the authoritarian legacy. Many political detainees were quickly released, and some oppressive laws have been repealed or are being amended, though there is much more to do in this regard. Constitutional reform, a stated government priority, appears to be on the back-burner for the moment, probably wisely given its difficulty and the range of other urgent problems that must be addressed. There is little clarity on policy priorities in most areas, but the government instructed all ministries and state/region governments to formulate and begin implementing “100-day plans” as of 1 May, consisting of quick-win actions and projects that would benefit the people.

Perhaps most importantly, Myanmar has passed through a year of much uncertainty and change without major political turmoil. Following the landslide victory of Suu Kyi’s NLD in a broadly credible election with almost no violence, there was an orderly handover from the military-backed government; and her administration has entered an awkward cohabitation with the military, as dictated by the 2008 constitution, without significantly compromising on key principles or prompting a fundamental rift with the military. Navigating these difficult waters has been a key early success for government, military and country.

The enormity of the challenges and the uncertain limits of the new government’s power have had
an impact. Suu Kyi has only partial executive authority under the constitution. This seems to have amplified longstanding tendencies, leading her to concentrate as much power as possible in her own hands. Many commentators have noted that the president and two vice presidents have largely disappeared from view. The cabinet also reflects this tendency, with clear priority given to loyalty; even a fake-degree scandal failed to unseat ministers in the two key economic portfolios. A notable lack of transparency and sometimes difficult initial relations with the media may be partially explained on the same basis. So too may prima facie curious positions, such as not objecting to the renewal of U.S. sanctions on Myanmar, which Suu Kyi may feel provide her with some leverage against the military and businessmen from the old elite, even at some cost to the economy.

The government has also made some initial missteps, including on the peace process and on Rakhine state, both of which can be seen as stemming from a failure to appreciate the complex details and a lack of consultation in advance of important decisions or initiatives. This has to be put in perspective: it is not unexpected that a new, inexperienced government inheriting the legacy of decades of divisive authoritarian rule would make missteps. Importantly, there have been no major failures. The key question is whether the missteps can be attributed to the settling-in period, or reflect a deeper culture of impulsive, non-consultative decision-making. If the latter, this would be a significant concern, but it is too early to judge.

Relations with the military have not always been sensitively handled. While there appears to be good cooperation and a convergence of views on the peace process, they have been strained in other areas, particularly around Suu Kyi’s appointment as state counsellor and how that bill was pushed through the legislature. The president has avoided calling meetings of the National Defense and Security Council, constitutionally-mandated as the highest security body, likely because Suu Kyi does not accept its democratic legitimacy, and the commander-in-chief has a slim majority in it that would give him control of decisions. While Suu Kyi may consider these unavoidable issues of principle, it is critical for maintaining cooperative relations that decisions the military sees as affecting its interests or the constitutional order are handled sensitively. More broadly, success hinges in part on whether the military sees benefits from the substantial concessions it feels it has made in the transition.

VI. Conclusion

Though there have been some teething problems, the outlook is encouraging. The transfer of power has been remarkably smooth, the government has taken some early steps toward further political liberalization, and there has been no fundamental rift with the military. There have been some early missteps on the peace process and Rakhine state, caused by announcing decisions without a full grasp of nuances or necessary consultations. These may reflect an inexperienced team finding its feet and can be overcome – as can residual distrust in the military – with some adjustment in the way government takes and implements decisions.

The government’s task is daunting. After decades of authoritarian rule and civil war, many key challenges are structural. The government must find ways of moving the peace process forward, addressing the situation in Rakhine state and continuing the delicate process of rebalancing China relations. As state counsellor, foreign minister and chair of the high-level committees in charge of the peace process and Rakhine state, leadership on all these fronts falls on Suu Kyi’s shoulders, a huge, potentially overwhelming burden. Success, therefore, depends not only on developing considered and consultative approaches, but also on ability to delegate. The international community can help by providing appropriate support and wise counsel and should not shy away from giving tough advice whenever necessary."


More than 750 delegates, many wearing checkered longyi or saffron-colored attire, attended the opening ceremony. The conference was the first time in seven decades that so many factions — the government, Parliament, the military and political parties, and ethnic armed groups — had gathered to
address the country’s armed struggles.

The conference picked up on the previous government’s partial success in securing a national cease-fire last year. But despite the gathering’s symbolism, expectations for progress were low. No formal negotiations were scheduled to take place during the five-day meeting.”

"National Human Rights Education Initiative Forthcoming in Burma," Global Campaign for Peace Education, July 23, 2016, http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/category/categories/news/, reported, “Burma’s national human rights commission will join the Ministry of Education in integrating human rights education into the national curriculum, a move likely to be implemented in the following academic year, the commission has announced.”


Poypiti Amatham, "Thailand Bombings Kill 4 and Wound Dozens, Most at Tourist Sites." The New York Times, August 11, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/12/world/asia/thailand-bombings-hua-hin-phuket.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, A series of bombings struck five provinces in Thailand, mostly at sites popular with tourists, on Thursday and Friday morning, in what a senior Thai official called a coordinated wave of attacks. Four people were killed and dozens wounded, the police said.

Gen. Prawit Wongsuwan, a deputy prime minister in Thailand’s military-run government, said the attacks were 'absolutely conducted by the same network.'" ICN, "Matthew Wheeler, "Thailand struggles to break out of the cycle of unrest," August 10, 2016, http://asia.nikkei.com/Features/Thai-referendum/Matthew-Wheeler-Thailand-struggles-to-break-out-of-the-cycle-of-unrest?n_cid=NARAN012&utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=aef7ea5dfe-Weekly_Update_5_12_August_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-aef7ea5dfe-359871089. commented, "The approval of the Thai military regime’s draft constitution on Aug. 7 marks a triumphant comeback for "Thai-style democracy," a term that dates back to the military dictatorship of the 1950s, but which has become a euphemism for the supremacy of unelected officials, carefully selected by and from the national elite to ensure that the will of the people does not get out of hand.

Although touted by the regime as a milestone on its roadmap to democracy, a bulwark against corruption, and a cure for almost a decade of political turmoil, the new constitution is more likely to deepen Thailand’s political divisions. Some 61% of voters voted in favor, but turnout was just 59%. This means that only a third of eligible voters cast ballots in favor of the draft. Nevertheless, the result is a victory for the ruling National Council for Peace and Order and its allies, and a defeat for representative politics.

Under the new constitution, Thailand’s 20th since the end of absolute monarchy in 1932, the 250-member senate will be appointed by the NCPO, and the lower house will be largely ornamental, a fig leaf for continued military rule, scrutinized and disciplined by powerful, unelected watchdog agencies. The Constitutional Court, which has reliably ruled against challenges to the status quo since 2006, will have unprecedented powers to intervene in the legislative and executive branches. The upshot is that power will remain with the military, specifically the army’s Queen's Guard faction -- known as the "Eastern Tigers" -- that staged the last coup and dominates the NCPO.

The referendum process was flawed. The regime prohibited any open debate about the issues, and passed a law that made campaigning against the draft punishable by up to 10 years in prison -- more than 100 "no" vote campaigners were arrested in the run-up to the poll. Meanwhile, the government bureaucracy supported the regime's "yes" campaign. Voters were exposed almost exclusively to
information provided by the Constitution Drafting Committee and the Election Commission, which glossed over controversial provisions and portrayed the draft as a means to stability.

Thailand is preparing for the looming royal succession. King Bhumibol Adulyadej is the world's longest-reigning monarch, but he is now 88 and ailing. The aura of the king is as intangible as it is ubiquitous, and his passing will fundamentally change the power equation in Thailand. But the generals under Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-Ocha, who is now out of uniform but very much still of the military, have designed a system to suppress dissent rather than accommodate change.

Vicious cycles

Even in the short term, this new constitution offers little hope of delivering the kingdom from the cycle of public unrest and military and judicial coups of the past decade. First, it does not address the fundamental political problem that has driven conflict since the 1970s: a lack of a social consensus on what constitutes a legitimate political order. The story of modern Thai politics is that of conflict and accommodation between the paternalistic, hierarchical order inherited from the absolute monarchy, embodied in the durable alliance of palace, bureaucracy and military, and recurring demands for inclusion and equality from below, exemplified in the expansion of electoral politics. The new constitution shifts the weight of power to appointed officials, reflecting the elite's contempt for elected representatives.

Second, Thai constitutionalism cannot resolve the conflict between elected and unelected authority because the military does not consent to constitutional constraints. With few exceptions, Thai constitutions have not served to create impartial institutions and a level playing field, but instead have consolidated the power of those who commissioned them. And they are not sacrosanct. Those who wield power tear up constitutions as soon as they become inconvenient, as the recurrence of coups d'état, and the failure of courts to hold coup makers to account, attest. As a result, Thailand has averaged a new constitution roughly every four years since 1932.

The closest precedent for the system envisioned by the 20th constitution may be the semi-democracy under Prime Minister General Prem Tinsulanonda (1980-1988), now chief of the Privy Council, which advises the king. It was marked by an unelected prime minister, unstable coalitions and an appointed senate that functioned as the bureaucratic-military party. While many Thais are nostalgic for this era, which coincided with a period of explosive economic growth, some tend to overlook the fact it was also a period of lively parliamentary politics and rampant corruption. From 1979-2001, there were 25 governing coalitions and 43 cabinets. Corruption scandals brought down all four coalition governments between 1988 and 1997.

Those who voted in favor of the new constitution in the belief it would deliver stability, curb corruption and pave the way to a swift general election are likely to be disappointed."

ICG, Yanmei XieAdam Lee, Senior China Analyst of the International Crisis Group, "The Philippines' Misguided Plan to Stop South China Sea Tensions," August 16, 2016, http://nationalinterest.org/feature/oil-wont-fix-the-philippines-china-problem-17373?page=show&utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=3e94cb051f-Weekly_Update_12_19_August_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-3e94cb051f-359871089, commented, "Former Philippine president Fidel Ramos was in Hong Kong earlier this month to meet his "old friends" in hopes of breaking ice with Beijing. In a statement issued Thursday, Ramos and his interlocutors, including prominent Chinese diplomat Fu Ying, said they discussed the way forward 'in the spirit of universal brotherhood and sisterhood for peace and cooperation between the two countries.'

In the geopolitical equivalent of David versus Goliath, China was legally thrashed by the Philippines last month in an international arbitration over their disputes in the South China Sea. In the aftermath, both are showing desires to mend fences. The parties, however, will squander the opening if they keep circling around the tried-and-failed idea of joint development of energy.

Minutes after a tribunal under the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled against a raft of Chinese maritime claims and activities, China issued a statement denouncing the Philippines, the tribunal and its ruling, but also said it was willing to 'make every effort to reach transitional arrangements, including conducting joint development in relevant waters.'

Manila had already signaled interest. A few days before the tribunal ruled, Foreign Minister Perfecto
Yasay said the Philippines wanted talks with Beijing to see how “we can utilize and benefit mutually from the utilization of the resources.”

First raised by Deng Xiaoping and repeated by subsequent Chinese leaders, joint development has become Beijing’s reflex response to its acrimonious maritime relations. Desperate for energy and incapable of developing it alone, Manila has long hung its hopes on Chinese partnership. The ruling may have rekindled the political will to collaborate, but has also legally snuffed out the prospect.

In a direct rebuke to the most controversial and sweeping component of China’s claims, the tribunal declared that “there was no legal basis for China to claim historic rights to resources within the sea areas falling within the ‘nine-dash line.’”

The line, also known as the U-shaped line or the cow’s tongue, swoops down from China’s coast to take in most of the South China Sea. It slices into the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) claimed by the Philippines, as well as into those by Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam. China has not specified the line’s coordinates, nor articulated exactly what it is claiming within it, but its actions—evicting other claimants’ oil and gas surveillance vessels and shielding Chinese fishermen from other coastal states’ law enforcement—suggest it asserts entitlement to natural resources within it.

The Tribunal also ruled that none of the land features in the Spratly chain, off the Philippine coast and a few hundred nautical miles from China, are legally “islands.” That means no country, China included, can legally claim an EEZ, which extends two hundred nautical miles outward and comes with exclusive rights to resources.

The ruling dramatically shrinks the scope of maritime zones that China can lawfully claim and leaves little chance that they overlap with the Philippine EEZ. The two sides are now hard-pressed to define a suitably disputed area with promising hydrocarbon prospects to collaborate in.

The Philippines’ Hunger for Energy

The Philippines may indeed be hungry enough for energy that it would consider trading off sovereign rights for Chinese capital, technology and freedom from harassment. The country imports more than 90 percent of its crude oil and petroleum products. Its only natural gas field is expected to run dry within the next fifteen years, while demand is projected to rise.

Manila has neither the funds nor the technical capacity to develop new energy sources in the South China Sea without foreign partnership. The only sizable commercial-grade natural gas reserves are on the Reed Bank, which Manila claims as part of its EEZ but which is within Beijing’s nine-dash line. International conglomerates have stayed away for fear of offending China.

Until the recent ruling, Manila’s only hope for developing the Reed Bank has been linking hands with China, and there has been no lack of effort. In 2003, the Philippines was short on options after failing to attract international investors to develop indigenous hydrocarbon resources. “We imported almost 99.9 per cent of crude oil and petroleum products. It was . . . the era of $100 per barrel of oil. We wanted indigenous oil but couldn’t explore ourselves in our backyard,” lamented Eduardo Manalac, then Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC) president and CEO and energy undersecretary.

Formerly a senior executive at Phillips Petroleum, Manalac had developed friendship with counterparts at China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC). “My instinct was, why can’t I ask these guys to help out with joint development? So I presented this to the [Philippine] president, and she enthusiastically approved.”

At the time, then president Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was presiding over a “golden age” of Sino-Philippine relations underwritten by generous Chinese infrastructure loans. During her 2004 state visit to Beijing, PNOC and CNOOC signed an agreement to collaborate on seismic surveys of the disputed waters. The agreement evaded sovereignty concerns by stating that it would “not undermine the basic position held by the Government of each Party on the South China Sea issue.”

The area covered by the bilateral agreement ended up overlapping with Vietnam’s claims. After six months of strong objection, Hanoi reluctantly joined the deal. The ambitious project covered an area of 143,000 square kilometers.

Under the tripartite agreement, CNOOC collected data that was processed in Vietnam and subsequently brought to the Philippines for interpretation. The parties performed their jobs dutifully and developed cordial working relations, and initial analysis turned up promising results for commercially recoverable deposits. They were, however, soon to encounter a debilitating backlash.
In late 2007, a Manila press conference was held to publicize the surveys. “It was then the media asked about the location of the area, and the controversy began,” said Guillermo Balce, then energy undersecretary. Though the size of the area had initially been made public, its location had remained confidential. Press articles, especially one in the Far Eastern Economic Review, revealed details of the deal, including its location. The author alleged the Philippines had “made breathtaking concessions in agreeing to the area for study,” and “about one-sixth of the entire area, closest to the Philippine coastline, is outside the claims by China and Vietnam.”

Around the same time, sentiment was turning against Arroyo and Chinese investments. The president and her husband were accused of corruption in a $329 million telecommunications deal with a Chinese company. Revelations about the joint exploration deal further energized her critics. Opposition lawmakers filed resolutions seeking probes into whether the administration had compromised sovereignty and sold out national territory for an $8 billion loan package. Some urged impeachment.

Opponents also challenged the project’s constitutionality. Under the Philippine constitution and the Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Act, Philippine entities must own at least 60 percent of the capital of a natural resource project in Philippines waters and the government must retain at least 60 percent of the net profit. Collectively, they are known as the 60/40 rule, which the tripartite agreement—with cost split evenly three ways—did not appear to meet. The Supreme Court was petitioned in May 2008 to nullify the agreement.

Besieged by legal challenges and political troubles, the Arroyo administration let the joint exploration agreement expire on July 1, 2008, despite China’s and Vietnam’s desire to renew. Another attempt at Sino-Philippine cooperation also miscarried. In May 2012, Philex Petroleum—a private Philippine company and majority shareholder of Forum Energy—approached CNOOC and offered it an investor role in a block on the Reed Bank. CNOOC reportedly responded “positively,” yet ultimately declined, as its participation would have to follow the 60/40 rule and could be interpreted as recognizing Philippine sovereignty. Talks have continued on and off, most recently in July 2014, but without agreement.

Pro-business members of the Philippine Congress have introduced bills to loosen the 60/40 rule but failed to gain traction.

If Manila were to now propose joint development on the Reed Bank on Chinese terms—even split of ownership and profit—it would be conceding sovereign rights to an area that China has no legitimate claim to. President Rodrigo Duterte may be willing to fudge some of the issues, but such a deal would be politically perilous and legally vulnerable. Beijing could not sign off on a deal involving a Chinese company participating as a minority shareholder, because it would be seen as retreating from its own claim and risking nationalist rage.

It remains to be seen how Beijing might react were Manila to reopen blocks in the disputed waters for international bidding, but the prospect for China and the Philippines to jointly develop hydrocarbon resources in the South China Sea, for now at least, is dim. It is time to give up wishful thinking and base cooperation on reality.

Fishing for Cooperation

The tribunal has left space and hope for the parties to share and jointly manage fisheries. Fish stocks may be less glamorous than hydrocarbons, but they are more strategically important from two perspectives: disagreements over fishing rights have led to most of the clashes in the area, and a collapse in stocks from overfishing would present an existential threat to many of the claimant governments—some 210 million people in the countries surrounding the South China Sea are estimated to depend on fishing and its associated industries for their food and livelihood.

The ruling states that both Filipino and Chinese fishermen have the right to pursue their traditional livelihoods in the surrounding territorial waters—a twelve-nautical-mile band—of the Scarborough Shoal, regardless of its sovereignty. Before Beijing sealed off the area during a two-month standoff in 2012, the waters had long been accessible to fishermen of both countries. With the ruling, China could reopen the waters to Filipino fishermen without detracting from its sovereign claims. This restoration of the status quo ante would ease tensions at little cost to Beijing.

In addition, in ruling that no land feature in the Spratly group qualifies as natural islands capable of generating EEZs, the tribunal has classified a sizable swath of the waters there as “high seas” in which all
states enjoy “freedom of fishing.” That leaves space for all claimants to jointly manage fisheries.

Overfishing and ruinous fishing practices are devastating the South China Sea’s fish stocks, which “have fallen 70% to 95% from 1950s levels, according to researchers at the University of British Columbia” as cited in the Wall Street Journal. Cooperation in sustainable fishing would not only build trust, but also help ensure the sustainability of a vital source of food and income. If the South China Seas fisheries continue to be unregulated and unmanaged, the fish stocks could drop “by as much as an additional 59% from 2015 levels in the next 20 years.”

Contributing to a sustainable fishing regime would help China salvage its reputation. The tribunal ruled that China had failed to prevent its fishermen from using fishing practices that destroy the environment and poaching endangered species. China can establish itself as a guardian of the marine environment and biology by participating in or even leading cooperation on sustainable fishing and enforcement against illegal activities.

The tribunal’s ruling provided legal clarity. The attendant international attention lit a fire under China’s seat to show goodwill and reduces the daunting power asymmetry that faces the Philippines. An opportunity for collaboration is presented—in fishing, not drilling.”

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) reported May 24, 2016, "European Union confirms continued support for promoting stability, peace and development in the south of the Philippines, "The leadership of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) welcomed confirmation today by the European Union (EU) of its continued support for promoting stability, peace and development in the region of Mindanao, in the southern Philippines.

On 23-24 May 2016, senior leaders from the MILF met representatives of the EU during a visit to Brussels, to discuss the latest developments and prospects in the peace process between the MILF and the Government of the Philippines. The visit also sought to raise awareness around the importance of peace in the Philippines to national, regional and global security, as well as the pressing development needs in Mindanao.

The visit was organized jointly by the EU and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), a private diplomacy and conflict mediation organization. The MILF delegation was led by its Chairman, Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim, MILF Peace Panel Chair and chief negotiator, Mohagher Iqbal, and MILF member, Abhoud Syed Lingga. The MILF delegation met representatives of the European Commission, including those from the Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development and the External Action Service, to request continued support from the EU and the rest of the international community for the peace process, and to discuss how best to address current development needs in Mindanao.

In March 2014, after seventeen years of talks, a final peace agreement – the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) – was signed by the Government of the Philippines and the MILF, the country’s largest rebel group. The CAB seeks to establish a new autonomous regional government in the south of the Philippines. Unfortunately, progress on the implementation of the Agreement has been slow, and this, as well as limited progress on development in Mindanao, has resulted in tensions rising again in the southern region.

'The visit of the MILF leadership to the EU comes at a crucial time. It raises awareness in Europe about the importance of the peace process in Mindanao as well the risks which its stalling poses to sustainable development and (inter)national security,' said Gunner Wiegand, Managing Director for Asia and the Pacific of the European External Action Service 'Finding a lasting and peaceful solution to the conflict in Mindanao should be a priority for all of us,' he added.

HD has been supporting the peace process between the MILF and the Government of the Philippines since 2007. Camilo Miguel Montesa, HD’s Country Representative in the Philippines, highlighted that the MILF will “continue to demonstrate its commitment to peace both in Mindanao and abroad”.

Duterte, who took office on 30 June, needs to build quickly on the foundations laid by President Benigno Aquino’s administration or the process risks collapsing. Duterte has suggested a new enabling law could be drafted by an ad hoc convention that brings together members of different southern ethnic, religious and political groups. The idea has some advantages, but not at the cost of prolonged delay. The greatest danger to peace is that the restive south, skeptical after watching at least three other agreements founder, will lose faith in the process and return to guerrilla warfare or tip deeper into lawlessness. The most effective way of avoiding these dangers is for the new government to pass enabling legislation quickly that delivers at least as much autonomy as was promised by the outgoing administration.

At the beginning of 2015, the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) seemed on the brink of an historic peace to end a conflict in which more than 120,000 people have died. After years of neglect, factionalism and talks in bad faith, Aquino’s government and MILF leaders had broadly agreed on a package that would grant the five southern provinces, collectively called Bangsamoro (Muslim Nation), a large degree of political and financial autonomy in return for the MILF disarming and dropping independence demands. The Framework Agreement on Bangsamoro in October 2012, followed by the Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB) in March 2014, laid out the architecture, but finalization was contingent on Congress approving the enabling legislation before Aquino’s term ended. That did not happen, the result of a bungled police operation and politicking ahead of the May 2016 elections.

Duterte, the mayor of the southern city of Davao who won that election, was one of the peace deal’s most vocal supporters during the campaign. Though he has said he favors autonomy for Bangsamoro, all indications are that he will not follow the same route as the previous administration to deliver it. It is unclear whether he envisions the settlement for the south as an advance model for his broader plans of national federalization or as an integral part of them. A long delay, or an autonomy bill that delivers less than the CAB’s promises, risks alienating key sections of the Bangsamoro population. A particular danger is that young people, disillusioned by failure of political negotiations, would seek alternatives, such as joining one of the militant groups waiting in the wings or turning to anarchic criminality.

There was no contingency plan for failure to pass the bill under Aquino, and by law the new government must start the process of drafting and approving legislation over. While doing so, it needs to put in place measures to preserve the gains of the previous administration and make significant good-will gestures fast to boost damaged confidence in the deal. Both sides need to prepare for the coming autonomy. The MILF leadership has invested most of its political capital in the negotiations and to maintain its credibility has to be able to show that the new administration will continue it in good faith. A number of interlocutors within the process and outside suggest the government should boost confidence through increased development assistance to local bodies in the south. The south is ill-prepared for autonomy. Although the delay presents a threat to the process, it is also an opportunity. It allows the MILF and other groups, such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), time to transition from guerrilla organisations to political parties; create an inclusive political platform bringing together Mindanao’s disparate population; and convince sceptics within their own communities to support social change for a lasting peace.

Mindanao’s peace process has been innovative: it includes an International Contact Group to coordinate outside support and, at least on paper, commitment to involve women, minorities, and civil society during the negotiation and implementation of agreements. International partners, in particular Malaysia, Switzerland and the member states of the European Union (EU), have been a vital, constructive force in the peace process, facilitating and assisting as needed, but resisting the temptation to insert themselves so far into the mechanism as to detract from its essentially home-grown nature. Foreign governments, diplomatic missions and NGOs should now help escort the process through the delay, publicly supporting measures such as development aid and education programs, while impressing upon Manila’s political elite that Congress needs to build on the achievements of the previous administration.

Failure to pass an acceptable autonomy law would risk exacerbating disenchantment with negotiated change, fuelling criminality and facilitating religious radicalization. Global jihadist movements like Islamic State (IS) have shown a clear ability to exploit social disorder in Muslim communities elsewhere to gain new recruits and have already gained some adherents among smaller and more opportunistic rebel groups in Mindanao.
Years of negative national media coverage of Muslim aspirations have had a harmful impact on how the rest of the Philippines views southern autonomy. The new government under Duterte must remember that ignoring or derailing the existing process would lead not to a return to the status quo ante but to an unpredictable, potentially much more violent future.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

*To maintain the momentum of the peace process*

**To the Philippines authorities:**
1. Use the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro (CAB) as the basis of any future process.
2. Expedite the passage of enabling legislation to create a CAB-compliant autonomous region in Mindanao.
3. Ensure strong coordination with Mindanao-based security forces to avoid confidence-shaking clashes.
4. Use high-profile developmental and social investments, funneled through local groups, to show goodwill, with a focus on infrastructure, education and health.
5. Develop a public communication strategy to prepare the rest of the country for Bangsamoro autonomy.
6. Establish a National Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission on Bangsamoro to deal with past injustices.

**To the MILF:**
7. Continue to show flexibility in negotiations with the new government on how autonomy is going to be delivered.
8. Reach out to non-Muslim constituencies, particularly Christian and indigenous groups, to ensure they do not feel threatened by the prospect of living in an autonomous Bangsamoro.

**To the MNLF:**
9. Do not attempt to renegotiate the CAB from scratch.

**To international partners and donors:**
10. Focus financial, programmatic and monitoring support on three main areas: governance and capacity building, strategic communications and peace diplomacy, and justice and rule of law.
11. Establish in coordination with various levels of government and the MILF a multi-donor normalization trust fund to help pay for the transition.
12. Help facilitate inward investment in Bangsamoro to boost the local economy through jobs and commerce.

*To prepare for autonomy*

**To the Philippines authorities:**
13. Ensure that MILF fighters who agree to demobilize get their full socio-economic assistance package, so as to encourage other fighters to follow.
14. Extend the offer of amnesty and a demobilization package to fighters of other once-secessionist groups, including the MNLF.

**To the MILF:**
15. Broaden the political base of its political vehicle, the United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP), to give a greater voice to women, young people, Christians and members of the Lumad indigenous group.
16. Help build capacity for governance in Bangsamoro by identifying and nurturing talent across all ethnic, social and religious groups and genders, and seeking assistance and advice as necessary.

**To international partners and donors:**
17. Focus on boosting the technical capacity of the Bangsamoro bureaucracy, with specific emphasis on new areas of governance they will inherit with autonomy, including taxation and fiscal governance, investment policy, and land management.

on drugs have soared to nearly 1,800 in the seven weeks since President Rodrigo Duterte was sworn into office, the nation’s top police official told a Senate hearing on Monday.

Under Mr. Duterte, who campaigned on a pledge to rid the country of drug dealers, 712 suspects have been killed in police operations, National Police Chief Ronald dela Rosa said. Vigilante killings have totaled 1,067 during the same period, he said, although it was unclear how many were directly related to the illegal drug trade."

ICG, "The Eurasian Economic Union: Power, Politics and Trade, Europe and Central Asia Report N°240, July 20, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/240-the-eurasian-economic-union-power-politics-and-trade.aspx, commented, "The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), created in 2015 by Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia, claims to be the first successful post-Soviet initiative to overcome trade barriers and promote integration in a fragmented, under-developed region. Supporters argue that it could be a mechanism for dialogue with the European Union (EU) and other international partners. Critics portray a destabilizing project that increases Russia's domination of the region and limits its other members' relations with the West. The EU views the project as a challenge to sovereign choices in its Eastern neighbourhood. Positions hardened after Armenia's 2013 departure from the Association Agreement with the EU, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade area, and Russia's annexation of Crimea.

On paper, the EEU is an economic, technocratic project that offers some benefits to members, particularly in easing cross-border trade and facilitating labor migration, but also poses economic risks by raising external tariffs and potentially orienting economies away from global markets. So far it has had little economic success, though access to Russia's labor market has been an important motivator and, on balance, a positive outcome for struggling post-Soviet economies. Beset by trade disputes, sanctions regimes and a regional economic crisis, trade inside the EEU fell by 26 per cent in 2015. But optimists argue that the legal status of labor migrants within the bloc has improved, and there will be long-term gains from harmonizing customs and trade rules.

The main political tensions around the EEU, however, stem from its role in regional politics. Russia views it not only as an economic grouping, but also as a mechanism to institutionalize influence over its neighbors and as a building block in a new international order. This raises tensions with members and has led to a clash with other integration drivers in the EU's and Russia's shared neighbourhood, specifically the EU's Association Agreements, including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade area (AA/DCFTA). Moscow views these EU initiatives as encroachment into its sphere of influence. This clash between different regional projects contributed to the tensions and conflict in Ukraine in 2014, and while Moscow argued the AA/DCFTA was harmful for its economy, EU officials saw the concern as political, stressing that EU standards are not a burden even for EU companies when exporting to Russia or cooperating with Russian companies. Both sides view the other as a rival, but EEU member states other than Russia have sought to deepen their relationships with the EU where they can.

Closer economic integration within the EEU should make conflicts between members (for instance, between Russia and Kazakhstan) less likely. Easier cross-border trade and movement could reduce tensions in Central Asia. Yet, if Russia uses the EEU to dominate the region politically and as a platform for confrontation with the West, other members are likely to view the organization as a threat to their independence. Rival economic partnerships – whether with the EU or China – would then look more attractive, potentially creating tensions in relations between EEU members and Moscow.

The EEU's uncertain role and future and the standoff with Russia over Crimea and eastern Ukraine, make it difficult for the EU to develop a coherent policy toward it. Some Brussels officials and member states are opposed to any talks, fearing they would legitimize Russia's policies toward its neighbors and cut across bilateral relations between the EU and Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus – all of which have experienced new momentum in the past year and a half. Others argue that EU engagement with the EEU is a possible channel for a breakthrough in relations with Russia, or at least that it could help build bridges, or even take pressure off countries in the Eastern neighbourhood and Central Asia, some of whom have complained about being trapped between Moscow and Brussels.

Political engagement between the two blocs is hardly realistic at present, in particular until conditions such as implementation of the Minsk Agreement on the Ukraine conflict are met. While Moscow
has repeatedly expressed an interest in formalizing relations, many in the EU have concerns that such a step would produce a substantively empty process with an appearance of normal relations but minimal substantive gains.

If approached with full awareness of the above risks, low-level technical talks between EU and EEU officials could, however, help inform future strategies and offer some pragmatic short-term gains, at least in terms of defining substance for future discussions. Higher-level engagement, however, should only follow serious shifts in Russian policy, both in Ukraine and in relation to other regional states, and this is highly unlikely in the short-to-medium term. The EU would also have to consider whether recognition of the EEU would enhance or undermine the ability of smaller EEU member states to define their bilateral relationship with Brussels."

ICG, "Nagorno-Karabakh: New Opening, or More Peril?" Europe Report N°239, July 4, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/south-caucasus/azerbaijan/239-nagorno-karabakh-new-opening-or-more-peril.aspx, commented, "The pattern of military escalation on the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and Line of Contact (LoC) around Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) since at least 2011 meant it should not have been the surprise it was when major fighting broke out on 2-5 April. In combat that evoked powerful nationalist emotions in both countries and included use of multiple-launch missile systems, heavy artillery, tanks, attack drones and highly trained special forces, Azerbaijan seized small but strategically important pieces of land, and up to 200 people on both sides were killed. That and the acute threat a graver escalation could draw in powerful neighboring countries have focused the much-needed political attention of key international actors and produced an opportunity to find a peaceful solution to a generation-old conflict, often mistakenly called frozen. It is essential that the parties, urged on by France, Russia and the U.S., as co-chairs of the Minsk Group (MG) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the diplomatic point body, make a decisive push for progress in peace talks.

Resumed military escalation would likely be far more destructive than the April flare-up. There is a serious risk that long-range ground-to-ground missiles would be used and casualties, particularly civilian, be much higher in the effort to gain a decisive ground advantage. In the wake of the April fighting, the publics in Armenia and Azerbaijan are more ready for military solutions than at any time in 25 years. Russia sees itself as the regional arbiter which is bound to intervene, not least because of its tight treaty relations with Armenia. Besides mutual affinity based partly on ethnic kinship, Turkey has military cooperation, a critical energy partnership and close political and economic relations with Azerbaijan. It links normalization of relations with Armenia, including reestablishment of diplomatic ties and opening of their border, – to progress on resolution of the conflict.

The regional context has changed profoundly in the last year, increasing the potential for wide fallout if fighting resumes. Moscow’s and Ankara’s ties are strained. Iran is still defining its approach to the region but has flagged an interest in a greater role. Russia and the West remain at odds, with differences in Eastern Europe perhaps even greater than in Syria. Interests do align in pushing for progress on the NK conflict, but Moscow, which profiles itself as the key mediator and security guarantor, also seeks thereby to strengthen its strategic stake a region it considers a sphere of privileged interest, including by forging a closer relationship with Baku. Moreover, while Moscow has the political will and clout to drive the process, its regional role has been divisive, so it needs the other co-chairs to make the process genuinely credible. France and the U.S. should ensure this cooperation is indeed substantive.

The talks the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents agreed to on 16 May to pave the way for negotiations on a comprehensive settlement can be a chance to get a peace process back on track. However, the statement issued after the follow-on talks in St. Petersburg on 20 June suggest momentum might already be weakening. All the Minsk Group co-chairs should engage in the mediation effort at a senior political level in order to lend it the necessary weight and sense of urgency. For progress toward an eventual comprehensive settlement to be possible, there must also be parallel movement on confidence and security building measures (CSBMs), including the OSCE investigative mechanism agreed in Vienna to establish responsibility for ceasefire violations. The co-chairs should maintain pressure on the sides to offer concessions, specifically on Armenia to hand over occupied Azerbaijan territory, and on Azerbaijan to accept strong, internationally-backed security guarantees and an interim status for NK. They should also engage Turkey, to encourage it to use its leverage in support of the peace process.
The EU should continue to give its strong political support to the Minsk Group, including through its bilateral relations with Baku and Yerevan, and the leverage negotiation of new agreements with both can provide. It could make a special contribution, in conjunction with key European Union (EU) member states, particularly Germany – the present OSCE chairman-in-office (CiO) and the EU Minsk Group members – by putting on the table concrete offers of assistance to bolster security and other CSBMs. The EU should also plan what substantial expert and financial contribution it could make to a future post-conflict reconstruction effort, including restoration of communications, such as railway rehabilitation.

Finally, the OSCE High Level Planning Group should step up preparatory work on a future peacekeeping force, including by exploring possible contributions. There will be much politics around the composition, but discussion is needed to galvanize planning. The ultimate product could range from deploying monitors drawn from the armed forces of member states to where the opposing armies face each other and civilians from the different ethnic communities live in proximity to each other, to substantial support for the local police.

None of this would yet mean achievement of a final resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. But if there is early and coordinated action on the return of occupied territories to Azerbaijan, establishment of credible measures to guarantee security and an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh, a genuine possibility that the peace process could break out of its current impasse and move forward in a positive direction could take shape.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships:

1. Take advantage of the renewed international attention and support for progress in the peace negotiations to make the compromises that would make war less likely and bolster the long-term security of their peoples.

2. Observe the ceasefire strictly, refrain from provocative rhetoric and create a permanent channel of communication in which to discuss the situation on the international border and the LoC and prepare meetings at head of state and foreign minister level.

To the Minsk Group co-chairs and other members, the EU and the OSCE CiO:

3. Stress to the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaderships, through high-level political engagement, the importance of seizing the opportunity before them, because a new, more serious escalation is likely if progress on CSBMs and toward comprehensive settlement is slow.

4. Prepare the sides for compromise by renewing efforts to encourage dialogue between Armenians, including in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azerbaijanis, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), to develop ideas to promote people-to-people contacts, transparency and accountability in the mediation process and public discussion about how a solution of the conflict would be implemented; and work with officials, media and civil society groups as part of that dialogue.

5. The OSCE CiO (Germany) should assist the Minsk Group (MG) co-chairs (France, Russia, the U.S.) with offers of practical support, including assistance with an investigative mechanism and an enhanced monitoring role for the CiO’s Special Representative; and press for reestablishment of a hotline between the two countries’ militaries.

6. Give the work of the OSCE High Level Planning Group new impetus by considering modalities, including exploring offers of personnel for deployment of monitors, police and peacekeepers.

7. The EU should use all leverage in its bilateral relationships with Armenia and Azerbaijan, including the discussions on new agreements with both, to press for a renewed commitment to work for peace; and its High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) should continue to lend explicit political support to the efforts of the MG co-chairs, including by direct contact with the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents in the run-up to their meetings.

8. To capitalize on the EU’s traditional strength and in the event peace talks lead to progress, the HR, actively supported by France and other EU members of the MG, should commission, and the EU’s Special Representative (EUSR) should lead, work on a plan of support for the reconstruction of Nagorno-Karabakh and the adjacent occupied territories and restoration of physical communications.

9. The U.S. and EU should encourage Turkey to support the efforts of the MG co-chairs to make progress in peace negotiations on NK in its statements and actions. International actors stress Turkey should move toward normalizing its relations with Armenia, including by opening the borders, without
ICG, Deirdre Tynan, "Kazakhstan's Protests Postponed – But for How Long?" May 12, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/kazakhstan/2016/05/12/kazakhstans-protests-postponed-but-for-how-long/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=6ad176696d-Kazakhstan_commentary_12_May_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-6ad176696d-359871089, commented, "In heading off a week of unprecedented waves of protests in Kazakhstan, President Nursultan Nazarbayev has polished his reputation as his nation’s problem-solver-in-chief. But none of the underlying problems in this big Central Asian state have gone away.

The protests, ostensibly about extending the rights of foreigners to rent agricultural land after 1 July 2016, had led President Nazarbayev to revive warnings of a Ukraine “scenario” for his country. On the same day as protestors in south-central Kyrgyzstan faced off with riot police, the long-serving leader said Ukraine’s economy is in tatters “because there is no unity, no sense of purpose, no tasks are being solved, [people] are busy with other things: fighting, killing, brawling”.

Nazarbayev however quickly slapped a moratorium on the legal changes for landholdings, a decisive move that makes it seem unlikely – at least for now – that there will be any repeat in Kazakhstan of Ukraine’s years of domestic instability and crisis, lost territory and conflict.

But the moratorium only partially addresses what took protestors to the streets. The demonstrations voiced deeper concerns about the state that Nazarbayev shows no sign of addressing any time soon. A collapse in oil income, decay in the provinces, a 75-year-old leader with no clear succession plan, distrust in government and fears of Chinese encroachment add up to a combustible mix in this thinly populated country the size of western Europe.

Protests against the government’s land leasing plans spread quickly to cities throughout the country. They began on 24 April in Atyrau in the resource-rich west of the country, where wealth has not filtered down and many workers have seen their relative financial and employment security eroded by the drop in oil prices globally. By 27 April, protests had spread to north-western Aktobe and north-eastern Semey. On 28 April, crowds confronted riot police in the Caspian Sea port of Aktau in the west. On 1 May, a small number of youth even challenged police in Almaty, the country’s south-eastern commercial capital.

Throughout the protests the police refrained from knee-jerk responses that result in injury or death – as happened in south-western Janaozen December 2011 when at least sixteen striking oil workers were killed by police.

But the situation was undoubtedly tense. “Unprecedented” was the word most often used when analysts and diplomats discussed the crisis. Even activists seem unprepared for the momentum the protests gained. Nazarbayev’s announcement of a moratorium was met with equal surprise.

Many Kazakhs are still worried by plans to allow foreigners to rent agricultural land for 25 years instead of the current ten years. And they fear that when land is rented to Chinese firms this will endanger Kazakh sovereignty. But most of all, the protests are about mounting frustration with Kazakh leaders, and the perception that having creamed what they could from every other resource in the country, the political elite is now preparing to sell the land from under people’s feet.

Nazarbayev’s 25-year-long rule of Kazakhstan is sustained by the type of stability an affluent autocracy can produce, but his family’s accumulation of wealth has not gone unnoticed. The snap parliamentary elections held in March 2016 to legitimize support for Nurly Jol (Bright Path), an economic crisis recovery plan, were uneventful but the exercise rang hollow. Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan’s authoritarian tendencies, corruption and lack of genuine political reform have gone hand-in-hand with economic growth fuelled mainly by resources. Consequently, the recent economic crisis has bitten hard. Oil output is down, the national currency has plummeted-, inflation is up,

China’s role in Kazakhstan is also under the spotlight. Massive Chinese investments and equally large loans have done much to develop, and at times prop up, the Kazakh economy. Across Central Asia, misgivings about China’s long-term intentions run deep. Politicians and industrialists may be happy to do billion-dollar deals with China, but most citizens view China as a threat to their independence.

Workers in Aktobe have told Crisis Group that China’s industrial presence in the oil rich region –
including big influxes of Chinese workers – meant unfair pay, unsafe working conditions, and fewer job opportunities for Kazakhs. But misgivings cut both ways. A senior Chinese oil executive said he would rather work in Africa than Almaty because of the discrimination he and his family faced on a daily basis. China has done little to counter these negative perceptions, preferring to conduct transactions at the highest level while taking a hands-off approach to difficulties encountered at the community level.

Internationally, Kazakhstan portrays itself as a trusted political and economic partner as it seeks a seat on the UN Security Council 2017-2018. Kazakhstan is indeed Central Asia’s most stable state, but tensions are building. The level of disconnect between the government in Astana and popular sentiment in the vast regions of Kazakhstan is pronounced, and tangible if you compare the marble and glass facades of the capital with the rundown infrastructure in the regions.

Kazakhstan does not have an inspiring track record when it comes to managing social unrest. The 2011 killings in Janaozen shocked the regime into improving policing. For now, the riot police have acted with restraint and professionalism, and some social media reports of alleged injuries have been exposed as provocations. It is vital that police ineptitude or deliberate brutality remains a priority for reform.

Equally, the government should refrain from clamping down on social media, which, in contrast to most state and privately owned media in Kazakhstan, is the main forum for debate and discussion. News reporting on the protests was thin and when it did make headlines it was to frame protestors as paid stooges. On 9 May, the day of planned protests in Almaty, several organizers were detained by police and the main square was closed off.

The protests came close to bringing together a variety of aggrieved groups with a diffuse but resounding anti-government message. How the authorities conduct themselves over the coming months will be a major test. At the very least, the recent riots should persuade Nazarbayev to reassess his policy of economic progress first, political reform second.

Kazakhstan is not doomed by fate to follow its fellow post-Soviet state Ukraine into turmoil, if cool heads prevail. But Kazakhstan is a brittle place, its leadership the product of the Soviet era, its policing tactics only subject to recent review, and China still has big strategic ambitions to invest in Kazakh agricultural land. The outburst of protests was unexpected, unnerving, and mark an unsettling opening to the next chapter of Kazakhstan’s independence.

ICG, Deirdre Tynan, Project Director, Central Asia, "Brittle Uzbekistan Hopes for a Controlled Succession: A stroke suffered by Uzbekistan’s long-serving authoritarian leader on 27 August has propelled the country into the unknown, but his inner circle will try to preserve their power and minimize disruption as the transition starts," Commentary/Europe & Central Asia, August 30, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/brittle-uzbekistan-hopes-controlled-succession, commented, "Uzbekistan will most likely celebrate its 1st September independence day without long-serv ing President Islam Karimov, marking a potentially dramatic first for this strategic Central Asian country since it broke free of the former Soviet Union 25 years ago.

The 78-year-old leader has ruled with iron fist since 1991, but suffered a brain hemorrhage on 27 August. The Uzbek authorities have broken their taboo about discussing the president’s health, saying he has a serious problem that may take time to treat. After years of speculation and anticipation, Central Asia’s most populous state may now face a tense transition, a prospect that is deeply unnerving for its neighbors.

According to the constitution, if the president cannot fulfill his duties, the chair of the Senate acts as caretaker until an election. Nigmatilla Yuldashev, a former justice minister, was handpicked by Karimov for the post in January 2015. He is a loyalist and owes his position to the president’s patronage, but adhering to the constitution – relentlessly amended to consolidate Karimov’s position – has little precedent in Uzbekistan.

While Karimov is temporarily incapacitated, however, the prognosis remains unclear. According to his daughter Lola Karimova-Tillyaeva, his condition is stable.

What is likely when the time comes for a transition is that executive power would be exercised by Karimov’s inner circle, including Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Rustam Azimov and the feared head of the National Security Service (NSS), Rustam Inoyatov.

All these players will want a smooth handover, with no dirty linen aired in public. If they manage to
avoid in-fighting, they are expected to manage the stakeholders and patrons who make up an opaque system of governance and privilege. It is likely that a script has been in place for some time and that each member of the inner circle knows his or her role.

While this is not a democratic process, it may well minimize immediate instability; Uzbekistan’s neighbors – especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – would welcome that. Underlying security threats to the region, including from the spread of transnational threats like Islamic State, were underlined by a 30 August suicide bombing that injured three guards at the Chinese embassy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

Neighboring Turkmenistan may have set an example. Its late president, Saparmurat Niyazov, was a far more mercurial ruler than Karimov. Yet within two months of Niyazov’s death in 2006, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov was declared head of state with no obvious disturbance to the country’s despotism. A similarly stage-managed transition is unlikely to lead to a reform of Uzbekistan’s deeply authoritarian system, but chaotic change in a fragile region would widely be considered dangerous.

Uzbekistan is a clannish, ethnically diverse country with regions that were rival khanates for centuries and still have conflict potential. Karakalpakstan in the north west is a resource-rich, environmentally degraded, autonomous republic that has never been allowed to hold a referendum on its future. Karakalpak dissidents, most in exile, complain of a movement of ethnic Uzbeks into their region, prejudice against its culture and an ever-present network of police informants. Some felt invigorated by Russian actions in Crimea and have grown more vocal, hoping for similar support for their ambitions. They and other Uzbek politicians in exile, however, have more bark than bite.

The densely populated Ferghana Valley is haunted by the legacy of a 2005 government crackdown that left hundreds dead, mainly in the city of Andijan. Incomes across the country have declined in the past year, and mass arrests of alleged Islamic extremists have contributed to a sense of fear and distrust.

Karimov’s foreign policy has shifted repeatedly over the years, producing turbulent relations with Russia, the U.S. and the European Union. China seemingly treats Tashkent more cautiously than other Central Asian states. A U.S. airbase was closed after Washington criticized the 2005 violence. Uzbekistan has flip-flopped in and out of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization and refused to join the Eurasian Economic Union, a Moscow-dominated trade group. Nevertheless, Russia has considerable leverage as host to some two million migrant Uzbek workers whose earnings are vital to Uzbekistan’s economy. Russian diplomats say privately there is little love for Karimov in Moscow.

Karimov’s daughter Lola is regularly touted as a potential successor, but professes disinterest in a high governmental post; his other daughter, Gulnara, is in disgrace from financial scandals. The most pressing concern of whomever from the circle around the president ultimately steps into the leadership role – even as caretaker – will be to maintain the status quo. Stability that papers over the country’s potential to fracture is also the approach Uzbekistan’s near partners will likely approve of, at least in the short term. Their hope will be that the Tashkent clan honors its backroom deals in order to stave off what could otherwise become a violent crisis with regional implications.”

European Developments

Great Britain voted, in late June, to leave the European Common Market (EU), triggering huge drops in financial markets around the world, statements by Scottish leaders to peruse separation from England, as Scotland wished to remain in the E.U., and huge numbers of people in Britain signing petitions for a revolt on the issue, as many said the repercussions of voting to leave the E.U. had not been sufficiently explained. Britain’s vote to exit the EU reflects, and may push forward, a number of global movements, with populist basis, some mostly on the left, others on the right, politically. One is xenophobia, and anti-immigrant feelings, with strong economic fears. Another is revolt against austerity and other economic policies that hurt middle and lower income people. The third is a movement against corporate power, growing inequality, and related economic issues. (Steven Erlanger, ‘Brexit’ Aftershocks: More Rifts in Europe, and in Britain, Too," The New York Times, June 24, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/25/world/europe/brexit-aftershocks-more-rifts-in-europe-and-in-britain-too.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0; Peter S. Goodman, "After ‘Brexit’ Vote, Investors Are Gripped by a Panic Last Seen in 2008," The New York Times, June 24, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/25/business/how-britains-breakup-with-the-eu-could-reshape-world-

Andrew Kramer, "Russia Calls New U.S. Missile Defense System a ‘Direct Threat’," The New York Times, May 12, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/world/europe/russia-nato-us-romania-missile-defense.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "As American and allied officials celebrated the opening of a long-awaited missile defense system in Europe with a ribbon cutting and a band, the reaction in Russia on Thursday suggested the system had raised the risks of a nuclear war.

Russian officials reiterated their position that the American-built system imperiled Russia’s security. But the public discussion in Russia was darker, including online commentary of how a nuclear confrontation might play out in Europe, and the prospect that Romania, the system’s host, might be reduced to 'smoking ruins.'"

ICG, Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, "Women in the North Caucasus Conflicts: An Under-reported Plight," June 9, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/2016/06/09/women-in-the-north-caucasus-conflicts-an-under-reported-plight/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=ad24e4b889-north_caucasus_9june16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-ad24e4b889-359871089, commented, "Women in the Russian republic of Chechnya have never been under such pressure as they are today. Yet not much has been written about their role, their place in society, and their rights in Chechnya and in other North Caucasian conflicts.

For more than two decades since 1994, the armed conflict between Russian federal forces and the insurgencies of the North Caucasus has been among Europe’s deadliest, churned by a vicious circle of unresolved religious and ethnic tensions, brutal counter-insurgency, lack of democratic procedures, social inequality, and bad governance. Instability and war resulted in a dramatic erosion of state capacity, weakened state institutions and the increased prominence of traditional and religious practices and intolerant ideologies.

All of this has shaped women’s experiences and roles – as victims, providers of security and perpetrators of violence – not just in Chechnya but also in the neighboring republics of Ingushetia and Dagestan.

Women’s rights violations

Women and girls in Chechnya are subject to honor killings, domestic violence, abductions for marriage and early marriages. In some Dagestani villages, they also suffer genital mutilation. In Chechnya and Ingushetia many are deprived of their children after divorce – with reference to purported “tradition” which allegedly prescribes children to be raised in their father’s family – and are often denied visiting rights. Some have been struggling to see their children for years. In Chechnya, sexual violence by close relatives, is hardly ever prosecuted; if such a crime becomes public knowledge, the victim may be killed to “purge the family shame”.

Maternity wards in the region are below acceptable standards, resulting in preventable maternal deaths and injuries. Corruption is also omnipresent in the health system: without a bribe a pregnant woman can hardly get adequate help. Even a bribe cannot guarantee quality care: women often encounter incompetent and negligent doctors. Infant mortality in the eastern North Caucasus is almost twice that of the developed regions of Russia.

In one hospital in Ingushetia, several cases of alleged criminal negligence, including instances in which women lost their babies and reproductive organs and one woman died, have been reported, most recently in September 2015. Investigations have so far led nowhere. In Dagestan, three women reportedly died in a hospital in the town of Kizilyurt in the last couple of months, relatives claim as a result of criminal negligence. Earlier this year, the death of a woman in the maternity ward of Dagestan’s Khasavyurt brought hundreds of protesters into the streets and ended up in stone throwing and disturbances.

Most of these crimes are punishable under Russian law. Yet, Russia is not able or is reluctant to enforce some aspects of its laws when it comes to gender-based violations, in some of its North Caucasus
republics where women's problems continue to be under-researched, under-reported, and insufficiently addressed by both central and local authorities.

Russian law is rather progressive in respect of the women's rights, even though the Committee to End Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) recommends that Russia adopt more comprehensive legislation to prevent and address violence against women, and notes the absence of an effective complaints mechanism for women to claim their rights. However, for a woman in Chechnya, Ingushetia or Dagestan the situation is further complicated by the fact that Russian law is just one of the three co-existing legal systems that regulate her position: customary law, Islamic sharia law and/or Russian law. All these systems are open to arbitrary interpretations, which can lead to serious infringement of rights.

The formal Russian legal system suffers from corruption and enforcement problems. Even when Russian courts pass decisions in favor of women, the local authorities, especially in Chechnya, openly sabotage their implementation. They have, for example, ignored court orders in favor of women in custody disputes, citing “tradition”. In one case taken to the European Court for Human Rights, the Russian state itself cited “tradition” as an obstacle to enforcing custody decisions. Some mothers have been unlawfully separated from their children for years.

Victims rarely dare to seek redress, and when they do, regional law-enforcement agencies often do not react or openly obstruct. In Chechnya the state protection that victims do get sometimes involves officials who collude with suspected perpetrators. Sergey Bobrov, a federal official, the head of Chechnya's investigative committee, tried to investigate honor killings which implicated local security officials, but received threats and was six months later dismissed from his position by President Putin. Moscow does not pay sufficient attention to investigating crimes against women, being either unaware of the problem or finding it unimportant. “They have lived this way for ages, there’s nothing we can do”, a high level federal human rights official told me.

The temporarily liberating impact of war

Today Chechen women are particularly vulnerable and at risk.

Women carried a special burden on their shoulders during the republic’s two wars. Men fought on both sides, and for those who didn’t, it was dangerous to move through the republic’s numerous checkpoints. They could be arrested, abducted, tortured or killed. Women became the main breadwinners, took care of children, cleared away debris and repaired damaged houses. They negotiated with the military, and when men were abducted by security services they blocked roads, protested, spent days in official institutions trying to establish their whereabouts, and searched through mass graves. Some eventually started to document crimes and became outspoken human rights defenders.

Paradoxically the extreme conditions of war were liberating for women. The pressure of tradition was forced aside as wartime conditions and the absence of men created an opening for women to take up leading roles in society.

Many Chechen women remain family breadwinners and still have to do all the housework, but since the war their social status has dramatically changed for the worse. After full-blown military confrontation ended and federal troops established control over the whole of Chechnya in 2003, the Kremlin launched a policy of 'Chechenisation', whereby most political, military and administrative functions were transferred to ethnic Chechens. The Kremlin put in power the formerly separatist Kadyrov family, to whom it outsourced law-enforcement and governance in the republic.

Chechnya’s 38-year-old dictator Ramzan Kadyrov declared that his regime was going to restore traditional values and mores, and today exerts immense pressure on women. He has described women as a husband’s property, whose main role is to bear children. In 2007, he introduced a strict dress code (a head scarf, shirts with long sleeves and long skirts) in government institutions, including schools.

He advocates polygamy as the solution when women run foul of traditional law, saying it is 'better to be a second or third wife than to be killed'. Though he officially bans under-age marriage and bridal abduction, cases of local security servicemen forcing very young girls into marriages, and as second or de facto temporary wives have been reported. Women’s activists told me that parents are afraid their daughters be seen in public, especially in the evenings, for fear of them being noticed by people in positions of power. Families cannot resist pressure from powerful security types who may seek to take them for marriage.

Honor killings also appear to have become more common in recent years. There are no distinct
state statistics about crimes committed against women in Russia, an omission that international
monitoring institutions repeatedly advise state authorities to correct. Perpetrators also go to great lengths
to conceal their crimes. Honor killings and domestic violence are also reported in republics beyond
Chechnya. Most recently in Dagestan, a father reportedly killed his two daughters for coming home late,
while another family chained a woman up for suspected misdemeanor.

Women's radicalism
Women in the North Caucasus are not only victims of violence or peacemakers, they are also
sometimes perpetrators of violence and bearers of radicalism.

Since 2000, Russia has been hit by 82 suicide bombing attacks involving 125 suicide bombers, at
least 52 of whom were women. I know of several families in Dagestan whose young women adopted radical
strands of Islam and then converted their siblings and even their fathers. One by one their family members
joined the insurgency in Russia and were killed, or are now members of the so-called Islamic State (IS). In
the last two years many radical women from the North Caucasus have resettled in areas of Syria and Iraq
under IS control.

IS presents itself as the most successful jihadist project of the 21st century, enticing young
radical women who want to marry mujahidin (holy warriors) with the hope to win a place in 'paradise'. As
one popular jihadist slogan has it: 'It is better to be a widow of a shaheed (martyr) than wife of a coward'.

While women's radicalism shares similar pull and push factors to men's, there are some specific
causes: pressures of the traditional society; lack of opportunities and freedom to make their own life
choices or realize their potential; sexual abuse; or traumatic relationships with husbands, brothers or
parents. Understanding these is essential to devising effective de-radicalization strategies.

Conclusion
Since the end of the Soviet Union the status and roles of North Caucasus women have undergone
several transformations. Two decades of instability and conflict gave rise to authoritarian regimes,
traditionalist policies and ideologies that have resulted in a dramatically deteriorated context for women's
rights, especially in Chechnya, the most affected conflict area. Local activists try to raise awareness and
assist victims of abuses, but their voices are weak and the plight of women in the North Caucasus conflicts
remains under-reported.

The Russian government should invest in a consistent effort to guarantee equal protection of
women not only in Chechnya, but also in Dagestan and Ingushetia. Among other measures, Russian
authorities should improve maternal and social services, effectively investigate gender-based violence to
combat impunity, and devise effective gendered de-radicalization strategies. The women of the North
Caucasus deserve at least the same level of protection as those in other parts of Russian territory."

Deirdre Fulton, " 'High Alert': Ukraine and Russia Building Up Military at Crimean Border: 'The
events are developing according to a pretty negative scenario. Neither side has any trust in the other,'"
ukraine-and-russia-building-military-crimen-border, reported, "Both Ukraine and Russia are escalating
military activity along the Crimean border, as tensions between the two nations—largely stoked by the
West—mount once again.

On Thursday, a Ukrainian spokesman said that in recent days, there has been 'a strengthening of
the [Russian] units that are at the border.'

Meanwhile, in response to Russian claims that the Ukrainian government was plotting terrorist
attacks inside Crimea, Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko on Thursday ordered "all military units near
Crimea and the eastern Ukrainian Donbas region to be at the highest level of combat
readiness," RT reports.

The Ukrainian security forces at the border with Crimea are ready 'for any turn of events,'
Ukrainian border guard spokesman Oleg Slobodyan told journalists at a press briefing.

Foreign Policy reports:

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Volodymyr Yelchenko, Ukraine's ambassador to the United
Nations, drew parallels between the current situation in Crimea and the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian
War in 2008, which also coincided with the Summer Olympics and a U.S. election.
"This scenario looks very similar and very familiar," said Yelchenko. "That's why we stand ready for further provocative developments.'

And the Kremlin said Thursday that Russian President Vladimir Putin has held a meeting with his Security Council to discuss additional security measures and tightening border controls in Crimea.

"There may be escalation in eastern Ukraine and that is very dangerous," Alexei Makarkin, deputy head of the Moscow-based Center for Political Technologies, told Bloomberg on Thursday. "The events are developing according to a pretty negative scenario. Neither side has any trust in the other.'

Unsurprisingly, voices in the West pinned blame for the recent escalation on Russia.

U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt dismissed Russia's latest claims against Kyiv: "We don't want to be distracted from the real issue here, which is not only Russia's occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea, but their continued aggression in eastern Ukraine," State Department spokesperson Elizabeth Trudeau added to reporters in Washington on Wednesday.

And a NATO official called on Moscow to "work for calm and de-escalation," adding that "Russia's recent military activity in Crimea is not helpful for easing tensions.'

But as investigative journalist Robert Parry wrote last month, 'the endless drumbeat of Western media reports about 'Russian aggression' results from a clever demonization campaign against Putin and a classic Washington 'group think' rather than from a careful intelligence analysis.'

'The real narrative based on actual facts would have acknowledged that it was the West, not Russia, that instigated the Ukraine crisis by engineering the violent overthrow of elected President Viktor Yanukovych and the imposition of a new Western-oriented regime hostile to Moscow and Ukraine's ethnic Russians,' Parry argued.

He continued:

In the up-is-down world that NATO and other Western agencies now inhabit, Russia's military maneuvers within its own borders in reaction to NATO maneuvers along Russia's borders are "provocative." So, too, is Russia's support for the internationally recognized government of Syria, which is under attack from Islamic terrorists and other armed rebels supported by the West's Mideast allies, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and NATO member Turkey.

In other words, it is entirely all right for NATO and its members to invade countries at will, including Iraq, Libya and Syria, and subvert others as happened in Ukraine and is still happening in Syria. But it is impermissible for any government outside of NATO to respond or even defend itself. To do so amounts to a provocation against NATO—and such hypocrisy is accepted by the West's mainstream news media as the way that the world was meant to be.

Earlier this year, news outlets reported that the United States was ramping up the deployment of heavy weapons and armored vehicles to NATO member countries in Central and Eastern Europe, citing "suspicions" about Russia's motives in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.'

ICG, "Ukraine: The Line," Europe Briefing N°81, July 18, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/ukraine/b081-ukraine-the-line.aspx?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=7381488eb8-ukraine_180716&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-7381488eb8-359871089, commented, "The 500km line of separation between Russian-supported separatist districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and the rest of Ukraine is not fit for purpose. The ceasefire negotiated at the February 2015 Minsk talks is being violated daily and heavily. Tens of thousands of well-armed troops confront each other in densely populated civilian areas. The sides are so close that even light infantry weapons can cause substantial damage, let alone the heavy weapons they regularly use. This presents major risks to civilians who still live there – about 100,000 on the Ukrainian side alone, according to an unofficial estimate – often next door to troops who have taken over unoccupied houses. It also heightens the risk of an escalation. Kyiv, Moscow and the separatists all bear responsibility for the security and well-being of civilians living along the front line.

Likewise, Kyiv's European allies, Washington and Moscow all have crucial roles to play in addressing the overall situation. They should insist that both sides withdraw their heavy weapons, as Minsk requires, from the front line to storage areas monitored by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
They should also press their respective allies – the Ukrainian government on one side, and the self-proclaimed People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk (DNR and LNR) on the other – to separate troops from civilians and to substantially widen the line of separation. Russia’s role in this is vital. It insists it is not a party to the conflict, but its military intervention in early 2014 triggered the crisis; two major incursions by its armed forces in 2014 and 2015 deepened it; and it is now the sole source of military, economic and other assistance to the two entities. Its officers train and largely command the separatist forces, and it continues to assure the separatists that it will intervene again if Ukraine attacks. Given Russia’s continued role in the conflict, international sanctions need to be maintained.

There is little doubt that the death toll is significantly higher than either side admits. Fighting takes place daily along large parts of the line, much of it unreported. Both sides often use howitzers, heavy mortars and rocket systems or park them menacingly in the center of large urban areas where they risk at the least becoming targets for the other’s artillery. The Minsk agreement to withdraw heavy weaponry, meanwhile, is violated daily.

Both sides should take urgent measures to address the security and humanitarian, including health, needs of the civilians stranded along the front line. Troops and military equipment should be moved out of civilian buildings and settlements. It would be helpful if the OSCE, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) specifically identified in their public monitoring reports those locations where civilians and military are intermingled. Ukraine also urgently needs to address the humanitarian fallout of the conflict, including clear signs of psychiatric distress in front-line villages. If it is unable to do this, an experienced international organization like Doctors without Borders should be encouraged to survey the needs. And the Ukrainian government should order local civil administrators, most of whom seem to have abandoned settlements on the front line, to return to work and at least be in contact with the population concerned.

The humanitarian crisis on the front line is also a political one. President Poro-shen-ko’s poll ratings in the east, including those areas Kyiv controls, have declined substantially. One oft-cited reason is the sense that the country’s leadership is not interested in the east. Ukraine, whose sovereignty over the occupied territories is internationally recognized, needs to take the lead in addressing these problems. Doing so would not be a sign of weakness, as some Ukrainian voices argue, or imply equal guilt with Moscow for the damage inflicted by the conflict. On the contrary, it would be proof that Kyiv was acting as a legitimate and responsible member of the international community that cares for the well-being of all its citizens.

The government-controlled areas of the two oblasts are also the stronghold of one of Ukraine’s main opposition parties, the Opposition Bloc. Widely described as pro-Russian and oligarch-funded, the Bloc is running nationwide ahead or neck and neck with the president’s party in many polls. Failure to help its own citizens on the border thus could well have political cost for the Kyiv leadership and fuel conflict by strengthening anti-government feelings in Luhansk and Donetsk.

This briefing, based on travels along the Kyiv-controlled side of the line of separation in April-May 2016, focuses on the intermingling of civilians and military in front-line areas on the Ukrainian side. It also surveys the views and outlook of Ukrainian military officers stationed along the front line. The officers are younger and more confident than those encountered two years ago. But their opinions were bitingly critical of the country’s political and military leadership, including President Petro Poroshenko. The president and other top leaders would be well advised to pay more attention to the mood of what is in essence the next generation of Ukrainian military commanders. All officers interviewed described the Minsk process as dead and strongly supported the idea, floated by some leading politicians, to seal off the separatist enclaves for the foreseeable future – a policy move the international community should caution against in no uncertain terms.


In the report about disappearances and torture in the Ukraine war, titled 'You Don’t Exist,' Human
Rights Watch and Amnesty International document harrowing abuse by both sides, including waterboarding and the use of electrical shocks."

Steven Erlanger, "NATO Invites Montenegro to Join Alliance," The New York Times, May 19, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/20/world/europe/nato-montenegro.html?ref=todayspaper. reported, "NATO made a formal invitation on Thursday to tiny Montenegro to join the alliance as its 29th member." Russia most likely will object, stating this move is provocative.


"Every Friday, just yards from a statue of Bill Clinton with arm aloft in a cheery wave, hundreds of young bearded men make a show of kneeling to pray on the sidewalk outside an improvised mosque in a former furniture store.

The mosque is one of scores built here with Saudi government money and blamed for spreading Wahhabism — the conservative ideology dominant in Saudi Arabia — in the 17 years since an American-led intervention wrested tiny Kosovo from Serbian oppression.

Since then — much of that time under the watch of American officials — Saudi money and influence have transformed this once-tolerant Muslim society at the hem of Europe into a font of Islamic extremism and a pipeline for jihadists.

Kosovo now finds itself, like the rest of Europe, fending off the threat of radical Islam. Over the last two years, the police have identified 314 Kosovars — including two suicide bombers, 44 women and 28 children — who have gone abroad to join the Islamic State, the highest number per capita in Europe.

They were radicalized and recruited, Kosovo investigators say, by a corps of extremist clerics and secretive associations funded by Saudi Arabia and other conservative Arab gulf states using an opaque, labyrinthine network of donations from charities, private individuals and government ministries."

Increasing attacks, By or inspired or otherwise, or without such connections, such as those discussed below, in Europe and around the world are increasing fears and security concerns, giving support to both xenophobia and law and order campaigns (including that in the U.S. by Donald Trump). This has been reflected in Germany, Melissa Eddy, "German Mood Is Shaken as Attacks Show Vulnerability to ISIS." The New York Times, July 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/27/world/europe/germany-attacks-).


The rampage Thursday night at a packed Bastille Day fireworks celebration in the southeastern city of Nice, which unfolded as the assailant used the rented refrigerated truck as a battering ram, was all the more unnerving because it came as a total surprise despite extensive security precautions, French officials acknowledged."

As attacks in Europe continued to multiply, Rukmini Callimachi, Melissa Eddy and Andrew Jacobs, "Gunman in Munich Kills 9, Then Himself, the Police Say," The New York Times, July 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/23/world/europe/munich-mall.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "A gunman opened fire outside a shopping mall in Munich late on Friday afternoon, killing nine people, wounding 21 and sending Germany's third-largest city into lockdown as the police scrambled to find what they initially thought were as many as three assailants.

By early Saturday, the authorities said the attack was probably the work of a single gunman, an
18-year-old German of Iranian descent who they said held both German and Iranian citizenship. The body of the presumed gunman, whose name was not immediately made public, was found less than a mile from the mall with a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, officials said."

The shooter was reported to have had mental problems, but no connection or interest in ISIS or other terrorist organizations (Rukmini Callimachi and Melissa Eddy, "Munich Killer Was Troubled, but Had No Terrorist Ties, Germany Says," The New York Times, July 23, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/24/world/europe/munich-shooting-attack.html?ref=todayspaper).

African Developments

Declan Walsh, "Militias in Libya Advance on ISIS Stronghold of Surt With Separate Agendas," The New York Times, June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/02/world/africa/militias-in-libya-advance-on-isis-stronghold-of-surt-with-separate-agendas.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Fighters aligned with Libya's United Nations-backed unity government are advancing along the Mediterranean coast toward the Islamic State stronghold of Surt, signaling the first major assault on territory that, since last year, has become the terrorist group's largest base outside Iraq and Syria.

Two separate militia forces have fought their way toward the city in recent days, attacking from both the east and the west, in apparently uncoordinated attacks that have reduced the length of Libyan coastline controlled by the Islamic State to 100 miles from about 150 miles. On Wednesday, one of the militias claimed to have seized control of Surt's power plant, 20 miles west of the city.

Those victories occurred in sparsely populated areas, and it was unclear whether the militias had either the strength or the will to push into Surt, which is thought to be heavily fortified and also harbor several thousand foreign fighters. But the advance did signal a new setback for the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, at a time when it is already under concerted attack in Falluja, Iraq, and in parts of Syria.

Analysts and diplomats warn that while the offensive addresses the West's biggest concern in Libya, it also risks destabilizing the fragile peace effort there by fostering violent competition between rival groups."


President Obama, during a news conference, said the airstrikes were critical to helping Libya's fragile United Nations-backed government to drive Islamic State militants out of Surt, which the group has controlled since June 2015."

ICG, "Jihadist Violence in Tunisia: The Urgent Need for a National Strategy," Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°50, Tunis/Brussels, June 22, 2016. Translation from French, https://d2071andwj.cloudfront.net/jihadist-violence-in-tunisia-the-urgent-need-for-a-national-strategy.pdf?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group's+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=977d0328b83-Weekly_Update_19_26_August&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11e97d0328b83-359871089, commented, "Tunisia faces a jihadist threat that arises as much from its own national territory as from neighboring Libya. To confront it, the authorities must urgently publish a counter-terrorism strategy that adopts a multidimensional approach, prioritizing prevention and including a mechanism for wide consultation. This would enable a coordinated response and help build broader national consensus around it. The priority is to overcome the mostly institutional and bureaucratic obstacles that have delayed the launch of a strategy since a new constitution was adopted in January 2014. Publishing
and implementing a strategy against jihadist violence, which could destabilize the country and encourage an authoritarian drift, will mean revitalizing security governance. Failing to respond coherently would allow some of the most vulnerable segments of Tunisian society to continue to radicalize, a primary goal of jihadist groups.

Jihadist violence in Tunisia has expanded and diversified since the 2010-2011 uprising against the regime of then President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali. While the government is determined to tackle this security challenge, it has yet to implement a multidimensional strategy that would enable it to address the root causes of violence, thereby preventing it and appropriately increase the capacity of security forces to anticipate the threat, react quickly and coordinate and adapt their responses. Releasing a national strategy would clarify the requirements and priorities for a fight of this kind, and would enable a public debate, encouraging popular buy-in and thus pre-empting resistance to its application. It would also improve security collaboration between Tunisia and its regional and international partners, which are keen to see their financial and technical support integrated into a clear strategic vision.

Political actors agree more or less on the strategic direction needed to tackle the problem, despite some divergence on the level of control over spaces of religious teaching and the balance between prevention and repression. The main problem is that the government has not yet published or implemented a responsive strategy – one whose operational components can evolve to become more effective. The context is unfavorable: Tunisia’s security challenges are urgent and tend to provoke a repressive response; coordination between the heads of state and government is poor; numerous administrative obstacles remain between and within ministries; and the multiple ad hoc counter-terrorism commissions often underperform and even fragment policymaking.

Two strategic documents were prepared in 2014 and 2015, but never published. These should now serve as a base for the drafting and dissemination of a new text that should reflect a deep understanding of jihadist groups. Two elements will be essential for its success: better cooperation between public institutions and a mechanism for evaluating the strategy’s effectiveness with a view to making the necessary adjustments.

The agency best placed to produce this type of document in coordination with the relevant ministries is the new National Counter-Terrorism Commission, established on 22 March 2016, which brings together various parts of the government, including from the security sector. It could also put in place a mechanism for consultation across a broad spectrum of political and civil society actors.

As a first step, to give new impetus to the finalization and dissemination of this strategy, the head of state and the head of government should agree on their respective roles in the security sector. Secondly, the head of government should strengthen its inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and the Security Management Follow-up Cell, and create the position of high commissioner for counter-terrorism, who should be given the status of minister without portfolio. The high commissioner’s task would be to improve coordination between the two heads of the executive, the relevant ministries, other government agencies (both inside and outside the security sector) and the various ad hoc counter-terrorism commissions. The high commissioner should have the appropriate profile and status to be able to support the National Counter-Terrorism Commission in the analytical aspects of its work, namely the completion of the strategy, and help revitalize security governance.

To finalize a multidimensional strategy emphasizing prevention and based on a solid understanding of jihadist groups, and to ensure its effective application:

- The National Counter-Terrorism Commission should draw on the two previous strategic documents to complete a new text, ensuring the active participation of all ministries and government agencies.

- The commission should present a public version of this new text and put in place a participatory evaluation mechanism that would allow consultation with a broad range of political and civil society groups representing Tunisia's many political and regional sensibilities, specifically those of border regions most affected by violent groups. Their perspectives should be taken into consideration to enable the adaptation of the document’s operational elements in response to an evolving threat.

- The head of state should take charge of publicizing the strategy’s guiding principles and encourage a process of public consultation.
To revitalize governance mechanisms and improve coordination between the two heads of the executive in order to enable the implementation of the strategy:

- The heads of state and government should define their respective roles in the security sector, without necessitating a change in the constitution.
- The head of government should strengthen its inter-agency coordination mechanisms, in particular the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and the Security Management Follow-up Cell, in order to overcome the bureaucratic resistance and cronyism that are weakening the chain of command within each ministry, especially the interior ministry.
- The head of government should appoint a high commissioner for counter-terrorism, with the status of minister without portfolio, who is politically independent and has the relevant legal expertise and experience in security management. This person should be tasked with supporting the National Counter-Terrorism Commission and improving coordination between the heads of state and government, as well as between different ministries, government agencies and ad hoc bureaucratic structures involved in counter-terrorism policy both inside and outside the security sector."

corruption.aspx?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d0ad7608ff-Tunisia_5_3_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d0ad7608ff-359871089,

commented, "Political tensions between supporters and opponents of Tunisia's transitional justice process and of its application in the economic realm are delaying the implementation of policies necessary to stimulate the economy and tackle corruption. The process' supporters view it as essential to keeping the revolutionary flame alive, reestablishing citizens' trust in state institutions and promoting the rule of law, equitable development and reconciliation. From their side, its opponents see it as a remnant of a past political context and an obstacle to economic recovery. Compromises will be needed to reconcile these two camps as well as strengthen government efforts to root out corruption and economically integrate regions most neglected under the former regime.

After the fall of President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January 2011, Tunisia's new political actors implemented a politicized, often arbitrary and thus haphazard, form of justice; comprising a variety of ad hoc and extrajudicial measures, this process could be described as "revolutionary justice". The former regime's victims were able to receive material and symbolic reparations, while businessmen believed to have been implicated in corruption had assets seized, faced trials (many of which are still pending) or were blackmailed.

In December 2013, a Truth and Dignity Commission (Instance vérité et dignité, IVD) was established to implement a comprehensive transitional justice mechanism anchored in the law, informed by the evolution of transitional justice theory and its use in other countries, and enshrined in Tunisia's new constitution (enacted in January 2014). The Troïka government in power at the time (composed of political forces in opposition or in exile during the Ben Ali era) supported the move.

After Tunisia's political landscape changed in December 2014, official support for the IVD began to crumble. The newly consecrated parliamentary and governmental alliance between Nida Tounes, a secular movement that has given a second political life to former regime members, and the Islamist party An-Nahda (a former Troïka member) created a political balance that has favored selective amnesia over remembrance.

During the second half of 2015, public debate about the transitional justice process became both more prominent as well as more polarized. In July, President Béji Caïd Essebsi proposed an economic reconciliation bill reducing the IVD's prerogatives. The most determined opponents of the bill, which has been shelved for now but could yet re-emerge in a new form, argue it would absolve those implicated in corruption and thus underscore victory by the "counter-revolution". Use of this latter term points to the revival of Tunisia's traditional socio-economic elite, mainly hailing from the capital and the east coast, which was weakened by the 2010-2011 revolution.

The bill's supporters – including An-Nahda, which is torn between its revolutionary ideals as a former opposition movement and its determination to preserve the fragile coalition with Nida Tounes – view the implementation of transitional justice measures as a threat to stability. They want the IVD to abandon its pursuit of corruption cases stemming from the 1955-2013 period and instead focus exclusively on human rights violations.

Both sides must make concessions if this struggle is to be overcome. First, it will be necessary to resolve...
the misunderstanding that derives from the association of transitional justice – and the legitimate role it can play in relation to justice and reconciliation – with the ad hoc measures adopted during the “revolutionary justice” period, which some groups deem a witch hunt against businessmen and senior civil servants.

Second, given the deteriorating economic situation, the country cannot afford to wait for the IVD’s final recommendations in 2018-2019. It would be better for the government to support a law regularizing under certain conditions the status of Tunisians implicated in corruption and tax evasion. Instead of entering into conciliation procedures that could create new opportunities for cronyism and blackmail, these Tunisians would have to entrust the inventory of their assets to certified public accountants, who would be held responsible for any false declarations, as a basis for a tax assessment and back payment.

To restart the economy, businessmen must be able to free themselves from the “revolutionary justice” measures which they claim have victimized them for the past several years. State agents accused of embezzlement under the previous regime should also be able to regularize their status. In exchange, both the presidency and the government should actively support the collaboration of other public institutions with the IVD, and ensure its activities, in particular its public hearings, are disseminated.

In parallel, the government should quickly formulate and implement measures to fight cronyism, nepotism and corruption; prioritize dialogue between regions, specifically between entrepreneurs in border areas, the Sahel (northern part of the east coast) and the capital; and institute new transparency mechanisms for public tenders.

The aim should not be to modify the transitional justice mechanism rooted in the January 2014 constitution but to find a middle ground that increases political elites’ confidence in it, so that the IVD’s work can take place in a more auspicious environment. Contrary to a widespread preconception, encouraging the implementation of the transitional justice process is in the current political class’s interest. Renewing political support for it and accompanying it with immediate reforms to prevent the spread of corruption would reduce the risks of polarization and help prevent Tunisians’ complete disillusionment with politics.”

ICG, "Boko Haram on the Back Foot?" Africa Briefing N°120, May 4, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/nigeria/b120-boko-haram-on-the-back-foot.aspx, commented, "Under its new president, Muhammmadu Buhari, Nigeria has regrouped, and neighbors are collaborating with it more meaningfully, taking a more powerful military response to Boko Haram into rural areas where the jihadist group remains strong. Other international partners also are supporting the effort against the insurgency that since 2009 has cost tens of thousands of lives, uprooted millions and spread to other Lake Chad basin states, damaging local economies and cross-border trade. Boko Haram is seemingly on a back foot, but formed of dispersed segments spread over a vast area (Borno state alone is 92,000sqkm) and accomplished in terror attacks, it is unlikely to be eliminated in a decisive battle. The Lake Chad basin states and their international partners, who meet in Abuja on 14 May 2016 at their second regional summit, must use their new collaboration to move beyond military cooperation and design a more holistic local and regional response, lest Boko Haram or similar groups remain a long-term threat to the entire Lake Chad basin.

In response to the regional campaign, Boko Haram is adapting to the new conditions, including by making greater use of women and children as suicide bombers to attack softer targets, though it can sometimes still launch large raids. It remains challenging to develop a clear picture of how the group has evolved over the past seven years and what motivates its leaders and rank-and-file. Many reports, as well as some books, are available, but most build on few first-hand sources, beyond statements and sermons by the movement’s leaders. Nigeria and its allies should more effectively collate and use information gathered from captured fighters, supporters and civilians in occupied areas. New accounts beginning to emerge from former abductees, jailed militants and defectors should help to produce an assessment of the continued threat, the best strategy for curbing the insurgency and, more generally, shape new thinking and measured policy options for responding to terrorist attacks from other extremist groups.

The Abuja summit is a major opportunity for Nigeria, its Lake Chad basin neighbors – Cameroon, Chad and Niger – and wider international partners, namely the European Union (EU), U.S., France and the UK, to address vital policy issues, including:
the bleak humanitarian situation, especially how to better support the region’s 2.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, including how to limit or mitigate the short- and medium-term impact on local communities of military embargoes on trade believed to sustain Boko Haram; ensuring return of the rule of law and ending state-ordered or state-sponsored counter-insurgency tactics that exacerbate local grievances and push youths to join armed groups and further alienate communities whose support is essential to combatting militancy; releasing some of those detained on suspicion of supporting Boko Haram and retrying individuals sentenced without adequate legal representation; distinguishing between irreconcilable Boko Haram fighters and those who might possibly be rehabilitated; preparing avenues for the rehabilitation of the movement’s rank-and-file, who join for diverse and often non-ideological reasons, while remaining open to engagement, public or discreet, with those Boko Haram leaders who may be looking for a compromise; rolling back the use of vigilante groups to fight the insurgents, which if not properly managed, could pose a longer-term threat; and returning government administration to marginalized peripheries, so as to provide crucial basic services – security, rule of law, education and health – and address factors that push individuals to join movements like Boko Haram.

This briefing builds on Crisis Group’s past work on violent Islamist radicalism in Nigeria, current field research there and in Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and its March 2016 special report, *Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State*. It sets the stage for a series of publications analyzing Boko Haram’s evolution from a small protest movement in north-eastern Nigeria into a regional menace and the responses of the Lake Chad basin states and their allies."

As Nigeria manages to move against Boko Haram, in its North, other crisis come to the fore, presenting serious difficulties in themselves, and weakening the government’s ability to act against Boko Haram. To begin with, the drop in oil prices has seriously injured the Nigerian economy, and the government’s financing, 70% of which comes from oil. This has been exacerbated by a 25% drop in oil production in the delta following the rise of the Niger Delta Avengers, who have been attacking oil production and distribution facilities, stating that their aim is to free the Delta – which receives little financial benefit from its oil extraction, which causes considerable environmental and hence human harm – from oppression. The Avengers have been encouraging rebellion elsewhere in Nigeria.

In the center of Nigeria, there have been increasing battles between farmers and Fulani herdsmen seeking grazing land for their cattle, as climate change and increased population make their own lands unable to provide sufficient grazing.

In the southeast, a new Biafran independence movement has been on the rise, rekindling the passions that led to a failed war of independence in the 1970s, that killed three million people in three years (Dionne Searcey, "Nigeria Finds a National Crisis in Every Direction It Turns," *The New York Times*, July 17, 2016, [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/18/world/africa/nigeria-niger-delta-buhari-oil-militants.html?ref=todayspaper](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/18/world/africa/nigeria-niger-delta-buhari-oil-militants.html?ref=todayspaper)).

ICG, "Nnamdi Obasi, "Buhari’s Nigeria: Boko Haram Off Balance, but Other Troubles Surge," May 30, 2016, [http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/nigeria/2016/05/30/buharis-nigeria-boko-haram-off-balance-but-other-troubles-surge/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=50912d1cc4-Nigeria_commentary_30_May_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-50912d1cc4-359871089](http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/nigeria/2016/05/30/buharis-nigeria-boko-haram-off-balance-but-other-troubles-surge/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=50912d1cc4-Nigeria_commentary_30_May_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-50912d1cc4-359871089), commented, "The peaceful election in March 2015 of President Muhammadu Buhari, a former army general, raised hopes that some of Nigeria’s most pressing security problems could soon be tamed. One year later, the new government has struck at the Islamist Boko Haram insurgency. But Nigeria is sliding deeper into other difficulties.

At his inauguration on 29 May 2015, Buhari pledged he would defeat Boko Haram and deliver greater security. He attacked the insurgents and – with help from Nigeria’s neighbors – has forced them onto the back foot, though the group remains resilient and the fighting has caused a major humanitarian crisis in the Lake Chad basin areas. Meanwhile, other security challenges are surging, particularly in the
In the south east, Igbo secessionist groups are more stridently demanding restoration of the short-lived Republic of Biafra (1967-1970). Decades-long Igbo grievances have been aggravated by popular misgivings about Buhari's intentions for the region. Demonstrators have been driven off the streets by the government’s arrest and continued detention of some leading agitators, notably Nnamdi Kanu who heads the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and the security forces' killing of unarmed protesters. But Buhari has not addressed the roots of the unrest. Instead, the government's hard-fisted reaction has alienated more youth and boosted the agitators' ranks, threatening more troubles ahead.

Nigeria’s Middle Belt is suffering increasing violence, involving pastoralists, cattle rustlers, agrarian communities, rural bandits and community vigilantes. Recent pastoralist-farmer clashes over land and water resources have produced more casualties: hundreds were killed in Benue state in late February, with about 100,000 displaced across seventeen of the state’s 23 local government areas. These clashes have also spread south, including a 24 April attack by herdsmen in Nimbo, Enugu state, which left over 40 ethnic Igbo residents dead. This is unprecedented in the south east, further stoking Biafran secessionist sentiment. The conflict has also prompted the resuscitation of long-dormant Igbo ethnic vigilantes, notably the armed Bakassi Boys, threatening further violence.

The Niger Delta’s fragile peace is unravelling, too. An earlier insurgency died down in 2009 thanks to a presidential amnesty offered to militants. As the government sought to arrest and prosecute ex-militant leader Government Ekpemupolo (better known as Tompolo) on corruption charges, armed groups notably the little-known Niger Delta Avengers, and the even more obscure Egbesu Mightier Fraternity, have resumed attacks on oil industry assets, cutting the country’s output to its lowest in two decades. Both groups have sent the government their lists of demands, mostly for local control of oil revenues, threatening even more crippling attacks if they are ignored. The government’s response – deploying more military assets and threatening an unmitigated crackdown – portend an escalation of the violence.

Insecurity has been aggravated by a wrenching economic situation. The National Bureau of Statistics reports that the economy contracted by 0.4 per cent in the first quarter of this year, the first time since 2004, and analysts do not expect the second quarter to be any better.

Faced with the precipitous decline in the price of oil, Nigeria’s most significant export, Buhari’s All Progressives Congress (APC) has not delivered on its many pre-election promises of early economic relief. As of 30 April, 26 of the country’s 36 states owed some or all of their workers monthly salaries, some for up to eight months. In March and April, Nigerians suffered some of their worst automobile fuel shortages in recent memory and the government’s decision this month to address scarcity by ending price controls led to a jolting 67 per cent price hike. Furthermore, the electricity sector is still hampered by poorly utilized generation capacity, high transmission losses and frequent outages, intermittently plunging the entire country into darkness. Recent pipeline sabotage by Niger Delta armed groups has further depressed the electricity situation.

Nigeria’s national currency, the naira, has depreciated by over 70 per cent since this time last year, leading inflation to soar to a near six-year high of 13.7 per cent in April 2016. With workers’ purchasing power diminished and many businesses unable to access foreign exchange for their operations, companies are shedding staff. Unemployment is rising: a federal police advertisement of 10,000 vacancies has drawn over one million applicants. Economic desperation could heighten social tension and insecurity.

Some of these challenges are the results of years of misgovernance and corruption; others, such as the oil price plunge, are beyond Buhari’s control. But as the administration enters its second year, it needs to embark on several short- and longer-term measures to reverse the country’s dangerous slide.

In the short term, government needs to consolidate the gains of its counter-insurgency campaign in the north east, while firmly advancing humanitarian and rehabilitation efforts for many affected communities. It must also address the deadly pastoralist-farmer clashes through a combination of security measures and promoting dialogue between these communities. Such measures may not address the fundamental drivers of the conflicts, but they could calm the country while lasting solutions are explored.

Furthermore, the government needs to de-emphasize forced responses and explore existing political mechanisms to respond to discontent in the south east, Niger Delta and elsewhere. President Buhari should particularly show greater empathy with aggrieved groups.

The federal government needs to urgently deliver sustainable improvement in electricity supply
and create the millions of quick impact jobs it promised before the 2015 elections. State governments must also channel their governors' so-called security votes (funds worth millions of dollars appropriated ostensibly to pay for discrete responses to security challenges but often pocketed by state governors) into constructive use. They must slash extravagant privileges senior state officials undeservedly enjoy, cut wasteful spending, eliminate payroll fraud and pay workers when due.

For the longer term, the government needs to recognize that much of the current violence and insecurity stem partly from the highly dysfunctional police, judicial and penal systems; and partly from fundamental flaws in the country's federal system. It needs to formulate and implement comprehensive security sector reform. President Buhari also needs to pursue constitutional and administrative reforms that will guarantee citizens' rights, curb corruption, improve transparency and accountability, and enhance service delivery. He can readily find elaborate guides in the submissions of various high-level national reform conferences held over the years.

Unless the government pursues comprehensive reforms, its gains in subduing Boko Haram will be short-lived and Nigeria could encounter even more deadly violence ahead."

ICG, "Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform," Africa Report N°237, June 6, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/nigeria/237-nigeria-the-challenge-of-military-reform.aspx, commented, "Nigeria's military is in distress. Once among Africa's strongest and a mainstay of regional peacekeeping, it has become a flawed force. The initially slow, heavy-handed response to the Islamist Boko Haram insurgency raised serious concerns, and its human rights record underscores a grave disconnect with civilians. President Muhammadu Buhari has taken some steps to reverse the decline and has recorded significant gains against Boko Haram, but ongoing prosecution of former chiefs for graft have further deepened the military's reputation as poorly governed and corrupt. The government and military chiefs, working with the National Assembly, civil society and international partners, need to do much more: implement comprehensive defense sector reform, including clear identification of security challenges; a new defense and security policy and structure to address them; and drastic improvement in leadership, oversight, administration and accountability across the sector.

The decline began during 33 years of military dictatorship that took a serious toll on professionalism, operational effectiveness and accountability. Return to democratic rule in 1999 raised hopes the institution could be restored, but successive civilian governments' pledges of much-needed reforms proved largely rhetorical. Presidents, defense ministry and parliament lacked the commitment and expertise to implement significant changes. They left the military badly governed, under-resourced and virtually adrift. Administration and accountability deteriorated throughout the sector. Poor – indeed, lacking – senior leadership has been compounded by equally poor legislative oversight and defense coordination.

Until recently, the military was under-resourced, with comparatively low budgets, disbursed irregularly and unpredictably. From 2000 to 2008, its budget was less than 3 per cent of overall government expenditure. From 2009 to 2014, it increased to an average of 7.2 per cent of government spending ($5-$6 billion); but, as in the past, this was still allocated disproportionately to recurrent expenditures, leaving very little for crucial capital investment.

Corruption is system-wide. Legislators often manipulate the appropriation process at the National Assembly to serve private business interests rather than benefit the armed forces. Dubious procurement practices, fraudulently bloated payrolls, poor financial management and weak auditing systems at the national security adviser's office, the defense ministry and armed services headquarters often mean funds are diverted to private or non-military purposes; arms, ammunition and other equipment are sometimes substandard and not always delivered. Inadequate funding, corrupt procurement and poor maintenance result in serious equipment and logistics deficits.

For a country of over 170 million people, facing several security challenges – from an Islamist insurgency in the north east to a resource-based conflict in the Niger Delta – a military numbering less than 120,000 personnel (all services) is clearly inadequate. Under-staffing reflects poor planning and a dubious recruitment system, but also is further aggravated by over-stretch induced by deployments in over two dozen internal security operations. Training institutions are short of facilities and instructors, lack training modules, and because they are largely focused on conventional operations, somewhat outdated. Personnel
are under-motivated due to low pay, poor welfare services and bleak post-service prospects.

The military’s poor human rights record has had a debilitating impact on effectiveness. Serious abuse of civilian communities, from the Ogoni (in the mid-1990s) to Odi (1999) and Zaki Biam (2001), and more recent extrajudicial killings, mostly in the context of countering militant and separatist groups from Boko Haram and the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), have alienated citizens, whose cooperation is crucial for successful internal security operations.

The cumulative effect is a military deeply challenged in its primary function of defending the country and its citizens. It has been able to reverse Boko Haram’s advance since early 2015 only with help from the forces of Nigeria’s poorer neighbors and support from foreign technicians and mercenaries.

Since assuming office in May 2015, President Buhari has appointed new and more competent service chiefs, relocated the military command center dedicated to the fight against Boko Haram to the north east and probed past weapons procurement. These actions have had salutary effects, but the benefits will be short-lived unless they are followed by formulation and implementation of a comprehensive reform program that encompasses the entire defense management spectrum, including leadership, oversight and administration. Failure to implement such reforms would leave the military distressed and Nigerians vulnerable to the current and future security challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To reform the military

To President Muhammadu Buhari and the Nigerian government:

1. Commit to formulate and implement comprehensive defense sector reform which would include:
   a) initiating public and expert dialogues to analyze and agree on the security and defense challenges and lead to initiation of a comprehensive defense sector reform program that clearly identifies those challenges;
   b) developing a new defense and security policy and structure to address them; and
   c) improving leadership, oversight, administration and accountability across the entire defense sector.

2. Establish an armed forces capacity monitoring and evaluation unit under the president’s direct supervision.

3. Improve funding of the military by:
   a) ensuring that at least 80 per cent of all money from participation in peacekeeping operations is invested in the armed forces;
   b) channeling to the defense budget all funds previously paid to former Niger Delta militant leaders for so-called pipeline security arrangements.

4. Improve local production of basic military items, particularly by creating an investor-friendly environment and encouraging private sector investment in defense-related industries, while winding down the Defense Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), which has proven to be a white elephant.

5. Curb corruption and improve accountability by probing all former major defense contracts, sanctioning indicted officials and giving the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) a stronger mandate to investigate corruption in the defense sector.

6. Strengthen, through a stronger mandate and better resourcing, the capacity of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to investigate and report violations by military units and personnel.

To the National Assembly:

7. Carry out appropriation and oversight responsibilities more effectively by:
   a) improving the expertise of members and committee staff on security matters, through better training and exchanges with similar committees in the parliaments of more developed democracies;
   b) scrutinizing military leadership nominees more thoroughly to ensure that only competent officers are appointed to head the defense ministry and the services;
   c) organizing public and expert hearings on formulation of a comprehensive military reform program, including a new, more relevant national defense policy; and
   d) conducting oversight visits to military establishments more diligently to add value to the defense establishment as a whole and administration of the armed forces in particular.

To the defense ministry:
8. Improve administrative capacity, including by organizing more training for civilian staff in such areas as procurement management, project monitoring and evaluation and operation of payroll systems, as well as accounting and auditing.

To the defense headquarters and the services:

9. Improve training in military institutions by ensuring adequate instructors, more relevant modules and more modern equipment.

10. Improve equipment and logistics by conducting more frequent and intensive equipment audits, ensuring better maintenance of existing assets and encouraging private companies to respond to basic procurement needs.

To Nigeria’s military and development partners:

11. Persuade the federal government on the need for deep, comprehensive and sustained military reform, including by providing relevant assistance, the flow of which is dependent on genuine steps and benchmarked progress.

12. Support the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) by offering training, equipment and other aid that boosts their capacity to monitor, investigate and prosecute corruption and human rights abuse in the defense sector more effectively.

John Prendergast and Brad Brooks-Rubin, "Modernized Sanctions for Sudan: Unfinished Business for the Obama Administration," Enough, Apr 6, 2016, http://enoughproject.org/reports/modernized-sanctions-sudan-unfinished-business-obama-administration, commented, "Peace efforts in Sudan have failed in the past, in large part because of insufficient international leverage over the Sudanese government, but now the Obama administration has an unprecedented opportunity in its final months in office to make a policy investment that could pay big dividends. The Obama administration can further build on new, emerging leverage with the Khartoum regime in support of an inclusive peace deal in Sudan leading to a transition to democracy. Sudan has become increasingly financially isolated during the last year, resulting largely from new types of sanctions measures and tightened enforcement measures that were principally focused on Iran. Sudan has been impacted because foreign banks moved to reduce their exposure to risky accounts and institutions in the wake of large fines paid for sanctions violations involving Iran and Sudan, as well as to protect against broader sanctions and money laundering risks. The spillover effect on the commercial activities, investments, and finances of leading military, security, and civilian officials associated with the Khartoum government has caused sanctions relief to replace debt relief as the regime’s primary preoccupation.

To maximize this newfound leverage with the Sudanese regime, the Obama administration should adopt a strategy based in part on an approach that was effective over time in bringing Iran to the negotiating table. While the economic and political contexts of Iran and Sudan are quite different, as are the underlying U.S. national security and foreign policy interests and exigencies, the fact is that both governments have become severely compromised due to isolation from the global financial system, largely as a result of banks de-risking in the wake of tighter global enforcement of sanctions. This financial isolation has created leverage with the government of Sudan—leverage that so far is not being utilized in a broader peace strategy—and opened a new opportunity to press for concessions on issues that have seemed intractable for decades. Iran, like Sudan, had been the target of comprehensive U.S. sanctions for more than two decades, but it took a series of innovative, intensified, and targeted measures, principally from 2009 to 2013, to finally turn off Tehran’s lifelines and push the Iranians to engage in serious negotiations. At the same time, Washington used a range of approaches to ease the burden of some of these pressures on the Iranian people. What followed was an intense, serious, and engaged multilateral diplomatic process that led to the signing of a landmark agreement on Iran’s nuclear program. Today, Sudan more closely resembles the belligerent and uncooperative Iran of 2007 to 2010: deserving of and susceptible to modernized sanctions that can finally support an end to the Khartoum regime’s violent kleptocratic behavior.

U.S. leaders should adopt elements of the playbook used with Iran and other recent crises that are appropriate to the Sudanese political and economic context. Leaders should begin by immediately ratcheting up financial pressure and tightening sanctions enforcement on Sudan, deploying more focused, enhanced, and modernized sanctions that more sharply target the military and financial assets of those...
most responsible for continuing conflict, atrocities, and mass corruption in Sudan. At the same time, the Obama administration should quickly provide needed guidance to minimize the unintended consequences of the existing sanctions measures that have harmed the medical, humanitarian, people-to-people, and academic sectors in Sudan. The United States should deploy this combination of tightened and eased sanctions measures to bring the Sudanese regime to a more inclusive, single, unified peace process that aims for a negotiated political transition in Sudan. The U.S. role would be to provide the leverage to catalyze such a unified peace process that leads to a truly inclusive peace deal in Sudan, the verified implementation of which would trigger the eventual removal of sanctions and bring debt relief and normalized relations with the United States.

Previous roadmap approaches to ending atrocities and pursuing peace in Sudan featuring incremental quid pro quo exchanges have failed, in part because of a lack of more effective pressures and meaningful incentives. Stove-piped, non-inclusive peace processes separating the parties and conflicts in Darfur, the Two Areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and the political opposition have likewise failed. The current efforts by the African Union's High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) reinforce this conclusion. The regime in Khartoum has undermined every peace process aimed at addressing Sudan's internal conflicts since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the North-South war in 2005. The Sudanese government effectively uses these peace talks as a means to divide opposition and undermine progress toward an end to conflict, because leading regime figures have benefited financially from the state of insecurity and absence of rule of law which this hijacked government has cultivated. The regime has thus undermined any potentially promising political agreement, and the United States and other partners have not heretofore cultivated the leverage necessary to change the calculations in Khartoum from war to peace.

Suddenly, however, that leverage has emerged serendipitously as a result of the Iran sanctions push. To build on this opportunity, robust efforts on three simultaneous fronts are needed in a new strategy: enhanced, targeted financial pressures; measures to ameliorate the impact of sanctions on humanitarian efforts; and a much more robust and internationally supported peace strategy.

The Obama administration—backed by a bipartisan group of congressmen and congresswomen—can use enhanced financial leverage to press the Sudanese government to unify the three currently disaggregated and ineffective negotiations forums (Darfur, the Two Areas, and the National Dialogue) and ensure that the root causes of conflict are addressed inclusively and comprehensively.

Ideally, this enhanced and modernized sanctions regime could be implemented through a new presidential executive order and, potentially, legislation on Capitol Hill, where the Congressional Caucus on Sudan and South Sudan pursues congressional action to peace and human rights in the two countries. The United States should also deeply engage other countries with influence to pursue their own targeted pressures and incentives on the Sudanese government in order to buttress a wider international push for peace in Sudan."

ICG, Casie Copeland and Magnus Taylor, "From Conflict to Cooperation? Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda," June 20, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/worldwide/2016/06/20/from-conflict-to-cooperation-sudan-south-sudan-and-uganda/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=13dc107833-sudans_uganda_20june16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-13dc107833-359871089, commented, "When South Sudanese leaders travelled to Khartoum in early June, pragmatically declaring their intent to “normalize relations” with their northern neighbors, it was a tentative sign of hope for what has been one of the Horn of Africa’s worst war zones.

Uganda, historically a staunch ally of South Sudan, is now seeking more constructive relations with Sudan too. The current processes – formal and informal, public and private – tackle a wider set of challenges that have historically inhibited good relations between the three countries. A new understanding between the three could bring a welcome change to the Horn’s complex balance of alliances and animosities.

The new overtures are driven by South Sudan's economic crisis, coupled with Uganda’s and Sudan’s desire to protect their interests in the country. South Sudan has large oil reserves, which are
exported through Sudan, but its production fell sharply with the eruption of civil war in December 2013. With the civil war’s end, Juba now wants to renegotiate the terms of its 2012 oil transfer agreement that mandates large payments to Sudan, arguing that a new deal needs to reflect the global downturn in prices and its own post-civil war financial straits. While Juba wants a new arrangement with Sudan, such a deal would come with strings attached. Donors’ reluctance to bail out South Sudan financially, unless Juba adopts stringent transparency and accountability measures, makes other options seem worse than a wider deal with Sudan.

Sudan now wants to cooperate too. Its economy, though more resilient, still suffers from the 2011 division of the country, the loss of shared oil revenue, and, like South Sudan, obstacles to full cross-border trade. But in return Khartoum wants South Sudan to help end wars in Darfur and the Two Areas, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, and stop its alleged support for Sudanese rebel groups.

Reaching agreement could be tough but conditions are more favorable than at any time since South Sudan’s secession five years ago. If both sides continue to work seriously on their bilateral relations, chances will rise of resolving other interlinked conflicts, notably the conflict in the Two Areas. A Khartoum-Juba deal would likely limit the operational space of Sudanese rebels – especially the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) – and lead to new border security arrangements.

**Khartoum and Kampala’s long rivalry**

The territory of southern Sudan (South Sudan since 2011) has long been a site of mutual interventions and proxy conflict between Khartoum and Kampala. During the 1990s, Uganda was suspicious of Islamist Sudan’s apparent desire to expand Arab and Islamic influence southwards. To counter the perceived Islamist threat, Uganda backed the Southern Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) in the Sudanese civil war. Khartoum supported Ugandan rebel groups, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), among others.

South Sudan’s 2011 independence directed its neighbors’ rivalry toward competition for influence over the new state. Despite this, Sudan and Uganda have shared interests in common, including unhindered South Sudanese oil production and stability under President Salva Kiir.

Sudan needs regular “transit fees” – a per barrel payment for use of the northern export pipeline – to buttress its fragile post-secession economy. Kampala’s concerns have shifted substantially from security to economic. It wants a prosperous South Sudan to trade with, particularly in the Equatoria region bordering Uganda. Kampala also believes it should have influence over major strategic decisions made in Juba; its historical support for the SPLA is reflected in a longstanding defense cooperation agreement, which includes allowing cross-border interventions by the Ugandan army.

When South Sudan’s civil war erupted in December 2013, Uganda deployed troops in support of the embattled Juba government, reviving tensions with Sudan. In response, Sudan provided limited backing to the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army – In Opposition (SPLA-IO).

**From civil war to regional peace?**

The potential for regional contagion following the outbreak of South Sudan’s civil war demanded mediation from the Horn of Africa’s regional security organization, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Though it failed to stop the war from escalating within South Sudan in its early months, IGAD’s largely unheralded success was to pull Uganda and Sudan (both member states) back from more aggressive posturing and toward a resolution of the war that both could support.

Critical to the eventual Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) in August 2015 were key provisions negotiated at the IGAD Head of State level involving Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. These included the withdrawal of Ugandan forces – completed in October 2015 – and the “disarmament, demobilization and repatriation” of any Sudanese rebel forces present in South Sudan, which include the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army – North (SPLM/A-N) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – which Khartoum alleges are materially supported by Juba. The long-running African Union mediation to end the armed conflicts in Sudan has also engaged both these groups.

As the 2015 South Sudan peace agreement recognizes, peace in the Sudans is dependent on all three countries’ approach to regional relations. Improved relations between Uganda and Sudan have been reinforced by regional heads of state summits during South Sudan’s peace process, joint efforts to resolve South Sudan’s civil war, presidential and vice presidential visits, mutual disparagement of the International
Criminal Court and plans to create a Joint Permanent Commission on bilateral affairs.

Precedents for Cooperation

Despite political will, the inherent complexities of the disputed Sudan-South Sudan border and relationships on both sides make this a fraught process with no guarantee of success. Skepticism and a degree of distrust remain on all sides. Yet negotiators are drawing from past agreements considered a success – notably the Chad-Sudan 2010 agreement, which precipitated the weakening of both Chadian and Darfur rebel groups; and the arrangement between Khartoum and Juba that led to the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA) disbanding and its members returning to the South in 2013. Elements of the former SSLA control part of the border as part of the Juba-Khartoum deal, which served both their interests during South Sudan’s civil war.

If Sudan and South Sudan cannot strike a new deal then the broader regional configuration may well revert to its previous state of instability, mutual suspicion and proxy conflict. But the emergence of a new and pragmatic grouping could shift the regional balance of power in the Horn of Africa with significant advantages to the regimes in Kampala, Juba and Khartoum, and help end one of Africa’s most enduring conflicts.”

With the situation again deteriorating in South Sudan, with the threat of large, and perhaps all, out conflict returning, the U.N Security Council voted, August 12, 2016, to increase peace keeping forces in South Sudan by 30 percent, to 15,600 troops, despite objections by the government of South Sudan (Rick Gladstone, "U.N. to Bolster Peacekeeping Over South Sudan Protest," The New York Times, August 13, 2016).

ICG, "Preventing Renewed War in South Sudan,” July 1, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/statements/preventing-renewed-war-in-south-sudan.aspx?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d712bd6783-Weekly_Update_24_June_1_July_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d712bd6783-359871089, commented, "The honeymoon period is now over for the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan, which formally ended the civil war in August 2015. Its guarantors need to act urgently in the next days to save it and prevent the country from returning to full-scale combat.

The agreement successfully enabled the return of Riek Machar, leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO), to Juba and the subsequent formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity in April. However, the formerly warring parties are now flouting it and increasingly preparing for widespread conflict. Implementation is stalled and fighting is already proliferating around the country. Unless something is done, it is a matter of only a little time before there is a return to war, and the agreement collapses.

For the moment, the permanent ceasefire, though increasingly strained, continues to hold in the civil war’s major conflict theatre. From the perspective of many in Salva Kiir’s wartime government, it applies only to the Greater Upper Nile region, therefore the proliferation of conflicts in Greater Equatoria and Bahr el Ghazal, such as the recent deadly clashes in Wau, does not affect their commitment to the peace agreement. However, the increasing number of discrete conflicts in other regions could trigger renewed fighting in Greater Upper Nile or Juba and lead to a far more explosive return to a broad civil conflict.

While the SPLA-IO in Greater Upper Nile is not as strong as it was in early 2014, when many army divisions split and soldiers defected to the rebels, its presence in Juba and recruitment of forces and allies in Greater Equatoria place the capital under a renewed threat, particularly its civilians, who are at risk of ethnically-targeted violence.

In the nine months that the ceasefire has been observed, forces have simply paused hostilities while remaining in close proximity: there has been no joint security oversight or move toward unification or demobilization. This would be an untenable status quo even if there were political progress, which there is not.

Renewed conflict would be devastating for South Sudan. It could also quickly lead to the regional contagion experienced in 2014, when the Ugandan military intervened in favor of Juba, and Sudan supported the SPLA-IO – and could reverse the nascent rapprochement between Uganda and Sudan. The
risk of regional war motivated the mediation efforts of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). It, as well as other international actors, put enormous pressure on Kiir and Machar to sign the peace agreement and establish the transitional government. The collapse of the agreement could have serious implications for the regional stability that IGAD’s Heads of State worked hard to protect.

At the African Union summit in Kigali within two weeks, IGAD has a chance to prevent a return to full-scale war. The Heads of State should consider the points of dispute and give the parties clear directives to salvage the agreement and prevent war. This should include:

- using IGAD’s authority, as the agreement’s guarantors, to re-affirm the warring parties’ commitment to the ceasefire and rejection of further violence;
- asserting that IGAD member states are fully aware of the deterioration of the political situation and prepared to expend resources on mediation and diplomacy with key actors;
- maintaining that IGAD member states are committed to the peace deal and will act through IGAD to secure regional stability if violence breaks out again; and
- directing the parties to act on key tenets of the agreement and IGAD resolutions, including IGAD’s key tenets of the agreement and IGAD’s authority, as the agreement’s guarantors, to re-affirm the warring parties’ commitment to the ceasefire and rejection of further violence;

Against the odds, the IGAD Heads of State came together last year and in effect forced an agreement on the warring parties. Their current lack of focus on peace implementation allows the parties to prevaricate and avoid implementing aspects they do not like. If the Heads of State do not take decisions that reflect the seriousness of the situation and follow up with action, their two years’ peacemaking work could amount to little.”

ICG, Casie Copeland, "De-escalating South Sudan’s New Flare-up," July 12, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/south-sudan/2016/07/12/de-escalating-south-sudans-new-flare-up/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=52e194b88f-South_Sudan_Q_A_12_July_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-52e194b88f-359871089, commented in a Q and A session, "Violent clashes in the capital of South Sudan have soured the country’s fifth anniversary of independence. Hundreds of soldiers and civilians were killed in the four days after 7 July, including two Chinese peacekeepers. The confrontation threatens to destroy the fragile progress made toward implementing a 2015 peace agreement to end a two-year civil war. The deal had allowed some opposition soldiers back into the capital, Juba, and the clashes have been between them and units of the national army and presidential guard. The UN is protecting tens of thousands of civilians in its compounds around the city, one of which has been repeatedly hit.

In this Q&A, senior analyst for South Sudan, Casie Copeland, explains what is behind the fighting in Juba and what can help prevent the conflict spiraling out of control.

The return to conflict was a growing danger, as Crisis Group noted in its 1 July statement on Preventing Renewed War in South Sudan. In the nine months that the ceasefire has been observed, forces have simply paused hostilities while remaining in close proximity: there has been no joint security oversight or move toward unification or demobilization. This would have been an untenable status quo even if there had been political progress, which has not materialized.

The South Sudanese warring parties signed the 2015 peace agreement, brokered by the regional security organization, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), under tremendous external pressure, particularly from neighboring Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya, as well as China and the U.S. Following the signing, regional powers greatly reduced their focus on South Sudan and IGAD’s mediation became inactive. This allowed the South Sudanese parties to backtrack to their original uncompromising positions. By early July, there had been no political progress on implementing the peace agreement and, in the absence of credible external intervention, no such progress seemed likely.

Tensions thus never dissipated between government forces loyal to President Kiir and Sudanese People’s Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO) troops following First Vice President Machar, who had returned to Juba under the 2015 peace agreement. Frictions rose over a series of incidents – with both groups at fault at different points – in the last weeks of June and early July. By 7 July almost anything could have sparked the larger battles that began on the weekend of 9-10 July. Once fighting broke out,
combat continued despite calls by both leaders to stop, highlighting the complicated relationship between
the leadership and different military units.

**What’s at stake for South Sudan?**

Renewed war would be devastating. The civil war from 2013 to 2015 was particularly brutal, with
many instances of ethnic targeting and other atrocities, and humanitarian suffering that was compounded
by a growing economic crisis. The fighting killed far more than 50,000 people, displaced approximately 2.3
million and the UN estimates that some five million will require humanitarian assistance in 2016. In 2014,
regional powers were drawn in when the Ugandan military intervened in favor of Juba and Salva Kiir, and
Sudan provided limited support to the SPLA-IO opposition forces.

IGAD’s mediation mission was partly motivated by the risk of regional war. International actors joined the
group in putting enormous pressure on President Kiir and First Vice President and SPLA-IO leader Riek
Machar to sign the August 2015 peace agreement and establish a transitional government – both leaders
objected to parts of the deal.

**What can IGAD do to pull South Sudan back from the brink?**

A unified regional position in IGAD, backed up by the African Union, China and the U.S., is crucial.
Both Kiir and Machar know they cannot sustain a war for long without the support of at least some
neighboring states. During the recent days of fighting, each of the IGAD heads of state reached out to Kiir,
Machar and others involved in the fighting to make clear that they needed to lay down their arms and that
no one in the region supported a return to war.

Beyond a ceasefire – which is a temporary measure at best – IGAD must come to agreement, again
supported by the African Union, China and U.S., on the consequences the two men, their military
commanders and factions will suffer if they do not stop fighting. This is especially important for Uganda
and Sudan, which have particular influence with the government and opposition SPLA-IO respectively.

**Will Uganda and Sudan seek to repeat their interventions seen earlier in the civil war?**

A nascent rapprochement between Uganda and Sudan, and a great wariness in Khartoum and
Kampala about the destabilizing potential of greater involvement in South Sudan’s conflicts, are directing
their efforts toward peace rather than supporting renewed war. Uganda in particular feels unfairly criticised
for sending in troops to support the government in 2013.

IGAD member states, along with their supporters including the U.S. and Chinese governments,
helped secure a ceasefire which was declared by Kiir and Machar on 11 July. If it does not hold, the
position of regional states will be critical, since any additional measures, such as an intervention brigade or
any form of sanction, whether against individuals or an arms embargo, would need to be implemented and
enforced by these countries.

In its communiqué on 11 July, IGAD called for an “intervention brigade”. This was first proposed in
2014 during the mediation but faltered as the UN and IGAD could not agree on its relationship to the UN
peacekeeping mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), or on the mechanisms of financial and logistical control.
The Security Council also suggested UNMISS could be augmented by troops from the region to secure
Juba. Deploying regional forces into UNMISS or independently would take time and would not resolve the
immediate standoff.

**Why is the IGAD-led peace process worth saving?**

Some argue that the IGAD deal deferred some issues, such as what type of federal government
should be created and whether a power-sharing arrangement between the war’s two main protagonists
could set South Sudan on the path to stability. But it halted the fighting, created a framework for reform,
transitional justice and elections and prevented regional powers being further sucked into South Sudan’s
war. IGAD agreed that it would not be destabilized under an agreement that kept Kiir as president and
Machar as first vice president. A divided IGAD where individual states meddled in South Sudan would have
led to far greater bloodshed.

A particular problem since the peace agreement’s signing has been that the IGAD leaders who
helped forge it have been absent during the difficult implementation phase. Specifically, the failure to
implement a number of the agreement’s political and security provisions laid the groundwork for recent
conflict. Now that a ceasefire has been called, those IGAD leaders should push Kiir and Machar to quickly
operationalize the security arrangements in the peace agreement, particularly by establishing Joint
Integrated Police units to patrol Juba, empowering the Joint Operations Center to ensure communication
and coordination between forces in Juba, and empowering the Joint Military Ceasefire Commission. These mechanisms should also be supported by donors.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 11 July urged the Security Council to impose an arms embargo on South Sudan, sanction leaders and commanders who are blocking the implementation of a peace deal and fortify a UN peacekeeping mission. If agreed to, would this help?

At this point, with a fragile ceasefire agreed and thus far holding, any punitive international action should be imposed carefully – and only in close coordination with IGAD and regional powers – otherwise it could undermine the ceasefire or even empower hardliners who support renewed war. Sanctions and arms embargoes can be valuable tools, but only where they serve clear political objectives.

Given the breakdown in the peace agreement, IGAD, supported by the African Union and major powers, particularly the U.S. and China, should re-assess their various political objectives in South Sudan, including the promise of stronger action if there is no compliance or if there is further fighting. The African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government summit meeting in Kigali, Rwanda on 17-18 July is a good opportunity to convene a high-level meeting on South Sudan.

Do President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar actually have full control over their forces?

The situation is fluid and, especially on the opposition side, lines of control have exhibited the same level of flux they exhibited during most of the war. Many soldiers have followed senior opposition officials other than Machar. Another problem is that many of the opposition soldiers killed were from Machar’s own official guard.

As Crisis Group noted in *South Sudan: A Civil War by Any Other Name*, many opposition forces are not personally loyal to Machar, instead they rose up in response to violence against ethnically Nuer civilians in Juba in December 2013 and only begrudgingly accepted Machar as the movement’s overall leader. This has always been the case and the recent fighting is no different to challenges in command and control the opposition SPLA-IO faced across the country during their rebellion.

The government has continued to counsel restraint among its forces but reports of looting, drunkenness and attacks on the UN base indicate that many have not heeded these orders.

With a number of peacekeepers killed in the recent fighting, how vulnerable is the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)? Do they have the resources needed to protect civilians fleeing the violence?

Peacekeepers have the means to respond to and deter some attacks on protection of civilian sites in or near UNMISS bases. When challenged by UN forces, some South Sudanese armed groups have retreated. UNMISS, however, lacks the numbers and equipment to protect all civilians, including those in Juba. Yet the mission has not been very assertive and not all of its forces are equally committed to its mandate. Some have literally run from their protection obligations.

There have been many attacks on UN facilities during the last years of war and, to date, no one has been arrested or prosecuted. The UN is an “easy target” in the eyes of many, making the situations particularly dangerous for its staff and civilians under its protection.

So far, the violence appears to be mainly confined to Juba. What is the risk that the fighting may escalate to other areas in South Sudan?

Fortunately the fighting has died down for now. But if it resumes there is a risk that it spreads and becomes much more difficult to end. Forces throughout the country are preparing for war and civilians are fleeing areas where they fear fighting. During the civil war, most of the fighting was confined to the Greater Upper Nile, where the opposition is strong in the far north, but since the August 2015 peace agreement the SPLA-IO has been actively recruiting in other areas particularly in greater Equatoria, in the south, where government forces are stronger. Fighting in the former Upper Nile state could be very intense, while in the Equatorias, fewer weapons and forces means it would likely be on a much smaller scale. The possibility of conflict spreading to different areas remains and is of grave concern."


"On Monday, South Sudan’s president, Salva Kiir, and his vice president, Riek Machar, each called for a cease-fire to end a series of back-and-forth battles between soldiers that began last Thursday."
One year ago, the main warring parties in South Sudan – the government and Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army-in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) signed a peace agreement designed to end South Sudan’s nearly two-year civil war. The government only signed under concerted pressure from regional and international powers; yet despite Juba’s reservations, the agreement stopped the worst of the fighting.

By mid-2016, peace implementation halted and fighting erupted between the government and rebel forces brought into Juba under a contentious post-agreement security deal. Following the brief fighting, the First Vice President and SPLM/A-IO leader, Dr. Riek Machar, left Juba and remained in the bush, waging a limited guerrilla conflict, for over a month. As the international community was focused on the security of Juba and their nationals, the South Sudanese government seized the opportunity and replaced Machar with the SPLM/AIO’s General Taban Deng Gai as First Vice President.

Last week, the UN Security Council authorized a regional protection force, on the basis of regional endorsement for the force after the clashes in Juba. Despite agreeing in principle to a protection force, the South Sudanese government strenuously objects to the mandate, leaving little option but negotiations to secure consent for deployment. The regional force is to operate under the existing UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), which includes more than 13,000 troops and police.

The over-focus on a new peacekeeping mandate at the expense of political developments in the country reflects international disunity and a lack of political strategy. International actors are struggling to respond to the evolving situation while regional actors are busy creating facts on the ground. A stronger government, watered down peace agreement, a new regional force under the UN (which has little linkage to peace implementation) and growing regional divisions are some of the outcomes of the last month’s events.

How we got here

The regional organization for the Horn of Africa, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), launched the peace talks that eventually resulted in the government and SPLM/A-IO signing the Agreement on the Resolution on the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS). The agreement called for the establishment of a transitional government and, through subsequent negotiations, Machar returned to Juba in April with a force of over 1,000 to take his place as First Vice President of the transitional government.

Many members of both the government, led by President Salva Kiir, and the SPLM/A-IO were only interested in the parts of the agreement that would benefit them, while others engaged in political brinkmanship to seek maximum advantage from the deal’s various provisions.

By the middle of this year, implementation of the peace agreement had stalled. In this environment, IGAD-PLUS – a grouping intended to bolster the peace process that includes the African Union (AU), China, European Union (EU), the IGAD Partners Forum (IPF), Norway, UK, UN, and U.S. – failed to recognize that Juba was a powder keg. The dangers were compounded by poorly designed post-ARCSS security arrangements that involved opposing forces in their thousands in the capital.

Conflict in Juba

Fighting between government forces and former rebels erupted in Juba in early July. As tensions increased, a series of violent incidents led to fighting at the Presidential Palace – where both Kiir and Machar were meeting. The fighting was started by a rogue SPLA-IO officer attempting to gain entry to the palace. Despite the protection he received from the president and senior security personnel, Machar failed to control his forces’ actions.

Amidst further fighting, the remaining SPLA-IO forces and much of its leadership, including Machar, withdrew from Juba. Government forces then took control of the Jebel area on the outskirts of Juba where the SPLA-IO forces and large U.N. base were located and were involved in violence and looting in that area. Machar’s predominantly ethnic Nuer SPLA-IO forces joined with Equatorian SPLA-IO members in different parts of Equatoria region (but not in close proximity to Juba), where there have been sporadic clashes, of varying degrees of seriousness, since.
During the fighting, Kiir protected many senior SPLM-IO officials, some of whom remain in Juba. Leading this group is Taban, Machar’s former chief negotiator. In a controversial meeting on 23 July, the few SPLM/A-IO members remaining in Juba appointed Taban as the group’s Chairman. Following July’s fighting, many SPLM-IO members in Juba said they believed that Machar would not be able to return to Juba and work with the president. They think Taban was unlikely to seek the presidency, and therefore Kiir would be able to work with him. Taban was sworn in as first vice president on 26 July.

Political Impasse

Despite enjoying the support of the government and most of the SPLM/A-IO leaders in Juba, Taban does not have the support of the diverse military groupings that comprise the SPLM/A-IO. (However, the Northern Bahr el Ghazal SPLA-IO forces defected to the government during July’s fighting.)

Meanwhile, Machar and remnants of his SPLA-IO forces in Juba moved to other parts of Equatoria region. Some have remained peaceful while others are responsible for new recruitment and attacks against government and civilian targets, including South Sudan’s main Juba-Nimule road (a situation of concern to Uganda, which uses the road for profitable exports to Juba). Most of Machar’s forces that were expelled from Juba remain in the Equatoria region – far from the SPLM/A-IO strongholds in Greater Upper Nile. This is an untenable position, despite indications that his forces are receiving some material support from Sudan.

Amidst diplomatic conversations about putting South Sudan under UN trusteeship, sending an intervention force and imposing an arms embargo, other opposition figures from across the political spectrum ramped up anti-government agitation. With a perceived “power vacuum” in opposition leadership, new alliances emerged and leaders sought external support for rebellion.

Sudan’s limited support to the SPLM/A-IO effectively constrained both the activity and number of armed groups in South Sudan over the past three years. Khartoum’s current participation in talks with Juba over armed group activity, as well as the government’s preference to carry on with peace implementation with Taban as first vice-president and begin integration offers, may be the only realistic alternative to further widespread conflict.

The diplomatic community in Juba is increasingly resigned to accepting Taban– a significant deal on armed group integration could cement his position and may offer the only viable option to pull back from renewed conflict, especially as Machar is unlikely to be welcomed back to Juba. In the midst of these significant developments, disunity and the lack of a political strategy among IGAD-PLUS leaves it struggling to respond to the evolving realities shaped by the South Sudanese and regional actors.

Regional Geopolitics

South Sudan has long been an arena in which regional powers competed for influence, and the geopolitics of its conflicts are now undergoing their most significant shift in more than a decade. The thaw in relations between Sudan and Uganda; on-going tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia; South Sudan’s strengthening of ties with Eritrea, and the deterioration of its relationship with Ethiopia have all created new opportunities and constraints both for South Sudanese parties and external peacemakers. Efforts to resolve the current conflict and pursue “punitive” measures against the South Sudanese government have run into opposition both within the region and on the UN Security Council.

This puts Juba’s supporters and those who propose measures that would have a negative effect on the government in increasingly polarized positions. Unlocking these complex geopolitical dynamics should be part and parcel of developing a political strategy that reduces regional tensions while bringing competing groups in South Sudan back into dialogue.

Sudan and Uganda

The outbreak of civil war in South Sudan in December 2013 brought long-standing tensions between Sudan and Uganda to the fore and caused many to fear a further regionalization of the conflict. Yet through frequent meetings between Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir and Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, the two came to terms over South Sudan and took a series of steps towards a less confrontational relationship. The countries did not have long to settle into this posture before facing new challenges. July’s outbreak of conflict, subsequent discussions over an intervention or protection force, and SPLA-IO leader Riek Machar’s replacement as first vice president has placed the new relationship under an immediate stress test. Though both sides are taking actions to keep the peace, a renewed rift between Sudan and Uganda, with each side backing their favored actor, could escalate conflict and further divide
the region.

**Ethiopia and South Sudan**

At the civil war’s outset, Ethiopia hosted peace talks and tried to take a neutral position between the government and SPLM/A-IO, as well as with Sudan and Uganda. Ethiopia’s intention was to prevent South Sudan’s civil war from becoming a regional conflict. Still, South Sudan saw Ethiopia’s hosting of Machar, and even the peace talks, as being “unsupportive”, and viewed its close relationship with the U.S. – the main proponent of punitive measures against the government – as un-neighboring. Following the tremendous pressure that Juba came under during negotiations to sign the ARCSS in August 2015, tensions continued to grow. The cold war between Addis and Juba is ever more apparent, and Juba’s belief that Addis is partial makes it increasingly difficult for Ethiopia to play a leading role in ARCSS implementation and potentially in the regional force. The two countries share a restive border and violent inter-communal clashes are common; conflict dynamics along the border will continue to be influenced by events in Addis and Juba.

**Eritrea and South Sudan**

Eritrea worked closely with the SPLA in the 1990s, particularly on its short-lived eastern front. During the period of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005-2011), relations soured and Asmara was widely accused of providing material support to anti-SPLA groups. However, in 2014, the SPLM/A-IO was disappointed to discover that Eritrea would not provide them with support. As relations between Addis and Juba became increasingly complicated, Juba pursued a rapprochement with Asmara. With plans to strengthen ties, including the shipment of humanitarian assistance through Eritrea’s Massawa port, the restart of regular flights between the two countries and an increase in official bilateral activity, the relationship appears set to deepen. This sets off alarm bells in Addis and will further complicate the relationship between Ethiopia and South Sudan. Meanwhile, South Sudan may now provide an alternate stage for the projection of unresolved matters between Asmara and Addis.

**Ethiopia and Egypt**

Beyond the IGAD region, Egypt’s role in South Sudan has increased in importance, particularly following its ascension to a seat on the UN Security Council, where it generally takes a non-interventionist stance. Egypt is in a long-running dispute over Ethiopia’s construction of the Grand Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile. Egypt believes the dam will reduce the flow of the river, particularly as its reservoir fills, violating principles on preventing downstream harm (one reason the World Bank declined to support it) and treaties on Nile water usage. Other Nile basin countries have challenged the continuing validity of treaties created while most of these states did not exist and have proposed a new one, which Egypt rejects. The dam is anticipated to finish in 2017, and current negotiations focus on the timeline for filling the reservoir. Egypt has engaged South Sudan in talks on how to increase the water flow from the White Nile. This mutually beneficial relationship gives Juba a key ally on the Security Council at a time when it faces calls from other council members for further sanctions, arms embargos, demilitarization of the capital and a regional force. Ethiopia, which does not always share the same approach to South Sudan as Egypt, will join the Security Council in 2017.

**Regional Protection Force**

Following July’s fighting, IGAD agreed to send a regional force to South Sudan. This was a revival of its 2014 proposal for a regional protection force, intended to put some weight behind the IGAD mediation, but it faltered in negotiations with the UN. The new force was subject to more than a month of debates over its mandate, composition and size. While the South Sudanese government consented in principle to the force, it strenuously objected to the mandate agreed on in UN Security Council Resolution 2304 on 12 August.

The mandate calls for a force of 4,000 to protect civilians, UN and humanitarian personnel, and ceasefire and peace agreement monitors. Controversially, it also calls for the force to control the airport; secure entry and egress from Juba; “disarm” government security forces who threaten civilians or protected persons; and take action in extremis in Juba or elsewhere – security tasks the government believes violate their sovereignty. That the forces are regional does not ameliorate the government’s concerns, given the region’s vested interests in South Sudan (which are not always the same as Juba’s).

Some Council members supported the mandate based on the belief that the SPLA-IO was capable of launching a large-scale attack against the capital, which it is not. After peacekeepers failed to respond
to attacks on foreigners last month, many believed a stronger mission was necessary to prevent a repeat of these events. Rather, the previously Juba-based SPLA-IO forces’ destabilizing presence in the Equatoria region is almost entirely unaddressed by the mandate. Many Council members who abstained were concerned about the mandate’s lack of focus on a political path forward and connection between the force and political objectives. Other diplomats and advocates questioned the utility of additional forces from regional countries that are already part of UNMISS and have a spotty record in discharging the pre-existing mandate. Senior UNMISS officials are concerned about the mission’s ability to absorb an additional 4,000 troops, as well as about the negative implications for the safety of mission staff and ability to carry out its core mandate to protect civilians.

A 5 August IGAD communiqué laid out some of the controversial tasks that were included in the mandate and called for the next step to be a meeting (which Juba believed would be a negotiation) with South Sudan and the region’s military chiefs. This meeting had not happened by 12 August and the Council, having already delayed consideration once, voted on the mandate drafted by the U.S., the regular penholder on South Sudan on the Council. The debate was contentious and, though the mandate passed, four Council members, including Russia, China, Egypt and Venezuela, abstained. The absence of consensus on the Council and Juba’s objections to the resolution call into question whether the mandate will be implemented as intended.

There is doubt as to whether a threatened arms embargo - conditions for which are spelt out in the resolution’s annex - is a realistic punitive measure. Several Council members are reluctant to impose an arms embargo, so it may not pass a vote - and, absent more unified Council support, may not be particularly effective regardless. Likewise, many non-Council members in the Horn of Africa are experts at skirting arms embargos and restrictions on arms transfers. If they are not fully committed to implementation, this could also limit an embargo’s effectiveness. There are further questions about how an effective arms embargo would impact Juba’s ability to provide border security or address internal rule of law challenges – which include rebel groups other than the SPLA-IO.

Juba has already expressed its displeasure and is likely to seek to make the peacekeeping mission’s operations even more difficult – including through limitations and delays on movement and clearances of personnel, and harassment of UN staff - as it negotiates over the new force. Routine and pre-agreed unit changeovers may be subject to delays given suspicions that the UN will use these changes to surreptitiously increase the force size.

Next Steps

At this juncture, the transitional government, with Taban as the first vice president, appears set to use a combination of carrots and sticks to implement the ARCSS - along lines far more favorable to the wartime government than originally envisioned by IGAD-PLUS. Deals on armed group integration – within or outside the parameters of ARCSS – could significantly reduce tensions between Khartoum, Juba and Kampala, break apart Machar’s fragile coalition and maintain Taban as the first vice president. Such a situation could result in stability in Juba and in many parts of the country, while leaving other areas still in conflict. Juba is unlikely to accept another mediation in an international forum as it did in 2014-2015, choosing to manage the ongoing conflict on its own, with its closest neighbors remaining deeply involved.

Discussions within IGAD, the African Union and Security Council over a regional force have sent the relationship between South Sudan and the west, particularly the U.S., into a downward spiral – benefiting no one. The government is now seeking to make clear through restrictions on the UN inside South Sudan that it is not possible to send in a 4,000-strong force without consent. Additional negotiations with the UN, IGAD and regional participants in the force are likely to continue to occupy key actors at the expense of engagement on a political resolution to the conflict. The UN should be cautious about the use of force without clear political objectives, and it should work with other IGAD-PLUS members to re-assess how the ARCSS can be realistically implemented in a manner that increases stability given the shift in dynamics in-country.

Juba has succeeded in clawing back from its position a year ago when it signed the ARCSS with significant reservations. At this stage, a partially implemented agreement favoring the government and presenting no threat to Kiir’s presidency is the most likely outcome of the past month’s tumult. This would mean relative stability in Juba and much of the country, with perpetual conflicts elsewhere.
Divisions within the international community, and IGAD-PLUS in particular, are likely to inhibit the formation of an overarching political strategy to address ongoing conflict and governance challenges. Instead, the South Sudanese will seek to shape the country's future trajectory, with regional influences - whether Juba welcomes these influences or not. Yet, a key aspect of the ARCSS is the devolution of power, some of which is still possible. IGAD-PLUS should coordinate its efforts with the transitional government to devolve power in line with the agreement’s power-sharing ratios to disaffected groups and communities who hoped to benefit from the agreement."

Jacey Fortin, "After Clashes in South Sudan, Conflict Over the Vice Presidency," The New York Times, July 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/26/world/africa/south-sudan-machar-kiir-taban-deng-gai-vice-president-juba-civil-war.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "After a tumultuous two weeks in the world's youngest country, a new shake-up is worsening the volatile relationship between Salva Kiir, the president of South Sudan, and his longstanding opponent, Riek Machar, the vice president." Machar claimed he was targeted during the last outbreak of fighting, and went into hiding. Another member of his party has been named Vice President, but said he would resign if Machar returned.

President of Zambia, Edgar Lungu, was reelected by a narrow margin, in mid-August, 2016. His opponent demanded a recount saying election officials were partial. The campaign was unusually violent in what has been one of Africa's more stable democracies (Norimitsu Onshi, "Narrow Victory for President of Zambia," The New York Times, August 16, 2016 http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/16/world/africa/zambia-president-edgar-lungu-election.html?_r=0).

ICG, Magnus Taylor, Analyst, Horn of Africa, "Museveni's Post-election Politics: Keeping a Lid on Uganda's Opposition," August 9, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/uganda/museveni-post-election-politics-keeping-lid-ugandas-opposition?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Updates+and+Alerts+for+Insights+on+Africa&utm_campaign=5fb0c3bb46-Uganda_commentary_8_August_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-5fb0c3bb46-359871089, commented, When I last wrote about Ugandan domestic politics, the February 2016 presidential election was still six months away. The big news was that Amama Mbabazi – the former prime minister – was running. Mbabazi had been sacked by President Museveni the year before and was seeking to forge an opposition ticket from an ambiguous position, not quite in and not quite out of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM).

Mbabazi told me that his candidacy was 'the biggest ever threat to Museveni's leadership'. This seemed fanciful, and it was unclear whether a third figure on the normally polarized political scene would break open the competition. Would there be a crumbling of consensus within the ruling elite? If so, would it threaten the country's internal stability?

Now, ten months on, the answer is clear. Not yet. Museveni won comfortably with 61.8 per cent of the vote. But something else might still unsettle the status quo. Museveni spent a lot of time and resources fighting Mbabazi. In doing so, did he take his eye off his opponent for the last four elections, Kizza Besigye?

Post-election Tensions

Besigye won 35 per cent and made considerable advances in urban areas – particularly Kampala (an opposition stronghold), but also Mbale in the east, Fort Portal in the west and Gulu in the north. This spooked the NRM, which decided that the best way to deal with the threat of post-election anti-government demonstrations was to keep Besigye under house arrest. The NRM clearly understands it faces a big challenge in containing political opposition in the five years before the next polls. Overcoming that challenge will require more creative political solutions than current hard-fisted attempts to shut down the operations of serious opposition.

The president's inauguration on 12 May looked like it might put a full-stop to a jittery post-election period. First, in late March, the Supreme Court dismissed a legal petition by Mbabazi challenging the election results. Then, in early April, Mbabazi's Head of Security, Christopher Aine – presumed killed after clashes with pro-government supporters during the campaign – turned up. In a piece of well-choreographed political theatre, Aine – the son of one of the “historical” 27 who started the liberation
struggle in 1980 – handed himself in to the president’s influential younger brother, Salim Saleh, contrite and apologetic for all the worry he’d caused. The incident underlined the enduring importance of the elite’s close personal ties in managing its own fragmentation.

Bouncing around Kampala in April on one of the ubiquitous motorbike taxis, it was easy to forget about the continuing proliferation of armed police and soldiers on the streets. In Uganda you get used to the subtle militarization of everyday life: the president is often seen in military fatigues (sometimes accessorized with an AK-47 over his shoulder), the police inspector general and interior minister are serving generals and the president’s son, Muhoozi Kainerugaba, heads the special forces. Ugandans live under a regime in which, despite the trappings of a representative democracy, the military still calls the shots.

Two months later and back in Kampala it was clear that the post-election hangover had worsened. On 11 May, Besigye had staged a parallel inauguration ceremony – a fantasy-like scenario in which he, not Museveni, became president – the day before the official event. Soon after the video of his “inauguration” started doing the rounds on social media, Besigye was arrested and, in a transparent attempt to keep him away from his support base in Kampala, flown to Moroto in the remote north-eastern Karamoja region and charged with treason in the local magistrate’s court. A few days later, Besigye was whisked back to Luzira prison in the capital where he remained until bail was granted on 12 July.

Meanwhile, tensions have grown within Besigye’s opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), which prevaricated over whether it would take up its seats in parliament. Eventually it did, even though some in the party argued that they shouldn’t legitimize the institution after their supposed electoral victory had been stolen. FDC’s president, Mugisha Muntu, seen as more pragmatic, was accused of failing to back Besigye’s “Defiance Campaign” with sufficient fervor. Some senior activists talk of launching a National Dialogue with the government – an idea borrowed from the more crisis-ridden Sudan – although there is little prospect of Museveni agreeing to share power with any serious political opponent.

Adding to the sense that all was not entirely settled, in early June several military officers, including the Entebbe Air Base garrison commander, and FDC MP Michael Kabaziguruka were arrested and charged with planning an alleged coup or rebellion (the terminology varied). Although these men may have reservations about the government, they would be in no position to seize power and probably had no real intention of doing so.

Finally, in a still unexplained incident, on 12 June the Central Police Station in Gulu, a northern town, was attacked by unidentified gunmen. The government has attempted to play down the incident, saying that it was an attempt to break out of jail a local political leader from the Democratic Party, but no one was entirely convinced. Uganda’s boisterous press had a field day and included references to “coup”, “rebellions” and “treason” in their headlines.

What Next?

Where will Uganda’s politics go next? First, a note of caution: this is not the first time Besigye has been arrested and charged with treason. Shortly after the 2006 general elections, when he won 37 per cent of the vote (and also claimed victory), the same thing happened due to an alleged association with an ill-defined, probably non-existent rebel group, the People’s Redemption Army. The case was eventually dismissed due to lack of evidence.

However, his latest charge of treason is appreciably different from those which saw him under house arrest during and immediately after the election. Those were largely preventive measures intended to disrupt the opposition’s ability to demonstrate on the streets – something the NRM has been wary of since the 2011 Walk to Work protests which brought out thousands of people and precipitated several violent confrontations with the security services. Now, Besigye’s charge is specific – although overblown and probably un-provable.

Besigye has spent much of the last decade fighting a seemingly recurring battle against Museveni and not getting very far; constantly harried by tear gas and arrests, ultimately defeated by a partisan political system weighted against him and his movement. If Besigye’s tactics and their outcome have changed little, the political context may have. The next election will be in 2021 and if the NRM is to field Museveni again as its candidate, then it may have a serious fight on its hands. A question that repeatedly comes up is whether there could be a transition and, if so, to whom? As yet there is no answer.

There was a flurry of speculation on the question of secession in June when both Museveni’s son
Muhoozi and his wife Janet received promotions in their respective fields: Muhoozi to major general in the Special Forces Command (SFC) and Janet to education and sports minister (she had previously been Karamoja affairs minister). Muhoozi’s promotion coincided with the announcement that the special forces would be elevated to a third service on a par with the air and land forces, while Janet went from a state ministry under the Office of the President to a full cabinet ministry. But neither promotion fundamentally altered the exalted status they occupy within the establishment, but rather confirmed that they would remain key actors.

Museveni’s choice of ministers for his new cabinet was mostly a confirmation of the status quo. Several key allies received promotions – for example Jeje Odongo is the new internal affairs minister – or hung onto their jobs; Kahinda Otafire is still justice minister despite losing his seat in the election. Henry Tumukunde, a former senior intelligence official and ally of Salim Saleh, was made a security minister. The president also managed to co-opt opposition MPs, with both Uganda People’s Congress and Democratic Party members accepting cabinet positions, thus neutralizing any future effective opposition to the NRM.

In the short term, Museveni’s major concern seems to be deciding how to contain the threat from Besigye. This may be the best explanation for the sudden proliferation of supposed coup plots and nascent rebel groups, which feed the rumor mill and force Besigye to defend himself against progressively more preposterous accusations. Keeping the opposition leader in legal proceedings helps put a brake on any political momentum that he may have gained during the election.

Feeding a febrile political climate with arrests and accusations could also be an attempt to make a pre-emptive strike against elements within the security services, particularly the army, which are thought to contain increasingly anti-Museveni elements. Causing some consternation within the regime, voters at several polling stations close to or associated with military barracks voted against the president in significant numbers in February – the lower ranks are thought to be unhappy with their poor pay and conditions. While this amounts to some form of political protest, and some officers may be engaging in more radical conversations, a coup attempt seems highly unlikely.

Long term, Museveni and the NRM political elite face the serious challenge of how to control growing popular resentment – caused, in the main, by a startling youth bulge (nearly 50 per cent of the population are under fourteen) and chronic unemployment – without being able to point to recent developmental and economic successes. Throw into the mix uncertainty over succession in the NRM and you have a recipe for a politics that is fractious at the grassroots and authoritarian at the top.

Workable solutions to the downward spiral of Ugandan politics are currently hard to define. They might include holding a political dialogue between government and opposition and laying out a timetable for leadership transition. However, this seems unlikely while Museveni and the NRM enjoy a renewed mandate conveyed by an election victory and no genuine extra-political threat to their authority. International actors, including the European Union and U.S., remain engaged and occasionally critical but more concerned with competing regional priorities, notably South Sudan and Somalia, where Uganda remains a key security actor.

While Museveni has retained his presidential stature, standing atop the system with grandfatherly poise, the political landscape remains in a state of flux. It is clear that the NRM is not a relaxed or settled regime and is uncomfortable with giving its main opponent any political space. This is surely an expression of weakness not strength. Besigye’s incarceration and harassment is no so preposterous accusations. Keeping the opposition leader in legal proceedings helps put a brake on any political momentum that he may have gained during the election.

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ICG, "Kenya’s Coast: Devolution Disappointed," Africa Briefing N°121, July 13, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/horn-of-africa/kenya/b121-kenya-s-coast-devolution-disappointed.aspx, commented, "The huge public expectations raised by devolved government on Kenya’s coast have turned into disappointment. Patronage politics that marked the former centralized system has been replicated in the new counties, making government even more inefficient and expensive. Though political leadership is now local, power is closely held, and leaders are suspicious of both national and local rivals. Certain regions, communities and many youth still feel marginalized. Political devolution has deflected but not resolved grievances that fuel militancy, which continues to be met by hard security
measures driven from Nairobi. Greater inclusion and cooperation within and between county governments, as well as national-county dialogue, is needed to maximize devolution’s potential and ensure militant groups, like Al-Shabaab, have fewer grievances to exploit.

The 2010 constitution prescribes partnership between national and county institutions; instead there is competition and confrontation (at least for now peaceful). The former Coast province is divided into six new coastal county governments. They are caught between the popular and still potent idea of majimbo – greater political and economic autonomy and authority devolved to the regions – and a central government that expects them to focus on service delivery and only play a parochial political role that many dismiss in frustration as vijimbo (little regions). National government (including the president) have undertaken a number of high-profile, if piecemeal, initiatives that the coastal county elite has interpreted as a challenge to the spirit of devolution and its local political primacy. In response, leading coastal politicians are stirring up local discontent and threatening unilateral takeover of key revenue resources such as Mombasa port. However, the coastal retreat into defensive regionalism is likely only to exacerbate county-capital frictions, not extract concessions from the national government.

The tension between national and county government is not unique to the coast, but coastal grievances, historical and current, are particularly acute and have fuelled the recent rise in nativist and Islamist-inspired militancy. Militant networks, though damaged and presently dormant, are by no means dismantled, and parallel networks of urban youth gangs and armed political entourages make for a still combustible mix. The coastal counties also remain an opposition stronghold into which the ruling party would like to make inroads. This risks a convergence of national and local political competition in the 2017 elections of a sort that in the past has produced communal tensions and localized violence.

The gulf of mistrust – exploited by all sides – not only limits the full delivery of devolution’s benefits; in the case of the coastal counties, it also undermines efforts to combat militancy and attendant violence now subsumed under a “countering violent extremism” (CVE) agenda that is a priority of both Nairobi and its international partners. Rather than focus solely on building the capacity of the security and intelligence services, international assistance to counter radicalization should give equal and increasing emphasis to outreach and reconciliation, so as to find political common ground and articulate and address the region’s grievances within the coast’s newly devolved political structures.

A renewed civic education campaign to underline the potential gains of devolution, as well as the responsibilities and roles of county government and its elected representatives, is urgently needed. Promising initiatives like the “Commonwealth of Coast Counties” (Jumiya Ya Kaunti Za Pwani, JKP), which aim to amplify the benefits of county government through regional (cross-county) projects, need to be depoliticized and given technical support by relevant national ministries and authorities and multilateral institutions (e.g., the World Bank). There should be greater institutionalization of welcome, but currently ad hoc, interventions toward resolving long-term land grievances, specifically the regularization rather than wholesale redistribution of land titles.

Overall, renewed reconciliation work is needed at all levels in the coastal counties ahead of elections; specifically, national and county governments and donors need to reach a renewed understanding of the role and limits of civil society and community-based organisations (CSOs and CBOs), which are still best placed to identify and diffuse potential conflict flashpoints at local levels. The promotion of greater partnership between national and county governments (even as a regional bloc) should be a security and developmental priority for Kenya and its partners."

In Kenya, in June 2016, opposition parties were mobilizing supporters to press the government to replace the national election system which they say is corrupt and partisan. After violence at a number of demonstrations around the country, the government banned illegal demonstrations. The opposition objected that that was unconstitutional and continued to demonstrate in many places, mostly peacefully. However in some low income areas people burned tires and barricaded roads. The police responded forcefully killing two people and injuring 50. The issue may go to the courts, who have sided with the opposition on several occasions (Jeffery Gettleman, "Kenya Bans 'Unlawful' Demonstrations," The New York Times, June 8, 2016).

Jeffery Gettleman, "Kenya Plans to Expel Somali Refugees From Dadaab Camp, Citing Terror

The Kenyan government has announced that it plans to expel hundreds of thousands of refugees, a move that aid agencies say would violate international law and endanger many people.

For years, Kenya has threatened to shut down the Dadaab refugee camp, where hundreds of thousands of Somalis have been marooned for decades. A sea of tents and plastic shelters spread out across miles of desert near the border with Somalia, the camp has become essentially one of Kenya’s largest cities.

On Wednesday, the Kenya government said that terrorists were using Dadaab as a hide-out.

ICG, "Central Mali: An Uprising in the Making?" Africa Report N°238, July 6, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/west-africa/mali/238-central-mali-an-uprising-in-the-making.aspx, commented, "While attention has focused on northern Mali, armed violence is escalating at an alarming rate in the center of the country, long neglected by the state. The management of natural resources has given rise to multiple conflicts that the government and local elites are unable to control. For the past several months, a jihadist uprising has capitalized on the state’s lack of legitimacy and extended its influence. State representatives are being chased out of rural areas. Yet, violence also stems from settlings of scores, banditry and a growing number of self-defense militias. The peace agreement signed in Bamako in June 2015 applies primarily to northern regions and disregards the center of the country. Mali’s government and its principal partners should renew their efforts to restore the state’s authority and legitimacy among all the communities of the area. Absent appropriate action, central Mali – an area more densely populated than the north and vital to the economy – risks becoming a source of protracted instability.

The center has long not been involved in the armed rebellions of the north, but has suffered from its consequences: banditry has surged and weapons have become more readily available since the 2000s. Marginalized groups, in particular some nomadic herding communities, see taking up modern weapons as a way to challenge existing hierarchies, and to contest the privileges of urban elites and traditional local aristocracies. The state, plagued by corruption and discredited by acts of brutality by the security forces, is struggling to retain its ability to mediate between all sides. In the circumstances, ethnic communities are closing ranks, particularly the Fulanis, who see themselves as victims.

The 2012 crisis was a turning point for the central regions when it was partly occupied by armed groups. State authority weakened as civil servants fled, abandoning large swaths of territory. The insecurity made some of the population seek protection or justice from militias, including radical groups. The French military operation Serval chased out these groups in 2013, but when state security forces returned they committed abuses, particularly against nomadic Fulani and Tamashq communities. Locals were also angered when corrupt civil servants regained posts. The state’s return neither restored security nor improved relations between its representatives and the regions’ inhabitants.

A radical group has thrived on this fertile ground, dubbed the Macina Liberation Front by the media and linked to the jihadist group Ansar Eddine. Little is known about its exact nature and some even question whether it really exists, but it demonstrated its presence with deadly attacks against security forces in several places in the central regions since early 2015. The group’s leader is reportedly Hamadoun Kouffa, a Fulani Muslim preacher famous for his strong criticism of the state and local elites. Since the group’s emergence, state representatives have become targets of its actions and rhetoric, and have again abandoned their posts; violence has increased.

It is difficult to distinguish between banditry, local vendettas and the actions of radical groups in this area. The latter form a determined core, even though they are in the minority, less structured, less well armed, and with fewer links to trafficking than radical groups in the north. They are taking root in rural areas, profiting from the state’s lack of credibility and from some inhabitants’ frustrations and fears.

Until now the government has favored a security-focused approach, which has yielded some results. But it has not allowed state authorities to regain control over the entire central territory and its brutality has widened the disconnection between the government and the local population. Political responses have lacked clarity and ambition. The area was largely absent from the Algiers peace talks that led to the signing of the Bamako peace agreement in June 2015. Most of Mali’s international partners have
had little involvement in the center, are predominantly based in Bamako and more involved in the north. Some authorities and local elites are tempted to try to improve security by supporting the creation of community-based self-defense militias. These militias cannot constitute a lasting solution to the real problem of local insecurity, and even less as a means to reverse the way the state has been discredited in the central regions. With inter- and intra-community tensions running high, militias have fuelled sporadic and worrying surges of violence, including between Bambara and Fulani armed groups in May 2016, which may have killed more than 40 people.

Central Mali has entered a volatile period, but heeding early-warning signals and taking preventive action could still stop the growth of radical groups. As Crisis Group’s report Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (14 March 2016) emphasized, preventing crises will do more to contain violent extremists than countering violent extremism will do to prevent crises. The government’s response should not focus exclusively on counter-terrorism operations, which contribute to a rejection of the state by the people, especially when accompanied by abuses. On the contrary, the government, in coordination with local elites, civil society and external partners, should demonstrate a greater ambition to reestablish public services in these long neglected regions. To do this, and to demonstrate its utility and impartiality, it should plan its actions carefully, rank its priorities and recognize that restoring its authority is not only a question of keeping order, but also rests on its capacity to deliver effective justice and education.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**To prevent the security situation deteriorating further in the central regions and enable the state to reestablish its presence and regain legitimacy there**

**To the Malian government:**

1. Develop a strategy to ensure the effective return of the state and the restoration of its legitimacy among all parts of the population. This should include:
   a) Reform of the local police, taking a lead for instance from recent projects in Niger; in particular, security forces should recruit women and men from different ethnic groups to enable the effective carrying out of their duties, including in areas lived in by nomads.
   b) A plan, developed through inclusive dialogue, to coordinate the state’s efforts in the center and to identify priority actions, specifically in the justice, education and natural resources management. Work on the latter should establish mechanisms to enable herdiers and farmers to live together more peacefully.
   c) Naming a high representative for the central regions to embody the state’s commitment to them, to work in consultation with local communities and civil society groups, and to ensure coordination with newly active donors.

2. Avoid using community self-defense groups, and strengthen the capacity of the security services while severely and publicly punishing security service abuses against civilians.

**To elites representing local communities:**

3. Take on the crucial role of mediating between citizens and the state, and in doing so, set aside intercommunal divides and individual disputes in order to cooperate with new representatives of local peoples, notably nomad chiefs and religious leaders, even those who have sympathized with armed groups since 2012.

4. Avoid supporting armed movements and self-defense groups, which are only a short-term response to insecurity and could, in the long run, dangerously fuel intercommunal violence in the center of the country.

5. Conversely, promote – in partnership with the state – the development of a local police force that serves local people and whose composition is representative of the central regions’ diverse ethnic groups and both women and men.

6. Support local conflict resolution initiatives, specifically inclusive forums in which the local population’s diverse age, ethnicity, socio-economic status and gender groups are sufficiently representative of the peoples of central Mali.

**To Mali’s main partners, in particular the European Union:**

7. Assist the state to redeploy at the local level through programs aimed at supporting the development of public services in the central regions.

8. Make the Mopti region a pilot site to test cooperative policies aimed at improving local security
and specifically reforming the local police – lessons drawn from here could serve other regions of the Sahel and northern Mali in particular.

To the UN Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA):

9. Extend the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) program so that it benefits both the north and the central regions without straying from the stipulations of the peace accord, making sure to link DDR to local police reform and avoid fuelling the creation of self-defense groups that are not strictly regulated by the authorities.

10. Support the restoration of state authority over Mali’s whole national territory according to MINUSMA’s mandate and, in order to do so, priorities an approach that aims to restore public services, including those of the police, as much as seeking to reinforce the international military deployment."

Congo Lurches Toward a New Crisis as Leader Tries to Crush a Rival," The New York Times, May 11, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/12/world/africa/congo-moise-katumbi-joseph-kabila.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "Democratic Republic of Congo — As hundreds of police officers ringed the courthouse, the mob came barreling up the street. From blocks away, you could hear its hungry roar. 'I am Moïse!; the people yelled. 'We are ready to die today!'

At that moment, Moïse Katumbi, a popular opposition politician who is the gravest threat to President Joseph Kabila’s rule, stepped out of a Mercedes van, wearing a white shirt, white pants and white shoes, the flag of the Democratic Republic of Congo knotted jauntily around his neck.

The crowd exploded in a celebratory frenzy. The police officers surged, swinging clubs, slamming protesters to the ground and firing tear gas. Clouds of acrid purple smoke cut through the tropical air.

Congo’s government, which is continuously lurching from one crisis to the next, is now playing a very dangerous game. Mr. Kabila, who faces term limits, is resisting international calls and rising pressure in Congo to relinquish power by the end of this year, as Congo’s Constitution requires.

ICG, "Katanga: Tensions in DRC’s Mineral Heartland," Report 239/Africa, August 3, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/democratic-republic-congo/katanga-tensions-drcs-mineral-heartland?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Updates&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-2815d1d9a4-Weekly_Update_29_July_5_August_2016&utm_campaign=2815d1d9a4-2815d1d9a4-359871089, commented, "Katanga is at the heart of growing political tension in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Intentionally stalled preparations for elections scheduled for November and rushed, politicized implementation of decentralization and break-up of some provinces (découpage), including Katanga, have fuelled tensions between the region and center and between the opposition and President Joseph Kabila’s ruling majority. This assumed an overtly political dimension after the former Katanga governor, Moïse Katumbi, declared his candidacy for president, provoking Kabila to initiate investigations and issue a warrant for his arrest for undermining national security. The Congo’s fragile institutions are under great strain. A credible national dialogue to discuss how to manage a transition, a commitment not to change the constitution for political purposes or prolong the transition to preserve the status quo, and measurable progress toward elections are urgently needed. To avoid prolonged crisis and likely violence, the UN and international partners should help facilitate and build on African Union attempts to support a dialogue.

Katanga has been at the center of the DRC’s tumultuous political history, as the seat of a failed secessionist movement at independence and as a key battleground in the second Congo war (1997-2003). Under Kabila père, then son Joseph, who succeeded him on his death in 2001, Katangans have held many critical positions in government and the security forces. Dissatisfaction with Joseph Kabila has been growing since the 2011 elections, in Katanga as elsewhere. One factor, failure to finance provincial administrations properly, has been compounded in Katanga by a sense of entitlement based on the huge contribution its mineral exports make to the national budget. This took a political turn in 2014, when Katumbi and other important local elites, mostly ex-Kabila allies, came out against the president’s apparent plans to keep power after his second – and according to the constitution final – term expires in December
The central government has increased repression and augmented the already heavy military presence in the region. In early 2015, partly in reaction to the growing opposition, the government decided to implement découpage, as foreseen in the 2010 constitution, increasing the number of provinces from eleven to 26. Katanga was split into four new provinces. While some local elites welcome the opportunity to run their own administrations, many in Katanga are unhappy at what they see as a divide and rule strategy. The découpage was rushed, ill planned, under-resourced and coincided with a budget crisis, due mostly to the drop in demand for Katanga’s minerals.

Katumbi’s emergence as a prominent Kabila opponent coincided with a split in the ruling majority, of which he was part. The opposition is strengthened but also fractured. On 4 May 2016, Katumbi declared his candidacy in the presidential elections that are still some way off, further heightening tensions. The announcement that he was being investigated prompted widespread demonstrations in Lubumbashi, Katanga’s major city, and the would-be candidate left the country for medical checks. The looming national crisis is already damaging weak political trust and may manifest itself through an upsurge in armed violence, protest, increased state repression and even security force fractures. All these may occur, and some have already, in Katanga, which is likely to be a major arena for violent political struggle and a symbol of wider problems. Serious tensions exist there between communities, especially local ethnic groups, migrants and the internally displaced (IDPs), who increased from 50,000 to 500,000 between 2011 and 2014. The economic downturn will also increase resentments and make problems harder to solve.

A crisis that could pose a serious challenge to stability in the region, and to international peacekeeping efforts, needs to be headed off. While national politics is increasingly zero-sum as the electoral deadline nears, some actors, including at local level, still have a strong interest in cooling the temperature to prevent conflict emerging. Early measures against unaccountable armed groups, and especially against those who encourage them, could avoid a greater problem later on. Politicians should desist from using armed groups to pressure their opponents, and national authorities should act, with support from the UN Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) to discourage them from doing so. MONUSCO should use its leverage to encourage this and deploy more assets to Katanga, especially human rights monitors and police. But this leverage is diminishing, and confronted with a gathering storm, other more radical options, such as downsizing the mission, may eventually have to be considered.

To address distrust between the center and provinces, financial flows need to be more regular, transparent and in line with statutes. National auditors and civil society must be better empowered to monitor these flows and their use. Resolving the DRC’s national and provincial problems ultimately requires trust and dialogue, as well as electoral progress. The stalled dialogue initiative, mediated by Edem Kodjo of the African Union (AU), should be pursued and other channels of communication kept open to allow elite-level talks on national and provincial interests. Congo’s international partners should support dialogue, as the AU is doing, and ensure that the critical question of center-province relations is kept on the table.

I. Introduction: The National Context

This report examines links between long-term tensions in the Katanga region and the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) linked to the constitutional and electoral deadline at the end of 2016.[fn]In this report, Katanga refers to the area that was Katanga province until July 2015.Hide Footnote President Joseph Kabila, in power since his father’s January 2001 assassination, has been elected in 2006 and 2011. The latter vote was controversial, marred by fraud and manipulation. A constitutional amendment early that year, favored him, as it allowed a candidate with a plurality but less than 50 per cent of the vote to avoid a run-off in which the opposition could have united behind a single candidate. Constitutional amendments also increased the power of the central government over the provinces. However, the constitution still unequivocally limits the president to two terms.[fn]President Kabila was declared the winner, with 48.95 per cent of the vote. Etienne Tshisekedi was runner-up with 32.33 per cent. Article 70 establishes a five-year term, renewable once. Article 220 prohibits the revision of Article 70.

Kabila’s mandate, therefore, should end in December 2016, but there is neither the financial resources nor political will to hold elections in November, and the electoral timetable is in disarray. The ruling majority (henceforth “the majority” in this report), an alliance of parties built around the president’s
People’s Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD, the largest in parliament), appears unwilling to relinquish power or face the electorate.

After failing in 2014 to amend the constitution to allow Kabila to stand for a third term, it turned to delaying elections, first by insisting on a prior national census. When this failed, due to sustained popular outcry in early 2015, the majority concentrated on delaying preparation and funding of elections. Updating the voter register, the most time-consuming requirement, has made almost no progress. Kabila’s government, a seasoned observer has noted, seems determined to “boycott its own election”.[fn]Kris Berwouts, “La République démocratique du Congo: de la fin de règne au règne sans fin?”, IFRI Notes, July 2016, p. 5. The last census was in 1984. The parliament’s allocation of seats depends on the number of registered voters. Berwouts, “DR Congo’s electoral process is at an impasse. Here are 3 scenarios for what comes next”, AfricanArguments.org, 22 May 2016. With only months to the end of the president’s legal mandate, the polls’ slippage (glissement) has become inevitable. The calculations of the Electoral Commission (CENI) suggest a delay of up to several years. The regime’s plans to stay in power were given legal cover by the Constitutional Court’s May ruling that the president could remain until an elected successor was installed.[fn]Crisis Group interview, CENI president and vice president, diplomats, Kinshasa, March 2016. “RDC: Joseph Kabila autorisé à s’accrocher au pouvoir”, Afrikarabia.com, 12 May 2016.

As discontent grew in early 2015, the government suddenly prioritized implementation of long-planned decentralization. This started with creation of 21 new provinces carved out of six of the existing eleven, a process known as découpage. Fully implemented by July, it was poorly planned and chaotically administered, adding to delays in both national and local elections. In March 2016, existing provincial assemblies indirectly elected governors for the new provinces, a process that took place under tight regime control and firmly established Kabila’s dominance of the new provinces.[fn]Découpage is discussed in more detail in Chapter III below. For new provinces, existing provincial assembly members formed assemblies according to their constituencies, then elected governors.

In the course of 2015, the government announced a national dialogue on the electoral process. Most of the opposition has refused to take part, arguing it would legitimize delays or demanding broad international engagement and guarantees. The dialogue has, however, become an integral part of the international attempts to avoid a deepening of the political crisis. The African Union (AU) announced support in January 2016 and in April appointed former Togolese Prime Minister Edem Kodjo as facilitator. The need for a dialogue was also included in UN Security Council Resolution 2277 (March 2016). In June, an international support group was created for the facilitation.[fn]“Inaugural Meeting of the Support Group for the Facilitation of the National Dialogue in the Democratic Republic of Congo”, AU press release, 4 July 2016. The Group includes: the AU, UN, European Union (EU), the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR). Hide Footnote Other international reactions to the current blocked situation have been more forthright, including the imposition on 26 June of bilateral sanctions by the U.S. on the chief of police of Kinshasa, Celestin Kanyama.

Kabila’s attempts to keep power have been resisted by both the “old” opposition around Etienne Tshisekedi’s Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) and former allies, such as Vital Kamerhe. In 2015, the opposition received a boost with the defection of Moïse Katumbi, the former Katanga governor, and several important parties from the majority bloc, which formed the “G7” coalition.

Opposition and civil society organisations have sought greater unity. The former continues to struggle over whether to present a single candidate in an eventual election and whether to participate in the national dialogue.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, politicians, diplomats and civil society members, Brussels, Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Bukavu, Goma, February-March 2016. The “Citizen Front 2016”, established in December 2015, was the first attempt to create a platform bringing political and social actors together, but it faltered because of strategic differences and distrust.[fn]The “Front citoyen 2016”, grouping parties, civil society organisations and individuals, formed in Senegal in December 2015. Floribert Anzuluni, also coordinator of the Filimbi youth organization, coordinates it. Tweet by @Salomon Kalonda (political adviser to Katungi), 4 January 2016; “RDC: Moïse Katumbi annonce son appartenance à l’opposition”, Radio Okapi, 3 January 2016. Katumbi did not participate in this gathering. Crisis Group interviews, Congolese political analyst, Brussels, February 2016; civil society representative, Goma, March 2016. In June 2016, a meeting of several opposition leaders in Genval, near Brussels, led to creation of the
“Rassemblement” under the leadership of Etienne Tshisekedi. The platform brings in Katumbi allies, including the G7, thus forming a potentially potent new alliance.[fn]In full: “Rassemblement des forces politiques et sociales de la RDC Acquises au Changement”. “La ‘déclaration de Genval’ unifie l’opposition congolaise”, L’Echo, 11 June 2016. “RDC: Katumbi dans les valises de Tshisekedi”, Afrikarabia.com, 8 July 2016. It does not include Kamerhe, however, the leader of the Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC).

The biggest blow to the opposition has been the Catholic Church’s decision to pursue a less confrontational line. Divided over its political strategy, it had taken a very strong position that the elections be held as scheduled by the constitution in November 2016, but, reportedly after intervention of the Vatican, cancelled a “March of the Christians” protest on 16 February for fear it could turn violent.[fn]Earlier, in December 2015, it recalled its representative from the opposition meeting in Senegal. The Church is also divided over its political strategy. Crisis Group, interviews, diplomats, civil society members and Catholic Church official, Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, March 2016. This frustrated opposition politicians, because the Church has strong moral stature, national presence and mobilization capacity. Katumbi in particular has been identified to a large degree with it, for instance appealing for a daily two-minute prayer at noon in support of the “democratic struggle”. The Church reappeared on the political scene after the June episcopal conference, speaking out against manipulation of the constitution, but it is unclear whether this heralds more activism.[fn]“Le front de l’opposition congolaise ne désarme pas”, La Libre Belgique, 4 February 2016. Crisis Group interview, Congolese Episcopal Conference (CENCO) representative, Kinshasa, July 2016.

Katumbi took a bold step on 4 May, when he announced his intention to stand for president.[fn]He is backed by the G7 and the Alternation for the Republic (AR), a new alliance of several smaller parties. That day, Justice Minister Alexis Thambwe announced he was being investigated for “recruitment of mercenaries”. Facing hearings, growing pressure and intimidation, he was hospitalized on 13 May. On 19 May, the national prosecutor issued an arrest warrant, but Katumbi was later granted highly unusual permission to travel abroad for medical care. Since Katumbi and the G7 left the majority, tensions have increased, particularly in Lubumbashi, capital of the former province. Protests turned violent on 24 April.[fn]“RDC: l’opposant Moïse Katumbi dénonce l’enquête ouverte contre ses ‘mercenaires’”, Le Monde Afrique, 4 May 2016. Crisis Group interview, Congolese analyst, Kinshasa, July 2016. “Opposition en RDC: manifestations à Kinshasa, répression à Lubumbashi”, Jeune Afrique, 25 April 2016. There are also more security forces, with armored vehicles, in and around the city.

These national problems will almost certainly continue to worsen when the president’s mandate ends in December. They may take several forms: breakdown of already low political trust, explosions of popular anger, state repression and even fractures in the security forces. This report analyses a region, Katanga, that will be a major player in the coming crisis and is representative of the country’s wider troubles. After examining its place in Kabila’s Congo, it looks at perceptions of découpage, political tensions between members of the Katangan elite in the region and Kinshasa, the risk of political violence linked to armed groups in Katanga and the overall impact on national politics. Based on fieldwork in Lubumbashi, Kolwezi and Kinshasa, it is part of a series on the DRC’s broader electoral process.[fn]See also, Crisis Group Africa Report N°225, Congo: Is Democratic Change Possible?, 5 May 2015; and Richard Moncrieff, “The reluctance of Joseph Kabila to cede power could push Congo to the brink”, The Guardian Global Development, 2 May 2016.

II. Katanga: The Centre of Gravity in Kabila’s Congo

In this podcast, Crisis Group’s Richard Moncrieff discusses the links between long-term tensions in the Katanga region and the crisis in DRC linked to the constitutional and electoral deadline at the end of 2016.

Katanga has always been central to Congo’s political dramas. Katangans’ desire for autonomy and sense of exceptionalism are fuelled by the region’s extraordinary mineral wealth, currently the source of well over half the DRC’s fiscal revenue.[fn]For more on Katangan history, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°103, Katanga: The Congo’s Forgotten Crisis, 9 January 2006; and Crawford Young, Politics in the Congo (New Jersey, 1965). The population of the former province was estimated at 9.2 million in 2010, 13 per cent of the national estimate of 69 million. Katanga had 4.7 million of the 32 million registered voters for the 2011 elections (14.6 per cent) and 72 of 500 seats in parliament. It had the most registered voters, and its population was surpassed only by Kinshasa. Only weeks after independence in 1960, Moïse
Tshombe’s National Confederation of Katanga (CONAKAT), supported by Belgian and U.S. interests, declared secession. The ensuing crisis prompted the first UN deployment of peacekeepers to DRC and was a defining moment in the country’s early turmoil. The UN force and the national army ended the attempt in 1963 and briefly forced Tshombe into exile. Other CONAKAT supporters fled to Angola, where in 1968 they founded the armed National Liberation Front of Congo (FNLC), the “Katangan tigers”, and with support from the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) launched failed invasions of Katanga in 1977 and 1978 (the “Shaba wars”).

Under Mobutu Sese Seko’s rule (1965-1997), the province’s mineral wealth was mismanaged, contributing to the decline of the huge state-run mining company Gécamines (Général des Carrières et des Mines) in the late 1980s.[fn]Gécamines was created in 1967 as successor of the colonial Union Minière du Haut Katanga (UMHK).Hide Footnote When he was forced to allow some political competition in the early 1990s, Mobutu stirred tensions between Luba immigrants from Kasai and native Katangans to weaken his strongest opponent, Tshisekedi (who is from Kasai). He also appointed Gabriel Kyungu as Katanga’s governor, who created a new political party, the Union of Federalists and Independent Republicans (UFERI).

In 1992, Kyungu blamed Katanga’s economic woes on Luba migrants and adopted an explicit policy of cleansing ethnic Luba from its major mining cities, which led to purges that killed more than 5,000 people. In September 2000, Kyungu formed the Union of Congolese Nationalists and Federalists (UNAFEC).[fn]The Luba are DRC’s largest ethnic group. The name applies to a variety of peoples who speak closely related languages and share culture and political history, derived from the Luba kingdom of the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries. Subdivisions include Luba-Shankaji of Katanga, Luba-Bambo of Kasai and Luba-Hemba of northern Katanga and southern Kivu. Kyungu, a Lubakat from Ankoro in current Tanganyika province and long-time spokesperson for the region’s frustrations, was Katanga provincial assembly speaker from 2007 until its dissolution in 2015. Crisis Group Report, Katanga, op. cit. Kyungu sanctioned ethnic cleansing of Luba in his province and was eventually forced out of power by a coalition of Katangans in 2001. In 2002, he formed the Union of Congolese Nationalists and Federalists (UNAFEC).

Katanga had a significant role in the 1997-1998 war, in which Laurent Desiré Kabila, a Lubakat (Luba from Katanga), overthrew Mobutu. Supported by Angola, many ex-“tigers” joined his Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), which developed an important base in Katanga. Many Katangans also joined the central government. However, resentment quickly surfaced, as predominantly northern Katangan politicians staffed the new administration and its security forces, while the province’s south was deprived of the greater share of power and representation it felt entitled to as the main source of mineral wealth.

During the second Congo war (1998-2003), northern Katanga was heavily militarized by the regime, blocking the Rwanda-supported Rally for Congolese Democracy-Goma (RCD-Goma) from capturing Lubumbashi and the strategically important Kamina military base. During that period, Kyungu, Joseph Kabila John Numbi (a key security adviser) were all involved in channeling support to local armed militia groups (Mai-Mai) set-up to fight Rwanda and its proxies. After his father was assassinated in 2001, and as he turned from winning a war to winning elections, Katanga was an important base for Joseph Kabila. He could count on northern and southern elites, including the popular Kyungu and businessman and political newcomer Moïse Katumbi, a key early ally.

A. The Political Networks

Joseph Kabila is a Lubakat from Tanganyika province. From 2007 until the latest reshuffle in September 2015, all his defense ministers were from northern Katanga, as were the interior and justice ministers from 2012 to 2014. Katangans currently hold eight of 37 ministerial posts, including the strategic and lucrative infrastructure, mines and finance ministries.[fn]“Ordonnance N°15/075 du 25 Septembre 2015, portant réaménagement technique du gouvernement”, Présidence de la République, Kinshasa, 25 September 2015. It appointed the following ministers of Katangan origin: Fridolin Kasweshi Musoka (infrastructure); Henri Yav Muland (finance); Martin Kabwelulu (mines); Aimé Ngoy Mukena (hydrocarbons); Félix Kabange Numbi (health); Baudouin Banza Mukalay (culture, died 14 May 2016); Emile Mota Ndongo Khang (agriculture); and Simplice Ilunga Monga (transport, deputy).Hide Footnote Powerful Katangans have included Guillaume Samba Kaputo and Augustin Katumba Mwanké (both now deceased), John Numbi and, increasingly, Kalev Mutond.[fn]Katumba Mwanké and Samba Maputo between them ran Kabila’s money, political networks and relations with Rwanda: Gauthier de Villers, Histoire du Politique au Congo-Kinshasa (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2016); “La fin mystérieuse du Richelieu congolais”, Le Soir, 7 August 2015. It appointed the following ministers of Katangan origin: Fridoli...
Katumba Mwanké, key presidential advisor dies”, Congo Siasa (www.congosiasa.blogspot.com), 12 February 2012; and Crisis Group interview, UN official, Kinshasa, June 2015.

Numbi, another Lubakat and the head of the Congolese police (PNC) from 2007 to 2010, was forced into a background role in 2010, following allegations that he was involved in the killing of respected human rights activist Floribert Chebeya. Previously in the military, he maintains strong links within the army and the Republican Guard (GR), and a return to a more prominent role is possible.[fn]Numbi was provisionally suspended as head of the PNC in June 2010, shortly after Chebeya was found dead after allegedly having been summoned to meet him. The reason for the suspension was to allow calm organization of the investigation. Numbi appeared as a witness at the trial that was organized from June 2011. In his statement, he denied having met Chebeya the day of his disappearance. Eight policemen were indicted and five convicted. Numbi was replaced as head of the police on 28 December 2013. See “L’affaire Chebeya, un crime d’État?”, film by Thierry Michel, 2012, which includes footage showing Numbi denying allegations of involvement. Following suspension, he remained involved in military matters in the east and relations with Rwanda. He is reportedly linked to the Bakata Katanga armed group. “Affaire Chebeya: l’ombre du général John Numbi plane sur le procès”, Radio France Internationale (RFI), 27 July 2015. According to multiple sources, Numbi also received several Katanga provincial authority contracts when Katumbi was governor. “John Numbi et Joseph Kabila: le désamour après la lune de miel?”, descwondo.org, 3 July 2015; Crisis Group interviews, civil society members, Lubumbashi, May 2015. 

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Kalev Mutond, a Ruund from Lualaba, is increasingly prominent as director of the National Intelligence Agency (ANR). His role as the president’s personal envoy in the 2015 national consultations advanced his political profile. His agency is deeply involved in repression of civil society groups, raising the possibility that Katangans in the national government will be increasingly involved in repression political activity at home, further heightening resentments.[fn]Crisis Group interview, Kinshasa-based diplomats, March 2016. Mutond was the agency’s domestic intelligence wing director from 2007-2011. “RDC: Filimbi, la nouvelle génération de citoyens qui ébranle le pouvoir”, GRIP, 17 August 2015. 

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Kalev Mutond’s brother, Guibert Paul Yav Tshibal, was Katanga’s deputy governor and briefly acting governor in 2015 after Katumbi’s resignation.[fn]During this short period, Tshibal remained in regular contact with Katumbi. Crisis Group email correspondence, Kinshasa-based diplomat, October 2015. Before becoming deputy governor, Tshibal was a leader of the Ruund (Lualaba) cultural association.

Katangans dominate the security services, in particular the GR, PNC and ANR.[fn]Kabila’s cousin, General Jean-Claude Kifwa, commander of the third military zone, including former Katanga and Phléémon Yav, the Katanga military region commander, are very influential. This is also the case for other important state functions, such as the national prosecutor, Flory Kabange Numbi (Lubakat), and the Central Bank governor, Déogracias Mutombo Mwana Nyembo (Luba-Hemba). Kabila’s longstanding cabinet director, Gustave Beya Siku, was replaced in a reshuffle in May 2015 but subsequently appointed ambassador to Angola.[fn]“RDC: un cabinet présidentiel renouvelé pour le président Joseph Kabila”, RFI, 28 May 2015; “Gustave Beya Siku handling oil relations again”, Africa Energy Intelligence, no. 754, 29 September 2015. 

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Katangans remain prominent in the presidential cabinet, including Théodore Mugalu, the influential chief of staff at the presidency. Two other prominent actors are Kabila’s twin sister Jaynet and younger brother Zoé. In 2011, both were elected legislators in what is now Tanganyika province, Jaynet as an independent in Kalemi and Zoé on a PPRD ticket in Manono.[fn]“RD Congo: Les gardiens du temple”, Jeune Afrique, 1 February 2015. Mugalu was ambassador to Tanzania and a PPRD MP. “Honorables Kabila, députés à l’Assemblée nationale congolaise”, Jeune Afrique, 14 February 2012. Jaynet is also president of the influential “Fondation Laurent Désiré Kabila” and has extensive business interests.[fn]She co-owns the Digital Congo media group and reportedly owns 50 per cent of Keratsu Holding Ltd., a stakeholder with 19.6 per cent of Congo Wireless Network Sprl., which in turn owns 49 per cent of Vodacom Congo. “Congo President’s Twin Has Indirect Stake in Vodacom Unit”, Bloomberg.com, 5 April 2016. 

Though many Katangans hold senior public office, some of the elite are increasingly frustrated with Kabila, blaming him as well as former Governor Katumbi for lack of development in Lubakat-dominated Tanganyika and Haut-Lomami provinces (formerly districts). In previous elections, Kabila obtained massive support from these areas and rewarded elites with key political and administration posts, including in the security services. However, he left out some prominent leaders, such as Jean-Claude Masangu (who

252
Elites are also aggrieved that he is reaching out to other constituencies to broaden his base, which may threaten the region's power. Kabila is reportedly aloof in dealing with Katangan elites, which is taken badly in his home province. Paradoxically, while most of the country sees power as concentrated in Katangan hands, Katangan elites, those close to Kabila and those now opposing him, are worried it is slipping from their grasp, especially since the 2011 election and the death of Katumba Mwanké.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, Katangan elites, Lubumbashi, May-June 2015, March 2016; Katangan political analyst, Lubumbashi, June 2015.

B. Economic Troubles

Copper and cobalt production in Haut-Katanga are the bedrock of DRC’s formal economy. In 2014, Katanga accounted for 71 per cent of revenue generated by the extractive sector, which is responsible for 95 per cent of total exports and a very large portion of central government revenues.[fn]“Rapport Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), RDC 2014”, December 2015. Copper alone is 30 per cent of export revenues. “Democratic Republic of Congo; country mining guide”, KPMG Global Mining Institute, 2014. For a comprehensive analysis of Katanga’s economy, see Donnion Dibwe Dia Mwembu, Delphin Kaimbi Mpyana and Didier Kilondo Nguya, “Le Katanga: entre croissance économique portée par le secteur minier et un développement en demi-teinte”, Observatoire des Grands Lacs en Afrique, July 2014.


However, the drop in commodity prices has affected this spectacular growth. In mid-2015, Glencore’s Kamoto Copper Company (KCC), producing 15 per cent of the country’s copper, suspended operations, causing a $200 million government revenue loss (approximately 4.7 per cent of total revenue).[fn]Total revenue, including grants, was $4.2 billion in 2015. Hide Footnote In May 2016, the Congolese Chamber of Mines projected a drop in the year’s copper production of 5.9 per cent. Cobalt production is projected to fall by 21.3 per cent, and production of all other minerals is also expected to decline. This seriously affects foreign currency reserves and is putting pressure on the Congolese Franc in a politically tense period.[fn]“DRC Mining Industry, First Quarter 2016”, Federation of Congolese Enterprises (FEC), May 2016, p. 4. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and civil society, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, March 2016; Kinshasa, July 2016; “Cost of Glencore unit’s suspension will complicate Congo’s elections”, Reuters, 26 October 2015; “Allocation de son Excellence Monsieur le Premier Ministre à l’occasion de la présentation du projet de loi de finances pour l’exercice 2016 devant l’Assemblée Nationale”, Primature, October 2015. Reflecting the drop in revenue, Prime Minister Matata Ponyo announced on 16 May a 22 per cent budget cut for 2016. The government also reached out to the World Bank and IMF for support. Crisis Group interview, Kinshasa-based diplomat, Kinshasa, March 2016. Aside from lower demand, unreliable energy supply and the challenging business climate have further stunted growth.[fn]Crisis Group interview, Lubumbashi-based civil society representative, May 2015; “Interview with Michael Kavanagh on the Congolese economy”, Congo Siasa podcast, 15 May 2015; “Wing and a prayer economics”, Africa Confidential, 23 October 2015; “Congo-K Miners no longer want to deal with SNEL”, Africa Energy Intelligence, 28 July 2015.

The parastatal Gécamines is central to the Katangan economy. In 1988, it was responsible for 42.9 per cent of government revenue, but Mobutu’s kleptocracy bankrupted it in the mid-1990’s. Restructured, it now has only limited production, partly due to prohibitive costs, but is a minority partner in joint ventures such as the copper and cobalt mine Tenke Fungurumé (TFM). This huge mining investment is reportedly on the brink of being sold to Chinese investors, a sign of China’s ongoing interest in Congo’s minerals, despite the global economic slowdown, which is likely to have geopolitical ramifications.[fn]Marysse, Omasombo, op. cit., pp. 23-29. TFM holds some of the world’s biggest reserves.
Freeport-McMoRan Copper & Gold Inc. is the operating partner, holding a 56 per cent interest. Gécamines holds a 20 per cent carried interest (taking a share of profit not proportional to investment level). In June 2016, Freeport outlined plans to sell its share in TFM. “Lundin gets bid extension on Freeport Congo mine stake”, Reuters, 19 July 2016.

The Africa Progress Panel and Global Witness reported under-valued, secretive Gécamines sales of mining assets to foreign investors around the 2011 election. The former estimated the government should have earned $1.36 billion more from five deals between 2010 and 2015. Global Witness and other sources allege such secretive deals have continued since 2014, including with Chinese investors. Proceeds allegedly function as a parallel source of central government funding, bypassing the scrutiny of parliament and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The government has denied allegations of underselling, insisting that it has published all relevant material, and vigorously defending the deals.[fn]“Equity in Extractives”, Africa Progress Report 2013, Africa Progress Panel, pp. 55-58; “Out of Africa, British offshore secrecy and Congo’s missing $1.5 billion”, Global Witness, May 2016. Crisis Group telephone interview, businessperson, November 2015; interview, diplomat, March 2016. Stefaan Marysse, Claudine Tshimanga, op. cit., pp. 25-29; Mining Minister Martin Kabewelulu stated that “assets were ceded in total transparency”; see “Congo loses out on $1.4 bln as mine assets sold cheap – Annan panel”, Reuters, 10 May 2013. Other parties implicated also fervently deny any wrongdoing.

Of particular concern has been the $6.2 billion Sicomines deal. Up to mid-2015, the contract funded an estimated $800 million in nationwide infrastructure projects. Another part of the deal is the development of a 240MW hydropower station in Busanga, north of Kolwezi.[fn]“La société anonyme Sino-Congolaise des Mines (Sicomines) is a joint venture, set up in 2007, between Gécamines (32 per cent) and three Chinese companies (68 per cent). Gécamines owns the sites. See Johanna Jansson, “The Sicomines agreement revisited: prudent Chinese banks and risk-taking companies”, Review of African Political Economy, vol. 40, no. 135, pp. 152-162, 2013; “Sicomines project to start producing copper before end-2015”, The Economist Intelligence Unit, 22 May 2015; “China’s ‘infrastructure for minerals’ deal gets reality check in Congo”, Reuters, 9 July 2015. “Congo, China partners near deal for $600 million power plant”, Bloomberg, 15 October 2015; “Power shortages threaten launch of Chinese-run copper mine”, Reuters, 28 August 2015.Hide Footnote Sicomines finally started copper production in November 2015 and in this short period has become the country’s third largest producer. Under the deal, investors are protected from falling copper values, and production is tax exempt.[fn]“DRC Mining Industry, First Quarter 2016”, op. cit., p. 4. This production appears in the statistics but does not represent new revenue for the government. Crisis Group interviews, diplomats and analysts, Kinshasa and Lubumbashi, March 2016. More broadly, Chinese companies own 80 per cent of Katanga’s mineral processing plants, and China buys 90 per cent of its minerals. “Country Report: DRC, 3rd Quarter 2013”, Economist Intelligence Unit, 1 September 2013, p. 14. Lack of transparency in allocation and spending of the money adds to the concern, including in Katanga, about the central government’s use of mining sector revenue.[fn]“Congo-K: les mines au cœur des réseaux ethniques”, Africa Mining Intelligence, 26 July 2013; “Ivanhoe rides into the elections”, Africa Confidential, 10 July 2015; “Défis de transparence, de la qualité et du respect des droits humains dans la réalisation des infrastructures du projet Sicomines à Kinshasa”, African Association for the Defense of Human Rights (ASADHO), November 2014. There is no evidence that Sicomines itself was complicit in the misuse of funds that went to public authorities. Gécamines management was not available for comment either on the Sicomines deal or on the alleged under-selling of assets when approached by Crisis Group in Lubumbashi in May 2015.

As the province’s economy grew after the civil war, its budget exploded, from $21 million in 2006 to $973 million in 2014 and a projected $1 billion-plus for 2015.[fn]“Le projet de budget de la province du Katanga pour 2015 déclaré recevable à l’Assemblée provinciale”, Agence Congolaise de Presse (ACP), 18 December 2014; “Katanga de tous les superlatifs”, Publiminfo, Jeune Afrique, 28 June 2015.Hide Footnote This is double the budget of Kinshasa, and almost five times that of Congo-Central (the former Bas-Congo), the second wealthiest province. Provinces currently have two sources of funding: provincial taxes and a 40 per cent share of national taxes raised in their territory, which the central government should return to them. The latter should be the largest revenue source; however, the central government has only partially kept its obligation. Nationally, it returned only approximately 14 per cent to provinces in 2014.[fn]“Avec la rétrocession, le Katanga serait plus développé, affirme son ministre des Finances”, Radio

Despite its riches, large infrastructural and developmental inequality persists in Katanga. The major mining areas in Haut-Katanga and Lualaba (in particular Kolwezi) have relatively good infrastructure, while the northern provinces, in particular isolated Haut-Lomami, are among DRC’s poorest. The poverty rate is above the national average.[fn]In Lualaba, there are also huge disparities between Kolwezi, its main mining district, and other areas. “Rapport des vacances parlementaires du district du Lualaba”, Lubumbashi, 28 May 2014. Crisis Group interviews, local politicians, humanitarians and diplomats, February-July 2015. According to a 2010 study on the découpage, Katanga had the highest tax revenue but Tanganyika and Haut-Lomami would be the least prosperous new provinces. “DRC: The Impact of the ‘Découpage’”, joint study, the European Commission, Belgian Development Cooperation and UN Development Program (UNDP), March 2010. “Resilience of an African giant”, World Bank, 2012, p. 30; “Plan Quinquennal de développement 2011-2015”, Province du Katanga (undated). According to the latter report (p. 29), the percentage of poor in Katanga is 87.8, against a national average of 71.3 per cent. Local elites often use central government failure to transfer revenue to justify lack of investment in northern Katangan development.

Even in the mining belt, large investments and growth have not translated into significant formal employment. Most Katangan miners are artisanal, selling their production to trading posts (comptoirs) in Lubumbashi, Likasi and Kolwezi, mainly owned by Chinese businesses.[fn]Gregory Mtembu-Salter, “Goodwill and Hard Bargains: the DRC, China and India”, South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA), March 2012. Many live in dire circumstances and are potential recruits for political thuggery, or even insurgency, and involvement in clashes between local and migrant labor.[fn]They often live in a squalor outside urban centres that contrasts with the continuous stream of trucks carrying valuable minerals. There is also concern about the mining industry’s environmental and health impact. Crisis Group interviews, local officials and civil society representatives, Lubumbashi, Kolwezi, May-June 2015. See also “L’Enfer des mines en RDC”, Amnesty International Switzerland, March 2012; and “Artisanal mining in the middle of a city: The Kasulo story in the DRC”, Southern African Resource Watch, 21 October 2015. This can take on ethnic overtones. The mining economy has for decades drawn in large numbers of migrant laborers, especially from Kasai province. Different communities, migrant and local, have fought for control of land, jobs and political office. Découpage has created new provincial structures that could further inflame these underlying tensions and disrupt investment plans, as examined below.[fn]Crisis Group interview, FEC representative, Lubumbashi, March 2016; “Kolwezi: la suspension des activités de Glencore préjudiciera l’économie”, Radio Okapi, 11 September 2015; “Le Katanga se serre la ceinture ... de cuivre”, Jeune Afrique, 20 September 2015. Overall, Katanga owes its particular place in Congolese politics to two factors: the Katangan origin of the president and his predecessor and its economic weight. Together these have created distinct political expectations. While many Katangan elites are happy to see one of their own in power in Kinshasa (and would like it to stay that way), they are aggrieved at the perceived failure to return to the region a fair share of the wealth it generates. In addition, within the former province, poorer areas feel disenfranchised by both the central and provincial governments.

III. The Politics of Découpage: The End of “Katanga”
A. Découpage: From Delay to Control

The DRC’s territorial organization and the relationship between the center and the decentralized entities has been a major political issue since the early days of independence. The 2006 constitution
mandated division of the then eleven provinces into 26 in the découpage process. The intention, which remains popular in many parts of the country, was to bring government structures closer to the people. Part of this deal was to reinforce provinces’ financial autonomy.[fn]Gauthier de Villers, Histoire du politique au Congo-Kinshasa, Les concepts à l’épreuve (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2016); Crisis Group Report, Congo, op. cit.; Jean-Claude Bruneau, “Les nouvelles provinces de la République Démocratique du Congo: construction territorial et ethnicités”, L’Espace Politique, no. 1, 2009. On decentralization’s financial aspects, see Evariste Mabi Mulumba and Clément Muya, “Décentralisation, gestion des finances publiques et problématique de la fiscalité”, in Jean Omasombo and Paule Bouvier (eds.), Décentralisation et Espaces de Pouvoir (Tervuren, 2014); and “DRC: The Impact”, op. cit. The provinces are expected to financially support local government structures (decentralized territorial entities, ETDs). Hide Footnote As noted, the constitution permits provinces to levy taxes, and its Article 175 provides, in a process called “retrocession”, that they should receive 40 per cent of locally raised national revenues. It also envisages a “national equalization fund”, to distribute 10 per cent of national tax revenues to provinces with weak local tax collection.[fn]Congo Central, Haut-Katanga, Kinshasa and Lualaba provinces are the only provinces that would not receive equalization fund transfers. Crisis Group interview, government official, Kinshasa, June 2015. Hide Footnote

The reality has not matched the constitutional aspirations. Decentralization remains more theoretical than real. The national assembly only adopted the equalization fund bill in November 2015, and the president still has to promulgate it. Retrocession has “hovered between 6 and 10 per cent from 2007 to 2013”.[fn]Pierre Englebert and Emmanuel Kasongo Mungongo, op. cit., p. 12. not anywhere near the 40 per cent level. This has been excused by reference to low absorption capacity and concerns about transparency and corruption at provincial level, which while partly justified are also partly due to central government unwillingness to invest in provincial capacity. Additionally, the government has not transferred civil servants and policy control to the provinces. The failure to fully implement retrocession has generated much bitterness, not least in Katanga which is well aware of the amount of resources it generates for the center.[fn]“Discours de clôture de la Session Ordinaire de Septembre 2015 par l’Honorale Aubin Minaku Ndjalandjoko, Président de l’Assemblée nationale”, Kinshasa, 15 December 2015. Englebert and Mungongo, “Misguided and Misdiagnosed” op. cit., p. 10. Crisis Group interviews, provincial administrators and politicians, Lubumbashi, May, June 2015. Between 2010 and 2014, Katanga reportedly received $44 million of an expected $155 million. “Suivi et évaluation de l’exécution des obligations légales par l’état en RDC: Cas de la rétrocession des recettes minières à la province du Katanga et à ses entités territoriales décentralisées”, Action Against Impunity for Human Rights (ACIDH), Lubumbashi, April 2015. Hide Footnote During Kabila’s first elected term (2006-2011), the government made incremental progress adopting laws needed to implement découpage and decentralization. However, it rolled back provincial political autonomy in the 2011 constitutional reform. Decentralization and découpage reappeared more prominently with adoption of the “Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement” (PSCF), in February 2013 and during the national consultations organized in September-October that year.[fn]Revision of Articles 197 and 198 allows the central government to intervene directly in the provinces’ political functioning, including to dissolve an assembly and dismiss a governor. The PSCF is an agreement by DRC and its neighbors to implement better national and regional policies, stimulated by the crisis over the Rwandan backed M23 insurgency. Crisis Group commentary, “Lubumbashi Takeover: Governance by Substitution”, 15 April 2013. Following a significant reshuffle in December 2014, the government pushed through legislation needed to implement découpage, which became a legal reality in July 2015.[fn]“Discours sur l’état de la nation”, Cabinet du Président de la République, 15 December 2015. Laws 015/004 (28 February 2015) and 015/006 (25 March 2015) fixed the 26 provinces’ borders. Six provinces were broken up (Bandundu, Equateur, Kasai-Occidental, Kasai-Oriental, Katanga and Orientale), one renamed (Bas Congo, now Congo-Central) and four left untouched, producing a total of 26. Katanga was split into Haut-Katanga, Haut-Lomami, Lualaba and Tanganyika provinces. Some new provinces had previously been territorial entities of the colonial state; others were former districts created after independence.

There are widespread concerns about implementation, particularly the lack of financial and material resources for both the transfer of responsibilities and the financial viability of the new provinces, as well as the short timeframe to deal with the issues ahead of the elections and the overall financial viability of many of the entities. There are also border issues and disputed areas, which could catalyze conflict, in
particular if long delayed local and provincial elections are finally organized.[fn]“La tribune de Muzito: la RDC, un Etat sans budget”, Le Phare, 6 April 2015. For an overview, see “DRC: The Impact”, op. cit.

Following the July 2015 change, existing executive authorities (governors and their ministers) initially remained to manage affairs, though with severely weakened authority and unclear legal status, which led to near paralysis in some provincial administrations.[fn]Crisis Group analyst interviews in a former capacity, governor, provincial assembly members and electoral commission staff, Kisangani, October 2015.  

Delays in electing the new governors in the second half of 2015 led the central government to ask the Constitutional Court in September for permission to appoint special commissioners to administer the new provinces, in effect suspending the authority of the governors and assemblies.[fn]“Elections en RDC: les retards s’accumulent”, RFI, 26 August 2015. Crisis Group interview, parliamentary official, Lubumbashi, March 2016; “La Cour Constitutionnelle tranche”, L’Avenir, 9 September 2015; “L’arrêt de la Cour Constitutionnelle en exclusivité et en intégralité”, Le Soft, 14 September 2015; Marcel Wetch’okonda, “Quelques commentaires sur l’arrêt de la Cour Constitutionnelle sur les élections des gouverneurs et vice-gouverneurs”, Congo Siasa, 19 September 2015. 

Critics suspected that the government always intended this, using a compliant CENI and Constitutional Court to impose commissioners, partly in order to establish initial control over the process and exert greater influence over the deputies responsible for electing the governors. It reportedly also tasked the ANR to follow the dynamics in the provincial assemblies. An opposition coalition unsuccessfully challenged the special commissioners’ nomination at the constitutional court, arguing their function had no basis in law and calling on the public to disobey them.[fn]Crisis Group email correspondence, Kinshasa-based official, July 2015; Kyungu Wa Kumwanza, head of the Katangan provincial assembly, denounced this: “Kyungu Wa Kumwanza furieux dénonce les intimidations de l’ANR sur les députés”, YouTube, 23 July 2015. Dynamique de l’Opposition Congolaise, Déclaration, 1 November 2015. 

The announcement in February 2016 that gubernatorial elections for the 21 new provinces would be held on 26 March came as a surprise.[fn]Crisis Group interview, Kinshasa-based official, March 2016. These are indirect, by the existing provincial assembly members elected in 2006. 97 individuals registered as candidates, but 21 were barred for a variety of legal reasons, including many who posed the greatest threat to the majority.[fn]CENI and later the courts accepted the majority’s request to revoke the candidacy of several of its members who had registered as independents, as well as those of several opposition candidates. The request is in a 23 February letter by Aubin Minaku, the majority’s secretary general, to the CENI, on file with Crisis Group. Crisis Group interviews, UN official and diplomats, Lubumbashi, March 2016. For the initial list of candidates, see Annexe à la décision N°006/CENI/BUR/16 du 28/02/2016, 28 February 2016; and for the final list, Communiqué de presse N°008/CENI-RDC/16, 11 March 2016. In former Katanga, candidates for the ruling majority, Richard Muyej and Richard Ngoy Kitangala, had only recently been appointed commissioners. The only major candidate linked to the opposition allowed to stand in Katanga was Christian Mwando Nsimba in Tanganyika.[fn]A member of the G7 and very close to Moïse Katumbi. Still, the majority remained nervous, and Aubin Minaku, its secretary general, was sent to Lubumbashi two weeks before the vote, to drum up provincial deputies’ support for pro-government candidates. The majority won all four governorships in Katanga.[fn]Crisis Group interview,

In total, the majority succeeded in getting fifteen of its 21 candidates elected in the new provinces. In the former Orientale and Equateur provinces, several independent (often disguised opposition) candidates were elected. One of these, José Makila, Sud-Ubangui governor and Labor Alliance for Development (ATD) party leader, then co-founded the AR coalition supporting Moïse Katumbi in May 2016. Overall the majority achieved its goal but was widely criticised for manipulation. A Catholic Church report was particularly critical of the CENI.[fn]The ATD is an offshoot from the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC). “Election des gouverneurs et vice-gouverneurs: La CENCO dénonce la violation de la liberté et du secret de vote”, La Tempête des Tropiques, 29 April 2016.

B. Katanga: A Particular Case

In a brief provincial assembly session on 16 July 2015, Katanga province officially ended, though its administration remained to manage affairs until appointment of the special commissioners. Just before the break-up, the central government reorganized several state and parastatal structures, including the security forces, to reflect the new territorial organization. Other parts of the administration, such as taxation, remain unchanged.[fn]“Ce que Kyungu et Katumbi ont dit le dernier jour du Katanga”, YouTube, 16 July 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPt775jOAfE&feature=youtu.be. On 14 July 2015, the president signed decrees adapting the national police and immigration command structures to reflect the new provinces. Crisis Group interview, FEC representative, Lubumbashi, March 2016.

1. The debate

While the principle of bringing government closer to the people, popular across the country, also has support in Katanga, several of its politicians, mostly in the (new) opposition, and citizens alike have been particularly critical of découpage and fearful of its outcome. The former province has a strong sense of identity derived from its wealth, history (including brief independence) and powerful, ethnic-based “cultural associations” that permeate its political, cultural and economic life.[fn]“Arguments pour le découpage, Honorable Kansabala”, Le Rassembleur Magazine, no. 12 (undated), Lubumbashi. Erik Gobbers, “Ethnic associations in Katanga province, the Democratic Republic of Congo: multi-tier system, shifting identities and the relativity of autochthony”, The Journal of Modern African Studies, vol. 54, no. 2 (2016), pp. 211-236. Many worry découpage is intended to break its demographic, economic and political weight and weaken Katangan identity.[fn]This was the opinion of traditional chiefs who met in Lubumbashi, 2-16 December 2006. “Le découpage territorial ... oui mais ...”, and “Arguments contre le découpage, Monseigneur Fulgence Muteba”, Le Rassembleur Magazine, no. 12, (undated), Lubumbashi. 150,000, including several “notables”, signed a petition to parliament opposing découpage. Several prominent people, including then Governor Katumbi and Provincial Assembly Speaker Kyungu, spoke against découpage, threatened to organize petitions to reunify the province and argued for keeping “Katanga” in the names of the new provinces.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, UNAFEC politicians, Lubumbashi May-June 2015; Moïse Katumbi, Brussels, October 2015; “Katanga: Gabriel Kyungu lance une pétition contre le découpage territorial”, Radio Okapi, 12 January 2015; “Présidentielle en RDC, redécoupage: entretien exclusif avec Moïse Katumbi”, RFI, 16 March 2015. In a highly symbolic act, two weeks before the province’s division, the two leaders inaugurated a monument symbolizing Katangan identity. “Identité katangaise ou nostalgie du Katanga finissant”, Tout Lubumbashi, 6 July 2015. This echoed earlier acts, such as when Katumbi erected a statue of secessionist leader Moïse Tshombé in Lubumbashi’s main square, also renamed in his honor. “Inauguration à Lubumbashi d’une fontaine à la place Moïse Tshombe”, ACP, 6 June 2010. “Interview with Moïse Katumbi”, Le Rassembleur Magazine, no. 12, (undated), Lubumbashi, pp. 38-39. Critics suggested découpage was designed to provoke secessionist sentiment, possibly to provide a pretext for crackdowns or further electoral delays; that it was part of the government’s glissement strategy; and that it was designed to cut the ground under Katumbi’s feet as he emerged as a serious challenger to Kabila. Several noted it considerably increased executive positions, thus scope for patronage, which the central government is determined to control.[fn]For the perceptions of découpage, Crisis Group interviews, Congolese politician, Brussels, October 2015; Katangan elite and
Lubumbashi based-analyst, Lubumbashi, May-June 2015; former community leader, Lubumbashi, March 2016. See also the September 2015 G7 letter and Katumbi’s declaration. Despite the criticism and fear, the process was implemented without major problems.

2. Kolwezi and Lualaba province

There is considerable support for the current process among elites in the poorer of the new Katangan provinces: Tanganyika, Haut-Lomami and Lualaba, where découpage is seen as important for development. Despite having voted massively for Kabila in 2011, these areas have long been neglected by the central government.[fn] Critics point to the contrast between the extensive farms and imposing villa owned by the president just outside Lubumbashi and the dilapidated state of his home region of Manono, in north Katanga, which was devastated during the 1998-2003 war. Crisis Group interviews Lubumbashi, June-May 2015 and March 2016. An often-heard criticism is “we have been forgotten”. Crisis Group interviews, Katangan elite, Lubumbashi, May-June 2015 and Lubumbashi residents, March 2016. See also Kris Berwouts, “Bateau sans boussole. Le régime Kabila en perte de cohésion”, Observatoire des Grands Lacs en Afrique, November 2014. Especially in Lualaba, which now includes the mineral-rich former Kolwezi district, and Tanganyika provinces, many see découpage as an opportunity to assert rights and regain control of “their resources”. In Tanganyika, the civil society platform SOCITANG pushed provincial legislators in 2012 to have their then district become a découpage pilot project, pointing to the supposed gains made by previously created new Congolese provinces.[fn] Crisis Group interviews, political party and civil society representatives, academics, and diplomat, Lubumbashi and Kolwezi, May-June 2015. Société Civile du Tanganika (SOCITANG), memorandum, 17 November 2012; Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives, Lubumbashi, Kolwezi, May-June 2015; Lubumbashi-based analyst, October 2015; “La population de Kolwezi appelée à la paix et à la tolérance”, ACP, 4 June 2013.

Kolwezi, the country’s richest mining area, is one of only five districts (of 26 before the 2006 constitution) not to have become a province. As a major mining center, its place in the new order is very sensitive. Locally, there is tension between those of Katangan origin and immigrant populations (particularly from Kasai), and between the “indigenous” Sanga and groups from the former Lualaba district, the “Tshota” or “G5” (regrouping the Tshokwe, Rund, Minungu, Ndembo and Luvale communities). A major Sanga frustration is that members of these other communities hold most of the important provincial positions and have better employment opportunities in mining companies.[fn] Crisis Group interviews, Lubumbashi, Kolwezi, May-June 2015; Lubumbashi-based analyst, October 2015; “La population de Kolwezi appelée à la paix et à la tolérance”, ACP, 4 June 2013.

In 2009, the Kolwezi-based Lwanzo Lwa Mikuba cultural association, representing the Sanga, submitted a petition to parliament with 100,000 signatures, requesting a constitutional amendment allowing the district to become a province.[fn] This repeated a call in October 2013: “Kolwezi réclame son statut de province”, La Croisette, 29 October 2013. On 8 December 2014, the association organized a protest in Kolwezi in which one person was reportedly killed. A last attempt in parliament, during the discussions on the January 2015 law fixing the future provinces’ borders, also failed. As a second option, instead of being integrated in Lualaba, Lwanzo would have preferred to integrate Kolwezi in Haut-Katanga. This reflects the close ties between this community and the Bemba, which together form the “Espace Sempya-Lwanzo”. [fn] “Treated like criminals, DRC’s race to silence dissent in the run up to elections”, Amnesty International, 2015, p. 15. “Des députés du Katanga désapprouvent le rattachement de Kolwezi à la province de Lualaba”, Radio Okapi, 13 January 2015. Erik Gobbers, op. cit., pp. 229-230.

The central government has clamped down on these calls for a new province and other elements of dissent. It arrested the Lwanzo leader and former legislator Vano Kalembe Kiboko in Kinshasa in December 2014 and sentenced him to three years in prison for inciting racial hatred and tribalism, after he railed against the Kolwezi’s planned incorporation in Lualaba province at a Lubumbashi press conference.[fn] Kiboko also clearly opposed any change in the constitution allowing a third presidential term. Copy of speech on file with Crisis Group. Crisis Group interview, Congolese opposition legislator, Kinshasa, June 2015; “Kinshasa: l’ex député Vano Kiboko condamné à 3 ans de prison”, Radio Okapi, 16 September 2015. Kiboko was released from prison on 5 May 2016.

During April-May 2015, several meetings to prepare for creation of the new Lualaba province were organized, including one initiated by the ex-interior minister, later special commissioner and Lualaba governor, Richard Muyey. At a May 2015 forum in Kolwezi community, representatives tried to reach a consensus on maintaining stability in the new province, including by carefully balancing community

According to several members of the new province’s elite, the priority should be development of infrastructure linking the mining areas in and around Kolwezi more directly to export routes, thus avoiding Lubumbashi. A particular need is to refurbish railways linked to the recently rehabilitated Benguela corridor in Angola.[fn]The “Lobito Corridor” project is included in the “Investments opportunities brief (IOB) Consultative Process: Key findings and recommendations”, ICGLR, Office of the UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, 2015, p. 32. The Congolese side of the railroad is not operational. The recently rehabilitated Angolan section is partially operational. Zambia has started work to connect to the Lobito corridor. Crisis Group interview, businessperson, Brussels, September 2015.Hide Footnote A second would be to repair the Kolwezi to Solwezi, Zambia road. Plans have come up against regional rivalries within the former province, however, with business elites in Kolwesi and Lubumbashi backing rival road corridors. Simmering disputes over transport links, vitally important given the money to be made from mineral transport, reflect the high stakes involved in delimiting new provinces and hurt the business climate, adding further insecurities to the economic challenges.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, civil society representatives Kolwezi, June 2015; former Governor Katumbi, Accra, November 2015; businessperson, Brussels, September 2015 and FEC official, Lubumbashi, March 2016. For an overview of the first Kolwezi-Solwezi road initiatives, see Jeroen Cuvelier, “The impact of the global financial crisis on mining in Katanga”, op. cit., pp. 17-19; and “Une question d’hégémonie: Du contentieux au sujet de la route Kolwezi-Solwezi”, Fragment 1, September 2009.

IV. The Region’s Rising Tensions

A. Frustration

There is a growing political dimension to the economic frustrations felt by Katangan elites and population that feeds into tensions with the center. It is based on the strong belief among elites that, despite their many internal divisions, national power should remain in their hands following November’s electoral deadline. Local elites, especially Lubakat, grumble about receiving too little attention.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, Katangan elites, Lubumbashi, May-June 2015. See also “Memo à l’attention des Notables Luba du Katanga”, Lubumbashi, 25 January 2014. They say control in Kinshasa would quell or harness dormant but real Katangan separatism.[fn]Crisis Group interview, political leader, Lubumbashi, May 2015.Hide Footnote With Kabila’s term ending and his popular support declining, fewer of the region’s elites believe that sticking with him and the majority as currently configured will allow them to keep power – though this has not yet reached a point of no return. In past months, the majority has invested considerable attention on the four new provinces,[fn]In the run-up to celebrations of national independence day in Kindu (Maniema) in 2016, Kabila spent several weeks in the ex-province, attending the conference of provincial governors in Lubumbashi and inaugurating several infrastructure projects in his home province, Tanganyika. Meanwhile, other provinces want to rebalance politics by transferring power to another region – the east-west cleavage is particularly potent – reflecting the principle of “la géopolitique”, wherein regional quotas and ethnic identity form a crucial part of Congolese politics.

The regime has reached out to provinces and elites beyond Katanga, both to reward them for having voted for Kabila in 2011 and to achieve better geographical balance. Most prominent among these provinces is Maniema, just north of the new Tanganyika province and home to Kabila’s mother, Sifa Mahanya, which twice voted heavily for the president.[fn]Aside from Kabila’s mother, key Maniema actors are Denis Kalume Numbi, General François Olenga, Kabila’s military staff chief, Emmanuel Shadari, PPRD parliamentary group chair, and Pierre Lumbi, Movement for Social Renewal (MSR) party leader and ex-national security adviser. It is also Prime Minister Matata Ponyo’s base.

Ponyo is one of three PPRD politicians competing to lead the majority and possibly succeed the president. The other two are Aubin Minaku (Kwilu), the parliament’s speaker and majority’s secretary general, and Evariste Boshab (Kasai-Occidental), deputy prime minister and interior minister. Katangans note that none are from their province but may take some solace from the installation of Henri Mova Sakanyi as PPRD secretary general.[fn]Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Kinshasa, June 2015. Mova Sakanyi was ambassador in Brussels, 2009-2015.Hide Footnote Though he has a small political base, he has quickly gained prominence and concentrated on refurbishing the PPRD’s machine.
These disputes between Katanga and the center have played into schisms in the majority over the last year. The G7 group of parties split from the majority after publishing letters between February and September 2015 criticizing the functioning of the majority and underlining damage done by the ill-prepared, under-resourced découpage. The final letter, sealing the split, called for respect of constitutional deadlines, essentially a demand that Kabila step down in December.[fn]Letters of 22 February, 5 March and 14 September 2015 on file with Crisis Group. Crisis Group interview Congolese politician, Kinshasa, March 2016; “RDC: le G7 se positionné dans l'opposition”, Radio Okapi, 10 October 2015.Hide Footnote The G7 includes the important Katangan parties UNAFEC, the National Union of Democrats and Federalists (UNADEF) and Avenir du Congo (ACO).[fn]The other parties in the G7 are the MSR, previously the second largest party in the majority; the Alliance for the Renewal of Congo (ARC) (Olivier Kamitatu), the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) (José Endundu) and the Solidarity Movement for Democracy and Development (MSDD) (Christophe Lutundula).Hide Footnote

Except for the weakened PPRD, only a few remaining parties in the majority have a significant following in Katanga, including Union for the Development of Congo (UDCO), now led by Jean-Claude Masango, and Health Minister Félix Kabange Numbi’s Awakening of Consciousness for Work (ECT).[fn]Six of seven UDCO national legislators are from the old province and eight of the ECT’s ten.

Hans Hoebeke Interview on CCTV Africa

Crisis Group’s Hans Hoebeke talks to CCTV Africa’s Fahmida on the situation in DRC, 25 January 2015 CCTV AFRICA

Some of these political frustrations have spilled onto the street. Lubumbashi saw protests in January 2015, and some incidents took place at Katumbi’s court case. These street protests have not reached Kinshasa levels, but they may become a more important factor as the electoral/constitutional crisis unfolds.[fn]A future Crisis Group paper will discuss street protests in DRC and government reactions.

Armed Groups and Possible Violence

Armed groups have recently been active in Katanga, though they do not have overt political platforms, and their generally low-profile operations are not as extensive as those in the Kivus. In some cases, their activities are probably linked to the elite frustrations outlined above and the secessionist sentiments they feed. Many are remnants from the civil war, when the region’s north was partly occupied by RCD-Goma and Rwandan troops, and local self-defense groups were mobilized in reaction.[fn]For more, see Crisis Group Report, Katanga, op. cit. Tanganyika province, areas of Haut-Katanga and Haut-Lomami continue to suffer from the activities of some Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and Mai Mai Yakutumba, both principally based in the Kivus.[fn]For a comprehensive analysis of Katangan armed groups and conflicts, see Georges Berghézan, “Groupes armés au Katanga, épicentre de multiples conflits”, GRIP, 9 June 2015; Michelle Brown and Michael Boyce, “DR Congo: Katanga in crisis”, Refugees International, 26 June 2014. There is also a conflict between the pygmy (Twa) and Bantu (Luba).[fn]For more, see “Nord-Katanga: Crise identitaire sur fond d’émancipation: conflit Bantous-Pygmiées”, Le Rassembleur Magazine, no. 10, (undated), Lubumbashi, pp. 35-37; “DRC Congo: Ethnic Militias Attack Civilians in Katanga”, Human Rights Watch, 11 August 2015.

One network of armed groups with overt links to Katangan identity issues is the Bakata Katanga (“Cut off Katanga” in Swahili), led by Kyungu Mutanga, better known as Gédéon. It claims to defend the region against exploitation by Kinshasa and reportedly has ties with small secessionist organisations.[fn]Gédéon, then leader of Mai Mai Gédéon, surrendered to MONUSCO in 2006 and was arrested. He was sentenced to death in 2009 (the DRC has a moratorium on the death penalty). He escaped in an outbreak of 1,000 prisoners in Lubumbashi in 2011. Crisis Group interview, MONUSCO official, Lubumbashi, June 2015. Groups calling for Katanga’s independence include Coordination pour l’organisation du référendum d’autodéterminat​ion du Katanga (CORAK), Congrès des Peuples du Katanga (CPK) and Conseil National de Transition du Katanga (CNTK). It is held responsible for most violence in what is known in Katanga as the “death triangle”.An informally named area that straddles Pweto, Haut-Katanga and Tanganyika provinces, as well as part of Malemba Nkulu in Haut-Lomami province, which suffered particularly badly in the second Congo war (1998-2003).Hide Footnote It was particularly active in 2013, when, in March, many of its fighters marched into Lubumbashi. It is mainly present in Katanga’s center but was also reported near Sakania, on the Zambian border.[fn]“Lubumbashi Takeover”, op. cit. Crisis Group interview, MONUSCO official, Lubumbashi, June 2015.
The Bakata Katanga were allegedly connected to politicians with national prominence, such as oil minister, former defense minister and now Katanga Governor Aimé Ngoy Mukena; former Central Bank Governor Jean-Claude Masangu; and, in particular, John Numbi.\footnote{Rapport sur le procès des crimes graves commis au Nord-Katanga par l’ex-ministre des Hydrocarbures dans l’embarras vis-à-vis de Kabila, Jeune Afrique, 7 December 2015.}

In mid-2014, MONUSCO and FARDC scaled-up operations against the Bakata Katanga, bringing some security improvement. IDP’s decreased, particularly in Pweto. Kabila also reshuffled command positions within FARDC and the military regions, notably appointing his cousin, Jean-Claude Kifwa, to head the wider south-eastern military zone and Philémon Yav, a former “Katangan Tiger”, as Katanga military region commander.\footnote{Rapport mensuel Protection Monitoring Katanga, UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), January 2015; “RDC: Katanga Rape hebdomadaire du 29 juillet 2015”, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 29 July 2015. “Reshuffle in the Congolese army – who bono?”, Christophvogel.net, 28 September 2014. “RDC: Philémon Yav, le Tigre de Kabila”, Jeune Afrique, 7 May 2015. Crisis Group Report, Katanga, op. cit., p. 6. Dozens of Bakata Katanga have surrendered, giving up weapons. However, few in Lubumbashi believe the group has been defeated; there is fear some politicians keep it in readiness for possible future need.\footnote{Georges Berghezan, “Katanga: le calme avant la tempête?”, GRIP, 15 March 2016.}

These are not the only army groups that should be a concern. On 30 December 2013, followers of the self-proclaimed prophet Mukungubila (from the same area as Kabila and an unsuccessful candidate in the 2006 election) attacked the state TV station (RTNC), the defense ministry and the national airport, all in Kinshasa.\footnote{Around the same time, a group also attacked the airport of Kindu, Maniema province. A few hours later, government troops surrounded the group’s compound in a Lubumbashi residential area and attacked after followers were said to have opened fire. Reportedly several hundred followers were killed, most in Lubumbashi.\footnote{Carnage des adeptes du prophète Joseph Mukungubila Mutombo, Rapport d’enquête, Action Citoyenne pour la Bonne Gouvernance, Centre pour la Justice et la Réconciliation, Humanisme et Droits Humains, Observatoire Congolais pour la Radioactivité, Justicia ASBL, Lubumbashi, 21 January 2014.}
Though the motivation of the attacks is still not entirely clear, they illustrate the potential consequences of unaddressed tensions between Katanga and the center and between Katangan elites. Many observers believe they were an attempt by Lubakat elite to pressure the president and secure their positions in the government and security forces.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, UN officials, diplomats, Kinshasa, March 2014; Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, May, June 2015. Mukungubila published a letter to Kabila on 5 December 2013 attacking his decision to name General Charles Bisengimana Rukira to head the PNC, denouncing Rukira for his supposed Rwandan origins and calling on security services to remove the president. Katumbi expressed support for the president. The failure to address the Bakata Katanga, the opaque nature of the Mukungubila affair and recent accusations against politicians of recruiting or harboring a militia all point to the continued role of unaccountable armed elements in uncertain political times.[fn]“RDC: l’opposant Moïse Katumbi accusé d’avoir recours à des ‘mercenaires’”, RFI, 4 May 2016; “Intégralité de l’entretien du Président Joseph Kabila avec les notables Katangais”, YouTube, 6 January 2015.

C. Moïse Katumbi’s Collision with the President

Former Katanga Governor Moïse Katumbi makes remarks during a meeting with U.S. government officials in Lubumbashi on 14 July 2015. USAID/Kaukab Jhumra Smith

Moïse Katumbi Chapwe is a Bemba from Kashobwe in Haut-Katanga province. When Mobutu was overthrown in 1997, he went into exile in Zambia, where he was close to the then President Frederick Chiluba and successful in business, especially transport. Joseph Kabila’s adviser, Katumba Mwanké, then Katanga’s governor, facilitated his return and remained a close ally and important intermediary with the president until his death in 2011. Katumbi became a Kabila supporter on his return and was elected Katanga governor in 2007 by the votes of 94 of the 102 members in the new provincial assembly.[fn]“Katanga’s new governor: man with a bold plan”, U.S. embassy Kinshasa cable, as published by wikileaks.org/plsusd/cables/07KINSHASA330_a.html. For a comprehensive profile, see Jean Omasombo, Biographie des acteurs de la Troisième République, CEP, Kinshasa, CERDAP, Lubumbashi, and Africa Museum Tervuren (Brussels, 2009). Katumba Mwanké, governor of Katanga, 1998–2001, was from the same region as Katumbi, whom he described as “certainly one of the better hopes our country has today” in his Ma Vérité (Nice, 2013, posthumous), pp. 127-129. Katumbi’s only opponent for the governorship was Pasteur Ngoy Mulunda (Lubakat), later CENI president (2011-2013) who ran the 2011 elections. He is an atypical Congolese politician, whose private business fortune, from fisheries, mining and transport, gives him an exceptional degree of independence from the central government.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, Kinshasa-based diplomat, June 2015; Lubumbashi, May-June 2015. Companies linked to Katumbi include the trucking firms Hakuna Matata, Muzuri Sana and Habari Kani, the latter a collaboration between Hakuna Matata and TFM. “Millionaire governor gears up for 2016 Congo election bid”, Reuters, 11 August 2015.

Katumbi is a charismatic populist and generally credited with a good record as governor. He is also chairperson of Lubumbashi’s football team, “Tout Puissant Mazembe”, which is an Africa-wide success, and, like many politicians, has close connections to the media, including two TV stations.[fn]The football club gives him a national profile and puts him at the center of a web of business interests. He took over from his Belgium-based brother, Raphaël Katebe Katoto, also a businessperson, who was close to the rebel group cum political party the RCD-Goma, which participated in the peace negotiations in the early 2000s before joining the transitional government, and to the UDPS. Omasombo, Biographie, op. cit., pp. 113-115. The team’s vice president is David Malta Forrest, CEO of the Group Forrest International, a major economic actor in Katanga. Nyota TV and TV Mapendo, linked to Katumbi, had their broadcasting licenses revoked in January 2016. Close media connections are relatively common for politicians. The presidential family has interests in Digitalcongo, and several other Katangan political leaders own or are close to a TV station. Crisis Group interviews Lubumbashi, May-June 2015 and March 2016. These, along with a hands-on style, have made him well-known and popular, in Katanga and beyond. Because the government delayed provincial elections, he was governor for eight years instead of the mandated five. He gained strong support from the province’s elite in this period, including the provincial assembly and particularly its speaker, Gabriel Kyungu.[fn]Crisis Group interview, UNAFEC politician, Lubumbashi, June 2015.

Some have raised conflict of interest questions regarding his business and political roles, but this has generally failed to tarnish his image, in part because of the perception that “since he is already rich, he won’t steal any more”. [fn]Crisis Group interview, Katangan elite, Lubumbashi, May-June 2015. “Ma part
c'est combien?: la formule magique du Katanga ...
”, Le Carnet de Colette Braeckman (blog.lesoir.be), 26 November 2015.

**Hide Footnote**
His tenure coincided with and benefited from the commodity boom, which led to significant infrastructure development in southern Katanga that contrasted, however, with the lack of development elsewhere in the province (see above).

Over the years, the relationship between the charismatic Katumbi and the more introverted Kabila became increasingly difficult. In the run-up to the 2011 elections, a seemingly disillusioned Katumbi announced he would leave politics. His position had come under pressure, as rumors that Zoë Kabila had eyes on the governorship increased and resonated favorably with several prominent northern Katanga Lubakat. But civil society organisations collected a million signatures on a petition imploring Katumbi to stay. A supporting rally a few weeks before the elections also highlighted the strong Katumbi-Kyungu alliance.[fn]“RDC: Moïse Katumbi arrête la politique”, Afrikarabia.com, 17 May 2011. “Les Kabila: de père en fils et de fils en frères? Un Kabila peut-il en cacher deux autres”, Wakati Yetu Wordpress, 21 November 2011. Later Zoë Kabila’s name appeared in particular as possible governor of the new Tanganyika province. “Moise Katumbi Chapwe bat campagne pour le Président Joseph Kabila Kabange”, ACP, 1 November 2011. MONUSCO document, dated 5 November 2011, in possession of Crisis Group.


Kabila reacted during a meeting with the Katangan elite in January 2015, from which Katumbi, Kyungu and Muyambo were absent. Concerning découpage, he argued that opponents had not used all available legal avenues and that the provincial assembly Kyungu headed had not taken a position. He also criticised Kyungu and Katumbi for the province’s lack of social development. Days later, RG units raided the office of JUNAFEC, the youth wing of Kyungu’s party. Kabila also replaced leading customs and tax administration officials in the province to break Katumbi’s network. Muyambo responded, “... it is too late: Katanga is no longer with him [Kabila]”. [fn]“Joseph Kabila réussit son grand oral”, Le Rassembleur Magazine, January 2015, pp. 6-7; “Intégralité de l’entretien du Président Joseph Kabila avec les notables Katangais”, YouTube, 6 January 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHAPBLFk8EA. “La garde présidentielle au siège de l’UNAFEC à la Kenya”, www.katanganews.net, 9 January 2015. In that period, some 40 JUNAFEC members were arrested. “RDC: ce que Joseph Kabila a dit aux Katangais”, Jeune Afrique, 5 January 2015 (Crisis Group translation). Hide Footnote Katumbi remained with the PPRD, but his distance from Kabila was now obvious.[fn]“Fin de la visite de travail du Premier ministre au Katanga”, ACP, 15 January 2015; “Le gouvernement ordonne le remplacement des responsables de la DGDA au Katanga”, Radio Okapi, 13 January 2015. “Présidentielle en RDC, redécoupage: entretien exclusive avec Moïse Katumbi”, RFI, 16 March 2015; “Congrès du PPRD à la FIKIN: Katumbi son absence a été très remarquée du début à la fin”, C-News, 19 May 2015.

Further signs of deteriorating relations came in summer 2015. In June, the government reportedly transferred a general file on corruption to the national prosecutor with suggestions that it implicated Katumbi. This was later denied by the prosecutor, and the president appears to have backed away from levelling corruption allegations for now.[fn]“Kabila clouts Katumbi”, Africa Confidential, 7 August 2015; “Jean Kenge: En rire ou en pleurer?”, Congoresearchgroup.org, 16 July 2015; “RDC: le parquet a reçu une dénonciation, pas une plainte de Joseph Kabila contre des individus”, Radio Okapi, 3 July 2015. “Corruption...

In August 2015, Huit Mulongo, his former chief of cabinet, announced creation of a new platform, the Neo-Conakat, to preserve and promote Katumbi’s ideas.[fn]“Création à Lubumbashi d’une plate-forme dénommée Neo-CONAKAT”, ACP, 16 August 2015. Huit Mulongo, leader of the “Conscience républicaine pour la démocratie et le développement”, spoke out against a constitutional amendment on 28 October 2014. “Huit Mulongo: ‘La révision de la constitution n’est pas opportune’”, Radio Okapi, 28 October 2014. Its reference to Moïse Tshombe’s CONAKAT, which fought for Katangan independence, was remarkable.

Preparing for his new position as a Kabila opponent and with one eye on future elections, Katumbi reached out to international actors and other opposition politicians, including Kamerhe and Tshisekedi.[fn]Crisis Group interview, Congolese politician, Brussels, October 2015. Katumbi reportedly hired a U.S. law firm to facilitate discussions with U.S. policymakers about the 2016 DRC elections. “Millionaire governor gears up”, op. cit. Later, he joined the opposition platform “Citizen Front 2016” and took center stage when he suggested opposition-wide primaries to choose a single opposition candidate. The idea was resisted by other opposition parties, fearful of his wealth and influence. They focused more on guaranteeing credible elections than who would contest them.[fn]Crisis Group interviews, civil society leader and opposition politician, Brussels, February 2016. “Elections – RD Congo – Vital Kamerhe: ‘Nous allons bousculer le pouvoir de Kabila’”, Le Point Afrique, 8 April 2016; “RDC: Katumbi face au défi de la candidature unique”, Afrikarabia.com, 31 March 2016. Since he left the majority, Katumbi has been close to the G7, and several other groups and parties have rallied to him. In May 2016, a new group, the AR, emerged, consisting of a dozen smaller parties, including Mayombo’s SCODE and several affiliated to people close to Katumbi.[fn]Including the National Party for Democracy and Development (PND), for which Katumbi’s brother, Abraham Kitanika Soriano, is a candidate for future provincial elections and the Conservateurs de la nature et démocrates (CONADE), a new party led by the brother of Katumbi’s political adviser, Salomon Idi Kalonda Della. He has also been underlining his links to the Catholic Church and received public support from Monseigneur Fulgence Muteba, bishop of Kilwa-Kasenga, his north Haut-Katanga birthplace.[fn]“Mgr. Fulgence Muteba commente la démission de Moïse Katumbi”, Radio Okapi, 7 October 2015. See also “Loi de programmation: des réactions de rejet”, Forum des As, 5 March 2015.

On 30 March 2016, the G7 formally asked Katumbi to be a presidential candidate.[fn]Tweet by @G7_RDC, 30 March 2016. Realizing that his attempt to inspire broader opposition unity had not worked, Katumbi declared his desire to stand on 4 May. On the same day, Justice Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwamba announced an investigation into Katumbi for allegedly employing mercenaries.

On 8-9 June, some 100 Congolese opposition politicians and civil society representatives met in Genval, Belgium. Katumbi was absent, but several close advisers and his brother, Katebe Katoto, attended. The meeting, convened by Tshisekedi, led to creation of the “Rassemblement”, led by Tshisekedi, in close partnership with Katebe Katoto. It allows Katumbi to operate in close association to the historic opposition leader.[fn]Crisis Group email correspondence with diplomatic sources, Nairobi, June 2016; Crisis Group interviews, Congolese analyst, Kinshasa July 2016.

The defections of Katumbi and the G7 have considerably weakened the majority in Katanga and especially Lubumbashi, where it has never had to contend with serious opposition. The government’s reaction has included suppressing public events by opposition groups, closing public space and shutting down media. In early April, the army paraded tanks and armored vehicles in Lubumbashi.[fn]“RDC: l’opposition harcelée et muselée au Katanga”, Afrikarabia.com, 1 February 2016. “Troops and heavy weaponry deployment highlights increased civil unrest, war risk in DRC’s Katanga region”, IHS Jane’s Country Risk Daily Report, 15 April 2016. The government reportedly blocked Katumbi’s plane from using the city’s airport, pushed members of the G7 and officials close to Katumbi out of administrative positions and intimidated others.[fn]Such as the mayor of Likasi, a Scode member. “Communiqué N°012/JUS/2015 by Justicia Asbl”, 28 October 2015. Another interesting example was a 12 October 2015 letter by the ANR’s Haut-Katanga provincial director to the acting governor requesting he no longer invite UNAFEC and other G7 members to provincial security council meetings, on file with Crisis Group. The central government and PPRD have also reinvigorated attempts to retain support in Katanga, including by encouraging new parties, or factions within existing parties. This included an attempt by the government in early 2016 to hijack the UNAFEC party. However Kyungu was able to produce court documents on 5
February that confirmed his leadership of the party.[fn]Tweets by @AmbHenriMova, PPRD secretary general, 18-20 October 2015. This campaign included issuing new membership cards to PPRD ministers and deputies. “UNAFEC: la destitution de Gabriel Kyungu qualifiée de non statutaire”, Radio Okapi, 25 September 2015; another example of interference in the internal affairs of parties was when the interior minister recognized Patrick Bologna, a legislator close to the government, as national president of the ACO, whose leader is Danny Banza. Legal document, dated 5 February 2016, referring to court proceedings dated 10 July 2015, confirming Kyungu as the president of the UNAFEC party, on file with Crisis Group. The risk of escalation with UNAFEC remains high.

Both Kabila and Katumbi are mobilizing and broadening their support. Kabila’s Katanga base seems concentrated with the Lunda-Ruund (Lualaba) and the Lubakat elite, in particular those from Malemba Nkulu. Katumbi is best established in Haut-Katanga and Kolwezi, but also has important allies in Tanganyika (Mwando Nsimba and the UNADEF), as well as some Lubakat allies, in particular Kyungu. His outreach to other Lubakat leaders seems not to have worked so far, and it remains to be seen how much découpage will reconfigure the political allegiances and dynamics between elites and the general population.[fn]Lualaba leaders from Lunda-Ruund include Diemu Chikez, Richard Mujey and Kalev Mutond. Crisis Group email correspondence, Katangan analyst, August 2015.

Demonstrations and violence escalated in April and May 2016, when the government accused Katumbi of endangering national security. He was injured in a protest outside the Lubumbashi courthouse and eventually flew abroad for medical treatment, an avoidance of all-out confrontation that may have suited both sides. He was subsequently convicted in a civil dispute over ownership of property, but the ruling and three-year prison sentence can be challenged, because he was convicted in absentia.[fn]Crisis Group interview, Congolese lawyer, Kinshasa, July 2016. “RDC: l’opposant Katumbi condamné à 3 ans de prison pour un conflit immobilier”, Radio Okapi, 22 June 2016. The presiding judge later said she came under political pressure to deliver this verdict; “RD Congo: une juge de Lubumbashi affirme avoir subi des pressions pour faire condamner Katumbi”, Le Congolais, 27 July 2016. Nevertheless, the government has strong cards to play and is likely to continue to bring legal cases to keep him on the defensive.

The population of Katanga and other opposition parties have stayed quiet through this round of confrontation, but no one thinks the problems have been resolved. Katumbi does not have old links to armed groups, so the high level of political tension is not linked to the outbreaks of armed violence described above, though some of his allies, in particular UNAFEC, could be involved in street clashes. But relations between government and opposition are vital indicators of the health of the political system and thus of the country’s fragile stability.

V. The Way Ahead: Repairing Kinshasa-Katanga Relations

The fundamental breakdown of trust between Kinshasa and many Katangan elite and ordinary citizens reflects countrywide discontent with the regime as it tries to delay elections in ever more inventive ways. It also reveals very Katangan concerns about identity, power and entitlement. The confusion around découpage and electoral delays appears intentional. Necessary legislation for the effective functioning and budgetary survival of the new provinces has stalled. In October 2015, the government froze transfer of national tax revenue to the provinces and other decentralized entities and announced an audit of all provincial budgets, which may take a long time and create further crises. All this adds to a growing feeling that decentralization gains and Katangan identity more widely are under attack.

The breakdown in trust and rising tensions risk triggering violent escalation. The concerns are at local, provincial and national levels. The most significant danger arises when the various tensions feed off each other, as appears to have happened with the 2013 Mukungubila incident that triggered violence in both Kinshasa and Katanga. An indication that the government is worried about such dynamics is the increased military presence in Haut-Katanga and Lualaba provinces. Particularly telling are the deployment of armored vehicles near Lubumbashi and reinforcements in Kolwezi. As the electoral deadline looms, government and opposition are increasingly focused on their fight to take or retain power and adopting a zero-sum approach. Real dialogue and government commitment not to manipulate the constitution for political purposes would contribute to de-escalating tensions across the country.

This situation is hardly promising for solving problems at local level, but it makes finding a way forward ever more important. Officials and elites at the local level have an interest in sustainable, credible
structures to deal with the many community tensions that will arise from découpage, including disputes over “non-native” rights and political and economic arguments between new provinces. These are most likely when local and provincial elections are organized. Responsible leadership is needed from cultural and community leaders and authorities. At the least, national authorities must allow space for local reconciliation initiatives and not take actions that might exacerbate problems. Politicians on all sides must desist from politicizing identity to shore up support bases.

The approaching elections necessitate further local action to deal with armed groups. Use of such groups to further political ambitions continues, in Katanga as well as the worse affected Kivus, despite fourteen years of official peace. However, while there has been some serious violence in Katanga over the last five years, and there is reason to believe the armed groups remain a threat, the frequency and intensity of incidents do not yet indicate an explosive situation. Where possible, disarmament and demobilization should be carried out, though this needs to be carefully considered and done case by case, so as to not inflame tensions or create perceptions that some communities are being unfairly treated. Ultimately, dealing with armed groups in Katanga, as elsewhere in the country, is a political issue, and steps should be taken to discourage politicians from manipulating them for their purposes, including through monitoring and exposing their activities.

The UN, through MONUSCO, has an important role. Its presence in Katanga, though limited, is being beefed-up to deal with a possible upsurge in violence if political tensions continue to rise. While there are limits to what it can do when national forces confront their own citizens, MONUSCO should continue reinforcing its police component in urban centres, to help with monitoring Congolese police and military in case of urban unrest and to provide security for political offices and human rights monitors.[fn]Planning is underway at MONUSCO to boost early-warning capacity for election-related violence by creating mobile teams to monitor human rights and political issues in Lubumbashi (in addition to Kinshasa and Goma). The Mission is reviewing its military and police deployments in areas at high risk of election-related violence and enhancing its ability to protect UN personnel in urban centres, including Lubumbashi, by developing evacuation plans and deploying helicopters and armored personnel carriers. “Report of the Secretary-General on [MONUSCO]”, UNSC S/2016/579, 28 June 2016. Operations by the FARDC against armed groups should be supported in line with experiences elsewhere in the country.

Rising political tensions in Katanga and the country at large coincide with a slump in the mineral export dependent economy. Major export prices are not expected to increase in the near future, leaving little margin to raise revenue other than by tackling corruption and increasing efficiency, but as political competition is patronage based, there is an ever more desperate fight over a shrinking cake. The resulting drop in the budget, cut 22 per cent in 2016 to little over $7 billion, will considerably affect the national government’s capacity to maintain the previously inadequate levels of funding to the provinces. It also dispels hope of quickly operationalizing the equalization fund, so the disparities between provinces will remain. Nowhere are the problems as stark as in former Katanga, whose new landlocked provinces of Tanganyika and Haut-Lamami are among DRC’s poorest, while Haut Katanga and Lualaba are among the richest.[fn]Government expenditure in 2015 was $4.5 billion, including a $300 million deficit. Crisis Group interview, development official, Kinshasa, March 2016. “DRC: The Impact”, op. cit. The details are beyond this report’s scope, but initiatives on agriculture, energy supply, infrastructure and diversification to alleviate the immediate impact and remedy structural economic and developmental problems are vitally important to lower political resentment and prevent or slow armed groups’ recruitment.

After ten years of tentative decentralization, which at least shifted some power to provincial assemblies and administrations, recent moves by Kinshasa have reversed the trend. Foreshadowing its probable approach in national elections, the majority has deployed all means at its disposal to ensure that nearly all provincial authorities are subject to its command. This adds to Kinshasa’s dominant position when handing out largesse in the provinces, which, even when done through Katangan politicians and officials, can fuel local resentments.

It is vital that the government makes the province-center financial relationship far more transparent. While provincial administrations’ absorption capacity may prevent the full immediate application of constitutional and legal decentralization provisions, progress is important so that provinces
are eventually able to receive entitled resources. This should be in conjunction with a financial monitoring mechanism, so that decentralization does not simply equate to decentralization of corruption. The national audit office (Cour des Comptes) is mandated to take this role but is largely neutered by the president's office. A more empowered audit office, with better civil society monitoring of financial flows, could help defuse province-center tensions. Again, the national political climate does not currently lend itself to such progress, but these issues should not be ignored if a better balance is to be found.

It is no exaggeration that electoral preparations and the government's actions to stay in power are fundamental threats to national cohesion and stability. Katanga, because of regime ties and its disproportionate economic weight, is one of the key battlegrounds, along with major urban centres such as Kinshasa, Goma and Kisangani. The lack of effective development, in particular in its north, and competing individual ambitions have pushed the Katangan elite into a dangerously polarized position. With resources distributed along patronage networks, it is determined to either keep a grip on central power (a determination potentially at odds with national democracy) or keep more resources at the provincial level. There is a danger that politicians will increasingly play the separatist card, expressed initially by desire to "reunify" in order to pressure the center. Support for Katangan identity is not inherently illegitimate, and prospect of a strong separatist movement is currently remote, but the risk is that politicians will mobilize armed groups and networks to manipulate separatist sentiment for their political ends.

Katumbi's declared presidential candidacy further escalated tensions from the provincial to national level. Several provincial political leaders have rallied to his camp, but Kabila retains strong Lubakat support, as well as a base in the new Lualaba province. Whether Katumbi and Kabila will ever contest an election head to head depends on future turns in the unfolding political drama, but if events since Katumbi announced his candidacy are an indication, the battle would be hard fought. Even now, the confrontation is likely to raise tensions, not just between province and center, which are connected by multiple overlapping networks, but also by shifting elite alliances.

VI. Conclusion

To move the electoral, financial and political issues forward constructively and put in place transitional arrangements for the now inevitable delay of the November 2016 polls requires a minimum of trust between the main parties, a more coherent opposition and a step away from winner takes all politics.[fn]Moncrieff, "The reluctance of Joseph Kabila to cede power", op. cit. Genuine, credible dialogue is needed, which should include but not be limited to a formal national dialogue. As elsewhere in the vast country, the risks of unpredictable deterioration and renewed violence are real in Katanga. Now is the time to head them off.

The UN and Congo's other regional and wider international partners need to take the risks more seriously and use their shrinking leverage more effectively. MONUSCO should reinforce its police and human rights monitoring in Katanga; donors should consider more support for local bodies that monitor activities of both state security forces and armed groups. Though the government will try hard to keep the international community out of its relations with the new provinces, mediation efforts to bring the main parties in political disputes together should keep the subject on the table. The stakes are high, as the progress achieved in DRC since 2006 could quickly evaporate, and the country, still hosting the UN's largest peacekeeping mission, could descend into a new, deep crisis reminiscent of the late 1990's."

ICG, Cedric Barnes and Zakaria Yusuf, "Somalia's Al-Shabaab Down but Far from Out," June 27, 2016, June 27, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/authors/cedric-barnes/, commented, "Somalia's militant group, Al-Shabaab, has often defied its adversaries' claims that it is in decline. In recent months, however, the movement has suffered setbacks, including territorial losses, high-ranking commanders killed and defections. The Somali Federal Government (SFG) and its internal, regional and international allies need to be clear-sighted about the reasons for these, and what they can do to stop another Al-Shabaab recovery.

Al-Shabaab's set-backs – and fewer attacks by the movement during the Ramadan holy Muslim month of fasting than in previous years – are the result of three distinct and unrelated factors. First, an enhanced and largely externally directed and funded campaign including drone strikes has eliminated high-profile leaders and diminished its military capacity. Second, some of Somalia's new federal units are demonstrating greater military effectiveness, even if they and the government still rely primarily on clan-based militias. Third, the Islamic State (IS) has challenged Al-Shabaab's greatest internal vulnerability – its
Whether the Somali government and its allies can advance their cause will largely depend on greater ideological cohesion. The Somali government and its allies can advance their cause will largely depend on greater ideological cohesion.

The Impact of U.S. Strikes

The U.S. has already stepped up its longstanding campaign against individual Al-Shabaab commanders and attacking the group’s military capacity. Drone strikes and ground operations have killed at least five Al-Shabaab leaders: Abdirahman Sandhere “Ukash”, from the combat operations wing (jabha), in December 2015; Hassan Ali Dhore, from the security and intelligence wing (amniyat) in March 2016; Daud Ma’alim (also known as Yusuf Haji), also from the amniyat, in May 2016; and Ma’alim Aden Hassan, a military instructor, in June 2016.

The U.S. army also claims that a drone strike in March this year killed 150 militants in a training camp in the Hiiraan region. Other successful assaults were launched by the U.S. contractor-trained Somali “Thunder” (Danab) Brigade – an elite, 570-strong commando force – from its Baladogle military air base in the Lower Shabelle region. Most recently the brigade killed Mohammed Mahmud Ali “Dulyadeen” or “Kuno”, a leading commander reportedly responsible for the attack on Kenya’s Garissa university college that killed 147 students.

The Clan Resistance and Islamic State Encroachment

Another important strike against Al-Shabaab came from some Somali clans, a reversal of Al-Shabaab’s usually deft management of clan relations. In February 2016, Abgal clan militias forced the group out of several locations in the Middle Shabelle region following resistance against alms (zakat) demands; Gugundhabe “Ma’awis Lei” clan militias did the same in Hiiraan, as did the original clan-based Sufi-inspired anti-Al-Shabaab militia Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama’a in Gedo (with the help of Ethiopian forces). The now more substantive federal states and interim administrations have also used their clan-based militias. In March 2016, for example, Al-Shabaab units were caught between the Somali National Army, Puntland’s “Darwish” forces and Galmudug Interim Administration militias as they attempted to enter the Mudug region and its port town of Gara’ad.

The March 2016 losses in Mudug were the result of Al-Shabaab’s botched attempts to move fighters toward their Golis mountain stronghold between Puntland and Somaliland as the group tried to eliminate a dissident faction that had declared allegiance to the so-called IS. The IS factor is the latest playing into a number of longstanding internal divisions – including reports of internal criticism of the current Emir Ahmed Diriiye “Abu Ubaidah” – that are arguably more deadly to Al-Shabaab than the military forces pitted against it. The prominent Sheikh Abdulqadir Mumim’s October 2015 pledge of loyalty (ba’ya) to IS was the most high-profile of at least four different pro-IS dissident factions across Somalia, which Al-Shabaab’s amniyat security wing ruthlessly began to exterminate in November 2015.

The internal purge against suspected IS sympathizers may explain a wave of Al-Shabaab defections to Somali government forces. These include the April defections of Ahmed Mohamud Afrah, a senior commander responsible for collecting tax (zakawat) contributions and Mohamed Hooley, a district commander in Galgudud region, as well as the defection of amniyat security officer Hassan Isaq Nuur in May. It may also explain a reshuffle of Shabaab’s governors (walis) in Lower Shabelle, Hiiraan and Mudug.

A Still-Lethal Punch

Despite these setbacks, the group can still hit hard against the Somali Federal Government and its allies, including the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Soft targets like government offices and hotels in Mogadishu are regularly subject to Al-Shabaab “complex attacks”, the latest against the Naasa Hablood Hotel on 25 June and the Ambassador Hotel on 1 June, killing civilians and a number of SFG officials, ministers and members of parliament with whom both venues were popular. An AMISOM base manned by an Ethiopian National Defense Forces contingent near the town of Halgaan, in Hiiraan region, was overrun on 9 June with significant casualties. Unlike the devastating attack on the Kenya Defense Force contingent in AMISOM’s base in El-Adde in January 2016, (Ethiopian) air power and reinforcements came quickly to Halgaan and inflicted heavy casualties on Al-Shabaab.

Worryingly, however, AMISOM has appeared to have disengaged somewhat on the ground. Despite its critical role and sacrifice in removing Al-Shabaab from strategic locations and opening the space for political progress, it has taken both a physical and political beating over the last eighteen months. Reduced
European Union funding and domestic issues are making some troop contributing countries threaten a draw down, with Uganda announcing its planned exit in late 2017.

The Double-edged Sword of Regional Peace-support

AMISOM’s role as both an operation against Al-Shabaab and as a peace-support force increasingly suffers from being dominated by nearby powers. It could almost be called “IGADSSOM”: Burundi aside, all troop contributing countries are members of East Africa’s regional peace and security organization, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Kenya and Ethiopia are Somalia’s direct neighbors; part of a wider trend on the continent of neighbors participating in stabilization or peace operations. A troop contributor that is a neighbor can more directly support the new federal entities with whom it shares borders and knows intimately. But this also risks sideling the development of the still weak Somalia National Army, and may indirectly risk friction between the Somali Federal Government and federal entities, as well as between the entities themselves.

The heavy presence of neighboring states in the newer federal entities of Jubaland, South West State and Galmudug can look like a partisan foreign occupation, especially where they are still internally disputed. Al-Shabaab can easily appeal to disgruntled Somali clans by charging that foreigners are manipulating internal affairs, then portray its role as Muslim resistance to non-Muslim powers, and implicitly, the defender of Somalia’s sovereignty.

Ethiopia’s deployment to Somalia of the auxiliary (Ogaden) clan militias – from its own federal Somali National Regional State – has also led to clashes with non-Ogadeni Somali clans in the shared border regions. In the medium term, with better-armed federal entities and clans taking the fight to Al-Shabaab, AMISOM may be faced with more conventional tasks of inter-communal peacekeeping, tasks for which governments and electorates in the troop contributing countries may have little appetite.

Sustaining Gains Against Al-Shabaab

Any strengthening of Somalia’s federal states represents a threat to Al-Shabaab. This includes the coming elections, where local clan-based electoral colleges in each of the federal states will directly select MPs. This should garner greater local buy-in for the federal government model, if not for centrally directed government. Greater stabilization support to the more substantive federal entities will also help. But to win back the political space and undermine Al-Shabaab’s ideology, Somali actors must create and act on a coherent narrative.

Al-Shabaab has been a tough survivor and one of its easiest wins is that it has been able to split the internal and external threats it faces. The divisions that IS prompts within Al-Shabaab are worth nothing if the Somali Federal Government does not offer a third way for political dialogue and accommodation, enhancing the current policy of individual amnesty.

Despite effective U.S. training for specialized commando units, overall attempts to rebuild the Somali National Army could be strengthened by better coordination among the large number of other states – at least eleven others – involved in their training. The reality of stronger federal entities and clan-based militias also demands a rethink of how Somalia’s security forces are to be rebuilt from a less centralized starting point. Above all, there is an urgent need for a concerted program of reconciliation at all levels, without which federal states and their clan militias are still as likely to fight one another (and the Somali National Army) as they are to take on Al-Shabaab itself.

(With additional research by Horn of Africa Research Assistant Abdul Khalif)."

ICG, Richard Moncrieff, central Africa project director at International Crisis Group, "The reluctance of Joseph Kabila to cede power could push Congo to the brink: When leaders in central Africa seek to circumvent the constitution for their own ends, as is the case in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, conflict often ensues," May 3, 2016, commented, "The actions of President Joseph Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) make clear his intention to stay in power beyond his second term. But with the people set against it, and a strong and unambiguous two-term limit in the constitution, his ambitions are leading his country to a dangerous impasse.

Since 2010, Kabila has deployed various tactics to delay the elections, hoping that this will allow him to stay on in a transitional arrangement. He has already achieved one of his goals: the timetable for presidential elections this year is no longer feasible."
This is a hazardous strategy. Riots in January 2015 killed dozens of people. Since then, the government has locked up leaders of civil society movements fighting to protect the country’s hard-won constitution. Given the scale of the organizational task and the lack of progress, the country will not be able to hold elections until well into next year.

Presidents clinging to power can destabilize countries. In neighboring Burundi, breaking a post-civil war promise not to extend a presidential mandate has quickly undermined the trust, social cohesion and political accord needed to avoid conflict.

Congo-Brazzaville is plagued by unrest after President Sassou Nguesso changed the constitution and then went on to win a controversial election in March. Where governments remain highly centralized and institutions weak, the guarantee that power will change hands is vital to ensure that grievances are expressed peacefully.

DRC suffers from overly centralized government and a patronage system in the hands of the incumbent. The deal that ended the civil war in 2002 shared the spoils of peace among former warring parties and other political hopefuls in the form of a government of national union, and then through a broad-based governing majority.

The limit on presidential terms gave a guarantee that power would eventually be rotated, even if, at the time, short-term gains were at the forefront of most minds. Unless Kabila moves on, prominent and popular politicians, many of his former allies, could be out in the cold for good. Facing a stubborn regime with less and less legitimacy, some may decide that violence is the only way to force change.

Activists see term limits as a weathervane of democratic progress. Term limits are now in place across southern Africa, although in countries dominated by strong liberation parties, the presidency has passed to someone from within the ruling party: Tanzania, Namibia and Mozambique. In Nigeria, Zambia and Senegal, presidential ambitions to stay on have been thwarted by rival elites or strong institutions, such as parliament and civil society. The president of Niger’s bid to cling to power was thwarted by his own army.

Central Africa has a particularly bad record. Weak institutions and centralized power have handed incumbents a huge advantage, not only in winning elections, but also in changing constitutions. International partners, including some aid donors, have not voiced concern often enough, worried that too much democracy could upset fragile stability. Since the democratic advances of the early 1990s, Central African Republic is the only state to have had a proper democratic handover of power, in 1993. That’s a very troubling record.

In DRC, the peace agreements of 2002 that introduced the presidential term limit brought welcome stability. But the deal kicked justice issues into the long grass and did not address centralized and corrupt governance. Kabila, like his counterpart in Burundi, is almost certainly worried that justice for violence committed in the civil war may catch up with him if he leaves office.

Trust, stability and the cohesion of the political system therefore lie at the heart of the “third term” question. African leaders considering these issues, in the African Union (AU) and elsewhere, face complex dilemmas. Some don’t believe in the principle of regularly handing over power. Others don’t want to interfere in the internal affairs of a neighbor, unless the instability threatens their borders.

Western powers promoting term limits therefore have no common African position to rally behind. They have also been frustratingly inconsistent, playing down Rwandan president Paul Kagame’s machinations to serve another term, while condemning the decision of the Burundian president, Pierre Nkurunziza, to run for re-election.

Pressure needs to be put on those unwilling to leave, but there comes a point when leaders are so entrenched that there seems little point in challenging their right to hold office. Calling it early is therefore vital. That is what the international community failed to do when Kabila removed the second round of the presidential elections in 2011 and went on to win a fraudulent election in November of that year.

A political system is based on trust that everyone will abide by the rules to at least a minimum extent; without that, stability will be short-lived. The international community should speak out at the right moment against leaders overturning constitutional provisions to suit their own agenda. This is especially true when previous conflict means trust is in short supply or faith in elections as a means of transferring power has been undermined.

Failure to speak out sends a message to opposition leaders that the only way to power is through violence – a conclusion that would spell disaster for DRC and other countries in the region."

"For months, many Nigerians have endured painfully long lines for gasoline and power failures that last for days — with no fuel for backup generators. Scant power means water cuts for homes that rely on electricity to pump it. Everyday items are missing from stores, and those that remain cost more than usual.

In this country of rampant inequality, the poor have long been desperate, and the rich are still able to buy their way out of problems. But the situation in Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is having an outsized impact on the expanding middle class, which has become accustomed to air-conditioning, owning a car and going out for Domino's pizza. Now, even a bottle of Perrier is too expensive for many.

President Muhammadu Buhari is urging patience, noting that when he took office last year he inherited a corruption-plagued mess."

ICG, Vincent Foucher, Jean-Hervre Jezequel and Nnamdi Obasi, "North-eastern Nigeria and Conflict's Humanitarian Fallout?" *Commentary* / Africa, August 4, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/northeastern-nigeria-and-conflict-s-humanitarian-fallout?utm_source=Sign+up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=9ce6413c1c-Nigeria_Commentary_5_August_2016&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-9cc6413c1c-359871089, commented, "Children are dying in Bama, a town in Borno state, north-east Nigeria, suffering from lack of food, clean water and medical care. They are the most tragic manifestation of the humanitarian fallout of the Boko Haram insurgency and the state response to it, a crisis that now impacts the lives of millions. The insurgency itself, the aggressive military response to it, and the lack of effective assistance, both national and international, to those caught up in the conflict threaten to create an endless cycle of violence and deprivation. Unless efforts to contain and roll back the current crisis are quickly scaled-up, peace is likely to remain a distant prospect in this region of Nigeria.

Once a city of 300,000, Bama is now an army-controlled camp of 30,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs), some forcibly moved there by the military. There are around a dozen sites like Bama, hosting at least 250,000 people living under the security forces' scrutiny. The number will likely grow as military campaigns continue.

Neither the army, nor the Nigerian emergency services are up to the task of caring for them. There have been – and still are – too many bottlenecks. Authorities must pay more attention and commit more resources, clarify and rationalize the country's assistance structure, improve aid governance, promote transparency (more NGO and media reporting), facilitate humanitarian access and address the widespread suspicion that many IDPs support Boko Haram.

Humanitarian agencies have also struggled to respond adequately, both in recognizing the scale of the problem and reacting sufficiently promptly. For their part, UN agencies and international humanitarian NGOs need to engage authorities more proactively and improve their collaboration in responding to one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world today. Doing so will mobilize more international funding – currently grossly lacking – and make better use of international expertise. If the humanitarian crisis is not addressed soon, it will have serious security and political implications. In the short term, it may push people back into areas under Boko Haram’s control, or to other parts of Nigeria whose capacity to sustain them is questionable, or across international borders, from where some could be trafficked into an already vulnerable Sahel region, and on to Libya – an important gateway to Europe. In the long term, it could leave the Nigerian state and its international partners tainted, undermining further their legitimacy and capacity to control violence in the north east and the Lake Chad region.

Dying in a “Safe Area”: The Situation in Bama

Situated 72km south east of Maiduguri, Borno's capital, Bama was once a major trade hub on a main road to Cameroon. Overrun by Boko Haram in September 2014, the army recaptured it in March 2015. Most of its inhabitants had already left by then and thousands had been killed by Boko Haram, but the army began bringing in civilians it found during operations in the surrounding rural areas. Citing security
concerns, the army has itself been running the Bama camp, notionally the responsibility of the Borno State Emergency Management Agency (BOSEMA). It has banned IDPs from travelling in the camp’s vicinity or to other “safe areas”. The security forces and state-supported civilian self-defense groups, known as vigilantes, also have been “vetting” the newly arrived. While Bama camp is safe from the Boko Haram threat that hovers over the wider local government area, it is, for many, a place of death. In June, the rate of severe acute malnutrition was 19 per cent among children – the emergency threshold is 3 per cent. According to the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 244,000 children are suffering from acute malnutrition in Borno state and on average 134 die every day from this. A few health ministry officials have been brought in under military escort for short stays and some humanitarian partners have been intermittently giving the army supplies to distribute to the IDPs, though with little supervision. This is not enough and with major deficiencies in water, sanitation and hygiene and the rainy season (June-September) under way, many are concerned that a cholera epidemic could break out. The rains, furthermore, will make many roads and tracks impassable.

The Humanitarian Costs of Insurgency and Counter-insurgency

Most officials blame Bama’s dire humanitarian crisis on Boko Haram: people began starving while they lived under the insurgents’ control, and the military rescued them. The insurgency has indeed done terrible damage to the lives and livelihoods of many in Borno state, as well as in neighboring Yobe, Adamawa and Gombe states. Boko Haram ruthlessly targeted some communities, particularly those that set up vigilante forces or helped the military, killing many civilians and forcing many more into exile. Those who tried to stay and live under Boko Haram’s control faced significant difficulties. The insurgents heavily taxed communities, plundered and forcefully recruited among them and fighting disrupted harvests. But the humanitarian crisis has been exacerbated by the nature of the counter-insurgency campaign. An aggressive, regional military operation has deliberately stifled economic activities, denying Boko Haram supplies, trade and income from protection rackets. Military operations have also made producing and accessing food a lot more difficult for all living in and close to Boko Haram-controlled areas. Trade and mobility, essential for making a living in the Sahel, have become extremely difficult and dangerous.

Attitudes toward those Displaced

Many among the military and many civilians are quick to look with suspicion on people coming from Boko Haram-held areas. Though there is no evidence to suggest a deliberate attempt to punish a population suspected of complicity with the insurgents, there are alarming signs that their welfare is not being prioritized, whether out of a lack of capacity or concern or due to security concerns. Even women captured, abused or forced into “marriage” by Boko Haram bear the stigma of their association, and their children are suspected of having “bad blood”. This fear of “contagion” and, more concretely, of suicide attacks by women and children, is part of the problem. This is one reason the only IDPs the army lets into Maiduguri, which already hosts an estimated 1.5 million, are children requiring sustained medical support, though sometimes without their careers. Conducting security operations should be kept distinct from humanitarian actions. If not, those in genuine need of assistance risk being denied help; while entire communities stand in danger of neglect. In such an environment, people are likely to feel increasingly alienated from the state, driving them to seek support elsewhere. Humanitarian assistance must remain impartial and needs-based; while security measures must be proportionate to the risk – which will likely be reduced, not increased, by greater freedom of movement – and non-discriminatory.

Inadequate National and International Assistance

At the end of 2015, 3.9 million people in north-east Nigeria out of a total of 5.2 million across the Lake Chad Basin were in urgent need of food assistance. In April 2016, the Borno state Governor Kashim Shettima and UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator Toby Lanzer visited Bama. Shettima said afterward that his state was “hanging between malnutrition and famine …. People [were] dying like flies”. Of the $248 million required for the emergency response in north-east Nigeria in 2016, less than 20 per cent was available by May. Donor pledges were higher for Chad and Niger, where the number of persons in need was smaller. The World Food Program (WFP) supported fewer than 2,000 people in the north east in March 2016; that figure had increased to 50,000 in May, but was still way behind target given that more than half of the 1.5 million IDPs just in Maiduguri are judged by the UN to be malnourished, and the situation in rural areas is often worse. In neighboring Cameroon, also affected by Boko Haram, UN agencies helped four times as many people (90 per cent of the most food insecure). In July, the total number of
IDPs in this part of Cameroon was around 190,000. Recent reports of the shocking conditions in Bama did draw some attention, but it took a controversial 22 June communiqué by Médecins Sans Frontières to bring the starving into the limelight.

The Nigerian government’s response has been hampered by constrained resources and multiple pressing security problems. It is facing a resurgent rebellion in the Niger Delta, separatist agitation in the south east, and increasing violence in the Middle Belt, including recent clashes between pastoralists and farmers over land and water, as well as a severe economic and budgetary crisis. Neither the National Emergency Management Agency nor its state-level counterparts have the funds or the capacity and experience to manage a prolonged, large-scale humanitarian operation. Already overwhelmed by IDPs in Maiduguri and other established sites, Nigerian agencies have struggled to serve new camps. Attempts to improve the government’s response have lagged. The Victims Support Fund (VSF) is constrained by the lack of clarity in Nigeria’s overall framework for humanitarian response. In July 2015, President Muhammmadu Buhari established a Presidential Committee on North-East Interventions (PCNI) to coordinate domestic and international humanitarian efforts, but as of July 2016, the committee had still not been inaugurated. Some government sources say the president is waiting for the National Assembly (federal parliament) to create the North East Development Commission (NEDC), which includes a humanitarian portfolio, but some interviewed by Crisis Group fear it may become merely another platform for the region’s elite to share patronage rather than for boosting humanitarian aid.

Many implementation partners of UN agencies lack the capacity to work in the region’s remoter parts where the terrain is extremely challenging and where they do not enjoy the relative protection of Maiduguri (which itself faces significant humanitarian needs). So far, humanitarian workers have been unable to establish credible contacts with Boko Haram to negotiate access and obtain guarantees that can reduce risks to acceptable levels. Particularly in areas of Borno state outside the Maiduguri metropolitan area, most organisations have depended on the army for protection, assessments of local security conditions and sometimes humanitarian service delivery.

Nigeria, with Africa’s largest population and economy, is sensitive to foreign criticism and, understandably, keen to ensure that foreign support in addressing the crisis does not compromise its sovereignty. Many officials remember the civil war (1967-1970) when Nigeria was condemned for the terrible famine in the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra and some secessionist supporters provided military aid under the guise of international humanitarian assistance. As a result, authorities are sensitive to outside aid or reporting. Yet the lack of reporting has made it difficult to mobilize international support for resources.

The Risks Ahead
Failure to adequately support IDPs, in part because of suspicion that they support Boko Haram, may push them back into, or discourage them from leaving, insurgent-controlled areas. Furthermore, it is entirely possible that Boko Haram’s attacks and suicide bombings in and around IDP camps are attempts by the insurgents to staunch the flow of people from areas under their control. It may be working to an extent. Some IDPs reportedly are choosing to return to their home areas, despite the risk of Boko Haram attacks, rather than staying in dire camps. In the long term, failure to help those in need could further undermine the state’s legitimacy and capacity to control violence. While the Nigerian military and its regional and international partners may be able to contain Boko Haram, unless the state addresses poor governance and other structural factors that drove people to support the movement, there is a high risk either that Boko Haram will be revived or similar groups will emerge.

What Should Be Done
To prevent the current humanitarian emergency from claiming more lives, prolonging the conflict and fuelling longer term insecurity in the region, the government must match its military campaign against Boko Haram with strong commitment to addressing the immediate humanitarian needs and longer-term development and reconstruction assistance to rebuild the north east. That includes granting access to, and facilitating, independent local and international reporting and assessments. This is necessary not only for proper resource mobilization, but even more importantly as a way to provide independent analysis of outstanding emergency relief requirements.

Borno state Governor Kashim Shettima and President Muhammadu Buhari, as well as some army commanders, have been remarkably willing to talk to journalists. However, the president should pay special attention to the governance of aid. Reports of the embezzlement and diversion of food and other aid need
to be properly investigated and officials found to have stolen or mismanaged aid must be sanctioned. For example, the report of the Borno state House Verification Committee into allegations of aid diversion, which should be completed soon, should be made public and quickly and openly acted upon.

The government and international partners should have fewer qualms about bringing assistance closer to the war zones. It is possible that some of it could leak to Boko Haram members, but this marginal price should be balanced with the immense relief it would provide, the lives it would save and the goodwill it would generate for the government. Furthermore, improved assistance would probably be more efficient in attracting civilians to government areas than military mop-up operations. Where Boko Haram can no longer use the "rhetoric of plenty", as it once did, offering feasts of meat and cold drinks to potential recruits, authorities now have that card to play.

Equally, the reluctance to allow IDPs encamped in secondary towns like Bama to move around should be revised. The arguably marginal benefit in security which the ban on movement provides will be far outweighed by the humanitarian gains and goodwill generated by easing up this restriction. As an immediate measure, all those most in need should be allowed to temporarily move to Maiduguri or other cities where appropriate treatment is available.

While vigilante groups have done much to defend their communities, Borno state authorities should stop using these irregular forces to vet IDPs. Further, the Federal Government should begin to put in place a demobilization process lest longer-term problems result, including increased risks of communal violence based on revenge between vigilante group members and displaced persons.

International partners must drastically increase their humanitarian response, including by releasing all funds pledged to the UN and other humanitarian agencies for the emergency. They must lend greater support to the government, preferably in a high-level forum that includes the military, UN agencies, international NGOs, as well as local civil society and NGOs. This forum should provide a platform for all actors to share knowledge, including their assessments of the gravity of the humanitarian situation and areas of greatest needs as well as clarify guiding principles and improve working relations.

The Buhari administration for its part needs to be far more proactive. A clarification of its assistance framework is pressing, and senior officials need to make clear that they regard the unfolding humanitarian crisis as a first-order priority. The government should accelerate the implementation of its response, for instance in disbursing the 12 billion naira (about $41 million) which it announced, in May 2016, would be used to rebuild the north east and also in implementing the programs of the Victims Support Fund. It is also essential that accountability mechanisms are strengthened.

The authorities should not forget that they announced the North East Marshall Plan (Nemap) in October 2015 with the aim of providing “intermediate and long-term interventions in emergency assistance, economic reconstruction and development” – a vital component of efforts to bring peace to the region. The first action of this ambitious plan should target camps for the displaced. In order to rebuild state legitimacy, the authorities should scale down reliance on security forces to manage the camps and give greater room to civil authorities.

Finally, periodic visits by senior leaders, including President Buhari himself, to the camps and major communities hosting IDPs are essential to begin breaking down the suspicion faced by the newly displaced, and to affirm to them, as well as to state and government officials, that as Nigerian citizens and victims of the insurgency, they should not be left without food or medical assistance. Governor Shettima’s visits are welcome moves. He should make more and his fellow governors should follow his example. Without a visible and genuine commitment to providing the humanitarian support needed in these areas, insecurity will persist – and could become worse – and peace will remain far out of reach.

ICG, Cedric Barnes, "A Wake-up Call for Eritrea and Ethiopia," June 15, 2916, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/worldwide/2016/06/15/a-wake-up-call-for-eritrea-and-ethiopia/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d591bab2f3-ethiopia_eritrea_15june16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-d591bab2f3-359871089, commented,

"A 12 June clash between Eritrea and Ethiopia comes as the Horn of Africa’s two most implacable rivals face a crossroads.

As Asmara seeks ways out of its long isolation, and Addis Ababa seeks to maintain and expand its
role on the global stage, they and their partners would be wise to turn this new outbreak of violence into an opportunity to seek a compromise settlement to their long-running border dispute. Otherwise the risk remains of sinking into a destructive new round of conflict in which both would lose.

Details are hazy and contested, but the fighting near the border town of Tserona appears to be the most serious conventional military engagement for some time. Despite the impression of a frozen conflict since the 1998-2000 war that killed an estimated 70,000 people, there have been at least eight significant flare-ups since 2011, often involving rebel groups sponsored by one or the other of the two belligerents. Indeed, one theory for the Tserona clash is that it is a response by Addis Ababa to an armed action by the Asmara-linked Ginbot 7 group in southern Ethiopia in May.

Still, Eritrea has not always been at daggers drawn with Ethiopia, from which it won independence in 1991, especially since both post-1991 governments were led by former rebel fronts that had (mostly) fought together during the 1970s and 1980s. Recent shifts in Eritrea and Ethiopia's international and regional standing, and relative internal vulnerabilities, may offer opportunity to end the two-decades-long estrangement.

**Border Impasses**

The international community has done very little to push for a resolution of the border issue since 2008, mostly because neither side has appeared to believe it is in their interest to pursue it.

Both sides actions' have blocked international efforts to end the dispute, despite the Algiers Agreement of 2000 that ended hostilities with both parties' agreement to binding international arbitration. The Ethiopia Eritrea Boundary Commission (EEBC) ruled in 2002 awarding gains to and extracting losses from both sides, but, in what proved the biggest obstacle to peace, awarding of the original trigger-point of Badme to Eritrea.

Ethiopia refused to implement the ruling without further consultations. Eritrea refused to talk before action on implementation. Faced with losing diplomatic good will in 2004, Ethiopia offered a "Five Point Plan" for negotiations and normalization of relations; on justifiable legal grounds, but with less diplomatic finesse, Eritrea refused. In late 2007, after Ethiopia had ceased its cooperation with the EEBC, it declared a virtual demarcation and dissolved itself. In 2008, facing increasingly hostile Eritrean deployments in the Temporary Security Zone patrolled by the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), that too wound down operations.

Diplomats put the dispute on the back burner as other imperatives for regional peace and stability demanded attention, including the resolution of the Sudanese civil war, the Darfur conflict, the independence of South Sudan and attempts to reestablish formal government in Somalia. Nevertheless, Ethiopia and Eritrea’s rivalry has played a complicating role in all of these processes, crises and conflicts.

Even worse, Eritrea's frustration toward what it perceived as the international system’s failure to pressure Ethiopia into implementing the 2002 border ruling led it to take unilateral initiatives to keep its rival on the back foot. This is reported to have included assistance to the Somalia’s Islamist extremist and al-Qaeda-affiliated Al-Shabaab. Global opinion soon branded Eritrea as a regional spoiler. The international community slapped on sanctions in 2009, included Eritrea in the United Nations Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea in 2010 and then established a United Nations Commission of Inquiry into Human Rights in 2014; its latest report condemning Eritrea’s 'systematic, widespread and gross human rights violations' was published a week previous to the Tserona clash.

**Asmara’s Wilderness Years**

From 2009, Eritrea was regionally and diplomatically isolated by the sanctions regime, its own decision to “suspend” itself from East Africa’s regional peace and security organization, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and its parallel absence until 2011 from the new African Union, based in the capital of its Ethiopian rival.

Internally, losses in the 1998-2000 war triggered a downward spiral. High-ranking officials who criticized the conduct of the war were incarcerated without trial and systemic internal repression became the norm. The country remained on a war footing and the already shaky economy nose-dived. Mandatory and prolonged national service (beyond the official eighteen months) for those aged between eighteen and 40 became an integral part of the state regulation of daily life.

President Isaias Afewerki, a guerrilla leader once lionized by international opinion, looked increasingly belligerent and autocratic in power, with ill-health doing little to improve his humor in public. A
growing number of young people chose to leave in search of economic opportunity, as in the rest of the Horn. In Eritrea’s case, youth were particularly anxious to avoid national service and used well-developed paths for refugees and diaspora forged during the 30-year independence struggle.

Ethiopia, meanwhile, was riding high. It had suffered a post-war political crisis which split the regime’s core Tigrayan People Liberation Front in 2001; disputed elections in 2005 that led to violent protest and repression; a pervasive closure of political space including restrictive legislation on non-governmental organisations. But Addis Ababa also managed to retain international support for its development agenda in support of the poor; its contribution to peacekeeping in the region; and robust action in Somalia that fit with the U.S.-led global “war on terror”.

Latterly, Addis Ababa also delivered impressive economic growth. In Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Ethiopia had an international star, who, with an experienced diplomatic cadre, made sure national interests chimed with those of the international community. The country sustained this balancing act even after his death in 2012.

**Eritrea’s luck turns**

In the last few years, the pendulum has swung back in Eritrea’s favor, and – against expectations – the government has used the opportunity to regain status in the Horn that it had so completely lost to Ethiopia. Proof of support to Al-Shabaab has not been forthcoming for several years. While links with other rebel groups continue, they don’t threaten international interests. Most importantly, its dire economic isolation – despite continuing sanctions – has eased.

Revenues have been helped by the large Bisha mine, which began producing gold, silver, copper and zinc in 2011. But even though many hopes for self-reliance were staked on the new business, external factors were more important. The European Union and its member states, anxious to assist the regime in stemming the flow of migrants toward the Mediterranean, have offered renewed development assistance of €200 million in late 2015. Then the Huthi-takeover of Yemen and the Saudi-led alliance to oust them suddenly made Eritrea’s long and adjacent Red Sea coast extremely strategic. Money that the president had periodically extracted from certain Gulf states was suddenly offered in greater quantities. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) reportedly spent hundreds of millions of dollars to lease the port of Assab, mothballed since the border-conflict ended its sole function as Ethiopia’s main entrepot. The leadership will feel vindicated that their strategic patience has paid off, and President Isaias, despite reports of emergency medical interventions abroad, survives as leader.

Ethiopia – at least compared with when Prime Minister Meles was the regional first among equals – is struggling to maintain the unqualified support of the international community. Though it continues to play a vital role in regional mediation and security – including in South Sudan and Somalia – and its economy is still viewed with admiration, the longstanding criticism of its dirigiste approach to economic development and intolerance for political opposition is increasingly heard.

Prime Minister Haile-Mariam Desalegn, who occasionally makes reformist noises and whose background as a non-Orthodox Christian from a small “southern” ethnic group is testament to Meles’s vision of a new Ethiopia, leads more collectively but without the intellectual fizz and decision of his mentor. The ruling party is unusually open about its internal disagreements, corruption is a growing problem, and drought and famine have returned.

Ethnic Oromo protests that began last November and rumbled on for several months were clumsily contained; they were only half-heartedly blamed on Eritrea, an allegation that no one really believed. Ethiopia’s well trained and armed military probably knows that delivering a decisive blow against Eritrea may fatally damage the regime and risk (another) complicated civil war on its doorstep. A policy of robust containment has been pursued instead, but that looks increasingly difficult to sustain.

**Tserona’s Wake-up Call**

Given the reversals of fortune, and Ethiopia’s regular warnings that it would take action against Eritrea if it perceived a threat, the Tserona incident should not have come as a surprise. That it should have alarmed domestic and international observers alike is recognition that this particular fault line is not dormant and that recent seismic shifts of the plates of regional power make it particularly unstable right now.

Ethiopia, despite slightly changed circumstances, still holds most of the military, economical and
political cards. It will take (uncontested) the seat reserved for African states as a non-permanent member of the United Nations security council for 2017-18, meaning sanctions on Eritrea are unlikely to ease. However the Tserona incident could also be a wake-up call that after a decade on the sidelines, the stalemate of no peace, no war is unsustainable. The regional and international context is shifting on both sides of the equation. Ethiopia’s enduring friends and Eritrea’s renewed acquaintances should once again try to find a new diplomatic track toward resolving the border issue.”

Ethiopia, stable for a decade, had been increasingly experiencing spreading civil unrest, especially among youth, for several months, as of mid-August. As of August 12, the proceeding week had seen thousands of people pouring into the streets in antigovernment protests (Jeffery Gettleman, "A Generation Is Protesting in Ethiopia, Cherished by the West for Stability," The New York Times, August 13, 2016).

ICG, "Burundi: A Dangerous Third Term," Africa Report N°235, May 20, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/africa/central-africa/burundi/235-burundi-a-dangerous-third-term.aspx, reported, "One year after President Pierre Nkurunziza’s decision to run for a third term sparked the crisis, the situation remains critical. The radicalization of the regime, which had been steadily increasing since the second post-conflict elections in 2010 and intensified by tensions over the third term in 2015, has seen the rise of the most hard-line leaders of the ruling party. These figures are determined to do away with the institutional system established by the Arusha accord – an agreement between Hutu and Tutsi elites in 2000 which put in place an ethnic quota system for state institutions, including the army, and established a two-term presidential limit. This political strategy to dismantle the accord and the return of violent rhetoric and tactics reminiscent of the civil war, have generated great fear within Burundian society – which, although deeply alarmed, has not yet given in to politicians’ tactics of inciting ethnic hatred. With the government and opposition invited to meet in Tanzania on 21 May, it is imperative that the guarantors of the Arusha accord call on them to engage in a meaningful dialogue on the future of the peace agreement and avoid a repeat of the country’s tragic past.

Violence, fear, socio-economic decline and deepening social fractures have characterized the beginning of the president’s third term. Following protests in April 2015 and Nkurunziza’s re-election in July, confrontation has taken the form of urban guerrilla warfare which, beyond the targeted assassinations, torture and disappearances, has had an insidious and devastating impact. By using ethnically-charged rhetoric and demonizing an obvious desire to bring the democratic consensus of the Arusha accord to an end, the regime has ruptured its relations with part of the population. Some 250,000 Burundians have fled, including a significant portion of the political and economic establishment as well as civil society activists. The flight has drained Burundi of its most dynamic citizens and exposed divisions between the regime on one hand, and the army, the capital and the Tutsi community on the other. Trade between Bujumbura and the countryside has also been disrupted and, according to recent estimates, 10 per cent of the population (1.1 million people) are in need of humanitarian assistance of some kind.

The paradox at the heart of this confrontation is that while Burundi has democratized, the ruling party, the Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD), has not. An institutionalized ethnic power-sharing system is completely divorced from a radicalized ethnically-homogenous party reverting to its historical roots (rebels leaders of the civil war era). As the opposition, now forced into exile, seems unable to overcome its own longstanding ethnic cleavages, the regime’s current strategy of repression (alleging a Tutsi conspiracy, breaking up the security services and creating units loyal to the regime) has revived fears of genocidal violence within the Tutsi community. There are no signs at present that the population is ready to be mobilized for violence on ethnic grounds. But the simmering social and humanitarian crisis, part of the population’s physical, political and economic insecurity, and fear itself, have created the perfect conditions for the situation’s further deterioration and ethnic polarization.

While many Burundians and the international community believed the ethnic problem had been solved with the Arusha accord, it has returned to the fore with President Nkurunziza’s third term. To reverse this trend, a debate should be organized on the necessary amendments to the peace agreement. The regime is presently staging sham debates through a “national dialogue” which remains completely...
under its control. Ideally, a debate on the Arusha accord would take place in Burundi. This, however, would require the government to lift current restrictions on civil liberties (freedom of expression, press and assembly, etc.) and allow the opposition to return from exile.

Before these conditions are met and in order to overcome the current impasse, a discussion between the opposition and the government on the future of the Arusha accord should take place outside of the country under the auspices of the guarantors of the peace agreement. The meeting called by former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa on 21 May should be the first step in the dialogue on the future of the Arusha accord. In parallel, international actors, the UN and the African Union (AU) in particular, should take measures to prevent the crisis from descending into ethnic conflict and a humanitarian emergency, and prepare for an immediate intervention to prevent large-scale violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To reduce tensions, restart the dialogue and convince the government and the opposition to participate

To the government:
1. Engage in constructive dialogue with the opposition, allow the media and civil society to work independently and free from fear, and revise its violent approach to political dissent.

To the opposition:
2. Renounce violence and, for the unarmed opposition in exile, engage in a constructive dialogue with the government and resolve internal disagreements in order to present a common front and clear positions.

To the UN, African Union (AU), East African Community (EAC) and European Union (EU):
3. Formalize a single international mediation structure in order to speak with one voice.

To the guarantors of the Arusha accord (in particular Tanzania and South Africa):
4. Form a working group comprising the National Council for the Restoration of the Arusha Accord and the Rule of Law (Conseil national pour le respect de l’accord d’Arusha pour la paix et la réconciliation au Burundi et de l’Etat de droit, CNARED), the National Forces of Liberation (Forces nationales de libération, FNL), and the CNDD-FDD tasked with discussing the necessary amendments to be made to the Arusha peace agreement.

To the AU and the EU:
5. Agree on how to implement the EU decision to change the financing arrangements for the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) by bypassing the government and disbursing funds directly to the soldiers.
6. The AU and its partners should also look for another troop contributing country to eventually replace Burundian soldiers within AMISOM in order to prevent Burundian authorities from using participation in the mission as diplomatic leverage.

To prevent a descent into ethnic conflict and be ready to intervene in case of mass violence

To donors who suspended part of their financial aid (the EU, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the U.S. and Switzerland):
7. Contribute financially to track hate speech by the authorities and the opposition in order to fight attempts at ethnic polarization. Burundian NGOs, with the assistance of some donors, have already begun doing this, but they require further assistance, specifically to cover speeches by local authorities in the provinces. Financial assistance for the documentation of human rights abuses should also be sustained and increased.

To the UN, the AU, the EU and bilateral partners:
8. The AU should put in place and the EU and the U.S. should expand sanctions regimes to include those propagating hate speech.
9. Agree to deploy immediately several hundred human rights observers and armed international police.
10. Take the necessary measures so that a rapid deployment force can be dispatched in case of emergency, which could include troops from the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO).

To Burundian and international NGOs involved in local conflict resolution before the current crisis with local mediation structures in place:
11. Reorient the work of these structures toward the documentation of human rights abuses and hate speech in Bujumbura and in the provinces.

*To mitigate the impact of the economic and social crisis on the population*

To donors who suspended part of their financial aid (the EU, Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the U.S. and Switzerland):

12. Verify the political neutrality and technical reliability of non-governmental actors in the context of changing the terms of aid provision. This requires a rigorous political and operational assessment of these actors. For some of them, a partnership with international NGOs and a strengthening of their financial and managerial capacities will be essential.

13. Fund monitoring mechanisms to evaluate the status of food security and sanitation, and conduct budgetary studies to identify the breaking point of key health and agricultural sectors in order to calibrate the financial support they need. Donors should ensure financing changes to their programs do not result in the interruption of all ongoing funding.

14. Create a committee to monitor the Burundian economy, specifically in the health and agriculture sectors and access to basic services.

15. Make available funds for the emergency humanitarian plan, which remains under-funded.


**Latin American Developments**

ICG, "Easy Prey: Criminal Violence and Central American Migration," Latin American and Caribbean Report No. 57, July 28, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/central-america/easy-prey-criminal-violence-and-central-american-migration, commented, "Massive deportations from Mexico and the U.S. have failed to stem the tide of Central Americans fleeing endemic poverty combined with epidemic violence. Stepped up enforcement has diverted undocumented migration into more costly, circuitous and dangerous channels. Criminal gangs and the corrupt officials who enable them are the beneficiaries of a policy that forces desperate people to pay increasing sums to avoid detention, extortion or kidnapping. Beefed-up border control inadvertently fuels human smuggling and fortifies criminal gangs that increasingly control that industry. Governments must guarantee those fleeing violence the opportunity to seek asylum through fair, efficient procedures, while launching a major regional effort to provide security and economic opportunity in home countries. Central American leaders, especially in the northern triangle of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, must in turn address chronic insecurity more effectively while monitoring and assisting those deported, especially children and adolescents, so they have an option other than fleeing again.

The humanitarian crisis of 2014, when the U.S. struggled to cope with a surge of undocumented migrants, especially unaccompanied children, was never resolved. It was just pushed southwards. In fiscal year 2015, Mexico returned 166,000 Central Americans, including some 30,000 children and adolescents, while the U.S. deported over 75,000. But the Mexican government’s capacity to control the flow of migrants and refugees is reaching its limit. Many see Mexico as their destination, not just the country they cross in transit to the U.S. Asylum petitions have more than doubled, straining capacity to process them fairly and efficiently. Though the acceptance rate has increased in 2016, it remains inadequate to protect the men, women and children whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by the criminals who dominate many impoverished communities.

Migrants from both Mexico and the northern triangle of Central America (NTCA) region have long fled poverty to seek a better life abroad, sending home remittances that are a major source of foreign exchange and a crucial prop for their home countries’ economies. However, Mexico and the U.S. treat what is now in large part a violence-driven refugee crisis as if it were still solely an economic migration problem.
Many victimized today by economic deprivation and social exclusion also face persecution by organized criminal groups, from neighbourhood gangs to transnational drug traffickers. Forced displacement is increasingly widespread, as violence reaches civil-war levels. About 150,000 people have been killed in the NTCA since 2006, an average of more than 50 homicides per 100,000, more than triple the rate in Mexico (where killings have soared since 2007) and more than ten times the U.S. average.

El Salvador became the most violent country in the western hemisphere in 2015 with a staggering murder rate of 103 per 100,000 people, while Honduras suffered 57 per 100,000 and Guatemala 30 per 100,000. Young people are the most vulnerable to violence, as both perpetrators and victims. The proportion of homicide victims under age twenty in El Salvador and Guatemala is higher than anywhere else in the world. No wonder that 35,000 children and adolescent migrants were detained in Mexico in 2015, nine times more than in 2011.

Those escaping violence at home are targeted again as they flee. Ideal victims, many have relatives who can be stung for ransom payments; lacking legal status, they are less likely than locals to report serious crimes like assault, extortion or kidnapping. They are also vulnerable to trafficking: the sex industry along the Mexican/Guatemalan border is largely driven by supply of migrants, especially adolescents, some of whom are held in virtual debt bondage to traffickers. A recent study, estimating that for every reported case there were 30 hidden victims, put sexually-exploited victims in Guatemala alone at nearly 50,000.

Guatemala has acted against human trafficking, including creating a special prosecutorial unit that, however, lacks staff and resources to be effective beyond the capital. Mexico has specialized units to investigate crimes against migrants, including a new one in the federal prosecutor’s office, but lack of information and resources again hampers efforts. Prosecutors should work with migrant shelters and other NGOs to encourage violent crime and official abuse victims to come forward, with guarantees of humanitarian protection and financial aid.

The region already has relatively robust legal frameworks to protect refugees: the countries of Central and North America either signed the 1951 convention on refugees or its 1967 protocol and have asylum systems in place. Mexico has been at the forefront of international efforts to protect refugees: its diplomats promoted the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, which expands the definition to those fleeing “generalized violence”. To offer effective protection, however, capacity must be expanded to process asylum requests quickly and fairly. The countries should also refrain when possible from holding asylum-seekers in detention, which can deter those most in need – families and unaccompanied children – from seeking help.

Mexico cannot shoulder the refugee problem alone; genuine regional sharing of responsibility is essential. Guatemala must also provide better safety and shelter to those in transit and combat human trafficking. The U.S. should step up legal, economic, medical and psychosocial support for international agencies, government institutions and local NGOs that work with refugees. Despite unabashed hostility from some political sectors to migration from Central America and Mexico, it should explore bringing more refugees, especially children, directly to the U.S., so they avoid a dangerous journey, and consider temporarily halting deportations of youths who risk becoming victims or members of gangs. Erecting more barriers and forcing migrants and refugees further underground has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, strengthening the illegal networks that have turned much of Central America into a criminal battleground.

Recommendations
To protect the lives and rights of Central American migrants
To the government of Mexico:
Recognize that migrants, especially children and families, must not be returned to Central American communities where their lives and freedom could be in danger; so expand the capacity of the Commission for Refugee Assistance (COMAR) to evaluate asylum petitions, based on the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1984 Cartagena Declaration, as incorporated in Mexican law.
Work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to implement protocols allowing migration agents and other government officials to seek out those needing protection, especially in border areas and migrant detention centres.
Provide alternatives to detention in consultation with civil society and community leaders, so families seeking refugee status can remain together and vulnerable groups – such as unaccompanied
minors, women and lesbian, gay, bi- trans- or inter-sexual (LGBTI) individuals – receive adequate assistance and protection.

Offer “Visitor for Humanitarian Reasons” status, commonly known as humanitarian visas, to applicants for asylum, allowing them to accept formal employment and move freely within the country.

End the impunity of criminals and corrupt officials who target migrants by:
- working with humanitarian agencies, shelters, and other NGOs to protect migrants who have been victims of or witnesses to violent crime, abuse or corruption, encouraging them to report crimes and serve as witnesses and informing them of their right to humanitarian parole and protection; and
- expanding special state and federal prosecutorial units to investigate crimes against migrants, and working with shelters and human rights groups to identify victims of violent crime or official abuse; such units should also work closely with state special prosecutors for migrants and the federal organized crime unit, prioritizing and monitoring the investigation of official corruption and violent crime, such as kidnapping.

**To the governments of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador:**
Provide adequate support for and monitoring of reported migrants, especially children, including security and enhanced screening to identify and provide follow-up aid to those needing particularly education and job opportunities.

Work with the UNHCR to establish in-country centres in Mexico and other transit and destination countries, where those fleeing violence can petition for refugee recognition and be screened for third-country resettlement.

Expand prosecutorial capacity in Guatemala to investigate human trafficking for sexual exploitation, especially in border areas; and work with shelters and human rights groups to encourage Central American victims of trafficking networks to report abuse.

Protect trafficking victims from involuntary deportation, providing resettlement assistance and counselling when necessary; and reunite children and adolescents with their families, if feasible, or refer them to specialized institutions able to provide the required medical and psychosocial care.

**To the government of the U.S.:**
- Step up and expand in-country processing for refugee status or humanitarian parole of Central Americans with protection needs, particularly minors; explore accelerating the asylum process; and give adequate shelter to those awaiting decisions.
- Work with the UNHCR to establish processing centres in Mexico and Central America so that those forcibly displaced can seek U.S. refugee recognition from the safety of neighboring countries.
- Give COMAR financial help and training, especially to expand regional offices; and set up mobile units along the border and migration routes.
- Assist Mexican authorities and NGOs with programs to help integrate refugees, including initiatives to help them find health care, training, employment and psychosocial support, when necessary.
- Address the push factors that impel Central Americans to leave the northern triangle by extending support for the Alliance for Prosperity for five years, with targeted programs to address community violence prevention, institutional reform and poverty.
- Help regional governments replicate effective community-based violence prevention programs, partner with the private sector to create jobs and undertake police and justice sector reforms like those exemplified by the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala.
- Halt deportation of undocumented youths by offering Temporary Protected Status (TPS) until countries of origin have effective education and job training programs; and provide resources to that end, so as to avoid sending them back to violent neighborhoods where they risk forced gang recruitment.

Anti-government sentiment is mounting after police forces opened fire on a teacher protest in Oaxaca on Sunday, killing at least eight.

Since then, two high level government officials from that state, Oaxaca Minister of Indigenous Affairs Adelfo Regino Montes and Secretary of Labor Daniel Gutierrez, have resigned in protest of the 'authoritarian actions that repress and kill Oaxacan people who defend their rights and the government’s negligence to any possibility of dialogue,' as Gutierrez put it.

On Wednesday, members of the medical organization Yo Soy Medico 17 from 32 states joined the ongoing strike, stating their opposition to Peña Nieto’s health reforms, which they say are a 'disguised way of privatizing health in Mexico,' according to TeleSUR.

Further, the group—which translates to 'I'm a Doctor'—has vocally condemned the killings and what they describe as intimidation and repression by authorities and organized crime. 'According to doctors,' TeleSUR explains, 'as violence has increased in Mexico they have suffered the consequences of crimes like kidnappings, enforced disappearances and killings that have gone unpunished by authorities.'

The dissident Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE) teacher's union—which largely represents educators in Mexico's predominantly rural and Indigenous southern states—has been staging dramatic demonstrations and road blockades against new mandated teacher evaluations, which they say ignore the challenges of their region while enabling mass layoffs.

These protests have been met with violent government repression, including the recent arrest of two of the union's leaders. But members explain that the government's opposition to the teacher's union runs far deeper.

'The violence used to dispossess them of their basic work benefits with the goal of privatizing education is a reflection of the violence with which the originary peoples and rural and urban peoples are dispossessed.' —joint statement by National Indigenous Congress and the Zapatista National Liberation Army

A social media post by the Twitter handle @puzzleshifter has been shared widely as a valuable explainer of the forces shaping the current violence.

'Why would [Peña Nieto] want to fire teachers en masse? Because they teach social justice curriculum as guaranteed under gains made in the Revolution,' they write. As the post explains, these teachers, known as 'Normalistas,' work at the same 'Escuelas Normales' that the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students were training to lead.

The post continues:

Normalistas are passionate about their profession and have a strong desire to impact the lives of children in dire rural poverty in Mexico. Many who become teachers, grew up in same communities/conditions as children they seek to teach - about their ability to change conditions.

According to the Mexican Constitution, rural [Indigenous] children have as much right to education as the children of the wealthy.

This is how and why the Escuelas Normales were instituted.

However, ever since they were instituted, they have been egregiously underfunded.

This has resulted in teachers who enter the profession, specifically to teach the most left out kids, in Mexico’s society.

For this, over the years, rural teachers have been accused of bringing kids revolutionary ideas. Many say, of course, that's our job!

So there's been a constant battle to stay true to the goals of the Revolution to teach rural kids and Central gov to reign them in.

The government violence has also been criticized by the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), which issued a joint communique on Monday blasting the 'cowardly police attack,' and assuring the teachers, 'you are not alone.'

'We condemn the escalation of repression with which the neoliberal capitalist reform, supposedly about 'education,' is being imposed across the entire country and principally in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero, and Michoacán,' themissive states.

'We call on our peoples and on civil society in general to be with the teachers who resist at all times, to recognize ourselves in them,' it continues. 'The violence used to dispossess them of their basic work benefits with the goal of privatizing education is a reflection of the violence with which the originary
peoples and rural and urban peoples are dispossessed.'

'We are saying no very firmly to all the so-called structural reforms that mean basically a change of only ownership. They are selling our land, our territory. The people are resisting.'

—Gustavo Esteva, Universidad de la Tierra

The fight seems to be just beginning as the union is vowing to 'stay here until the government is willing to talk.'

As one teacher from Nochixtlán told Democracy Now! on Tuesday: 'If tomorrow the government is open to dialogue, then the conflict ends. The governor wants what he calls educational reform. And what we want is a dialogue for the kind of change that the people require, the kind that meets their needs.'

The unnamed educator continued: 'If you go to our communities, there are many needs. How are the kids doing? The children can't go to school to learn. All they think about is eating, because they don't eat. No one can learn if they don't sleep well, if they walked many miles to go to school. So the government should go and see what happens firsthand. And until there is a dialogue, we will not end our protest demanding educational reform.'

'And who will revive our dead?' they added. 'The dialogue won't bring our dead back to life. And those who are imprisoned, there aren't just five or 10, there are thousands.'

As Gustavo Esteva, founder of the Universidad de la Tierra in Oaxaca, further explained, 'This is a very complex war. It doesn't—it did not start in Oaxaca. The teachers' struggle, it is a global struggle. It started in Colombia, in Brazil, in Chile, in the U.S.—everywhere.'

'[W]e are in a war trying to say a very firm no to this kind of education. It is useless instruction,' he added. 'And we are saying no very firmly to all the so-called structural reforms that mean basically a change of only ownership. They are selling our land, our territory. The people are resisting. And then we are resisting with them to oppose this kind of operation.'


Violent protests have claimed the lives of at least nine people in little more than a week, littered the roads with the charred remains of cargo trucks, and tapped a deep vein of anger and mistrust toward the government.

Thousands of students here in the southern state of Oaxaca have been without school for months as their teachers have taken to the streets, rejecting national efforts to improve the enormous, abysmal education system.

But after government forces clashed with demonstrators here in the town of Nochixtlán last week, leaving at least nine dead and dozens wounded, the protest movement appears to have gained steam, plunging President Enrique Peña Nieto's signature education changes deeper into controversy."

A strong grass roots movement in Mexico was pressing the government to act against the countries endemic corruption, in May 2016. The legislature was considering a series of anti-corruption measures, including a bill that would require all public officials to reveal their assets, and potential conflicts of interest, and prove they are paying taxes. Their close relatives would have to reveal their assets (Kirk Semple, "Grass Roots Drive Is Forcing Mexico to Face Its Corruption," The New York Times, May 2, 2016).


Elisabeth Malkin, "Honduras Arrests 4 Men in Killing of Berta Cáceres, Indigenous Activist," The
New York Times, May 2, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/03/world/americas/honduras-arrests-4-men-in-killing-of-berta-caceres.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "Four men have been arrested in the murder of a Honduran environmental and indigenous rights activist whose killing two months ago prompted international condemnation, the authorities said on Monday.

The activist, Berta Cáceres, led a decade-long fight to block construction of the Agua Zarca Dam along the Gualcarque River, which is sacred to her Lenca people. Despite numerous threats and the killings of other members of her organization, she was undeterred.

She was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize last year, but the international acclaim was not enough to protect her. On March 3, gunmen burst into the house where she was staying in La Esperanza, her hometown, in western Honduras, and fatally shot her. The suspects were arrested in raids early Monday. Two of them are linked to the Honduran company that is building the dam, Desarrollos Energéticos S.A., or DESA.

Since the killing, the Honduran government has been under intense pressure to find Ms. Cáceres’s killers. The murder occurred as President Juan Orlando Hernández has been trying to project a new image of his country, one of the most violent in the world.” Her family members are concerned that the investigation may not reach up to those who authorized the murder, death threats and related actions.


In a joint statement, the two sides said that they had overcome some of the most intractable parts of a peace deal, which they have been negotiating in Havana since 2012.

In addition to a cease-fire, the rebels — known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or the FARC — agreed to lay down their arms.

The two sides said they would hold a ceremony in Havana on Thursday to mark the cease-fire, attended by Colombia’s president, Juan Manuel Santos, the FARC leader Rodrigo Londoño and other Latin American leaders. Negotiators hope a final peace deal will be reached in the days or weeks to come."

"The agreement sets in motion an end to the region’s oldest conflict. An estimated 220,000 people have been killed in more than 50 years of fighting between the guerrillas and the government. More than five million people are estimated to have been displaced."

"The agreement to lay down arms sets the stage for what will be one of the largest demobilization of guerrilla fighters in years. An estimated 7,000 FARC foot soldiers and commanders would be expected to disarm. Many were kidnapped as children by the guerrillas and know no other life than one with the rebels."

"Under a related agreement reached last year during the negotiations, FARC soldiers would enter into a “transitional justice” system, with reduced sentences for those who confess to crimes that took place during the conflict. In many cases, the punishments are expected to be limited to community service."

"Many FARC leaders have been killed and the group has suffered from mass desertions in its ranks. It counted 17,000 members in the early 2000s, a group that is estimated at 7,000 or fewer today."

And continuing: ICG, "On the Verge of Peace: Colombia Reaches Final Agreement with the FARC: The comprehensive Colombia peace deal faces major challenges, including a 2 October plebiscite, disarmament and UN verification. But after four years of talks in Cuba, Colombians have passed a new landmark in the long search for an end to 52 years of armed conflict, Statement Latin America & Caribbean, August 25, 2016, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/verge-peace-colombia-reaches-final-agreement-farc, commented, "Crisis Group welcomes the 24 August announcement in Havana that Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) have reached a final peace agreement. This is a landmark in the long search for an end to 52 years of armed conflict. After two failed attempts at negotiating peace with the largest guerrilla group over three decades, exhaustive and painstaking talks behind closed doors have led to a final agreement that aims to remedy the cause of the conflict, provide redress for its victims, and ensure that the FARC can eventually
become part of the country’s democratic system.

The deal is the fruit of four years of talks in Cuba, including agreements on comprehensive rural reform; strengthening guarantees for political opposition; major reforms to drug policy and coca crop substitution; a truth commission; a special judicial apparatus to hear cases of the most serious human rights violations committed in the conflict; FARC’s reincorporation into civilian life; and seats for FARC in the Congress, among other issues. A special UN mission is already deploying to monitor and verify the weapons abandonment process, bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities.

The final points negotiated included FARC’s participation in the political system and reintegration into civilian life. It will contest the 2018 congressional elections and be guaranteed a small number of seats in the Senate and House of Representatives. Until then, FARC can choose three civilians as non-voting representatives in the Senate and three in the House.

While the accord is cause for celebration, major challenges remain in the six to nine months ahead as Colombia transitions from war to peace. The most immediate is the 2 October plebiscite, when citizens will vote on the package, with the result binding on President Juan Manuel Santos. Low approval ratings and discontent with aspects of government performance dog him, while the opposition led by popular ex-President Álvaro Uribe, has targeted its campaign at the most controversial aspects of the peace deal: that convicted FARC members may avoid jail, although those most responsible for the most serious crimes still will face deprivation of liberty for several years, and guaranteed seats in Congress. The opposition also argues that it would renegotiate the deal to achieve better terms, which is generally considered to be unrealistic.

Approval of the deal is far from a given. Proponents will have to argue simply and effectively and separate the merits of peace from the perceptions of government performance. The government has already begun to educate the public about the content of the accords. The FARC also has a role. It must start to gather its forces and destroy some weapons before the vote. Expressing remorse for its worst abuses against civilians, such as kidnapping and extortion, would go a long way toward convincing voters that it will fulfil the agreements in good faith.

FARC began to move off a war footing last year with an informal ceasefire, but its full transition will begin with the weapons abandonment process, set to last six months from the official signing of the agreements in late September. A detailed timeline, UN mission verification and clear protocols indicate the process has a robust framework. In light of the extermination campaign that met the FARC’s efforts to join the political system in the 1980s, however, concerns will focus on the security of fighters who leave the 23 cantonment and eight smaller sites where the guerrillas will concentrate. Efficient, flexible application of the security protocols will be essential. Security of the communities FARC formerly controlled will also be fundamental. These often have a hostile relationship with army, and the presence of illegal economic activities, above all coca cultivation and mining, will tempt other armed groups to seize vacated territory.

One such armed group could be the National Liberation Army (ELN), the second-largest guerrilla force, with an estimated 1,800 combatants and a strong presence in border areas with Venezuela. The government and ELN announced separate peace talks in March but have yet to convene the first round and are locked in a stalemate. Monitoring and verifying a cessation of hostilities in a context of ELN and other armed groups is sure to be a main challenge in the immediate post-conflict era.

FARC will also have to maintain internal cohesion during the transition to guarantee it can fulfil its side of the agreements, including stopping all forms of violence against the armed forces and civilians. Risk of dissident and divided units breaking away has been confirmed by events in the FARC’s First Front, which operates in the south-east province of Guaviare and has stated that one of its factions will not take part in the peace process. There is strong evidence that other FARC units are divided. Attacks have already been attributed to them, and in some areas, fighters have joined the ELN.

The government also has the challenge of creating goodwill, both in areas long affected by violence and state abandonment, and also in zones expected to host cantonments. State legitimacy in many of these places is close to nil. The government must begin a sustained dialogue as it implements projects to stabilize territory and reintroduce its authority.

Finally, the UN mission tasked with monitoring and verifying arms abandonment, ceasefire and cessation of hostilities is essential for both the parties and society to trust that the deal will be fulfilled. Managing the expectations of local communities while remaining within its limited mandate will be
challenging. Collecting and channeling reliable information from and through a plethora of national and international actors will be difficult. And as it resolves disputes over possible violations, it will be under pressure to take sides, especially against the FARC. To make informed decisions, it will need to consult with delegates from the guarantor nations, Norway and Cuba. The international community, especially but not only the U.S. and European Union, will on occasion need to publicly support its tough decisions during a turbulent period.

Previously:
ICG, Kyle Johnson, "The National Liberation Army (ELN) Joins Colombia’s Search for Peace, May 12, 2016, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-colombia/2016/05/12/the-national-liberation-army-eln-joins-colombias-search-for-peace, presented a dialogue, "The Colombian government announced on 30 March the beginning of the formal phase of peace negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN), the second largest guerrilla group in Colombia. These talks, together with those nearing completion with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in Havana, are the country’s greatest opportunity yet to end 52 years of armed conflict. But how different will this peace process be compared to the one with the FARC? What lessons can be learned from the latter, and what incentives do ELN leaders have to achieve a substantive agreement? In this Q&A, Crisis Group’s Colombia Senior Analyst Kyle Johnson explains why the history of the ELN and its horizontal political structure make it such a unique negotiating actor.

How would you describe the ELN as a group, and where does it operate?
The ELN is a leftist guerrilla group founded in 1964 that operates mostly on the Colombia/Venezuelan border, where it controls many informal border crossings. It is also present along the Pacific coast and in north-central Colombia. It is involved in illegal economic activities such as kidnapping, extortion, illegal mining and drug trafficking. Its principal strategy is to carry out “armed resistance” against what it terms the oligarchies from Bogotá and multinational corporations that want to extract or exploit Colombian natural resources without supporting local communities. The group has about 2,000 fighters, but its real strength comes from unarmed activists and communities who are somehow connected with the ELN. It is a very horizontal organization and it makes decisions based on internal consensus.

Generally, it is said that the FARC is an armed group with a political agenda, while the ELN is a political group with arms. What does that mean?
That’s a common way to explain how different the two groups are. The FARC has a vertical hierarchy, with a leader heading a seven-person Secretariat and a somewhat larger High Command, and it has long prioritized military tactics over politics, without completely ignoring the latter. The ELN, by contrast, has high-level decision-making bodies, which make decisions based on consensus, and below them, everyone at a certain level gets an equal voice. The ELN sees political action as the best way to strengthen the organization. It also sees political action as a way of strengthening their military side. For three decades, the ELN has focused on building local “popular power”, while the FARC has aimed to take power in Bogotá. Also, the FARC is larger, with close to 8,000 fighters and perhaps 20,000 militia members, and it controls more territory. Despite their differences, both groups have had a good enough relationship historically. However, there were costly military confrontations between them between 2006 and 2010.

Why did the FARC enter into peace negotiations with the Colombian government before the ELN?
Policies toward the FARC – whether to pursue its defeat or make peace with it – have been a central factor in the election of almost every Colombian president since the 1980s. The current government was no exception. Benefitting from the weakening of guerrilla forces by the military campaign pursued by President Álvaro Uribe (2002-2010) yet recognizing the state’s inability to secure an end to the armed conflict by military means alone, President Juan Manuel Santos has pursued negotiations with both groups, but with priority given to the FARC process.

This focus makes sense. FARC has inflicted the most political pain on Colombia’s central government, and in the past has been perceived as threatening to take over the country. Whether that is true or not, the existence of this perception is important. Nobody has ever thought that the ELN could seize the capital.

Meanwhile, although both the FARC and ELN have realized they will not win the war, their response
to this new awareness has been quite different. The FARC, which experienced a generational shift in its leadership after the death of its founder, Manuel Marulanda, in 2008, made a strategic decision to negotiate. The ELN adjusted its strategy to one of “armed resistance” on a local level, where winning the war is no longer the goal, and so peace negotiations were not as necessary from their perspective. Also, while the FARC seized the opportunity presented by Santos’ determined pursuit of a negotiated solution, the ELN saw Santos as just another member of Colombia’s oligarchy: they argued nothing had changed politically in Colombia and therefore negotiations were not justified.

It took six months for the Colombian government and the FARC to work out a peace agenda, while with the ELN, the same process lasted almost three years. Why so?

The FARC’s clear decision to pursue negotiations meant that in many respects the process was simpler with the FARC. It was a question of agreeing to the points to be discussed, the right language to define the issues and a methodology. Also, it was fairly clear which issues were important to the FARC and where common ground could be found. The group was ready and had the political will to quickly define an agenda and take important early steps like ending economically-motivated kidnappings. The ELN, on the other hand, took almost two years just to arrive at a very weak and fragile internal consensus that negotiations with the government were a good idea.

Talks with the ELN are scheduled to begin at the end of May in Ecuador. President Santos, though, has stated that dialogue will not begin until the ELN stops kidnapping and releases all its kidnap victims. The group has rejected this demand stating that the government should not set conditions for the negotiations, putting this starting date somewhat in doubt.

What incentive does the ELN have to make peace right now?

The ELN has three main incentives to negotiate peace. First, it may simply not get another opportunity for talks in the near future. Second, without the FARC in the picture, the group may not be able to survive a government military offensive. And finally, as the country moves forward with the FARC in a post-conflict arrangement, the ELN risks becoming politically irrelevant. Time is also pressing. The ELN effectively only has until 2018, when the mandate of the Santos government ends, to sign or come close to reaching a peace agreement."

"Building peace from Colombian universities," Fundacion Escuelas de Paz, http://www.escuelasdepaz.co, reported, “'Peacebuilders' is a program that seeks the integral formation of 1,200 university students in Colombia, involved in the scholarship program “Dreams of Peace” of Bancolombia Foundation, in knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes conducive to building Cultures of Peace.

Peacebuilders is carried out by Escuelas de Paz (Schools of Peace) Foundation based on the six components proposed by UNESCO in the 2000 manifesto for a culture of peace and non-violence. Also it works on the six pillars raised by the methodology of education for peace, known as “The Flower for the Culture of Peace”. Finally, as a transversal axis the Guiding Principles of UN Secretary General on the Participation of Youth in Peace Building were taken.

These participants will implement impact actions on their university communities through collective nonviolent actions that enable a more just society. Due to the national situation of peace talks between the government and the FARC guerrilla in Havana, Cuba, it was formed a group of 70 students leaders in building and advocacy of cultures of peace, historical memory and reconciliation, with capabilities for replication in the next semesters and to design and implement new actions for peace within the institutions in which they were formed.

In a first stage, 320 students have been trained in three cities in the country: Bogotá D.C, Cartagena y Manizales since July 2015. The scholarship program of Bancolombia Foundation is an initiative developed from the line of social management of Bancolombia, who have an interest in developing a program of high social impact, which aims to provide resources and conditions that allow students with specific characteristics as vulnerable conditions, to access to higher education in technical, technological and university programs nationwide.

For more information visit Fundacion Escuelas de Paz: http://www.escuelasdepaz.co."

The signing in Havana today of agreements on the “end of the conflict” and the referendum mechanism for the Colombian population to approve the final peace deal provides the strongest assurance yet that the 52-year armed conflict between the government and the country’s largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), is finally coming to an end. President Juan Manuel Santos and rebel leader Rodrigo Londoño (Timochenko) signed the detailed document with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the presidents of Chile, Cuba and Venezuela and the foreign minister of Norway as witnesses, among other high-profile figures.

The agreements spell out the functioning of the ceasefire and cessation of hostilities; the arms abandonment process for the FARC; the security guarantees for FARC guerrillas who transition to civilian life; the preparation of the “reincorporation” process for FARC guerrilla members; the 23 cantonment sites and eight smaller camps where the FARC will assemble its forces and how they will function; and the mechanism for a referendum on the final peace agreement.

The bilateral ceasefire and cessation of hostilities will begin immediately after the signing of a final agreement. Five days later, the FARC will begin moving its fighters, still armed, to the cantonments and camps. In the first month, other types of weapons that FARC fighters may not carry individually will be transported to the camps. During the first two months after the final agreement is signed, “unstable” weapons will be destroyed. Six months after having signed the final agreement, the FARC will have abandoned all its weapons.

The parties also agreed to enable the Colombian people to vote in a referendum on the final peace deal in accordance with the requirements laid down by the Constitutional Court. The Court is currently debating the constitutionality of a possible plebiscite proposed by the government.

In addition, the parties announced a series of security guarantees covering the dismantling of “paramilitary successor organisations” and protection of the political movement the FARC is expected to create in the aftermath of the peace agreement. These measures include the creation of a National Commission on Security Guarantees; a Special Investigative Unit within the Attorney General’s Office; a Comprehensive Security System for Political Action; a Strategic Security and Protection Plan for the new FARC political movement; and a Comprehensive Security and Protection Program for Local and Regional Communities and Organisations, among other measures.

Crisis Group commends both delegations for overcoming the enormous challenges of negotiating peace over the course of close to four years, as well as the technical subcommittee involving members of the Colombian armed forces and the FARC, and the witness and guarantor nations of Cuba and Norway, and Venezuela and Chile respectively. We also applaud the inclusion of victims in the talks at various critical moments.

Now we all await agreements on the final issues: FARC “reincorporation” to civilian life; its transformation into a political movement; and the monitoring and implementation mechanisms for all commitments. The composition and workings of the Special Tribunal for Peace, which will handle transitional justice for those accused of human rights violations during the conflict, also remain to be resolved. Crisis Group will continue to report on potential obstacles in implementation and options for overcoming them in order to help Colombians consolidate and sustain the peace that the country, its neighbors and the world community await.”

Nicholas Casey, "Colombia and FARC Rebels Reach a Deal to Free Child Soldiers," The New York Times, May 15, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/16/world/americas/colombia-and-farc-rebels-reach-a-deal-to-free-child-soldiers.html?ref=todayspaper, reported, "The Colombian government and the country's largest rebel group announced on Sunday that they had reached an agreement to release child soldiers from rebel custody, an important step in peace negotiations, which are in their final stages.

"The deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC, could involve hundreds of children who were recruited to fight in Colombia's long civil war, though no census of child soldiers has ever been taken."
Venezuela’s economy had collapsed further by mid-May 2016. In many places electric power was only available about two hours a day. Public hospitals had failed, with many patients dying from lack of supplies, failing equipment from lack of maintenance. The political crisis was deepening, possibly to an explosive point (Nicolas Casey, "Dying Infants and No Medicine: Inside Venezuela’s Failing Hospitals," The New York Times, May 15, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/16/world/americas/dying-infants-and-no-medicine-inside-venezuelas-failing-hospitals.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).

ICG, "Venezuela: Edge of the Precipice," Latin America Briefing N°35, June 23, 2016, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/b035-venezuela-edge-of-the-precipice.aspx?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=41bebd3fc0-venezuela_23jun16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-41bebd3fc0-359871089, commented, “In December 2015, President Nicolás Maduro immediately recognized the opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) coalition’s resounding legislative election victory. For the first time in over sixteen years, the prospect arose of political cohabitation between the alliance led by the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) and its opponents, and with it a unique opportunity to resolve the protracted political crisis by peaceful and democratic means. The government, however, has chosen confrontation, using control of the judiciary and other nominally autonomous branches of state to neutralize the opposition’s control of the National Assembly. The MUD seeks a recall referendum, which the constitution allows after the mid-point of any elected term of office. With battle-lines drawn, both sides treat many of the other’s decisions as legally and practically null and void. The government should cease efforts to block the referendum, and the international community should insist on a timely and effective dialogue with facilitators acceptable to both sides.

The conflict of powers is all the more damaging because the economic and social crisis has worsened significantly. The World Bank estimates that 2016 GDP will decline by over 10 per cent, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that inflation will approach 500 per cent in 2016 and more than 1,500 per cent in 2017. With no wage indexation, the population below the poverty line is growing fast. Food and other basic goods are scarce, and most Venezuelans cannot afford to buy enough if they can find them. The health service is close to collapse, with most vital medicines unavailable and hospitals experiencing a sharp increase in patient deaths. Most citizens spend hours every day queuing for price-controlled goods, with no guarantee of success. The government has refused to allow donors, private or public, to send food or medical aid, arguing that pressure to do so is a cover for foreign intervention so as to damage its reputation and ultimately remove it.

It has been apparent for some time that without some form of international engagement the crisis is unlikely to end peacefully and constitutionally. The government is doing all it can to hinder the MUD’s efforts to cut short the Maduro presidency by legal means. If a recall referendum is not held this year, it would lose much of its effectiveness, since the constitution provides for the vice president to take over if the president leaves office in the last two years of his term, which ends in January 2019. If, however, Maduro was removed by referendum in 2016, a presidential election would be required in 30 days. If it produced a MUD successor, the response of Chavista loyalists might pose serious governability problems.

The secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS) has called for application of the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which provides for diplomatic initiatives, including good offices, in the event of an interruption of the democratic order in a member state. Simultaneously, two former Latin American presidents and a former Spanish premier, at the request of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and endorsed by the June 2016 OAS General Assembly are seeking to promote a government-opposition dialogue. The former Spanish premier, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, briefed the OAS Permanent Council on 21 June on the exploratory stage of those efforts. No agreement has been reached on when that dialogue might actually start, and the MUD has described it as “thus far non-existent” and “convened by only one side”. The Council is scheduled to meet on 23 June to discuss the secretary general’s report.

To prevent an undemocratic, possibly violent outcome and facilitate an immediate solution to the rapidly worsening humanitarian crisis:

*The government should*
declare a humanitarian emergency and permit delivery of external food and medical aid and its distribution by non-governmental agencies; refrain from using the Supreme Court to neutralize the elected legislature and permit a peaceful electoral solution to the political crisis by allowing the National Electoral Council (CNE) to exercise its constitutional role; and free all political prisoners, allow political exiles to return without reprisals and engage in direct, effective, and timely dialogue with the opposition.

The MUD and National Assembly leadership should prioritize national interest over partisan objectives; maintain their declared commitment to peaceful, constitutional resolution of the crisis; and make every effort to pursue an effective dialogue with the government.

The regional community should insist that the government permit emergency food and medical aid and prepare a thorough assessment of principal humanitarian needs and how to meet them; • examine the crisis in the framework of the Inter-American Democratic Charter and urgently assist in restoration of constitutional norms and rule of law; and support efforts to pursue a structured, timely dialogue between the two sides and press the CNE to follow the constitutional timetable for a 2016 recall referendum."

Simon Romero, "Michel Temer, Brazil’s Interim President, May Herald Shift to the Right," The New York Times, May 12, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/13/world/americas/michel-temer-brazils-interim-president-may-herald-shift-to-the-right.html?ref=todayspaper&r=0, reported, "The new Brazilian president's first pick for science minister was a creationist. He chose a soybean tycoon who has deforested large tracts of the Amazon rain forest to be his agriculture minister. And he is the first leader in decades to have no women in his cabinet at all.

The government of President Michel Temer — the 75-year-old lawyer who took the helm of Brazil on Thursday after Dilma Rousseff was suspended by the Senate to face an impeachment trial — could cause a significant shift to the political right in Latin America’s largest country."

Some annalists say the move to oust the Brazilian President and other members of the government is an action by the conservative elite to try to break the popular socialist party and bring in a more conservative government. There have been street protests against the impeachment as well as against corruption.

It is important to note that the Brazilian Congress, including its conservative members, is rife with corruption problems, also, which may become major political issues (Andrew Jacobs, "Brazil’s Graft-Prone Congress: A Circus That Even Has a Clown." The New York Times, May 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/world/americas/brazils-most-entertaining-show-may-be-congress.html?ref=todayspaper).

On August 31, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff was removed from office as President by a vote of the Brazilian Congress. Rouseff said she and her followers would continue to fight against what they considered a political coup (Simon Romero, "Dilma Rousseff Is Ousted as Brazil’s President in Impeachment Vote," The New York Times, August 31, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/01/world/americas/brazil-dilma-rousseff-impeached-removed-president.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).


It is unclear how Folha de São Paulo obtained the transcripts of the 75-minute phone conversation
between the newly-installed Planning Minister Romero Jucá, a senator at the time, and former oil executive Sergio Machado. But the discussion reportedly took place in March, just weeks before Brazil's lower House voted to impeach the democratically-elected Rousseff.

Both Jucá and Machado were targets of an ongoing internal investigation known as Operation Car Wash, which sought to expose money laundering and corruption at the state-controlled oil company Petrobras, which allegedly accepted bribes in exchange for contracts.

The transcripts, according to *Intercept* reporting, reveals 'explicit plotting' between the two, who 'agree that removing Dilma is the only means for ending the corruption investigation,' as well as reported collusion with some of Brazil's 'most powerful national institutions,' including officials in the military and Supreme Court.

Summarizing the report, *Intercept* journalists Glenn Greenwald, Andrew Fishman, and David Miranda write:

The crux of this plot is what Jucá calls 'a national pact' – involving all of Brazil's most powerful institutions – to leave Michel Temer in place as President (notwithstanding his multiple corruption scandals) and to kill the corruption investigation once Dilma is removed. In the words of *Folha*, Jucá made clear that impeachment will 'end the pressure from the media and other sectors to continue the Car Wash investigation.'

Miranda, among others, has suspected that such a motive was behind the ouster. But on Monday he and his colleagues declared the transcripts were 'proof that this had nothing to do with preserving Brazilian democracy and everything to do with destroying it.'

And while the political crisis in Brazil has been widely reported in mainstream press as an 'impeachment,' Greenwald, Fishman, and Miranda argue that the new reporting gives ample credence for news outlets to refer to it as a 'coup.' Pointing to some of the most damning aspects of the transcripts, they write:

The transcripts contain two extraordinary revelations that should lead all media outlets to seriously consider whether they should call what took place in Brazil a 'coup': a term Dilma and her supporters have used for months. When discussing the plot to remove Dilma as a means of ending the Car Wash investigation, Jucá said the Brazilian military is supporting the plot: 'I am talking to the generals, the military commanders. They are fine with this, they said they will guarantee it.' He also said the military is 'monitoring the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)),' the social movement of rural workers who support PT's efforts of land reform and inequality reduction and have led the protests against impeachment.

The second blockbuster revelation – perhaps even more significant – is Jucá's statement that he spoke with and secured the involvement of numerous justices on Brazil's Supreme Court, the institution that impeachment defenders have repeatedly pointed to as vesting the process with legitimacy and to deny that Dilma's removal is a coup.

Jucá on Monday confirmed the authenticity of the transcripts but said his comments were taken out of context.

Meanwhile, demonstrators camped outside the home of Interim President Temer after a protest on Sunday organized by Frente Povo Sem Medo, a coalition of Brazil's leftist movements."

Nika Knight, "Temer Convicted of Breaking Election Laws As Thousands March for Democracy in Brazil: More revelations of "oozing corruption" in interim president's administration," *Common Dreams*, June 3, 2016, http://www.commondreams.org/news/2016/06/03/temer-convicted-breaking-election-laws-thousands-march-democracy-brazil, reported, "Upheaval in Brazil continued this week as a court handed down a conviction against right-wing president Michel Temer, who took over after the ouster of leftist president Dilma Rousseff, and banned him from running in elections for the next eight years."

A regional elections court in Temer's hometown of São Paulo on Thursday "issued a formal decree finding him guilty and declaring him 'ineligible' to run for any political office as a result of now having a 'dirty record' in elections," Glenn Greenwald reported in *The Intercept*.

The decision came less than three weeks after Temer oversaw what has widely been described as a 'coup' to overthrow Rousseff, the recently re-elected Workers' Party president.

"In the scope of the scheming, corruption and illegality from this 'interim' government, Temer's law-breaking is not the most severe offense," Greenwald notes. "But it potentely symbolizes the anti-
democratic scam that Brazilian elites have attempted to perpetrate. In the name of corruption, they have removed the country’s democratically elected leader and replaced her with someone who—though not legally barred from being installed—is now barred for eight years from running for the office he wants to occupy.'

As interim president, Temer has swiftly and openly transformed the formerly left-leaning and diverse Brazilian government into one pushing neoliberal, right-wing policies, helmed by an all-white, all-male cabinet. In the New Yorker, Jon Lee Anderson summarized a few of Temer’s decisions that have raised eyebrows worldwide:

He got rid of the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights, ordering it to be subsumed into the Ministry of Justice—which he promptly handed over to Alexandre de Moraes, a former security official from São Paulo who is accused of deploying death squads to fight crime in that city. (His former office has denied the accusations.) This came at the same time as news of a horrifying case in which a sixteen-year-old girl in Rio de Janeiro was gang-raped by as many as thirty-three men, some of whom filmed their abuse and posted it to social media.

[...]Temer’s choice for agriculture minister, meanwhile, was a portly billionaire senator named Blairo Maggi, who cast the deciding vote in the Senate to unseat Rousseff. Maggi, the former governor of the state of Mato Grosso, made his fortune by cutting down millions of acres of Amazonian wilderness. In a 2007 piece for National Geographic, the journalist Scott Wallace wrote, ‘Maggi is 'O Rei da Soja, King of Soy, the world’s largest single producer. Maggi acquired a less flattering honorific when Greenpeace gave him its Golden Chain Saw award in 2005.' **For a number of years while he was governor, Mato Grosso led Brazil in deforestation.** In 2010, Maggi was elected to the Senate, and, with the support of the powerful bancada ruralista, Brazil’s agribusiness lobby, he became the head of the environmental committee, where he helped push through a set of environmental regulations known as the Forest Code. Among other things, the Forest Code gave amnesty to landowners who had previously engaged in illegal wilderness clearances.

'The oozing corruption of Temer’s ministers has sometimes served to obscure his own,' Greenwald writes. 'He, too, is implicated in several corruption investigations. And now, he has been formally convicted of violating election laws.'

On the same day Temer was convicted, suspended president Dilma Rousseff joined 5,000 women marching for women’s rights and democracy in Rio de Janeiro:

Greenwald also discussed the United States' involvement in Rousseff’s impeachment in a video published Friday by The Intercept, observing that WikiLeaks had published diplomatic cables showing Temer secretly meeting with officials in D.C. in 2006 and 2007, and that impeachment proponent Senator Aloysio Nunes met with officials and lobbyists close to Hillary Clinton in Washington in the days following his vote to impeach Rousseff.

A government overthrow in Latin America "cannot happen without U.S. approval," Greenwald argued. "If the U.S. was supporting democracy, the impeachment would not have happened."

Moreover, "it’s always true that the U.S. government strongly prefers right-leaning governments than left-leaning ones in South America," Greenwald said. "Why? It’s obvious: right-leaning governments tend to help the international banks, Wall Street, hedge funds, international capital."

Indeed, on Thursday the Financial Times reported that investors around the world were "rooting" for Temer’s administration.

U.S. and Canadian Developments

Sharon LaFraniere, Daniela Porat and Augustin Armendariz, "A Drumbeat of Multiple Shootings, but America Isn’t Listening: Most shootings with four deaths or injuries are invisible outside their communities. And most of the lives they scar are black." The New York Times, May 22, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/23/us/americas-overlooked-gun-violence.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, ”The Elks Lodge episode was one of at least 358 armed encounters nationwide last year — nearly one a day, on average — in which four or more people were killed or wounded, including attackers. The toll: 462 dead and 1,330 injured, sometimes for life, typically in bursts of gunfire lasting but seconds.

293
In some cities, law enforcement officials say a growing share of shootings involve more than one victim, possibly driven by increased violence between street gangs. But data are scarce.

Seeking deeper insight into the phenomenon, The New York Times identified and analyzed these 358 shootings with four or more casualties, drawing on two databases assembled from news reports and citizen contributors, and then verifying details with law enforcement agencies.

Only a small handful were high-profile mass shootings like those in South Carolina and Oregon. The rest are a pencil sketch of everyday America at its most violent.

They chronicle how easily lives are shattered when a firearm is readily available — in a waistband, a glove compartment, a mailbox or garbage can that serves as a gang's gun locker. They document the mayhem spawned by the most banal of offenses: a push in a bar, a Facebook taunt, the wrong choice of music at a house party. They tally scores of unfortunate in the wrong place at the wrong time: an 11-year-old clinging to his mother's hip, shot as she prepared to load him into a car; a 77-year-old church deacon, killed by a stray bullet while watching television on his couch.

Among the mass shootings in the U.S. since May 2016, was the killing in an Orlando, FL in a gay nightclub of 50 people, and the wounding of 53 others, by a gunman using an assault rifle. While praising ISIS, the gunman appeared to be making an anti-assault. It was the worst such attack in U.S. history (Lizette Alvarez and Richard Perez-Pena, "Praising ISIS, Gunman Attacks Gay Nightclub Leaving 50 dead in Worst Shooting on U.S. Soil," The New York Times, June 13, 2016).

From 2005-2014 violence against L.G.B.T. rose from being the second most targeted group, after Jews, to being the most targeted in hate crimes, according to the FBI. While the total number of defined hate crimes declined, the list shifted. In 2005 the listing of groups according to the number targeted was: Jews, L.G.B.T., Blacks, Muslims, Hispanics, Asians and Whites. In 2014 order was L.G.B.T., Muslims, Blacks, Whites, Asians and Hispanics (Haeyoun Park and Iaryna Mykhyalyshyn, "Hate Crimes Now Directed at L.G.B.T. the Most," The New York Times, June 18, 2016).

Eric Lichtblau and Monica Davey, "Homicide Rates Jump in Many Major U.S. Cities, New Data Shows," The New York Times, May 13, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/14/us/murder-rates-cities-fbi.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0, reported, "Experts cannot agree on what to call a recent rise in homicides, much less its cause, but new data on Friday that showed a sharp spike in homicide rates in more than 20 cities rekindled debate over whether it was time for alarm.

The data showed particularly significant increases in homicides in six cities in the first three months of the year compared with the same period last year — Chicago, Dallas, Jacksonville, Fla., Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Memphis. But almost as many cities reported a notable decline in recent months.

New York saw a 25 percent drop, while Las Vegas's homicide total nearly doubled. Law enforcement officials struggled to explain the numbers and differed over their significance.

The heroin epidemic, a resurgence in gang violence and economic factors in some cities were all offered as explanations, but the most contentious theory came from an agency that usually does not worry much about local crime: the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The number of reported and filmed shootings by police of unarmed black people, that videos depicted as totally unwarranted, became major sources of protest around the U.S. in early summer, 2016, while Latinos and American Indians also noted unequal treatment and unjustified deaths at the hands of police. Also exploding into to the national discussion of police reform and building relations of trust between communities and police was the killing of 5 police officers by a sniper in Dallas, TX, during a peaceful rally supported by the city and the police on finding resolution to these issues. That was followed, July 16 with the shooting of 6 police officers in Baton Rouge, LA, three of whom died. (Rick Rojas and Samantha Schmidt, "Amid Protests Over Police Shootings of Black Men, Latinos Note A Disparity," The New York Times, July 14, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/15/us/amid-protests-over-police-shootings-of-black-men-latinos-note-a-disparity.html?ref=todayspaper; Haeyoun Park and Jasmine C. Lee, "Looking for Accountability in Police-Involved Deaths of African Americans," The New York Times, July 13, 2016; Manny Freeman, Richard Perez-ena and Jonah Engel Bromwick, "Five Officers Killed as Payback, Chief
As of July 22 the pattern of police shootings shown on video to be totally unjustified continued in North Miami, FL with a black care taker, on his back on the ground, hands in the air, stating he was helping a patient, an autistic man.

The Great Recession (combined is some Republican governed states with neoliberal economic policies) continues to have long range impacts in the United States, seen especially clearly in a degrading of essential public services, as cash strapped local governments have privatized ambulance and other services. "Since the 2008 financial crisis, private equity firms have increasingly taken over public services like emergency care and firefighting, often with dire effects." - sometimes deadly. This is detailed in Danielle Ivory, Ben Protess and Kitty Bennett, "When You Dial 911 and Wall Street Answers," The New York Times, June 25, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/26/business/dealbook/when-you-dial-911-and-wall-street-answers.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0). Similarly, private equity firms have moved into the housing markets, and are undertaking the same bad behaviors that banks and mortgage companies exhibited that brought on the great recession and injured people, loosing paperwork, and rushing foreclosures: "Some private equity firms that came in as the cleanup crew for the housing crisis are now repeating errors that banks committed, while others are bypassing the working poor" (Mathew Goldstein, Rachel Abrams and Ben Protess, "How Housing’s New Players Spiraled Into Banks’ Old Mistakes," The New York Times, June 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/27/business/dealbook/private-equity-housing-missteps.html?ref=todayspaper&_r=0).

"Can Restorative Justice Break the School-to-Prison Pipeline?" Global Campaign for Peace Education, July 19, http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/category/categories/news/, commented, "Last September, Berkeley (CA) Tech Academy Principal Sheila Quintana had no choice but to suspend 10 students after an off-campus brawl was caught on video by neighborhood residents. Quintana knew there had to be a better way to deal with the disciplinary process than to shut the students out of school, which can send them into a cycle of futility: falling behind in class and ultimately dropping out with scarce employment opportunities, elevating the risk of a life of crime and incarceration.

There is a better way. It’s a concept known as restorative justice, in which perpetrators of minor to moderate offenses are brought into an intensive program in which they are led to confront the underlying causes and consequences of their actions."

DIALOGUING

THE WORLD HUMANITARIAN SUMMIT: ON THE FRONT LINES FOR ACTION

Rene Wadlow, May 21, 2016

The World Humanitarian Summit organized by the United Nations will open on 23 May 2016 in
Istanbul, Turkey. The aim of the conference in the words of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki moon is to see what should be done “to end conflict, alleviate suffering and reduce risk and vulnerability.” Turkey is on the front lines of the consequences of armed conflict with nearly three million refugees from Syria and Iraq as well as its own attacks against Kurds. Turkey has entered into agreements with the States of the European Union concerning the flow of refugees through Turkey to Europe – agreements that have raised controversy and concern from human rights organizations.

Given the policies of the Turkish government, some non-governmental organizations have refused to participate in protest. Doctors Without Borders – one of the best-known of the relief organizations – has pulled out. However, the Association of World Citizens will participate while working for a settlement of Kurdish issues at the same time.

As with all UN conferences, there has been a good deal of earlier discussion. These discussions within UN agencies, national governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have led to a synthesis document which sets out the agenda and the main lines for discussion in Istanbul. It is the Secretary-General’s report for the World Humanitarian Summit One humanity: shared responsibility. (A70/709). There is a useful overview of the current world situation of refugees, internally-displaced people and of people on the move to escape persistent poverty. There are also warnings about future displacement of people due to the consequences of climate change.

As the report highlights “The effort necessary to prevent and resolve conflict will be massive but can be broken down into sets of core actions. They include demonstrating courageous leadership, acting early, investing in stability and ensuring broad participation by affected people and other stakeholders.”

As with so many UN reports, there is a call for courageous political leadership and a mobilization of political will. If there were more courageous political leadership, we might not have the scope and intensity of the problems we now face. There is a limited amount that we can do to provide courageous political leadership at the national level. Rather we have to ask what can we do within non-governmental organizations in which we are active to resolve conflicts and deal with some of the consequences of the conflicts such as refugee flows.

I see three areas, outlined in the UN report as agenda items, that we can develop on a non-governmental level. The UN report sets out the values that also guide our NGO actions. “To prevent and alleviate human suffering, to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human person – these are the most important humanitarian principles.

The first issue for NGO action is to strengthen respect for the laws of war – now more commonly called Humanitarian Law. The recent and wide-spread attacks against medical facilities and medical personnel indicate an erosion of the laws of war. There is an urgent need to strengthen respect for the laws of war. This is an issue on which NGOs and the media can focus. Much humanitarian law has already been codified into the Geneva Conventions and other treaties. States which have not ratified should be encouraged to do so, but States must also be encouraged to live up to their word.

The second area is risk analysis and the publication of findings. All governments do a certain amount of risk analysis and contingency planning, especially the military. However, they make their findings public only when it serves their interests and States give little information as to how the analysis was made. NGOs along with academic institutions can provide analysis from open sources and indicate growing tension areas – what I have called “storm warnings”. For storm warnings to be effective, they need to reach as many people as possible and especially those in the path of the storm. International support for conflict resolution efforts must be made early and in a continuing way. If a storm does not break out quickly, it does not mean that the “storm-creating factors” have gone away and that attention can be put on other possible conflict areas. There need to be constant awareness of the way that tensions may form.
The third issue is training and preparation. There are a relatively large number of people working for (or having worked for) relief operations. They are able to set up tents, field kitchens, field clinics and water supplies. There may be need for more but there is not much room for innovation. However, teaching in refugee camps, dealing with longer-range psychological damage are areas where there is less experience and also less agreement as to what is to be done.

We can wish creative energies for the participants in the World Humanitarian Summit. Hopefully, the broad outline of actions necessary will be set, but the real work of all international conferences comes in the follow up.

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DEFEATING ISIS AND ENDING THE SUNNI-SHITE WAR IN IRAQ


Now that Iraqi forces, with the support of the international coalition, are gearing up to recapture Mosul—ISIS’s last major stronghold in Iraq—the question that looms high is what will be the fate of the Iraqi Sunni community following ISIS’s inevitable defeat? I maintain that unless the political discussion begins now between the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government and the Sunnis (under the auspices of the US) to determine the fate of the Sunni community, defeating ISIS alone will not end the ongoing Sunni-Shiite civil war in Iraq that has claimed the lives of tens of thousands since 2003.

As long as the Iraqi Sunnis do not know what the future has in store for them, they have no reason to put their lives on the line to fight against ISIS and make all the sacrifices only to benefit the Shiite government in Baghdad, which they reject and despise even more so than ISIS.

The Obama administration should, parallel to the fight against ISIS, immediately start to negotiate the future status of the Sunni Iraqis with the Iraqi government and agree on establishing an autonomous region in their three provinces—Ninevah, Salahildin, and Diyala—to run their own affairs along the lines of Kurdish autonomy in the north, with a loose connection to the central government in Baghdad.

For this to succeed, it will be necessary to provide the Sunnis, soon after the defeat of ISIS, with substantial financial aid to build the institutions they need during a transitional period of five to ten years, including health care facilities, schools, and social services to buttress the foundation for the establishment of such autonomy.

To assume that Iraq will somehow be stitched together following the defeat of ISIS is a gross illusion, as Iraq’s de facto partition into three states was ordained immediately following the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Liberating Mosul from ISIS will be extremely difficult under any circumstances. Indeed, for ISIS the fight over Mosul is a do-or-die battle and they should be expected to resort to any means at their disposal, however cruel and inhumane, to deny the coalition and Iraqi forces from realizing their objective.

The fight can be expected to be street-to-street and house-to-house, with many thousands of potential civilian casualties while likely destroying much of the city’s infrastructure.
The only way to reduce the scale of devastation and bring a gradual end to the Sunni-Shiite civil war in Iraq is to entice the Sunni communities inside and outside Mosul to join the fight. This, however, comes at a price that the central Iraqi government must be prepared to pay, which is negotiating the establishment of an autonomous Sunni region in their three provinces.

The capture of Mosul by ISIS had precipitated the exodus of hundreds of thousands of minorities, including Turkmen, Yazidis, Christians, Shiites, and others. As a result, the Sunni community still constitutes the absolute majority of the population. Due to their concerns over continuing instability, discrimination, and bloodshed, many who fled will not be able or willing to return after the defeat of ISIS.

To that end, as a former top Iraqi official said to me, there is a need for an “urgent comprehensive dialogue between the stakeholders to align [the] political roadmap to the military liberation [of Mosul] roadmap.”

Among the more than 700,000 Sunnis currently residing in Mosul, nearly 100,000 are of fighting age who can join the fight against ISIS from inside the city if they see a clear path that would lead them to the establishment of a self-governing entity.

This will not only accelerate the demise of ISIS and potentially reduce the level of death and destruction, but will eventually bring a gradual end to the Sunni-Shiite civil war. The same source stated that “Iraqi officials need to embrace a new culture of dialogue and compromise to project to its constituency its ability to adapt to the needs of its people’s welfare.”

Having lost their dominance of Iraq to the Shiites in 2003 after 81 years of continuous rule, the Sunnis still refuse to accept what they consider to be a historic travesty. This was further aggravated by eight years of the Shiite government led by Nouri al-Maliki, who abused his power and marginalized, mistreated, and victimized the Sunni community.

Sadly, the mistreatment of the Sunnis continued under the current Abadi government in spite of the fact that the US pressured Abadi to establish a unity government united in their purpose, given the necessity of defeating ISIS as a prerequisite to stabilizing the country.

The presumed ‘unity government’ in Iraq that the US sought is a farce. The Sunnis will never accept a subordinated position to the Shiites knowing that, at least for the foreseeable future, they will continue to suffer under the heavy hand of a Shiite government.

Prime Minister Abadi is weak, his government is largely corrupt, and has done little to pacify the Sunni community. Iran continues to exert significant political influence in Baghdad, engendered from religious affinity and the fact that Iran provided shelter to thousands of Iraqi exiles during Saddam’s reign.

Now that Iran is actively participating in the fight against ISIS through its militia, to which the US has quietly acquiesced, the Sunnis do not view Iran’s involvement and its considerable influence on Iraq as transient. As a result, the Sunnis find themselves inadvertently and often voluntarily supporting ISIS, as they are more religiously aligned with ISIS than with the Iraqi Shiites.

Knowing the Shiites in Iraq will remain the dominant power, the majority of the Sunni Arab states, led by the Saudis, strongly feel that the establishment of Sunni autonomy will limit Iran’s significant influence over the Shiite Iraqi government.

There is no doubt that the future of Mosul following the defeat of ISIS will seriously be contested and the Iraqi government will resist any arrangement that will not restore Mosul as an integral part of Iraq.
I believe, however, that there will be no end to the Sunni-Shiite violent conflict unless the city of Mosul, which is in the center of the Sunni Ninevah province, becomes the provincial capital of the newly established Sunni entity.

The central issue that must be incorporated into any agreement on Sunni independence is major foreign investments, and in particular the equitable distribution of the country’s oil revenue, which would require a strict, internationally guarded, and binding mechanism from the UN Security Council to ensure permanent and full implementation.

An equitable agreement on sharing oil revenue could also pave the way to better and closer relations between the Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites, which will lead to greater cooperation in many other fields, including joint economic development programs, security cooperation, trade, etc.

The Obama administration lacked a clear strategy in Iraq, to which President Obama admitted in early 2015. Now that the conditions on the ground have changed and ISIS is on retreat, Obama can help with the full support of its coalition partners in shaping Iraq’s future by negotiating a new political arrangement with Iraq’s central government that will grant the Iraqi Sunni community autonomous rule.

This may well be the only practical recipe that will bring about the defeat of ISIS and end the vicious Sunni-Shiite civil war in Iraq and other Arab states.

Some of the ideas expressed here are fully supported in a previous article I wrote in February 2016.

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AVAVAVA

TURKEY’S ELECTED DICTATOR

Alon Ben-Meir,* July 20, 2016

Even before the failed military coup, Turkey’s President Erdogan governed like a dictator who had the last word on all state matters. The botched coup was nothing but, as he put it, “a gift from God” to purge what is left of Turkey’s democracy and cleanse the army and judiciary in order to ensure the total subordination of all institutions to his whims.

For Erdogan, being elected was akin to being granted a license to trample and dismantle all democratic tenets to consolidate his powers and promote his Islamic agenda.

As a shrewd and highly skilled politician, Erdogan painted the coup as an assault on democracy, which was supported by a chorus of Western powers, knowing full well that Turkey under Erdogan is anything but a democracy.

His staying power, however, is attributed to his uncanny ability to appeal to the underclass and his success in delivering the “goods” that nearly half of the population was in dire need of, including access to health care, improved infrastructure, job opportunities, and the promotion of Islamic values (in a manner that was unacceptable in the past) with which ordinary Turks could identify.

The nearly 50 percent of the population who benefited directly from these reforms and became ardent supporters of Erdogan were not concerned about the trampling of democratic rule, even though he
has systematically robbed them of any rights that a democracy provides. Nevertheless, tens of thousands heeded his call to go out to the streets to confront the military, and did so at grave risk to their lives.

In fact, one of the main reasons behind the coup was to stop Erdogan from completely destroying Turkey’s remaining secular and democratic pillars, which were established by Turkey’s founder Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923.

Ataturk sought to establish a Western-style secular democracy and made the military the custodian of Turkey’s constitution. The armed forces exercised that prerogative four times before to prevent the country from sliding into disorder.

The first coup, in 1960, led to the overthrow and execution of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes due to his increasing Islamization of the country; the fourth coup in 1997 ended with the forced resignation and banishment from politics of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, also because of his degradation of secular principles of the country.

While affecting regime change through a military coup is certainly not the preferred method, given how Erdogan gradually and successfully pillaged the country of all its democratic substance, a segment of the military felt it had little choice but to stage a coup to change the perilous path that Erdogan is pursuing.

This entire tragic episode could have been prevented had Western powers, led by the US, been more vociferous in condemning the unruly way in which Erdogan exercised his power, especially in the past several years; instead, they kept emphasizing Turkey’s strategic importance, which Erdogan fully exploited to his advantage.

Turkey’s role in hosting nearly 2.5 million Syrian refugees and its ability to either stem the flow, or open up the gates to allow refugees to flood European cities further strengthened Erdogan’s hand.

He successfully exploited the EU’s deep concerns over the refugee crisis by making a deal that provides Turkey several major benefits that outweighed its obligations. The keystone of the deal is that migrants crossing from Turkey into Greece will be sent back, and for each Syrian returned to Turkey, a Syrian refugee will be resettled in the EU.

In return, Turkish nationals would have access to the Schengen passport-free zone while the EU fast-tracked the allocation of €6bn ($6.6 billion) in aid to Turkey to help migrants, and to “energize” Ankara’s bid to join the EU.

Although thus far the EU resisted Erdogan’s threat to cancel the deal if it were to renege on its agreement on visa-free entry due to his post-coup threat to restore the death penalty, Erdogan remained defiant, believing that he can bully the West with impunity.

Moreover, Erdogan presumed Turkey’s significant role in fighting ISIS and his consent to allow the US Air Force to use Turkey’s Incirlik Air Base to strike ISIS targets gave him increased leverage against the US, which further muted any criticism for his continuing gross violation of human rights.

Those who had hopes that Erdogan might just take heed of the coup and show some restraint in dealing with those suspected of being involved in it had those hopes quickly dashed.

He wasted no time in initiating a massive witch-hunt—nearly 9,500 are currently facing legal proceedings, and around 50,000 soldiers, judges, civil servants, and teachers have been suspended or
detained. Hundreds if not thousands will languish in jail under emergency laws that permit indefinite administrative detention without formal charges.

More ominously, Erdogan ‘raided’ higher learning institutions by barring all academics from any foreign travel even for scholarly purposes, while the state education council demanded the resignation of over 1,500 university deans.

The vast number of people rounded up so quickly raises suspicions that these individuals had already been blacklisted; Erdogan was able to do so with a nearly 200,000-strong internal police force and intelligence units, who are extremely loyal to him.

Leave it now to Erdogan, who has emerged stronger than before the coup, to further intensify his brutal war against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and the Syrian Kurds, who are the US’s allies no less, and continue to refuse to resume negotiations with Turkey’s significant Kurdish community.

Perhaps the time has come for the EU and the US to reassess their relations with Turkey and stop enabling Erdogan to exercise free reign, when in fact his behavior has a direct and indirect impact on Western interests, both domestically and in the Middle East.

The US cannot afford any member of NATO to squash all democratic rules with no consequences. Moreover, Erdogan has demonstrated time and again a lack of loyalty and commitment as a NATO member.

Turkey should be put on notice, as Secretary of State John Kerry recently stated that NATO has a “requirement with respect to democracy... Obviously, a lot of people have been arrested very quickly.” He grimly added, “Hopefully we can work in a constructive way to prevent backsliding.”

Moreover, Erdogan should be warned that Turkey’s prospect of becoming an EU member will be a thing of the past if he continues to grossly undermine the principles of democratic governance, including the complete subordination of the judiciary to his political agenda.

Though the US and the EU need Turkey in the fight against ISIS, Erdogan should be reminded that ISIS constitutes an even greater threat to Turkey than to Western interests.

Finally, Turkey should be pressured to resume negotiations with its Kurdish minority and bring an end to the war against the PKK, which is further destabilizing the region at a time when the focus must be on defeating ISIS.

In that regard, Erdogan must understand that there will be serious consequences if he does not end his assault against the Syrian Kurds under the pretext of fighting terrorism (he conveniently accuses their military wing, the PYD, of working in conjunction with the PKK).

Whereas Erdogan viewed the failed coup as a God-sent opportunity to wipe out whoever is perceived to be his enemy, the US and the EU must use this occasion to put Erdogan on notice that history has shown time and again that totalitarian regimes come to a bitter end, and that he too will not be spared his day in court.

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A MOVEMENT TO END THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Alon Ben-Meir,* July 14, 2016

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been steadily deteriorating, making the prospect of reaching an agreement on the basis of a two-state solution ever more intractable. What is sorely lacking is effective opposition parties that could present an alternative to Netanyahu’s policy toward the Palestinians, and a national popular movement demanding change before the continued entrenchment of Israel in the West Bank becomes irreversible.

The leadership of the opposition have lost their political compass, promoting no ideas as to how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Instead, they have been focusing on how to maneuver around one another to serve their narrow personal interests rather than that of the state.

The failure of the opposition to coalesce under a dynamic leadership and create a national movement to stop Netanyahu and demand peace now will put Israel’s future in jeopardy. Otherwise, none of these leaders will escape the harsh judgment of history for their dismal failure.

In recent years, Israel’s political scene has been increasingly shifting to the right, the latest manifestation of which is the appointment of Avigdor Lieberman (the leader of the nationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party) as defense minister, which does not bode well for dealing with the Palestinian conflict.

This shift is transforming the country from its founding as a secular democracy with a Jewish majority into a fanatic conservatism with religious undertones, which are becoming ever more pervasive.

For the Netanyahu government, the occupation of the West Bank is only a problem to be managed rather than the most consequential conflict that could obliterate Israel’s Jewish character and its democratic institutions, while shattering the dream of the vast majority of Jews to live in peace and security in a state they have been dreaming of for centuries.

One of the most troubling developments is the slow transformation of the Israeli military from an independent, unbiased, and revered institution – and the melting pot of Israeli society – into an institution religiously influenced and increasingly leaning toward the right-of-center.

A growing number of top officers are deeply religious and committed to the preservation of the settlements, and if or when the time comes to evacuate many of the settlements scattered throughout the West Bank, future Israeli governments may no longer be able to count on the military to enforce an evacuation order.

Leave it to Lieberman to complete the task and make the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) not only a force to protect the legitimate national security of the country, but an instrument to sustain the occupation and protect the settlers in the name of national security.

The current relatively reduced hostilities and economic prosperity enjoyed by much of the Israeli population has made them ever more passive in the face of the simmering conflict, as the government continues to propagate the notion that it can manage the conflict indefinitely.

This lack of public awakening is extraordinarily troubling, for as long as there is no sense of urgency to resolve the conflict, the prospect of a solution is moving from bad to worse; as long as the political opposition remains silent, they are directly contributing to the destruction of Israel’s very foundation.
Unfortunately, the one time Israelis did take to the streets *en masse* (in 2011) was primarily about economic conditions, with no reference to the conflict with the Palestinians. Those protesters did not connect the fact that their own economic difficulties are, to a great extent, a direct result of the hundreds of millions of dollars being spent to maintain the occupation and legalize new and expand existing settlements, with no groundswell of public protest in response.

Growing public despondency, high unemployment, lack of opportunities, and other social malaises that impact the community are often the factors that precipitate the formation of national movements that protest against the prevailing conditions. The Arab Spring, and Egypt in particular, exemplified this norm, as it was a grassroots popular movement without a specific leader behind it.

The problem in Israel is that the socioeconomic conditions are not compelling enough to spark a national movement, as by and large the country is flourishing, and complacency – rather than political activism – has become the national mantra.

The only way to prevent the country from sliding into the abyss is for the opposition parties to coalesce around one leader who would raise the banner of political revolt to awaken the public to the imminent looming danger facing Israel.

Such an initiative should be spearheaded by centrist and leftist parties including Meretz, Yesh Atid, and the Zionist Union, with the support of the Joint Arab List, to put a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict atop the national agenda.

Unfortunately, leading opposition figures, including Yitzhak Herzog, Tzipi Livni, and Yair Lapid, have been more concerned about their personal interests and blind ambitions rather than what is best for the future of the country. I maintain that this is the most dangerous state in which Israel finds itself today, as there is no effective movement to counter the policies of the Netanyahu government.

To circumvent this trend, a new leader will have to be chosen from outside the political ranks with no formal background in party politics, particularly former Chief of Staff of the IDF Gabi Ashkenazi, who can exude public confidence in handling national security. He could lead a political bloc composed of all the opposition parties that can rival Netanyahu’s coalition and stand a real chance of toppling it in the next election.

Despite the array of domestic socio-economic and foreign relations issues that need to be addressed, however critical they may be, the opposition parties must set aside their differences and agree to make the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict front and center of the national agenda, as it directly impacts all other issues facing the nation.

To that end, they must develop a practical initiative that begins with a process of reconciliation—people to people initiatives—to start mitigating three major impediments to give any future peace negotiations a far better chance of succeeding at a later date: the deep distrust between the two sides, legitimate national security concerns, and disabusing significant Israeli and Palestinian constituencies of the illusion that they can have it all at the expense of the other.

I do not believe that there is any other alternative – not if ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is seen as the foundation on which Israel’s future as a democratic, Jewish, and secure state is the ultimate objective, and the *raison d’être* behind its very creation.

For Herzog and other politicians to even contemplate joining the Netanyahu government under any guise would be nothing but allowing themselves to be used to serve Netanyahu and his cohorts’ sinister schemes to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state in any form.
Time is against Israel, and as long as the Israeli public buys into Netanyahu’s argument that the Palestinians cannot be trusted and will remain an irredeemable foe, the continuing occupation becomes morally justifiable by a large segment of the population, even though it is pushing Israel closer to the precipice.

The two-state solution remains ultimately the only practical solution, and now that nearly all Arab states see Israel as a potential ally in their confrontation with Iran and their occupation with the Sunni-Shiite war of attrition, Israel must seize the opportunity. The opposition parties must promulgate the Arab Peace Initiative and persuade the public to embrace it, as it provides the foundation for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

What is needed now is a mass mobilization of the people, led by major political figures who are committed to finding a solution to the conflict and campaign day-in and day-out to raise public awareness of the impending danger that Israel is facing if the Netanyahu government is allowed to continue along the same path.

Israel’s opposition political parties are facing a fateful national challenge. They need to wake up and understand the urgency of the hour. Time is running out, and as long as the opposition remains in disarray, they are further endangering Israel’s future and becoming nothing but complicit to Netanyahu’s perilous policy.

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**MOVING BEYOND THE QUARTET**

Alon Ben-Meir,* July 7, 2016

The report that was recently released by the Middle East Quartet – comprised of the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations – is a welcome step. The report reiterates the importance of reaching a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians on the basis of a two-state solution. Perhaps most crucially, the report concludes with a pointed observation that unless significant and tangible progress toward peace is made, the status quo will inevitably lead to further deterioration in Israeli-Palestinian relations and potentially renewed full-scale violence between the two sides.

According to the report, there are three elements that are currently aggravating the fragile state of affairs: first is the ongoing (albeit sporadic) violence; second is the continued expansion and legalization of settlements; and third is the illicit build-up of arms, specifically by Hamas.

To reverse these trends, the Quartet recommends that no unilateral action should be taken by either side – for example, the annexation of more territories by Israel, or new attempts by the Palestinians to ‘internationalize’ the resolution of the conflict – and that both sides demonstrate sincere commitment to achieving a two-state solution.

The Quartet also calls for ending incitement, ceasing settlement expansion, refraining from ‘provocative actions’, and fostering a ‘climate of tolerance,’ and although all are necessary, the report does not provide any new insights, nor does it establish a framework that could lead to a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
Nevertheless, the Quartet report is important in bringing back the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the attention of the international community, stressing the need to begin serious negotiations to reach an agreement and warning that, otherwise, they will both suffer dire consequences.

That said, while the Quartet recognizes the dire situation in the Middle East now, it fails to take into account the reality on the ground and the psychological dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has and continues to impede any progress.

Indeed, given the venomous relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, it does not allow for the implementation of any peace initiative, either unilaterally or through international involvement. Therefore, the situation on the ground must first change to create a conducive environment for both sides to make the necessary concessions.

As a result, neither Israel nor the Palestinians are able, even if they were willing, to make the necessary compromises in the current atmosphere. They have and continue to defy repeated calls by the Quartet and the US to solve the conflict, and ignored numerous UNSC resolutions (including 242 and 338) which called on Israel and the Palestinians to solve their conflict based on a two-state solution.

To that end, I strongly feel that any future negotiation must be preceded by a process of reconciliation in order to address three critical issues: mutual distrust, concerns over security, and the illusion that either side can have it all at the complete expense of the other.

Although the Quartet’s report briefly mentions the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative (API), in my view, the API should not be considered as a mere device for directing the negotiating process, but rather as the central framework for achieving a comprehensive peace.

There are a number of facts that distinguish the API from any other framework for peace: First, it originated from the Arab states (led by Saudi Arabia), to which they relate, rather than from the outside the region, as does the Quartet, which has no Arab representation.

Second, the API provides all parties to the conflict – including Hamas and Israel, who have not embraced it as of yet – several common denominators on which they agree, though they have not, for strategic reasons, accepted them publicly, including the Palestinian refugees, national security, the disposition of the settlements, and the future of Jerusalem.

Third, the API offers a realistic framework for a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which both sides desire.

Finally, it is important to note in this regard that the API was not offered on a take it or leave it basis, as was portrayed to the Israeli public. All of the conflicting issues are subject to negotiation between the two sides if there is any true intention by both sides to reach an agreement.

In this regard, I believe France’s initiative to resume Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is critically important. France is trying to take a different approach to solving the conflict, and is considering the API framework to that end.

I maintain, however, that the French initiative must pay specific attention to the need to psychologically prepare both sides through a process of reconciliation (people-to-people interaction) before the resumption of formal negotiations to dramatically enhance the chance of succeeding.
There is no doubt that under any circumstances the peace process has become ever more intractable over the past decade and will further deteriorate and potentially lead to a major conflagration that neither side wants but is doing little to avoid.

France’s international conference, to take place toward the end of the fall as a follow-up to the first conference that took place on June 3rd, will certainly generate greater momentum to resume peace negotiations. It must, however, offer international mechanisms starting with the process of reconciliation that could potentially lead to a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has reached a point of saturation which is bound to explode. Any voice that raises the attention of the international community to prevent a catastrophe in the making is a welcome one.

It is time to act, and in that sense the Quartet has made its contribution. It must now be translated into a workable framework, which only the API can provide.

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"WE HAVE A RIGHT TO ENGAGE IN NON-VIOLENT ACTION:"
CHRISTIAN LEADERS REFUSE TO BE SILENCED IN STRUGGLE FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS
AS GOVERNOR ANDREW CUOMO CONTINUES HIS CONTROVERSIAL CRUSADE AGAINST BDS
CHURCH VOICES DEFEND THE MOVEMENT

David Palumbo-Liu*

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As is well-known by now, the unilateral decision of New York governor Andrew Cuomo to create a blacklist of businesses and organizations abiding by divestment and boycott campaigns related to Israeli human rights abuses has drawn widespread criticism for both its high-handedness and for its violation of constitutionally guaranteed freedoms. As might be expected, the response from civil liberties groups and groups advocating for Palestinian rights was swift and pointed. However, opposition also took the form of a letter drafted by the Reverend David Gaewski, New York Conference Minister, writing on behalf of the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ, a judicatory with 260 churches in the state of New York.

Noting the Church’s resolution to divest from “companies that profit from or that are complicit in violations of human rights arising from the occupation of the Palestinian Territories by the state of Israel,” and to “boycott goods produced in or using the facilities of illegal settlements located in the West Bank,” the letter actually asks that the church be put on the blacklist:

"As a church, we have a right to engage in non-violent action to bring about change, including using economic leverage. All people and organizations have that right, and it is a right we must defend. For this reason, with the full support of the Board of Directors of the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ, I respectfully request that the New York Conference, United Church of Christ be placed on the top of your list of organizations you would like the state of the New York to boycott. Gov. Cuomo – stop denying our rights. Rescind your executive order now!"
Gaewski told Salon that he wrote Cuomo because he felt “the executive order limits the rights and freedom of people of faith to enact faith-motivated actions toward peace. I am most concerned that the Governor is diminishing our freedom of expression.” He explained that what drives the Church’s commitment to Palestinian rights is the belief that “a separate society where Palestinians do not enjoy the same rights as any other person living in the region can not result in peace.” Gaewski added, “I think people of all faiths want to see peace in the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.”

In fact, the discussion about what position to take with regard to Palestinian rights is taking place in several religious organizations, often as a continuation of many years’ discussion and action. In May the United Methodist General Conference, despite pressure from the State of Israel and even the admonishment of church member Hillary Clinton, passed a number of resolutions for justice of Palestinians. Also, as the New York Times reported in January:

"The pension board of the United Methodist Church — one of the largest Protestant denominations in the United States, with more than seven million members — has placed five Israeli banks on a list of companies that it will not invest in for human rights reasons.... It appeared to be the first time that a pension fund of a large American church had taken such a step regarding the Israeli banks, which help finance settlement construction in occupied Palestinian territories."

And in April the Alliance of Baptists “affirmed the use of nonviolent boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) strategies and comprehensive education and advocacy programs to end the 49-year Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.”

Most recently, at its General Assembly in Portland last week the Presbyterian Church (USA) debated several measures to address the injustices taking place in Israel-Palestine. This is a continuation of a discussion from the June 2014 meeting, when it narrowly passed a divestment resolution. As the New York Times put it, “The vote, by a count of 310 to 303, was watched closely in Washington and Jerusalem and by Palestinians as a sign of momentum for a movement to pressure Israel to stop building settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and to end the occupation, with a campaign known as B.D.S., for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions.” What we are seeing now is that that momentum has grown even stronger, and not only amongst Presbyterians.

Several overtures (resolutions) sponsored by the Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church were passed, including “Advocating for the Safety and Well-Being of Children of Palestine and Israel,” “Calling for the RE/MAX Corporation to Cease Selling Property in West Bank Settlements,” “On Prayerfully Studying the Palestinian Civil Society Call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS)” and “For Human Values in the Absence of a Just Peace in Israel-Palestine.” It also urged Congress to hold hearings into the use of US military and police equipment by the government of Israel.

One other overture worth noting is “On Affirming Nonviolent Means of Resistance Against Human Oppression,” which points out that the PCUSA has a long history of using boycott and divestment as a way to side with those who are oppressed as well as to ensure the integrity of its values and investments—the overture passed overwhelmingly in committee and in the plenary.

In its press release, IPMN noted two important aspects of the Assembly’s discussion. First, that CEO and co-founder of RE/MAX sent in a letter declaring, “RE/MAX, LLC will no longer receive any income from the sale of Jewish settlement properties in the West Bank.” Marita A. Mayer, who advocated for the overture, stated, “We’re pleased that RE/MAX is acknowledging that its operations in the occupied territories are problematic from a legal and moral point of view, but we’re waiting to see what this means in practical terms.” And with regard to BDS, IPMN notes, “the plenary of the General Assembly supported by over 70% a continuing study of the global grassroots BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanctions) movement for Palestinian rights and freedom. Rejecting attempts to categorically reject BDS and choosing instead to engage in prayerful study, the General Assembly recognized the historic commitment of the Presbyterian
Church (USA) to nonviolent strategies for social change."

Geoff Browning, Peacemaking Advocate for the Presbytery of San Jose, told Salon:

"We have made tremendous progress. We are working to educate the church about the suffering and injustice that is taking place, sometimes with our complicity of silence. I really believe that in order to advance the goal of divestment, we (the church, universities, etc.) are best served by asking our communities whether we want to profit from the harm caused to others. I sometimes hear opponents say something like, 'Well, this is a complicated issue and we have no business taking sides or trying to resolve it. Our divestment won't do anything to advance the cause of peace.' Rather than trying to explain 60 years of occupation, I have found that it is much easier to simply say, 'I agree that it's complex, but can we agree not to profit from the suffering of others?'"

And just a few months ago, the Unitarian Universalist Association divested from several companies due to their involvement in Israel’s occupation. As the advocacy group Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East (UUJME) noted in a press release at the time:

"The UUA has adopted a human rights screen focusing on conflict zones that includes human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories. The UUA subsequently divested from Hewlett Packard Enterprise, HP Inc., and Motorola Solutions. The UUA has also divested from Caterpillar Inc., due to concerns over its environmental and social practices. These four companies have been the target of boycott and divestment campaigns due to their complicity in violations of Palestinian human rights."

At a time when politicians like Andrew Cuomo are not only not offering moral leadership on this issue, but rather exploiting it to carry out grandstanding (and illegal) acts, it is not surprising that these and other religious organizations are stepping up to fill that void. This is precisely what happened during the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa.

In 2014, Archbishop Desmond Tutu made this plea at a demonstration for Palestinian rights in Capetown:

"I asked the crowd to chant with me: 'We are opposed to the injustice of the illegal occupation of Palestine. We are opposed to the indiscriminate killing in Gaza. We are opposed to the indignity meted out to Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks. We are opposed to violence perpetrated by all parties. But we are not opposed to Jews.'

... I appealed to Israeli sisters and brothers present at the conference to actively disassociate themselves and their profession from the design and construction of infrastructure related to perpetuating injustice, including the separation barrier, the security terminals and checkpoints, and the settlements built on occupied Palestinian land.

I implore you to take this message home: Please turn the tide against violence and hatred by joining the nonviolent movement for justice for all people of the region," I said."

This act of refusing to be complicit with injustice, of breaking one’s ties to an oppressive regime, is what these religious organizations, and people of faith, are undertaking. And they are part of a much larger coalition of intellectuals, artists, writers, activists, trade unions, and organizations worldwide, appalled by the unfettered violence of the Occupation.

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BERNIE SANDERS AND THE FRENCH INITIATIVE

Alon Ben-Meir,* June 8, 2016

Following the 2016 US presidential elections, the next administration must adopt a new and realistically balanced policy toward Israel and the Palestinians to bring an end to their conflict in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace based on the Arab Peace Initiative. Throughout the primary campaign, only Senator Bernie Sanders had a position on this consuming conflict that was fresh, balanced, and welcome, especially given the increased intractability of the conflict and its dangerous implications not only for Israel and the Palestinians, but also for the US's strategic interests in the Middle East.

The continuation of the conflict also has direct consequences on the security of the EU, precisely because it feeds into the region’s extremism from which the EU suffers greatly. In this regard, France's initiative to resume Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is timely and should be pursued despite the initial lack of consensus at a recent meeting in Paris between the European, American, and Arab foreign ministers on convening an international conference at the end of the year to address the conflict in earnest.

Throughout the primary campaign, Sanders articulated his position concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stating that: “I read Secretary Clinton’s speech before AIPAC, I heard virtually no discussion at all about the needs of the Palestinian people… Of course Israel has a right to defend itself, but long term there will never be peace in that region, unless the United States plays... an even-handed role in trying to bring people together and recognizing the serious problems that exist among the Palestinian people ... There comes a time when if we pursue justice and peace we are going to have to say that Netanyahu is not right all of the time.” [emphasis added]

What is admirable about his stand is not that it is new, but that it is articulated by a significant presidential candidate. Although he has failed to secure the nomination of the Democratic Party, he has become a major political force and the presumptive nominee, Hillary Clinton, must seriously take into account his position on this critical issue.

Many Israeli and American Jews cynically accuse Senator Sanders of being an apologetic, self-hating Jew who is willing to bend backwards only to demonstrate that he is even-handed, when in fact he is undermining, from their perspective, Israel’s national security concerns.

On the contrary, I maintain that Sanders has taken this even-handed position precisely because he is committed to Israel’s security and well-being; he fully understands that time is against Israel, and those who really care about Israel’s future must speak out.

Sanders recognizes that Israel has no future as a Jewish, democratic, and secure state unless it recognizes the Palestinians’ right to a state of their own and “treat[s] the Palestinian people with respect and dignity.”

Many American politicians who support the policy of successive Israeli governments are, in fact, exploiting Israel for their own benefit. They want to draw not so much the votes of the Jewish community and their financial contributions, but the tens of millions of votes of the critically important evangelical constituency, whose support of Israel, for religious reasons, is unwavering.

Due to its traditional one-sided policy, the US has become the enabler of Israel’s addiction to the occupation and settlements by allowing successive Israeli governments to pursue a disastrous policy of expansionism, even though such a policy was and still is to Israel’s detriment.
As a result, the US’s involuntary acquiescence has allowed Israel to defy the international community with impunity, further strengthening Israel’s resolve against making any significant concession and rendering peace ever more elusive. Ironically, instead of protecting Israel’s national security, the US has inadvertently exposed it to constant threats and violence.

The fact that the Palestinians and the international community have failed to compel Israel to change direction does not suggest that the Israelis are winning. Israel is, in fact, only digging itself into an ever deeper hole from which it will be unable to climb unscathed.

This is what both Sanders and the French initiative want to avoid, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be wished away. Direct involvement of the US and the EU continues to be essential to changing the dynamic of the conflict, provided that careful lessons are drawn from past failures.

Given the intense hostility, hatred, and total lack of trust between Israel and the Palestinians, the resumption of direct or indirect negotiations will lead to nowhere as neither side is able to deliver the major concessions that will be required to reach an agreement without full public support.

For these reasons, the French initiative, with the backing of the next US administration, must support a process of reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians that precedes formal negotiations.

Although the June 3 meeting in Paris left the prospect of convening an international conference to revive the Israeli-Palestinian peace process later this year somewhat ambiguous, the participants have nevertheless agreed on a positive joint communique.

The communique calls for “fully ending the Israeli occupation” which represents an important shift from the US’s prior position, and that “a negotiated two-state solution is the only way to achieve an enduring peace, with two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.” It further states that the status quo is unsustainable and “actions on the ground, in particular continued acts of violence and ongoing settlement activity, are dangerously imperiling the prospects for a two-state solution.”

The US, in conjunction with France and the EU, should develop the mechanism that would establish a process of reconciliation to advance the prospect of peace, and to that end create a commission of reconciliation.

This commission should consist of individuals who are apolitical, greatly respected in their community for their integrity, and hold no formal position in their government. These individuals must be unbiased representatives, skilled in their profession, deeply committed to peace between Israel and the Palestinians — seeking no reward or compensation — and devoted humanitarians.

As such, the combined talents and creativity of the Commission will be unsurpassed, their power of persuasion will be formidable, and their unbiased perspective will make them a major force in advocating for the reconciliation process. In addition, a fair-minded Israeli and Palestinian, who are fully committed to peace and with a deep knowledge of the internal affairs of their respective communities, would act as general counsel to the commission.

The process of reconciliation undertaken by the commission should include scores of people-to-people interactions that would begin to mitigate some of the distrust between the two sides and pave the way for substantive negotiations 18 to 24 months down the line.
In this regard, Senator Sanders should insist that the Democratic platform reflect this new approach, and if Hillary Clinton becomes the next President, she must commit herself to pursuing such a course.

Simultaneously, as I mentioned a number of times before, the Arab Peace Initiative should provide an overall umbrella under which an Israeli-Palestinian peace (based on a two-state solution) is negotiated in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, which a majority of Israelis and Palestinians would fully support.

By raising the need for the US to play an even-handed role to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sanders has introduced a new critically important paradigm that the next administration must adopt, and in conjunction with the French initiative, they can create a much better prospect of ending the debilitating and explosive seven decades-old conflict.

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PAX CHRISTI MICHIGAN STATEMENT ON GUN VIOLENCE

August 2016, available on the Pax Christi website: http://www.paxchristimi.org/#!gun-violence/4h

Significantly more deaths from gun violence occur each year in the United States than any other developed nation in the world. A February 2016 American Journal of Medicine study reveals that, with 10.2 deaths from firearms per 100,000 citizens in 2010, the U.S. suffered nearly three times the rate of fatalities as any other country in the study. The Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence estimates that between 2009 and 2013 nearly 109,000 people were shot in the U.S. each year, with an average of 32,964 dying from their wounds annually, including 2,624 children and teens. The effective lack of restrictions on access to guns contributes to gun violence. The Washington Post reports that Americans now own an astonishing 112.6 guns per 100 citizens, compared to the worldwide average of just 10.2 guns per 100 persons.

Numerous mass shootings have scarred the American landscape: Sandy Hook, Columbine, Orlando, San Bernardino, Charleston, Aurora and Virginia Tech are among the communities where innocent lives have been lost. After each devastating incident, gun advocates and their primary spokesman, National Rifle Association (NRA) CEO Wayne LaPierre, respond by calling for more guns and fewer gun safety laws, and by accusing those calling for greater gun safety of “politicizing” tragedy. Hopes for reasonable federal gun control legislation are stymied with Congress effectively “bought off” by the NRA, with $650,000 in donations to members of Congress in the 2012 election, and over $808,000 in 2014.

Special mention must be made of what Pax Christi USA, in its July 2016 Statement on Racial Violence in the U.S. calls “a crisis of racism and fear – political and media sources brand certain people as presumptive enemies. Our uncivil political rhetoric, amplified by the media, reinforces the fear of whole groups of people: young black men, Muslims, undocumented immigrants, members of the LGBTQ community. This only serves to fan racism, bigotry and the ‘blaming of victims’ of impoverishment and marginalization.” It is essential to involve such marginalized communities in the search for solutions to gun violence.
The Hebrew prophets repeatedly warned against idolatry; as a prime example, placing trust in weapons. “God will judge between nations and render decisions for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation will not lift up the sword against another, nor will they train for war anymore.” (Isaiah 2:4). In the wake of the Newtown tragedy, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism posed the question, “Is the need for sensible gun-control a religious issue?” Its Director, Rabbi David Saperstein answered, drawing on the same prophetic tradition of his faith: “You bet it is. The indiscriminate distribution of guns is an offense against God and humanity.

Our gun-flooded, violence prone society has turned weapons into idols. And the appropriate religious response to idolatry is sustained moral outrage.”

The Catholic Church has, as the American bishops remind us, “… been a consistent voice for the promotion of peace at home and around the world and a strong advocate for the reasonable regulation of firearms.” In his January 1, 2014 World Day of Peace message, Pope Francis proclaimed, “I appeal forcefully to all those who sow violence and death by force of arms: in the person you today see simply as an enemy to be beaten, discover rather your brother or sister, and hold back your hand! Give up the way of arms and go out to meet the other in dialogue, pardon and reconciliation, in order to rebuild justice, trust, and hope around you!”

Pax Christi Michigan agrees that “reasonable regulation of firearms” is urgently needed, and long overdue. Specifically, we advocate comprehensive federal legislation that would:
1. Require universal background checks on all prospective firearms and ammunition purchasers, including at gun shows and on private in-person or online gun sales;
2. Require a waiting period of a specified number of days between a firearm purchase and when it is physically transferred to the purchaser;
3. Require persons seeking to purchase or possess a firearm to: obtain a firearm safety certificate by successfully completing a safety training course; register their firearms and obtain a license; notify law enforcement when their weapons are lost or stolen; and, safely store their firearms and ammunition in the home to prevent access by children and other unauthorized users;
4. Require gun dealers to obtain a local permit, conduct employee background checks, and obtain liability insurance;
5. Ban semi-automatic assault weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines;
6. Ban licensed and unlicensed open carry of loaded and unloaded firearms;
7. Require the personalization of handguns, that is, equipping them with technology that prevents them from firing when operated by an unauthorized user; and, prohibit the manufacture, importation, purchase and transfer of non-personalized handguns;
8. Legalize comprehensive ballistic identification through “microstamping” technology;
9. Repeal the “Dickey Amendment” that prevents the Center for Disease Control from spending funds “to advocate or promote gun control,” and restore funding for research on gun violence;
10. Offer a gun buyback opportunity to private gun owners, without fear of prosecution; and,
11. Pass campaign finance reform and reverse the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision to reduce the role of money in the U.S. political system, and to diminish the role of lobbying.
As part of the Catholic peace and justice movement that seeks to model the Peace of Christ,
Pax Christi Michigan considers the current situation, with gun violence ravaging our families and communities and terrorizing our children, to be unconscionable. With this Statement on Gun Violence, we declare unequivocally that we reject gun violence, and that we follow the One who said, “Peter, put away your sword.”

\[\text{WHAT WE READERS ARE ABOUT?}\]

Please share with us what you are doing relating to nonviolent change. If you send us a short report of your doings, learnings, ideas, concerns, reactions, queries,... we will print them here. Responses can be published in the next issue.

Steve Sachs: As summer winds down into fall, I am hoping that Hillary Clinton can win the U.S. Presidency by enough votes that the Democrats can take back both the Senate and the House, as well as a good many state legislatures to undo gerrymandering by the Republicans that has made the House unrepresentative. Should that happen, given Clinton’s inclusive campaign, there is a good chance the U.S. could begin to move beyond the terribly divisive and harmful politics that increasingly has plagued the country over the last years.

\[\text{ARTICLES}\]

DERADICALIZATION IN REFUGEE CAMPS AND BEYOND

Alon Ben-Meir,* May 19, 2016

The influx of millions of Syrian refugees to Europe is more than likely to become another source of radicalization that could increase the number of violent extremists among the refugees and lead to further acts of terror in their host countries. Depending on how long the refugees stay in camps and the way they are treated, terror attacks will either be reduced in number, frequency, and scope, or made increasingly acute once they are permanently resettled. Host countries must employ special methods to thwart any infiltration attempts by violent extremists under the guise of being refugees, and develop a countering violent extremism plan that encompasses all aspects of deradicalization.

Host countries have little choice but to do just that because a single attack would come at the enormous cost of dozens of casualties and massive destruction, not to speak of the fear, panic, and economic dislocation that would spread throughout the community; the attacks in Paris and Brussels speak for themselves.

To achieve their objective, host countries must consider every aspect of what the refugees have experienced, both psychologically and physically, and carefully assess the short and long-term impact that every measure will have on the mindset of the refugees so as to reduce their anxiety and enable them to embrace this new chapter in their lives.

The focus on internal security in the camps and the gathering of intelligence must receive top consideration. It should be emphasized, however, that no amount of policing or sophisticated intelligence gathering will suffice unless such activities are taken in conjunction with a host of other preventive measures.

To begin with, host countries must judiciously reflect on the trauma that nearly every refugee experiences as a result of being abruptly and often forcibly removed from their homes, leaving behind...
much of their possessions, family, and friends, let alone the torturous emotional ordeal of not knowing what is in store for them.

To ease this individual and group trauma, local authorities need to provide psychological counseling to the refugees, with a special focus on youth between the ages of 15 and 25, who are the most susceptible to radicalization and may otherwise become easy prey for violent extremist groups to recruit while awaiting resettlement.

In addition to counseling, they need to be occupied with positive activities, for example, helping in the relief efforts in the camps and other administrative duties, to feel useful and relevant, which would help them regain their self-esteem.

They should also be provided new outlets for communal engagement, including professional training, sports activities, and education, not only to allay the trauma they are experiencing but also to begin the process of adjustment to a new and productive life.

Education, however, should not be limited to the youth. Teachers should also receive counter-radicalization training and develop curricula that underscore the horrible downside of violent extremism. In addition, the families of young boys and girls should be included in the education process, as parents could hold extremist views because of their past bitter experiences.

Indeed, idleness and boredom breed contempt, resentment, and impatience. The young need to be kept informed as to when their trials may come to an end, what to expect once they leave the camps, and what means they will be provided with to live with their families in dignity.

It is well-documented that the longer refugees stay in camps, the greater the risks are for radicalization, which is further aggravated when the camps are overcrowded, unsanitary, and isolated with little or no access to the outside world.

In years past, many Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan, as well as Afghan refugees in Pakistan in the 1990s, became radicalized, and today we are witnessing the slow emergence of a similar phenomenon among Syrian refugees.

Although law enforcement is critical to prevent outbreaks of violence and criminal activity, police officers must not treat young offenders with harshness and abuse. Taking punitive action disproportionate to the severity of the crime can breed deep resentment and lead to new violent crimes and radicalization.

To substantially reduce the level of crime, authorities should in particular conduct field studies, initiate regular outreach programs, and engage the refugees in dialogue—listening to and acknowledging their grievances, and making every effort to address their legitimate complaints.

This is important because the refugees must believe through day-to-day encounters that the host country is doing all it can to support them and alleviate their pain and concerns. Outreach efforts also become an important public source to gather information and detect radical activity, terror plots, and recruitment by extremist organizations such as ISIS.

The host countries need to utilize social media to provide a counter-narrative to the voices of violent extremists who are trying to lure the youth to their ranks. This counter-narrative should not come exclusively from government officials of the host country, as many refugees view that as self-serving or potentially entrapping. It should come, in the main, from respected religious scholars, imams, and other revered individuals from within the refugee community.
Using a religious counter-narrative is critical because radical Islamist organizations resort to extreme religious precepts, however contrived, to persuade the young to join. Indeed, zealous believers do not feel the need to produce evidence to support their convictions that they are operating according to the will of God. For this reason, violent religious narratives can be effectively countered only with moderate Islamic teachings, with an emphasis on non-violent traditions and the virtue and morals of Islam.

There are two other important factors to consider in the effort to minimize radicalization in the refugee camps. First is the proximity of the camps to the country of origin, which allows for the smuggling of weapons and drugs, and the infiltration of violent extremists into the camps, who remain inactive until such time when they are ready to commit acts of terror in the host country or bordering states.

This requires greater resources for police to monitor various crossing points and conduct careful screening and registration. While the need for such measures is extremely important, the procedures must not be arbitrary and abusive. In this regard, voluntarily reporting suspicious activity in a safe manner, along the line of ‘if you see something, say something,’ should be encouraged.

Being that the vast majority of refugees are the victims of circumstance, they should be treated humanely and with sensitivity. Indeed, even some violent extremists can be disarmed by demonstrating compassion and understanding toward the whole refugee community, and treating them humanely and with respect.

Second, the need to provide refugees with their daily necessities may prompt tension with surrounding indigenous communities, especially if they are poor and lack access to services being provided to the refugees, such as healthcare and education. For this reason, host countries must ensure that the surrounding communities are not neglected at the expense of providing aid to the refugees.

To be sure, ignoring the surrounding communities could instigate violent conflicts between the two sides and lead to the radicalization of young refugees in particular; these types of incidents have been cited in Jordan, Turkey, and Germany. Thus, the host country must carefully consider where to build a refugee camp and how that might impact the surrounding area.

The above measures could substantially reduce, but not eliminate, the chances of a determined violent extremist infiltrating through waves of refugees, or a refugee becoming radicalized in the camps. For this reason, host countries should continue the process of deradicalization, mainly through integration, once the refugees are permanently resettled.

How and where to resettle refugees is a critical factor that has long-term effects on absorption and integration. It is only natural that people of the same background, who have gone through the same horrifying experiences, would gravitate to one another, but host countries should avoid concentrating thousands of refugees in one location because this prevents integration with mainstream society.

Previous waves of Muslim immigrants who settled in London, Brussels, Paris, and other European cities provide stark examples of such insular communities. Whereas families should stay together, the host countries must not create a situation where they prevent the integration process, which is central to deradicalization.

Learning from past experiences, host countries should focus on the youth by integrating them into the local communities through activities in which their indigenous counterparts are involved.

Most important is teaching the language of the host country to enable them to enroll in the school system, providing counseling for those who appear to need it, and offering opportunities for professional training.
In addition, instead of indoctrination, the youth should be provided with holistic educational experiences that draw on cognitive, affective, and performative modes of learning to help them restore their sense of self-worth.

Another important activity is to familiarize the youth in particular with the rest of the country by organizing trips, joined by native peer groups, to explore their new country first-hand. This activity allows young men and women to develop a sense of belonging.

Non-governmental organizations should also play a constructive role in accelerating the process of absorption and integration by offering, for example, internships and other office work that utilizes the talents these youth have while learning and adapting to a new work environment.

Host countries must ensure that prisons do not become incubators for radicalization. Violent extremism will persist for a long time, and could dramatically increase the number of extremists within the prison population at a prohibitive cost.

To counter this, the authorities should develop a comprehensive rehabilitation program, as reformed prisoners would best serve as role models to deradicalize other individuals, especially at-risk youth.

Finally, it is of the utmost importance to engage communities of refugees in sustainable development projects of their own choice, initially funded by the government. These types of projects allow the refugees to develop a sense of pride and achievement, provide job opportunities, and build the foundation for self-sufficiency and productivity.

Participatory projects require trainers, facilitators, and organizers, which host countries can initially appoint, but they will ultimately be run by members of the community itself, empowered by their own creative resources.

Needless to say, it is easier said than done to adopt the measures outlined above, but given that violent extremism will otherwise only fester, host countries have little choice but to invest time and resources to mitigate the plight of the refugees, starting with the refugee camps and continuing throughout their resettlement process.

Host countries cannot be long on talking and short on funding. Any government committed to deradicalizing young men and women must invest, along with private donors and foundations, as much as needed to address the epidemic of violent extremism.

There will be no decisive victory over deradicalization as the root causes behind violent extremism are deeply rooted in many Arab and Muslim states, where millions of youth are despairing with no prospect of a better future, and blame Western powers in part for their plight.

Moreover, whereas violent extremism can be contained or even defeated by Western countries by taking the measures briefly outlined above, the ideology of groups such as ISIS cannot be defeated any time in the foreseeable future.

We must bear in mind, however, that as we address the radicalization phenomenon, we cannot allow ourselves to be possessed by it or permit it to undermine our social and political values, which are the strongest weapons we have to defeat violent extremism.

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The Islamic State will ultimately collapse - and indeed it was doomed from the start because it could not offer real hope to the populations under its control, only the relentless fury of destruction and an obsession with perpetual war against enemies real and imagined, coupled with extreme religious interpretations of daily life.

ISIS is failing and will fail not only because it is a brutal and shortsighted organization that rules through fear and totalitarian control of day-to-day life, but because it is a denial of the creativity of the human mind - it is an intellectually starved group that is devoid of ideas, of anything resembling theological or philosophical content. Thinking or theorizing outside the strict bounds of Sharia is forbidden and regarded as a criminal violation of Islamic law. So while ISIS has a great deal of technical expertise at its disposal, it suffers from an utter dearth of ideas, and anything like a positive vision of government is entirely lacking.

Its ideological zealousness betrays a nihilistic core - a void. This emptiness is perhaps the key to understanding ISIS's appeal to certain youths who are attracted by the violent and uncompromising simplicity of its outlook: there is no necessity to think, and indeed anything resembling theological or religious speculation is forbidden.

ISIS represents a form of Islamo-nihilism: a name that underscores the inherent contradiction of this ideology, which turns the Islamic tradition against its own conditions of possibility and literally consumes itself in the fury of destruction. And in terms of ideas, when we look at ISIS, we can find nothing positive, only a cult of death: in the end the only content it offers is genocidal rage.

The vacuum of ideas has emboldened Salafi-jihadists, who have responded with a selective, and brutally enforced, reading of scripture. It would appear that not only Salafi-jihadists, but also many Westerners as well, have forgotten that the Koran prohibits forcible conversion: "There shall be no compulsion in religion." (2:256) People must be allowed to choose freely. Similarly, it has been largely overlooked by those that seek to demonize Islam, and those that seek to oppress others in the name of Allah, that one of the salient features of the Koran is precisely that it regards the sexes as fundamentally equal. The Koran insists on gender equality in the creation of male and female from a single soul. Islamo-nihilism cannot be defeated with military means alone: the final death blow will involve an intellectual and epistemological break with the harsh and polarizing narratives which characterize Salafi-jihadists like ISIS.

If, as Marx once observed, to be a radical is literally to go to the 'root' of a matter, then the truly radical Muslim is the one who recognizes that Islam is a religion not of indiscriminate violence and subjugation of women, but of activism and solidarity with the marginalized, the oppressed, and the disenfranchised.

In an authentic fundamentalist, you do not find any resentment or envy regarding a non-believer's way of life. That is not the case with fanatics or pseudo-fundamentalists, who are profoundly disturbed and captivated by the sinful life of the non-believer. Interestingly, the Koran itself makes the same point and warns us against this: "Do not grieve for the unbelievers, nor distress yourself at their intrigues." (16:127) In waging war against the infidel the fanatic is fighting his own temptation – for he always harbors a secret doubt, and his violent assault reveals the absence of a true belief or conviction. By contrast, the Koran
Especially now, when Islam is appropriated and directed towards purely destructive ends, it is essential to retrieve and embrace Islam as a force for radical social and political egalitarianism. Islam's tradition of nonviolent resistance in the face of injustice needs to be among the repertoire of ideas that we employ to fill the nihilistic void that ISIS continues to exploit. In a 2013 speech before the UN, Malala Yousafzai invoked the life of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, a Muslim leader from the Pashtun tribe, who was a close friend of Gandhi and nicknamed the "Frontier Gandhi" in British India. Khan, imprisoned by the British for over fifteen years, successfully mobilized 100,000 nonviolent Muslim soldiers (the Khudai Khidmatgar) and demonstrated that there is a genuine compatibility between methods of nonviolent resistance and Islamic values and beliefs.

Judeo-Christianity is threatened not by radical Islam but by right wing, anti-immigrant racism. At this moment, the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition has something special and unique to offer, precisely when it seems to be defeating itself: this is because the political problem of today is the problem of love thy neighbor. Trump's crass brand of populism is based precisely on distrust and fear of the neighbor.

The question we need to ask is: what is the neighbor? Is it someone who reminds us more or less of ourselves? Or is the neighbor rather that which startles us by their unfamiliarity, their strangeness, their refusal to accommodate our expectations of the other? I submit that it is the latter - and if that is the case, then perhaps there is an alternative to irrational fear and hate. To fully rescue Islam from the nihilistic violence of today will mean championing an Islam that is radical in its embrace of the excluded other, that represents solidarity and non-violent resistance in the face of social inequity, oligarchy, exploitation, and injustice.

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The Basic Needs Approach to Development with its emphasis on people as central to the development process is embodied in the June 1976 World Employment Conference Declaration of Principles and Programme of action.\[1\] The Declaration underlines the importance of the individual and the central role of the family and household as the basic unit around which to work for development.

Although the Basic Needs Approach builds on the development thinking of the United Nations and national governments of the 1950s and 1960s such as rural development, urban poverty alleviation, employment creation through small-scale industries, the Declaration of Principles is a major shift in development strategies with its focus on the family with the objective of providing the opportunities for the full physical, mental, and social development of the human personality. The Programme of Action defines a two-part approach: “First, Basic Needs includes certain minimum requirements of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain household equipment and furniture. Second, Basic Needs includes essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, health, education and cultural facilities.”

The Programme added a basic element to the actions: “A Basic Needs-oriented policy implies the participation of the people in making the decisions which affect them through organizations of their own choice.”

The Basic Needs Approach concentrates on the nature of what is provided rather than on income – income having often been used as the criteria for drawing a ‘poverty line’. The Basic Needs Approach is concerned not only with the underemployed but also with the unemployable: the aged, the sick, the disabled, orphaned children and others. Such groups have often been neglected by the incomes and productivity approach to poverty alleviation and employment creation.

For Yemen which is largely structured on the basis of clan-extended family institutions, the Basic Needs Approach is most appropriate. In practice, there are few institutions or associations beyond the clan level, although tribal and religious identities are often mentioned. Tribes and religious identity are “shorthand” terms as it is impossible to mention the multitude of clans. However, a family welfare – meeting basic needs is the most appropriate strategy on which to base post-war planning. Although the fighting continues sporadically and agreement on a possible “unity government” seems far away, Basic Needs Planning must start now.

Footnote


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TURKEY’S CREEPING AUTHORITARIANISM: IS THE RESISTANCE ENOUGH

Stephen Zunes*


Turkey’s march towards authoritarianism took another dangerous turn this past week with the forced resignation of moderate Islamist Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, apparently at the insistence of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.
Though constitutionally the Turkish prime minister wields executive authority and the president is largely a figurehead, Erdoğan—who served as prime minister for eleven years before term limits forced him to step down in 2014—appears to still be in charge.

And he is becoming ever more autocratic.

With his Justice and Development Party (AKP) controlling a sizable majority in parliament, Erdoğan has been steadily increasing his grip on power, with police raids on opposition media, the jailing of independent journalists on trumped-up charges, severe repression in Kurdish-populated areas and arrests of even moderate non-violent Kurdish leaders for alleged terrorist ties, the undermining of the independent judiciary, and the arrests of political opponents. Though often portrayed as a struggle between autocratic Islamists and democratic secularists, the situation in Turkey is not that simple. The secular nationalist governments which ruled the Turkish Republic for most of its first eight decades were either semi-autocratic center-right plutocracies or rightwing military dictatorships, with those subsequent to World War II maintaining close strategic ties with the United States.

The election of Erdoğan and the AKP in 2003 was initially welcomed by some pro-democracy elements as a means of weakening the military’s overbearing influence, breaking up the old corrupt oligarchic order, and challenging U.S. hegemony. However, the AKP has proved itself to be at least as corrupt, oligarchical, deferential to the wealthy and powerful economic interests as the secular elites they replaced. Erdoğan’s social conservatism and Islamist rhetoric has alarmed both Western nations and educated secular Turks.

In addition, Erdoğan has cultivated a kind of cult of personality not seen in a Turkish leader since the days of founding President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Indeed, rather than resembling Iran of the ayatollahs as some initially feared, it is instead looking increasingly like the Russia of Vladimir Putin.

Just as the United States and European governments tolerated previous military dictatorships on the grounds that Turkey was a valuable NATO ally in the struggle against Communism, however, Western leaders have similarly demonstrated little inclination to challenge Erdoğan’s repression given his perceived role as an ally in the struggle against Islamist extremism. Not that taking him on would be easy.

Erdoğan remains genuinely popular. In a manner comparable to conservative Republican leaders in the United States, he has taken advantage of the resentment of religious Turks in rural areas and poor working class communities, winning their allegiance by portraying himself as their ally against liberal secular urban elites, despite the fact that the AKP’s economic policies primarily benefit the wealthy at the expense of the poor majority.

This cultural divide has been exacerbated by the often-condescending views towards AKP supporters held by educated Europeanized liberals of the country’s western cities. Many of these urbanites express nostalgia for former governments led by long-discredited corrupt secular nationalist politicians or military rulers. This has made the development of an electoral majority that can successfully challenge the AKP’s growing power extremely difficult.

The good news is that this has not stopped the people of Turkey from fighting back.

Civil society movements, stressing democracy and economic justice, are growing and becoming better organized. In 2013, the violent breakup of a nonviolent sit-in in Istanbul’s Taksim Gezi Park protesting a planned urban development project in one of the city’s few remaining downtown green spaces spawned a mass movement demanding greater democracy, government transparency, and economic
justice. Over the next several weeks, over three and a half million Turks took to the streets in more than 5,000 demonstrations across the country.

As with the Occupy! movement in the United States, the protesters were unable to sustain their momentum, but it has helped spawn important grassroots initiatives and curtailed the state's efforts at consolidating power still further. Organized labor, feminists, environmentalists, civil libertarians, and anti-war activists have become increasingly bold in challenging government policies, as have those fighting government corruption, economic injustice, and suppression of Kurdish rights.

And just as Turkey has produced elite autocratic secularists, it has also developed progressive democratic Islamists. A group known as Antikapitalist Müslümanlar (Anti-Capitalist Muslims) has played an important role in the popular opposition, challenging the corruption, arrogance, social conservatism, and crony capitalism of the new Islamic bourgeoisie nurtured by the AKP, and instead stressing Islam's message of social justice, respect for the environment, and honest governance. Antikapitalist Müslümanlar have organized a series of campaigns and creative public protests challenging the AKP's claims of representing religious Turks. During Ramadan, when the ruling party hosted an ostentatious iftar (the evening meal breaking the daylong fast) for the party's wealthy supporters in Taksim Square, they put together a simple "people's iftar" for thousands sitting on the pavement in a nearby pedestrian mall.

Whether such mobilizations of pro-democracy forces, both Islamic and secular, can coalesce into a large enough force to prevent Erdoğan from establishing a full-fledged dictatorship remains to be seen. The forces of reaction are gaining strength in Turkey, but so is the democratic resistance.

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THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD NEWS ABOUT TURKEY'S ATTEMPTED COUP

Stephen Zunes*


The survival of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his ruling Justice and Welfare Party of an attempted coup last week is a mixed blessing.

Despite the ultra-conservative policies and creeping authoritarianism of the Erdogan regime, Turks from across the political spectrum opposed the coup, which was attempted by a faction of the Turkish military.

As the putschists were claiming they had seized state power, Erdogan—instead of calling for armed resistance—used FaceTime to appeal to the nation: “I urge the Turkish people to convene at public squares and airports. There is no power higher than the power of the people.”

In response, hundreds of thousands of supporters took to the streets and faced down the putschists, despite scores of unarmed protesters being killed by tanks, attack helicopters, and snipers.

The good news is that the coup’s failure may be a sign that, for the first time in history, Turkey's elected government has successfully imposed civilian rule over the military. Having experienced military rule a number of times in recent history, the Turkish public recognized a military regime would probably be
even worse. They also saw what happened in Egypt, where liberal democrats initially cheered the military coup against Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood only to find themselves under a brutal military dictatorship.

Turks’ resistance to the coup demonstrates that the Turkish military no longer has the overbearing role it had for so many decades, effectively exercising veto power from behind the scenes. On four previous occasions, they easily seized power from democratically elected governments.

The bad news is that the apparent success in resisting the military may not be used for democratic ends.

Indeed, Erdogan and his AKP is already using the coup attempt as an excuse to crack down even harder on dissent. In just a matter of hours, Turkish president Erdogan ordered the jailing of more than 6,000 people, including 2,745 judges and prosecutors, for allegedly supporting the coup attempt. Meanwhile, the Interior Ministry has fired close to 9,000 people across country, including thirty governors.

Observers seriously doubt that a government not known for its efficiency could have carried out any credible investigations with such speed. There is little doubt Erdogan is using this as an excuse to consolidate his rule and eliminate checks on his power.

Turkey’s coup was largely defeated by massive nonviolent resistance, adding to a list of countries where military putschists have been overwhelmed by people power: Germany (1923), France (1962), Bolivia (1979), Argentina (1987), Russia (1991), Haiti (1992), Thailand (1992), Venezuela (2002) and Burkina Faso (2015). Just because the military may take over government buildings and proclaim itself in charge doesn’t mean people will recognize its authority or agree to cooperate.

But it was not exclusively nonviolent resistance. Pro-Erdogan thugs beat and even lynched soldiers suspected of supporting the coup and there are increasing reports of vendettas carried out by pro-AKP mobs.

It’s also unfortunate that this impressive show of civil resistance in the face of an illegitimate military coup was done to defend a reactionary government.

But the fact that a leader targeted by a coup would recognize that civil resistance would be the key to his government’s survival is yet another indication of the growing awareness that power does not just come from the barrel of a gun.

There is no evidence to suggest that the United States supported the coup attempt, despite accusations by some Turkish officials. Charges that the moderate U.S.-based Turkish Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen was behind the coup are murky at best. After initially simply calling for both sides to show restraint, the Obama administration joined the rest of the international community in denouncing the coup.

The U.S. has strongly supported the Turkish military on the four previous occasions when it has seized power. This included the martial law period during the 1980s during which thousands of civilians were killed and tens of thousands of nonviolent dissidents were jailed (at the same time the Reagan administration, ironically, was leading international efforts to sanction Poland for a far less-violent martial law.)

In 2003, the Turkish parliament refused to let the country be used as a launching pad for the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said he was “disappointed” that the Turkish military “did not play the strong leadership role on that issue that we would have expected.”

At least the Obama administration recognized that having the United States support a military coup against a democratically elected and still fairly popular government—particularly given the history of
U.S. support for coups and regime change in the region—would likely sow instability rather than order.

It would be even better if the United States were to withhold military assistance and other support unless the Erdogan government ceases its repression against nonviolent and democratic opponents.

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THE AFGHAN QUAGMIRE: TIME FOR AN EXIT STRATEGY

Alon Ben-Meir,* August 3, 2016

Two weeks ago, President Obama announced that the US will draw down its troops in Afghanistan from 9,800 to 8,400, altering his original plan to reduce the number to 5,500. His decision suggests that conditions on the ground are not as promising as he expected them to be, and maintaining a larger number of troops is important as he believes “it is in our national security interests...that we give our Afghan partners the best opportunities to succeed.” The president, however, did not spell out what success actually means. If he meant that Afghanistan will eventually become a stable and functioning democracy, he is fundamentally mistaken.

Indeed, even if the US stations three times as many troops for another 15 years or more, given the multiple conflicts, ruthlessness, and duplicity of the players involved and the country’s long history, the US cannot rescue Afghanistan from the quagmire in which it finds itself. The president’s concluding remarks strongly suggest that the US’ military presence in Afghanistan is essentially open-ended, saying: “…given the enormous challenges they face, the Afghan people will need the partnership of the world, led by the United States, for many years to come.” [emphasis added]

The facts on the ground remind us of the Vietnam War—a needlessly prolonged conflict with no prospect of victory—except that the war in Afghanistan is even more complicated and becoming increasingly intractable. To understand what the US strategy should be to end a war that has lasted more than any other in US history, consider the following:

First, Afghanistan is a landlocked country with a rugged and mountainous terrain replete with thousands of caves, some of which are miles long and familiar only to the indigenous population. Historically, no power has been able to conquer and sustain its conquest of Afghanistan from the time of Alexander the Great, including the Mongols, the British Empire, and Soviet Russia.

Demographically, the country has a population of 32 million, 99 percent of whom are Muslims, composed of tribes and kinship-based groups in a multilingual and multi-ethnic society. As such, the country is politically divided and lacks social and political cohesiveness.

Second, given the history and determination of the Taliban, bringing them to submission was always a non-starter. Even though the US is fully aware that many Taliban militants operate from safe havens inside Pakistan and other hard-to-reach areas, the US is still unwilling to confront Pakistan, giving the Taliban no incentive to negotiate in earnest.

As long as this situation remains unchanged, the touch and go negotiations over the past 14 years will lead to nowhere. Just like the Vietcong, the Taliban strongly feel that they will eventually wear out any government in Kabul, and will keep fighting and make all the sacrifices until they exhaust the US and eventually prevail.
Third, Afghanistan’s border with Pakistan—the Durand Line—stretches through the entire southern and eastern boundary between the two countries and is poorly delineated and unprotected. It divides the Pashtun tribes of the region between Afghanistan and Pakistan and has been a source of increasing tension between the two countries, which explains Pakistan’s unique concerns and determination to protect its national interests and have a say about Afghanistan’s current and future political order.

There is concrete evidence, revealed by the former head of Afghanistan’s main intelligence agency, Rahmatullah Nabil, that Pakistan fully supports the Afghani Taliban to achieve a dual purpose: maintain its influence in Afghanistan, and prevent India from establishing a presence in the country, thereby thwarting any effort by New Delhi from encircling it.

Chris Alexander, Canada’s former Citizenship and Immigration Minister and former Ambassador to Afghanistan, flatly stated “Canada and its allies must take a united front against Pakistan because it is a sponsor of terrorism that threatens world security.” That said, the Obama administration was and still is unwilling to confront Pakistan because the US views the country as an ally in the war on terror, and the Pakistani military serves to secure the US’ strategic interests in south and central Asia.

Fourth, the growing presence of ISIS and the return of strong elements of al-Qaeda, numbering between 1,000 and 3,000 fighters, have become increasingly evident in the mountainous region along the Pakistani border. Their recent attack against the Hazara minority killed 80 people, presumably because members of the community provided some support to the Assad regime in Syria. US military spokesman Brigadier General Charles Cleveland aptly put it: “That’s our concern, these high profile attacks, they are effective because they’re not that difficult to achieve.”

It can be expected that ISIS attacks will become more frequent, especially because of its steady retreat in Iraq and Syria, while further destabilizing Afghanistan and complicating the war efforts regardless of the extent of the US’ continuing military backing.

Fifth, the premature introduction of democracy to Afghanistan is inconsistent with the culture of tribalism and dominance of Islam orthodoxy in the country. Although the new constitution recognizes gender equality, participatory politics, and some civic and political rights, it has also institutionalized tribal nationalism and ethnic hierarchy.

Given the above, one might ask why did the US, under both the Bush and Obama administrations, feel that it could go to any Muslim country, such as Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and others, ravage them, and then impose political values of which they are not disposed or willing to accept?

Afghanistan’s social and political setting makes it prone to ethnic and civil wars and the breakdown of state institutions. The West can at best provide only a model of democracy, and has no business going far and wide to promote its political culture which is alien to the natives and doing so under the gun no less.

This Vietnam syndrome must come to an end in Afghanistan. It is reminiscent of a slot machine gambler who pours money into the machine, hoping to get the jackpot that never materializes, finally leaving the machine exasperated and broke. Neither Bush nor Obama learned the bitter lessons of Vietnam, and both poured money and resources into a failing enterprise with no end in sight.

After the US officially spent more than $650 billion in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, in addition to $150 billion contributed by other allied countries, Afghanistan remains a mess. Bribes and favoritism are pandemic, and hundreds of millions are skimmed by corrupt officials, over which hardly anyone frowns.
As things stand now, the four-nation group (comprised of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and the US) has no plans to resume the negotiations with the Taliban, who has refused to participate in any negotiations since January. They fundamentally disagree about the political framework that should govern Afghanistan in the future.

The next US administration must change course and develop an exit strategy that offers some face saving way out. An agreement that all conflicting parties should accept rests on three pillars:

It is a given that the Taliban must be an integral part of any future government, as long as they commit themselves to basic human rights, specifically in connection with women, and prevent al-Qaeda and other extremist groups (including ISIS) from using Afghanistan as a launching pad for terrorist attacks against the US or any of its allies.

The moral argument against the Taliban has to be based on religious precepts to which they can relate and would enable them to change their ways without losing face. For example, there is nothing in the Koran that permits discrimination against women – rather, we find a defense of gender equality: “I shall not lose sight of the labor of any of you who labors in My way; be it man or woman; each of you is equal to the other.” (3:195) Nor is there any indication in the Koran that women are not permitted to receive an education.

Pakistan will have to be, for the reasons cited above, part and parcel of any solution to protect its national security interests and prevent India from meddling in Afghani affairs. Islamabad must also commit to ridding the country of radical Islamists, especially al-Qaeda. From everything we know, Pakistan and the Taliban can agree on such a political formula. The US should withdraw its forces from the country over a period of a couple of years, leaving behind a contingency of a few hundred military personnel, along with a UN presence, to monitor and ensure compliance with the agreement.

After 15 years of fighting, hundreds of billions of dollars spent, and tens of thousands killed on both sides, Afghanistan is not better off today than it was immediately following the collapse of the Taliban regime. The upcoming American administration must commit itself to ending Afghanistan’s quagmire, because short of a negotiated agreement, there will be no victory against the Taliban any more than America’s disguised defeat in Vietnam.

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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has rarely been so far from finding a resolution. Since the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas during the summer of 2014, the desire to seek peace has been diminishing, and instead growing tensions have prevailed, punctuated by stabbings and car-ramming attacks by the Palestinians, and violent acts including arson by the settlers.

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THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: BREAKING THE DEADLOCK

Alon Ben-Meir and Gilles Pargneaux*

Republished with Alon Ben-Meir’s permission, from his blog, http://www.alonben-meir.com/article/the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-breaking-the-deadlock/, May 3, 2016. This article was originally published in *Le Monde*.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has rarely been so far from finding a resolution. Since the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas during the summer of 2014, the desire to seek peace has been diminishing, and instead growing tensions have prevailed, punctuated by stabbings and car-ramming attacks by the Palestinians, and violent acts including arson by the settlers.
The despair of both peoples has rarely taken such a dispiriting face than with this daily violence. Moreover, the attention of the international community has been diverted from the Palestinian question due to the Syrian conflict and the murderous activities of Daech (ISIS), which are the main focuses of diplomatic efforts and public opinion.

**A state of tension favourable to peace between Israel & Palestine**

Yet, the climate has rarely been so favourable to a resolution of the conflict. The chaos that is sweeping the Middle East has been a game-changer in relation to Israel and the Arab countries.

Many Palestinians and Israelis are worried about the possible breakout of ISIS in Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas’ policy failures and the insistence of the Israeli government to return to dialogue under its own terms provide a breeding ground for more hostile activities that will prevent pacific coexistence. Terrorist sparks are everywhere in Palestine; no country in the Middle East has an interest in letting a new conflict emerge.

However, a majority of Israelis and Palestinians seek peace, and the desire of Arab countries to normalize their relations with Israel offers fertile ground for the resumption of peace negotiations.

In 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative was proposed by the Arab League to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the proposed framework, all Arab and Muslim countries would establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel after the successful conclusion of the peace process with the Palestinians.

For the Arab countries, truce with Israel would enable the emergence of an arc of stability from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Peninsula. This could prove useful for these countries who want to rally against the regional influence of Iran.

**Leadership must come from Europe**

In this complex situation of intertwined interests, Europe has a prominent role to play as the US is currently unable to commit to the peace process. Distracted by the upcoming presidential elections, concerned about the absence of a real prospect to reach an agreement, and its preference to assume a wait-and-see attitude, the US may well be ready to back an EU initiative for peace.

Such an opportunity exists. France has been trying for months to rekindle the peace process and is considering an international conference involving all the stakeholders in this conflict. The European Union as well as its Member States have to give their unmitigated support to this initiative.

However, some diplomatic conditions have to be met, drawing on the lessons of past failures. Otherwise, we would at best get temporary truces, a mere respite before the next outbreak of violence. The Arab Peace Initiative has to be the basis of all negotiations.

On the one hand, it stresses the principle of coexistence between the Arab and Israeli peoples. On the other hand, it shows a spirit of compromise to end the conflict with mutually agreed upon land swaps.

The role of the European Union is to support the peace process. In this context, we have to affirm that the Middle East Quartet is now more a burden than a help in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their demands towards Hamas are outdated and don’t take into account the new realities.

All those who have an interest in the status quo are supporting the Quartet. We need to get rid of the Quartet, revitalize the Arab Peace Initiative and promote the latest French initiative.
As for now, preparing peace

However, seventy years of failures in the attempts to bring peace between Israel and Palestine have taught us that diplomacy alone is not enough. Seven decades of suffering, the loss of Palestinian dignity as well as the political opportunism from the leaders of the two sides have built psychological barriers which are almost impossible to overcome in the current situation unless a process of people-to-people interactions for a period of time precedes the peace negotiations.

There is a need for mutual understanding to accept the obvious: the destruction of Israel or the vanishing of the Palestinians are impossible scenarios. Coexistence between the two peoples is the inevitable historical horizon.

This entails ending the poisonous narratives delivered by leaders from both sides, ending rampant settlement construction, changing school textbooks that demonise the Other, supporting common initiatives like Ecopeace to protect shared environmental heritage... all conditions that will pave the way for peace.

the enemy’s staying alive”. His words resonate with this conflict where the Other is reduced to their role as a hereditary enemy. Breaking this cycle is our ambition.

With this favourable climate, the current diplomatic efforts and some mutual confidence-building, we have the will to solve once and for all the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the EU has the capacity to assume the leadership role. This is our roadmap to reach peace.

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INCENTIVES AND PEACE PART 1

Alon Ben-Meir,* August 16, 2016

Unless distrust, insecurity, and illusions are first addressed, no incentives—however sweeping and compelling—will motivate Israel and the Palestinians to make the critical concessions needed to reach a peace agreement.

This article is part one of two; see below for the conclusion.

The international conference that was convened by France on June 3rd in Paris to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process ended up without concretely establishing specific measures that would persuade both parties to resume negotiations in order to reach a peace agreement. The joint communiqué issued following the conference stated “The participants discussed possible ways in which the international community could help advance the prospects for peace, including by providing meaningful incentives to the parties to make peace.”

Although the conferees agreed to reconvene again later this year and offer some incentives to both sides to restart the negotiations in earnest, I maintain that no incentives, however extensive and compelling, will succeed unless preceded by a period of reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians. In fact, if Netanyahu or Abbas refuse to engage in a process of reconciliation, this would strongly suggest that they are not interested in reaching a peace agreement, let alone making the major concessions necessary to achieve peace.
While incentives will eventually become necessary to lock in an agreement, there are three essential impediments that must first be mitigated in order to change the Israelis’ and Palestinians’ perception of each other to enable them to negotiate in good faith.

The three elements are: the embedded distrust between the two sides; concern over national security; and the illusions that significant constituencies on both sides continue to entertain, which ultimately deny each other’s right to an independent state of their own.

Distrust: The pervasive and mutual distrust cannot be mitigated through negotiation nor dispelled by simply agreeing to begin to trust one another—it is a process that must be nurtured over a period of time. According to the philosopher Jay Bernstein, “trust relations provide the ethical substance of everyday living... Trust relations are relations of mutual recognition in which we acknowledge our mutual standing and vulnerability with respect to one another.”

Distrust remains one of the most daunting problems that continues to haunt both sides and has become engrained in the minds of nearly every Israeli and Palestinian, as neither has made any effort to mitigate it. On the contrary, they have and continue to take demonstrable actions on the ground in ways that only deepen distrust.

By way of example, Israel continued building and expanding settlements, Hamas constructed tunnels in Gaza for offensive purposes, certain Palestinians and settlers engaged in wanton violence, and leaders on both sides displayed public acrimony. Moreover, personal chemistry and communication between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership was and still is completely absent.

Continuing distrust has automatically created a dogmatic attitude of stubbornness and reinforced assumptions about each other’s true intentions. Moreover, the absence of trust leads to social paralysis and the loss of hope while evoking fear, a deep sense of uncertainty, and the inability to foster social bonds. As a result, both sides became suspicious of every action taken by the other regardless of how well-intended they were, as mutual skepticism led to the sense of futility in making any concessions.

To be sure, little effort was made to engage one another through mutual conciliatory interactions to cultivate trust. Instead, they used the public stage to malign the other, further deepening hatred and distrust rather than building new bridges. As a result, the absence of trust has sunk too deep to be simply rectified at the negotiating table. It must thus be nurtured to allow both sides to view one another as a potential partner worthy of being trusted.

In the final analysis, distrust can be mitigated only through people-to-people interactions. Both sides need to take confidence-building measures to faithfully demonstrate they can, in fact, begin the process of learning to trust one another and commit to reaching mutually agreed-upon terms of engagement that will pave the way for a durable peace. Some of these measures could include but are certainly not limited to the following:

Israel can stop or at the very least slow the expansion of settlements during this period. It should bring an end to collective punishment and night raids, and work closely with Palestinian internal security to prevent extremists on either side from undermining this process. Another measure is releasing nonviolent Palestinian prisoners, or allowing them increased visitation rights so families can regularly visit.

The Palestinians can also take certain measures, beginning with stopping all public incitement, working closely with Israel in pursuit of extremists within the territories, engaging regularly in a positive public narrative, openly talking about the need to reconcile with Israel, and stressing the inevitability of coexistence between both peoples. To be sure, people-to-people interactions over a period of at least 18 months will be necessary to cultivate a degree of trust that would allow both sides to view the other through a more positive lens.
National security: There is a current state of fear and anxiety for the future experienced by both sides, which is constantly fed by a deep sense of national insecurity. This concern is largely informed by past experiences, as both can in fact make a strong case as to why they are troubled by national security concerns. For the Israelis, these experiences include random shelling, acts of extreme violence like the multiple stabbing incidents over the last 8 months, car bombings, and existential threats emanating from Iran and groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah. By constantly invoking a sense of insecurity, it became the state’s mantra, often prompting Israel to take uncalled for measures to presumably enhance its security while further aggravating the Palestinians’ sense of insecurity.

In regards to the Palestinians, their constant and overarching fear is related to their understanding that Israel is and will always remain the most powerful state in the region, and that under no circumstances can they ever overwhelm Israel through force. To paraphrase Henry Kissinger, Israel’s absolute security renders the Palestinians absolutely insecure. That sense of insecurity fosters a constant concern often reinforced by fear of night raids, home demolitions, loss of territory, and administrative detention, among others. The fact that Israel can take, at any time, measures deemed necessary under the guise of protecting its own national security has created a deep sense of vulnerability among the Palestinians.

In addition, regional volatility and the development of events over which neither side has complete control do not allow them to take security for granted. The sweeping regional upheaval, including the civil war in Syria, the rise of ISIS, and the impact of the violent Sunni-Shiite conflict, has a direct and indirect effect on the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians and creates heightened anxiety, which inhibits making any concession that might affect their national and individual security.

Even if both sides are persuaded to stop all activities that promote or instigate concerns over national security, it will still take time to fully collaborate and regularly take consistent and mutually complementary practical steps of reconciliation to allay some of these national security concerns.

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INCENTIVES AND PEACE: PART 2


Unless distrust, insecurity, and illusions are first addressed, no incentives—however sweeping and compelling—will motivate Israel and the Palestinians to make the critical concessions needed to reach a peace agreement.

Part II: This article is a continuation from Part 1, above.

The international conference that was convened by France on June 3rd in Paris to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process ended up without concretely establishing specific measures that would persuade both parties to resume negotiations in order to reach a peace agreement. The joint communiqué issued following the conference stated “The participants discussed possible ways in which the international community could help advance the prospects for peace, including by providing meaningful incentives to the parties to make peace.”

Although the conferees agreed to reconvene again later this year and offer some incentives to both sides to restart the negotiations in earnest, I maintain that no incentives, however extensive and compelling, will succeed unless preceded by a period of reconciliation between Israel and the Palestinians.
In fact, if Netanyahu or Abbas refuse to engage in a process of reconciliation, this would strongly suggest that they are not interested in reaching a peace agreement, let alone making the major concessions necessary to achieve peace.

While incentives will eventually become necessary to lock in an agreement, there are three essential impediments that must first be mitigated in order to change the Israelis' and Palestinians' perception of each other to enable them to negotiate in good faith. The final element (in addition to distrust and national security) is the illusions that significant constituencies on both sides continue to entertain, which ultimately deny each other's right to an independent state of their own.

**Illusions:** In *The Future of an Illusion*, Sigmund Freud offers the following definition: “…we call a belief an illusion when a wish-fulfillment is a prominent factor in its motivation, and in doing so we disregard its relations to reality, just as the illusion itself sets no store by verification.” What is characteristic of illusions is that: 1) they are derived from deep human wishes, and 2) the belief is held (or would be held) in the absence of any compelling evidence, or good rational grounds, on its behalf.

Both sides have a very powerful and widely influential constituency that still believes they can have it all. In Israel, parties such as Jewish Home, which is led by Naftali Bennett and part of the coalition government, still believe that much of the West Bank should be annexed and that no viable Palestinian state should be established as Israel can manage the conflict indefinitely.

On the part of the Palestinians, groups such as Hamas believe that all of Palestine, including Israel, is Palestinian territory, and that under any circumstances (and despite occasional statements to the contrary) Israel should not exist as an independent Jewish state. At best, they believe that the Jews can live in Palestine under Palestinian rule.

Both sides have been living with illusions about these issues and are imbued with a zero-sum approach, as if any gain by one side must be at the expense of the other. Unfortunately, the leadership on both sides have done nothing but promulgate these beliefs, and even less to disabuse themselves of these illusions.

Since illusions answer to inner needs, having to give them up can be an extremely painful, even traumatic experience. As a result, one of the major obstacles to adopting the Arab Peace Initiative (API) has been that many Israelis are still not prepared psychologically to relinquish some of their most cherished illusions (i.e. acquiring the whole land of Israel). On the other hand, the Palestinians, especially Hamas, also want to control the entire mandated Palestine, which is illusionary as well. Israel's illusions have served to create the logic for occupation, ultimately perpetuating the dehumanization of the Palestinians. Israel's political leadership clung to these illusions and never understood the mindset of the Palestinians.

The Palestinians, for their part, cling to their illusions just as blindly and desperately as the Israelis, which leads to resistance to and fear of change. This has contributed to making the Israeli-Palestinian conflict both chronic and intractable, as the various illusions are continuously and consciously nurtured by daily encounters between the two sides.

Finally, illusions are also fed by experience itself—since the creation of the state of Israel, neither side has come to terms with the fact that coexistence is not one of many options, it is the only option.

**Incentives:**

Given that these three points need to first be mitigated, any and all incentives provided have to occur once these issues have been largely allayed, while preparing the parties to embrace the overall
framework for peace based on the API. In fact, providing any incentives prior to a period of reconciliation could undermine the effort to persuade both sides to make the necessary concessions for peace. Indeed, if they begin to benefit before making practical concessions, there will be no compelling reason to concede on anything, as has been the case in the past, and hope that their position could be further strengthened as time passes.

In an interview with Le Monde, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault stated following the June 3rd conference that “I am targeting two outcomes for this meeting [a follow-up international conference]: confirmation of the prospect of a conference with the parties by the end of the year and the creation of several working groups, one of which will be on the theme of economic incentives, e.g. the offer of a special partnership with the European Union and an association agreement for the future Palestinian State.”

Foreign Minister Ayrault is absolutely correct to suggest that incentives are necessary to persuade both sides to come to terms with each other’s rights and existence. These incentives, however, will not work unless, as stated above, they are preceded by a period of 18-24 months that allows for the mitigation of the three elements addressed above.

There is no doubt that finalizing a peace agreement would require significant incentives, and to that end the EU, along with the US, can offer the Palestinians the following, among other incentives: committing to raising billions of dollars to resettle and/or compensate the Palestinian refugees; and providing financial aid for the building of infrastructure throughout the Palestinian territories, in particular the building of schools, hospitals, and clinics, as these social and civic institutions are critical for the development of their future state. In addition, the EU can grant special provisions for Palestinian students to study tuition-free in European universities, provide guidance and assistance in the development of democratic institutions, and offer training and provisions for internal policing and security.

In regards to Israel, the EU can upgrade its association with Israel into a comprehensive partnership with increased trade and investments, and enhanced scientific and cultural links. In addition, the EU and the US can offer a financial aid package, similar to the ten-year plan currently being negotiated between the US and Israel, specifically for revitalizing debilitated, poverty-stricken areas in Israel, particularly those in urban locales.

Another potential incentive is establishing a special strategic association between Israel and NATO. Such an association would also provide a security umbrella to Israel, particularly in dealing with any potential threat from Iran. This measure will make it known that the US and the EU are prepared to come to Israel’s aid against any material threat emanating from any source.

Conclusion:

Although a majority of Israelis and Palestinians realize the inevitability of coexistence and presumably understand the general parameters of a negotiated peace agreement, biased and selective perceptions, reinforced by historical experience and incompatible ideologies, have locked both sides into immobile positions. The factors that maintain and enhance these patterns include emotions such as fear, distrust, insecurity and illusions; the psychological outcome is mutual denial of the narrative of the other and mutual delegitimization. Put together, the operative result is stagnation and polarization.

What is therefore needed is a consensus-oriented dialogue and people-to-people interaction over a period of time, before they can sit and negotiate, to resolve the issues of perception—a tall order given the current environment that buttresses rather than ameliorates negative perceptions. Yet, this remains the only starting point that could usher in a negotiating process to successfully end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
JUST A TRICK

Uri Avnery, June 11, 2015

ONCE I heard the following story from the then Swedish ambassador in Paris:

"In 1947, when the UN was discussing the plan to partition Palestine, I was a member of the sub-committee dealing with Jerusalem. One day, the Jews sent a new representative. His name was Abba Eban. He spoke beautiful English, much better than the British or US members of the committee. He talked for about half an hour, and at the end there was not one person in the room who did not hate his guts."

I was reminded of this episode when I saw on TV the press conference held by Dore Gold, the Director General of our Foreign Office. Its subject was the recent Paris peace conference, which was vehemently denounced by our government.

From the moment I saw Gold for the first time I disliked him. He was our new ambassador to the UN. I told myself that my attitude was an unworthy rejection of foreign Jews ("Exile Jews" in Israeli slang). Gold speaks Hebrew with a very pronounced American accent and is no Apollo. I would have preferred as our representative an erect, Israeli-looking pioneer-type who speaks English with a pronounced Hebrew accent. (I know this sounds racist, and am thoroughly ashamed of myself.)

GOLD’S CONFERENCE was about the French peace initiative concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

I have a lurking suspicion – it is still lurking around – that this is not really a French initiative, but a camouflaged American one.

It arouses the fury of the Israeli government, and no American president can do that if he wants himself or his party to be reelected.

There is a terrible fear haunting our government. Barack Obama abhors Netanyahu, and for good reason. But he cannot do anything against him openly – not until midnight on election day. Whether Hillary Clinton or (God forbid) Donald Trump is elected, Obama remains in office for almost another three months after the elections – and in this period he is as free as a bird (as the Germans would say). He can do whatever he likes. Whatever he dreamed about, day and night, for eight long years. And what he dreamed about was Binyamin Netanyahu.

Ah, the sweet revenge. But only in November. Until then he has to dance to Netanyahu’s tune, unless he wants to hurt the Democratic nominee.

So what can he do in June? He can farm things out. For example, ask the French to convene a peace conference to prepare the way for recognition of the State of Palestine.

Asking the French to convene a high-ranking conference in Paris is like asking the cat if it wants some milk. You don’t have to wait for an answer.

France, like Great Britain, is mourning its imperial past, when Paris was the center of the world and educated Germans and Russians, not to mention Egyptians and Vietnamese, spoke French. The passports
of many nations were printed in that language.

That was the time when almost half the world appeared on the maps in French blue, while the other half appeared in British red. The time when the French diplomat Georges Picot and his British colleague Mark Sykes divided between them the Ottoman Middle East, exactly a hundred years ago this week.

Having the foreign ministers (not to mention kings and presidents) of the world congregate in one of the many beautiful palaces of Paris is a French dream. The British, in much the same situation, would like the same, but are busy with the infantile urge to leave the European Union.

Whatever, what we have now is this French initiative, a glittering assembly of foreign ministers or their representatives, demanding the resumption of the peace negotiations within a limited time frame, with the declared aim of recognizing the Palestinian state.

NETANYAHU loves France. He loves to amuse himself with his wife on the French Riviera, dine in the most expensive Paris restaurants and live in the most luxurious Paris apartments - as long as others pay for it. This came out last week in the trial of a French Jew who is accused of swindles amounting to hundreds of millions of Euros, and who paid for several of the Netanyahus’ trips. Netanyahu does not believe in paying for his pleasures himself, and like the Queen possesses no credit card.

But enjoying French luxury is one thing, enjoying French diplomacy is something else. At this moment Netanyahu, when he is not occupied with his lawyers, devotes his time to defeating the French initiative.

Why, for god’s sake? What’s so bad about a gathering of the world’s top statesmen and stateswomen to re-start the Israeli-Palestinian peace process? Well, practically everything!

This peace process is like a sleeping dog. A dangerous dog. While it sleeps, Netanyahu can get away with everything – deepening the occupation of the Palestinian territories, expanding the settlements (quietly, quietly, don't wake the dog!), do all the hundred daily things that make the occupation "irreversible". And here come the French and poke the dog in the ribs.

So what? people might ask. There have been conferences before, peace processes galore, international resolutions. If another large conference is convened and the details of a peace agreement discussed, Israel will not attend and Netanyahu will ignore the whole thing. How many times has this happened before? It will hardly deserve a yawn.

BUT THIS time it may be different. Not in itself, but because of the international atmosphere.

Slowly, very slowly, Israel's international horizon is darkening. Small things are happening every day all around the world. A resolution here, a boycott there, a condemnation, a demonstration. The Israel that was universally admired disappeared long ago.

The BDS movement is immensely successful. It does not really hurt the Israeli economy. But it creates a mood, first on the campuses and then around them. Jewish institutions are sending SOS messages.

By now, the Jewish institutions themselves have been infected. The daily news about the happenings in the occupied territories and even in Israel proper hurt Jews, and especially the young ones. Many of them turn their backs on Israel, some become actively engaged against it.

Israel is a strong country. It has a very large military, the most modern weapons, a sound economy
(especially high-tech), frequent diplomatic successes.

This is no second South Africa, as the BDS people would like to see it. There are huge differences. The apartheid regime was led by Nazi-sympathizers, while Israel is still riding the world-wide wave of Holocaust-era penitence and remorse. South Africa depended on its rebellious black labor force, Israel imports foreign labor from many countries.

Israel does not really depend on American financial aid. This aid is a luxury, not more. It needs the US veto against hostile proposals in the UN, but it can – and does – generally ignore the UN.

Yet, taken all in all, Israel’s worsening international standing is worrying. Even Netanyahu is worried. Slowly but surely the world is accepting the State of Palestine as a fact of life and as a condition for peace.

So Netanyahu is looking around for a new trick. And what does he see? Egypt!

ISRAEL’S RELATIONS with Egypt go back a few thousand years. Egypt was already a regional power when the original Israelite people came into being. After the exodus from Egypt (which never really happened) the Bible tells us of many ups and downs in the relations between powerful Egypt and little Israel.

When the Assyrians laid siege to Jerusalem and the Judeans hoped for help from Egypt, the Assyrian general mocked: "Thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, upon Egypt, on which, if a man lean, it will go into his hand and pierce it!" (2 Regnum 18 and Isaiah 36)

Now the current Pharaoh, Abd al-Fattah a-Sisi, is Netanyahu’s great hope. Egypt, bankrupt as ever, depends on Saudi Arabia. The Saudis (secretly) depend on Israel in their fight against Iran and Bashar Assad. So a-Sisi is also a (secret) ally of Israel.

To bolster his stature, a-Sisi also poses as a peace-maker. He calls for a "regional" peace initiative.

In his diatribe against the French, Dore Gold lauded the Egyptian peace initiative. He accused the French of sabotaging it, and thereby preventing peace.

Netanyahu also verbally accepted the Egyptian initiative, adding that it needs only "a few changes". Indeed it does. a-Sisi bases his plan on the 2002 Saudi peace initiative, which had been adopted by the Arab league and become the Arab peace initiative. This demands that Israel leave all the occupied territories (including the Golan and East Jerusalem), accept the State of Palestine, the Right of Return of Palestinian refugees etc.) Netanyahu would die a thousand deaths before accepting any one of these.

Using the Egyptian plan as a pretext for rejecting the French plan is sheer chutzpah, based on the cynical assumption that one can indeed cheat all the world all the time.

"Regional", by the way, is the new buzz-word. It came up some time ago, and even some well-meaning Israelis adopted it. "Regional peace", how beautiful.

Instead of talking about peace with the hated Palestinians, let’s talk about peace with the "region". Sounds good. But it is total nonsense.

No Arab leader, from Morocco to Iraq, will sign a peace agreement with Israel that does not include the end of the occupation and the creation of a Palestinian state. No one can. The masses of his people
will not let him. Even Anwar al-Sadat included these provisions in his peace treaty with Menachem Begin (though in terms that could easily be broken).

When in 1949 my friends and I first put forward the solution that has become known as "two states for two peoples", it included, as a matter of course, peace with the entire Arab world. And peace with the Arab world will include, as a matter of course, peace with the State of Palestine. The two go together, like Siamese twins.

Speaking now of "regional peace" as an alternative to peace with the Palestinians is nonsense. "Regional peace" in that sense means no peace.

The other day Gideon Levy wrote in Haaretz that Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman "are now talking like Uri Avnery in 1969".

Very flattering. But, alas, only a trick.

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THE SHOT HEARD ALL OVER THE COUNTRY

Uri Avnery, August 6, 2016

ON JUNE 28, 1914, the Austrian heir to the throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, visited Sarajevo, the main town of Bosnia, then an Austrian province.

Three young Serbian inhabitants of Bosnia had decided to assassinate him, in order to achieve the attachment of Bosnia to Serbia. They threw bombs at the car of the archduke. All three failed to harm him.

Later on, one of the assailants, Gavrilo Princip, chanced upon his intended victim again. The archduke's car had made a wrong turn, the driver tried to reverse, the car stalled, and Princip shot the duke dead.

That was "the shot heard around the world". This small incident led to World War I, which led to World War II, with altogether some 100 million dead, to Bolshevism, Fascism, Nazism and the Holocaust. Yet, while the names of Lenin, Stalin and Hitler will be remembered for centuries, the name of Gavrilo Princip, the most important person of the 20th century, is already forgotten.

(Because he was only 19 years old, Austrian law did not allow him to be sentenced to death. He was sent to prison, where his death from tuberculosis went unnoticed in the middle of World War I.)

For some reason, this insignificant person who made history reminds me of an insignificant young Israeli named Elor Azaria, whose act may well change the history of the State of Israel.

THE FACTS of the case are quite clear.

Two young Palestinians attacked an Israeli soldier with a knife in Tel Rumaida, a settlement of extremist Jews in the center of Hebron. The soldier was slightly wounded. The attackers were shot, one died on the spot, the other was severely wounded and lay bleeding on the ground.

What happened next was photographed by a local Palestinian with one of the many cameras distributed by the Israeli human rights association "B'Tselem" to the local population.

The crew of an Israeli ambulance was treating the wounded soldier, ignoring the seriously wounded Arab who was lying on the ground. Several Israeli soldiers were standing around, also ignoring the
Palestinian. About 10 minutes later Sergeant Elor Azaria, a medic, appeared on the scene, approached the wounded Palestinian and shot him point-blank in the head, killing him.

According to eye-witnesses, Azaria declared that "the terrorist must die". Later, on the advice of his phalanx of lawyers, Azaria claimed that he was afraid that the wounded Palestinian had an explosive charge on his body and was about to kill the soldiers around him – an assertion clearly disproved by the pictures which showed the soldiers standing nearby obviously unconcerned. Then there was a mysterious knife which was not there at the beginning of the clip and could be seen lying near the body at the end.

The film was widely distributed on social media and could not be ignored. Azaria was brought before a military court and became the center of a political storm that has been going on for weeks. It is splitting the army, the public, the political scene and the entire state.

LET ME interject a personal note. I am not naive. In the 1948 war I was a combat soldier for ten consecutive months, before being severely wounded. I saw all kinds of atrocities. When the war was over, I wrote a book about these atrocities, called "The Other Side of the Coin"(in Hebrew). It was widely condemned.

War brings out the best and the worst in human nature. I have seen war crimes committed by people who, after the war, became nice, normal, law-abiding citizens.

So what is so special about Elor Azaria, apart from the fact that he was photographed during the act?

We all saw him on TV, sitting in the military courtroom during his trial, which is still going on. A childish-looking soldier, seeming quite lost. His mother sits directly behind him, cradling his head in her arms and stroking him all the time. His father sits nearby and in the intermissions shouts abuse at the military prosecutor.

So what is so special about this case? Similar acts happen all the time, though not on camera. It's routine. Especially in Hebron, where a few hundred fanatical settlers live among 160,000 Palestinians. Hebron is one of the oldest cities in the world. It existed long before Biblical times.

In the center of Hebron there is a building which, according to Jewish belief, houses the graves of the Israelite patriarchs. Archaeologists dispute this claim. Arabs believe that the tombs belong to venerable Muslim sheiks. For them, the building is a mosque.

Since the beginning of the occupation, this has been a place of continued violent strife. The main street is reserved for Jews and closed to Arab traffic. For soldiers sent there to guard the settlers, it is hell.

In the clip, Azaria is seen shaking hands with somebody immediately after the killing. This person is no other than Baruch Marzel, the king of the Tel Rumaida settlers. Marzel is the successor of "Rabbi" Meir Kahane, who was branded as a fascist by the Supreme Court of Israel. (Marzel once openly called for my assassination.)

During the trial it was revealed that Marzel plays host every Saturday to the entire company of Israeli soldiers guarding the settlement, including the officers. This means that Azaria was exposed to his fascist ideas before the shooting event.

WHAT MAKES the case of the "shooting soldier" (as he is called in the Hebrew press) a turning point in the history of the Zionist enterprise?
As I mentioned in a recent piece, Israel is now rent into diverse "sectors", with the rifts between them growing ever wider. Jews and Arabs; Orientals (Mizrahim) and Europeans (Ashkenazim); secular and religious; exclusive orthodox and inclusive "national religious"; male and female; heterosexual and homosexual; old-timers and new immigrants, especially from Russia; rich and poor; Tel Aviv and the "periphery"; Left and Right; inhabitants of Israel proper and the settlers in the occupied territories.

The one institution which unites almost all these diverse – and mutually antagonistic – elements is the army. It is far more than a mere fighting force. It is where all Israeli youngsters (except the orthodox and the Arabs) meet on equal terms. It is the "melting pot". It is the holiest of the holy.

Not any more.

This is where Sergeant Azaria comes in. He did not just kill a wounded Palestinian – named, by the way, Abd al-Fatah al-Sharif. He mortally wounded the army.

FOR SOME years now, a secret endeavor of the "national-religious" has been going on to conquer the army from below.

This sector was once a small and disdained group, since religious Jews by and large rejected Zionism altogether. According to their belief, God exiled the Jews because of their sins, and only God has the right to allow them back. By appropriating God's task for themselves, Zionists were committing a grievous sin.

The mass of religious Jews lived in Eastern Europe and were destroyed in the Holocaust. A number of them came to Palestine and are now a secluded, self-sufficient community in Israel, taking huge sums of money from the Zionist state and not saluting the Zionist flag.

The "national-religious", on the other hand, grew in Israel from a small, timid community into a large and powerful force. Their tremendous birthrate – 7-8 children is the norm – gives them a large advantage. When the Israeli army conquered East Jerusalem and the West Bank, studded with holy places, they also became assertive and self-assured.

Their present leader, Naftali Bennett, a successful high-tech entrepreneur, is now a dominant member of the government, in constant competition and conflict with Binyamin Netanyahu. The party has its own education system.

For decades now this party has been engaged in a determined effort to conquer the army from below. It has pre-army preparatory schools which produce highly-motivated future officers, and is slowly infiltrating the lower officer corps. Kippah-wearing captains and majors, once a rarity, are now very common.

ALL THIS is exploding now. The Azaria affair is blowing the army apart. The high command, still mainly composed of old-timers, Ashkenazim and (comparative) moderates, put Azaria on trial. Killing a wounded enemy is against army orders. Soldiers are allowed to shoot and kill only if they are in immediately danger to their lives.

A large part of the population, especially the religious and rightist sectors, protested loudly against the trial. Since the Azaria family is oriental, the protesters include the bulk of the oriental sector.

Netanyahu's acute political nose immediately scented the trend. He decided to visit the Azaria family, and was only held back at the last moment by his advisors. Instead, he called Elor's father, and conveyed his personal sympathies on the phone. Avigdor Lieberman, before his appointment as Minister of Defense, personally visited the courtroom in order to demonstrate his support for the soldier.
It was an open slap in the face of the army command.

Now the army, the last bulwark of national unity, is being torn apart. The high command is openly attacked as leftist, a term not far removed from traitorous in current Israeli discourse. The myth of military infallibility lies shattered, the authority of the high command profoundly damaged, criticism of the Chief of Staff is rampant.

In the contest between Sergeant Elor Azaria and the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Gadi Eizenkot, the sergeant may well win. If convicted at all for blatantly disobeying orders, he will get off with a light sentence.

Killing a defenseless human being has turned him into a national hero. His was the shot that was heard all over the country. Perhaps all over the world.

HATRED UNLIMITED

Uri Avnery, July 9, 2016

A PALESTINIAN youngster breaks into a settlement, enters the nearest house, stabs a 13-year old girl in her sleep and is killed.

Three Israeli men kidnap a 12-year old Palestinian boy at random, take him to an open field and burn him alive.

Two Palestinians from a small town near Hebron enter Israel illegally, have coffee in a Tel Aviv amusement quarter and then shoot up everybody around before they are captured. They become national heroes.

An Israeli soldier sees a severely wounded Palestinian attacker lying on the ground, approaches him and shoots him in the head at point blank range. He is applauded by most Israelis.

These are not "normal" actions even in a guerrilla war. They are the manifestations of bottomless hatred, a hatred so terrible that it overcomes all norms of humanity.

THIS WAS not always so. A few days after the 1967 war, in which Israel conquered East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, I traveled alone through the newly occupied territories. I was welcomed almost everywhere, people were eager to sell me their goods, tell me their stories. They were curious about the Israelis, much as we were curious about them.

At the time, Palestinians did not dream of an eternal occupation. They hated the Jordanian rulers and were glad that we had driven them out. They believed that we would leave soon, allowing them to rule themselves at long last.

In Israel, everyone spoke about a "benevolent occupation". The first military governor was a very humane person, Chaim Herzog, a future President of Israel and the father of the present chairman of the Labor Party.

Within a few years, all this had changed. The Palestinians realized that the Israelis did not intend to leave, but that they were about to steal their land, quite literally, and cover it with their settlements.

(Something similar happened 15 years later in South Lebanon. The Shiite population greeted our
troops with flowers and rice, believing that we would drive the Palestinians out and leave. When we didn't, they turned into determined guerrilla fighters and eventually founded Hezbollah.)

By now, hatred is everywhere. Arabs and Israelis use different highways, but it is far worse than South African apartheid, because the whites there had no interest in driving the blacks out. It is also far worse than most forms of colonialism, because the imperial powers did not generally pull the land out from under the feet of the natives in order to settle there.

Nowadays, mutual hatred reigns supreme. The settlers terrorize their Arab neighbors, Arab boys throw rocks and improvised fire-bombs at passing Jewish cars on the highroads where they themselves are not allowed to drive. Recently, the car of a high-ranking army officer was stoned. He got out, pursued a boy who was running away, shot him in the back and killed him – in flagrant violation of army rules for opening fire.

TODAY, SOME 120 years after the beginning of the Zionist experiment, the hatred between the two peoples is abysmal. The conflict dominates our lives. More than half of all news stories in the media concern this conflict.

If the founder of modern Zionism, the Viennese journalist Theodor Herzl, were to come to life again, he would be totally shocked. In the futuristic novel he wrote in German at the beginning of last century, called Altrneuland ("Old-new Land"), he described in detail life in the future Jewish State. Its Arab inhabitants are portrayed as happy and patriotic citizens, grateful for all the progress and advantages brought by the Zionists.

In the beginning of the Jewish immigration, the Arabs were indeed remarkably acquiescent. Perhaps they believed that the Zionists were a new version of the German religious immigrants who had arrived a few decades earlier and indeed brought progress to the country. These Germans, who called themselves Templars (no connection with the medieval crusader group so called) had no political ambitions. They set up model villages and urban neighborhoods and lived happily ever after, until the German Nazis infected them. At the outbreak of World War II the British deported them all to far-away Australia.

The model village these Templars built near Jaffa, Sarona, is now an amusement park in Tel Aviv – the very place where the latest terrorist outrage took place.

When the Arabs realized that the new Zionist immigrants were not a repeat of the Templars, but a new aggressive colonialist implantation, conflict became inevitable. It grows worse from year to year. The hatred between the two peoples seems to reach new heights all the time.

BY NOW, the two peoples seem to live in two different worlds. A centuries-old Arab village and a new Israeli settlement, situated one mile apart, might just as well exist on two different planets.

From their first day on earth, children of the two peoples hear totally different stories from their parents. This goes on in school. By the time they are grown up, they have very few perceptions in common.

For a young Palestinian, the story is quite simple. This was an Arab land for more than 14 centuries, a part of Arab civilization. For some, their ownership of the country goes back thousands of years, since Islam did not displace the existing Christian population when it conquered Palestine. Islam was at the time a much more progressive religion, so local Christians gradually adopted Islam, too.

In the Palestinian view, Jews ruled Palestine in antiquity for a few decades only. The Jewish claim to the country now, based on a promise given to them by their own private Jewish God, is a blatant
colonialist ploy. The Zionists came to the country in the 20th century as allies of the British imperialist power, without any right to it.

Most Palestinians are now ready to make peace and even to live in a reduced Palestinian state side by side with Israel, but are rebuffed by the Israeli government, which wants to keep "all of Eretz Israel" for Jewish colonization, leaving only some disconnected enclaves to the Palestinians.

A PALESTINIAN ARAB who believes that this is a self-evident truth may live a few hundred yards away from a Jewish Israeli, who believes that this is all a pack of lies, invented by Arab anti-Semites (an oxymoron) in order to drive the Jews into the sea.

Every Jewish child in Israel learns from an early age that this land was given by God to the Jews, who ruled it for many centuries, until they offended God and He drove them out as a temporary punishment. Now the Jews have come back to their country, which was occupied by a foreign people which came from Arabia. These people now have the cheek to claim the country as their own.

This being so, official Israeli doctrine says, there is no solution. We just have to be ready for a very very long time – practically for eternity – to defend ourselves and our country. Peace is a dangerous illusion.

The naïve vision of Herzl was opposed by the right-wing Zionist leader Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky. He stated – quite rightly – that nowhere in the world has a native people ever give up its land peacefully to a foreigner. Therefore, he said, we have to build an "iron wall" to defend our new settlement in the country of our forebears.

Jabotinsky, who had studied in the liberal post-Risorgimento Italy, had a liberal world-view. His present-day followers are Binyamin Netanyahu and the Likud party, who are anything but liberal.

They would applaud wildly if God made all Palestinians disappear overnight from "our" country. They might even consider helping God a little bit.

INDEED, GOD plays an ever growing role in the conflict.

In the beginning, God played a very minor role. Almost all first-generation Zionists, including both Herzl and Jabotinsky, were staunch atheists. It was said that Zionists were people who did not believe in God, but who believed that God had promised us the country.

This has radically changed – on both sides.

In the beginning of the conflict, early last century, the entire Arab world was infected with European-style nationalism. Islam was always there, but it was not the driving force. Arab national heroes, like Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, were avid nationalists, who promised to unify the Arabs and turn them into a world power.

Arab nationalism failed miserably. Communism never took root in the Islamic countries. Political Islam, which was victorious against the Soviets in Afghanistan, is gaining ground throughout the Arab world.

Curiously enough, the same happened in Israel. After the 1967 war, in which Israel completed its conquest of the Holy Land, and especially the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, atheist Zionism steadily lost ground, and a violent religious kind of Zionism took over.

In the Semitic world, the European idea of separation between state and church never really took
In both Islam and Judaism, religion and State are inseparable.

In Israel, power is now wielded by a government dominated by the extreme ideology of the religious right-wing, while the "secular" left-wing has long been in full retreat.

In the Arab world, the same is happening – only more so. Al-Qaeda, Daesh and their ilk are gaining everywhere. In Egypt and other places, military dictatorships try to stop this process, but their foundations are shaky.

Some of us Israeli atheists have been warning of this danger for decades. We said that nationalist states can reach compromise and make peace, while for religious movements this is almost impossible.

Secular rulers can be assassinated, like Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Yitzhak Rabin in Israel. Religious movements live on when this happens to their leaders.

(Assassin is a corruption of the Arab Word Hashisheen. The 12th century founder of this sect, the Old Man of the Mountain, used to feed his emissaries with Hashish and send them on incredibly daring missions. The great Salah-ad-Din (Saladin) once woke up in his bed to find a dagger next to him – and hastened to make a deal with the leader of the Assassins.)

I AM convinced that it is in the vital interest of Israel to make peace with the Palestinian people, and with the Arab world at large, before this dangerous infection engulfs the entire Arab – and Muslim – world.

The leaders of the Palestinian people, both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, are still comparatively moderate people. This is true even for Hamas, a religious movement.

I would suggest that for the West in general, supporting peace in our region is also of paramount importance. The convulsions now affecting several Arab countries do not bode well for them, either.

Reading a document like this week’s Quartet report on the Middle East, I am amazed by their self-destructive cynicism. This ridiculous document of the Quartet, composed of the US, Europe, Russia and the UN, is intent on creating an equilibrium – equally blaming the conqueror and the conquered, the oppressor and the oppressed, ignoring the occupation altogether. Verily, a masterpiece of hypocrisy, a.k.a. diplomacy.

Absent all chances for a serious effort for peace, hatred will just grow and grow, until it engulfs us all.

Unless we take action to stem it in time.

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FROM ADAM KELLER'S BLOG, "CRAZY COUNTRY"
ON ISRAEL AND THE PALESTINE TERRITORIES
http://adam-keller2.blogspot.co.il

Thirst and narrative, August 12, 2016

"Here at Fasayil, in the Jordan Valley, we get water twice a week," explained our host, to the group of activists from Tel Aviv. "Twice a week the water is flowing through this little water pipe which you see here on the ground, a pipe with a 20 mm diameter. When the large container is full we distribute the water among all the families, it has to last for three days. And by the way, we are more fortunate compared to the Palestinian communities more north. To them, Israel does not give any water at all, and
often the soldiers even confiscate the water which they buy for themselves. That is because the area where they live had been declared as a firing range, and the army says they are living there illegally. So far, they did not declare Fasayil a firing range."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fasayil

So what could we do about it – we, fifty Israelis who had followed the call of "The Water Coalition" and came to Fasayil on a Saturday afternoon? We could say a few words of sympathy and encouragement, and express shame at the acts of the country whose citizens we are. We could take down from our bus the 120 bottles of mineral water which we brought with us as a completely inadequate gesture of solidarity. (The tanker which we intended to bring got stuck on badly paved roads, and came only the following day.) But at least a cardboard box full of toys was immediately assaulted by the Fasayil children with cries of joy. We could help build a simple playground from local materials and sit down with our hosts for a modest meal. And to raise big signs “Open the tap! Water is a right” towards the camera of the Social TV. And then we got back on the bus and went back to our homes in Metropolitan Tel Aviv where the water is always flowing in the taps. Always.

http://tv.social.org.il/en/water

Two days later, there were other visitors arriving at the village of Fasayil. In the morning, soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces came to Fasayil, accompanied by bulldozers. Two residential buildings were destroyed in less than half an hour. Twelve people, including seven minors, were left homeless.

Was that in any way related to our visit? Probably not. B’Tselem documents in recent weeks a sharp rise in the number of house demolitions carried out by the army throughout the Occupied Territories. At the Al-Moarjat community, also in the Jordan Valley, four residential buildings were demolished, leaving homeless 14 people, including two children. And five buildings were destroyed at the community of Umm al-Kheir in the South Hebron Hills, in this case leaving 27 homeless people, including 16 minors. And so on and so forth. Seven more Palestinian communities have gotten a destructive visit from the army in the past week.

https://youtu.be/B-GEt8qYq6E

The day on which the soldiers and bulldozers came to the village of Fasayil in the Jordan Valley was also the day when Sima Vaknin, Director General of the Ministry for Strategic Affairs, attended an urgent session at the Knesset in Jerusalem. She informed the Knesset Members of a severe situation - "Israel is perceived in the world as a Pariah State". But hope is not lost. The Ministry for Strategic Affairs has established an ten-member inter-ministerial team, charged with formulating an alternative narrative, and Israel will make every effort to get it accepted by the world. The ultimate goal is to instill this alternate narrative globally during the next ten years, until 2025. "For me, victory means a narrative change in the world’s perception of Israel. That the world will no longer equate Israel with Apartheid" she noted.

http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.735598

How exactly is that to be achieved? Vaknin, who until a few years ago served as the Chief Military Censor, refrained from providing Knesset Members with any detailed information. "The fight against the de-legitimization of Israel is a very sensitive topic. I'm pushing the ministry to work in utmost secrecy, and I asked for the minister in charge, Gilad Erdan, to refrain from public statements regarding the work of the ministry. We want most of the work of the Strategic Affairs Ministry to be classified. There are very many sensitivities. I can't even explain in an open forum what these sensitivities are... Much of what we do goes under the radar. I can explain in detail only at a close session of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, with an absolute prohibition on publishing anything said there. All I can say here is that the
operating budget on the campaign against de-legitimization of Israel comes to 128 million in 2016."

Still, some of the methods to be used were exposed two days later. Strategic Affairs Ministry officials held a work meeting with their colleagues from the Interior Ministry and the Interior Security Ministry, and informed them that "Dozens of international organizations are active on the West Bank, under various guises. They are gathering information on IDF operations in the Territories. Foreign activists then make use of this information to promote a boycott and isolation of Israel. Boycott-supporting activists are agitating Palestinian residents of the West Bank, inciting them against the IDF forces and disrupting military operations." It was estimated that "there are several hundred such foreign activists, who enter either through Ben Gurion Airport or via the Allenby Bridge, and pretend to be tourists. Some activists are leaving after a short stay, but some remain in the West Bank for long periods."

Therefore, Ministers Gilad Erdan and Aryeh Deri resolved to establish a joint team tasked with preventing such activists getting through passport control and expelling those who already managed to enter the country. Among other things, the team will collect intelligence on foreign activists who are in the country in order to establish a judicial case justifying their deportation. Also examined by the team's legal advisers is the option of "criminalizing" entire organizations, so as to be able to deport or deny access to anyone who is a member with no need of gathering specific evidence against each activist separately.


On the pages of "Israel Today" aka the Bibinews, Itai Reuveni spelled out who is meant: "For a long time, various agencies are sending to Israel extremists disguised as tourists, in order that they will document 'Human Rights violations' [quotation marks in the original].

"The most blatant example is the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel, a project founded in 2002 by The World Council of Churches. Its declared purpose is to bring volunteers to 'experience life under occupation and influence the International Community's involvement in the conflict'. This project is sending activists from dozens of countries for a period of three months, after a training in their home country which includes ways of dealing with the military and briefing to get into Israel. When arriving, they get a further briefing and then go into the field, wearing brown vests with the program logo. They are deployed at the crossings and points of friction, and even in the Old City of Jerusalem, and make one-sided documentation of alleged Israeli violations. At a peak moment activists positioned themselves at the Wailing Wall and documented the security forces' activities. At the end of three months, many activists return to their home countries and promote various anti-Israeli campaigns at the explicit request of the program managers. An end should be put at last to the activity of this and other organizations of the same type such as the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and The American Friends Service Committee of the Quakers, who until now got humanitarian visas."

http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=16901

This morning, the radio news reported that the French Government condemns the demolition of buildings in Nabi Samwil, north of Jerusalem, whose construction was financed by France. "It is the third time this year that Israel is destroying or confiscating humanitarian aid structures which were erected by France, including a school which was destroyed six months ago. The increasing pace of demolition is in contravention of International Law."

Perhaps the French Ambassador should be expelled, too?

"It can happen to anyone!", July 9,2016

"We are deeply concerned at the news that the Israeli government published plans to further
expand settlement construction on the West Bank. This seems to be another step in the process of systematic takeover of Palestinian land which undermines the foundations of the two-state solution" said the State Department spokesperson in Washington. Prime Minister Netanyahu got the news during the high-profile trip to Africa and was quick to respond during a press conference held in Kigali, the capital of Rwanda. "What the hell? We don't agree with the Americans. Construction in the settlements is not at all what hinders the achievement of peace. The only obstacle is Palestinian incitement, only that!"

Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who was standing next to Netanyahu at the press conference, added: "I, too, am criticized in the West - and I criticize the criticizers. They accuse us of having no democracy? Those who say so don't understand Rwanda. I do what is best for our people." The fact is that Kagame holds power in Rwanda for sixteen years already, and only recently his people went to the polls and decided by a 98% majority to grant their beloved President yet another seven years. To quote from the report of Boaz Bismut of Israel Hayom, (nicknamed Bibinews), who accompanied the Prime Minister's entourage in Africa: "Kagame, one of the most impressive leaders in Africa, has a world view very similar to that of Netanyahu. Both of these leaders understand each other and trust each other, they know they can depend on each other."

As part of the government's conspicuous pampering of the settlers, five million Shekels were allocated for the establishment of bicycle paths in the settlement of Kiryat Arba. On the radio news bulletin, Agriculture Minister Uri Ariel - who was deeply involved with this decision, though it had nothing to do with agriculture – was asked: "Are there so many cyclists in Kiryat Arba? Would it not be better to invest the money in creating more bicycle paths in Tel Aviv?" - "How can you even ask such a question, when a family in Kiryat Arba is still in mourning for a 13-year-old girl murdered just a few days ago?" Replied the minister. "The settlers have suffered a severe trauma, they feel threatened, their morale must be raised."

Indeed, the 13 year old Hallel Ariel was killed last week by a Palestinian who infiltrated into the settlement. The Israeli press repeatedly published photos of her young face, and Yediot Aharonot gave a banner headline to her mother's "Goodbye, My Princess!" at the gravesite. It is unlikely that in the course of her short life she ever heard the words "occupation" or "land grab". How would she have heard of such unpleasant things at the bosom of her loving family, in a home surrounded by vineyards at the edge of the settlement?

Hallel Ariel was killed by Muhammad Taraireh from the nearby Palestinian town of Bani Naim, who was himself killed a few minutes later by the Kiryat Arba security squad. He was 17, and he wanted to avenge the death of his cousin Yusef Taraireh, who was killed by the army on March 14, as well as of a neighbor woman killed last week. Probably he also had other reasons for wanting to die. Less than a week before he killed and was killed, Taraireh wrote on Facebook: "Grave, where are you? Are you waiting for me? Angel of Death, don't you miss me?".

Military forces laid a tight siege to Bani Na'im and revoked the work permits of 2400 townspeople. Soldiers photographed and measured the Taraireh family home in advance of its demolition. Carrying out the demolition depends on getting the court's approval - but in the vast majority of cases the judges do approve such demolition orders, even if there is no proof of any involvement of family members. The government and the security services assert that demolishing the homes of families is needed in order to create deterrence. Israeli judges do not tend to argue with what the security services assert is needed for security.

Currently, the Supreme Court already approved the implementing of two previous demolition orders at Qalandiya refugee camp, for the homes of two young Palestinians who had carried out an attack in the Old City of Jerusalem and were then killed on the spot. Carrying out a demolition order in Qalandiya is far from a trivial affair. No less than a thousand soldiers and police were mobilized in order to achieve this aim. They entered the camp, met with the expected resistance of local youths and immediately
opened up with tear gas and "rubber bullets" (i.e., rubber-coated metal bullets). Even Red Crescent ambulances trying to reach and evacuate the wounded were met with a barrage of tear gas. Eventually the mission was accomplished: closely guarded by the soldiers, the bulldozers did their job and the homes of the Assaf and Abu Habisa families were razed to the ground. Was deterrence achieved?

The parents of the Palestinian boy Mohammed Abu Khdeir, who was kidnapped and burned to death by three Israelis, petitioned the Supreme Court to order the government to demolish the homes of the families of those murderers as well. So far, the government rejected such calls out of hand. According to the Defense Ministry and the security services, there are only a few isolated cases of Israeli Jews who want to harm Palestinians - and therefore, when it comes to Jews they do not need to create a deterrent, and therefore there is no reason to demolish family homes. What will the Supreme Court justices decide?

Meanwhile, at the Jaffa Military Court the trial is continuing of the famous (or infamous) Sergeant Elor Azaria, who while on service at the city of Hebron shot and killed a Palestinian who was lying wounded on the ground. Earlier this week, extensive media attention was given to the emotional (in some views, well rehearsed) courtroom outburst by Charlie Azaria, the defendant’s father: "They are framing my boy! Don’t you see it? They want to put him in jail - for what? Where have we come to? What do the prosecutors know about Hebron? Had any of them ever been in Hebron? Did one of them sent an 18-year old boy to serve in Hebron? Day and night, I hear the soldiers. They talk to me. They are haunted by fear. They don’t sleep at night. They can’t walk a single meter without the fear of being stabbed. Our people are being blown up, being murdered. Is it for that that I sent my son to be a combat soldier? So that they will send him to jail? Where is the Prime Minister?"

In Yediot Ahrnonot, Nahum Barnea wrote:"The Israelis who demonstrate in support of Azaria do not care what the law says. They are convinced that there is no difference between shooting a terrorist who is charging, knife in hand, and shooting a terrorist who is lying helpless on the asphalt. Terrorists should be killed under all circumstances. The Israelis who commiserate with his parents on the social networks do not care about the norms in the army. They regard a 20-year old soldier as a child, who should not be held culpable - certainly not when it comes to killing a terrorist."

http://www.yediot.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4825622,00.html

Of course, Azaria’s lawyers can’t openly present such arguments to the judges. The defense line is based on the attempt to prove that Azaria felt sincerely threatened, fearing that the person lying on the ground might be carrying an explosive device and that that was why he deliberately shot him in the head. Officers took the witness stand, one after the other, refuting such assertions and stating explicitly that Azaria had no grounds to feel threatened, and that it was up to his commanding officer who was on the spot to deal with any threatening explosive device. Thereupon, Azaria’s fans filled the social media with wild abuse and some death threats against the testifying officers.

This week, the B’Tselem Human Rights organization presented new evidence regarding the circumstances under which the 27-year old Sarah Hajuj was shot to death at the Tomb of the Patriarchs on the morning of July 1. The police version is that she was shot when holding a knife and threatening to stab a female police officer who was about to conduct a search. Witnesses assert that she had been already subjected to massive quantities of pepper spray directly in the face which completely overwhelmed her, and that she no longer constituted any kind of threat when a policeman killed her by four consecutive gun shots.

This time, B’Tselem did not come up with a video to show the exact circumstances of the killing. No official body in Israel would consider launching yet another sensational and controversial trial, based solely on the testimony of Palestinian witnesses. The adherents of Sergeant Azaria assert that "He only got in trouble because B’Tselem took that video of him" – and they are likely right.
Also this week, the army’s "Conscience Committee" heard the arguments of Conscientious Objector Tair Kaminer, who is already for six months going in and out of the military prison, and in again. Unlike Azaria, who is not being handcuffed when taken to the military tribunal, Tair Kaminer was brought from the military prison to the Conscience Committee room with handcuffs on.

When given the opportunity to speak, she told the senior officers constituting the Conscience Committee that it would be against her conscience to take part in what she regards as the cycle of bloodshed and violence. She is not prepared to accept the committee’s narrow definition that "conscience" consists solely of pacifism and of absolute refusal to serve in any army whatsoever, under any circumstances. "Prior to the date of the call-up, set for me by the army, I did a year of community service, working with children in Sderot on the Gaza border and experiencing the harsh reality of the Israeli children who grow up in that area. The situation is also harsh for Palestinian children who grow up in Gaza or the Occupied Territories. They all learn to hate the other side. When I look at all these children together, at the future generations of both sides and the reality in which they grow up, I see an endless continuity of trauma and pain. Already for years, there is no effort to achieve a political solution, no attempt whatsoever to bring peace to Gaza and Sderot. By opting for a violent military way, we are perpetuating on both sides a hatred which would just worsen with every new generation. Therefore, I cannot take an active part in maintaining a status quo which in my view must be completely changed. That would be completely contrary to the dictates of my conscience."

Thirty-nine well-known jurists, including five former deans of Law Faculties at Israeli universities, wrote to the head of the IDF Legal Branch, calling upon the army to recognize Tair Kaminer’s right to Freedom of Conscience. The Military Conscience Committee is in no hurry to make a decision. Tair’s parents call every day - and every day they receive the reply that the Commission continues to deliberate on her case.

And this, too, took place this week: Israeli circus artists - and three Palestinian circus performers from Nablus - converged on the Nahalat Binyamin pedestrian mall in Tel Aviv to express solidarity with the Palestinian clown and circus artist Mohammed Abu Saha, who is already seven months imprisoned without trial. "No to Administrative Detention!" "They arrest clowns, too!" said the placards waved towards the crowds strolling to the nearby Artisan Fair. In the middle of the street, a clown was sitting in a cage. Next to him, an activist spoke through a loudspeaker: "The so-called Israeli Administrative Detention is nothing but imprisonment without trial. Without trial, without any charge, without a lawyer, without anyone telling you of what you are accused and how long you can expect to stay behind bars. Imprisonment without trial, and it can happen to anyone! It can happen to any one of us, at any time! " At this point, two other activists approached, who played the role of soldiers. They gagged the speaker while he shouted: Help! Help!, tied his hands and pushed him into the cage next to the clown.

This little performance greatly moved one of the passers-by, who tried to burst in and release the detainees inside the cage. But the police, who were present in order to maintain order, rushed up, grabbed the man and dragged him away. While being dragged off, the man screamed: "He is right! It really can happen to anyone!"

Israel 2016: A house divided, June 10, 2016

Sunday, June 5, 2016 - forty-ninth anniversary of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This year it intersected with "Jerusalem Day," when the government of Israel and the extreme right celebrate according to the Jewish calendar what they call "The Liberation and Unification of Jerusalem". It also coincided with the start of the Muslim fast of Ramadan. On that day I stood among several hundred demonstrators on the balcony of the Jerusalem Town Hall, to protest the annual "Dance of the Flags" held by the young Nationalist-Religious-Messianic of all types.

Along Jaffa Street below us the procession flowed, a forest of Blue and White Israeli national flags
and sprinkled among them some flags of the Movement for Building the Temple and a Yellow flags held by
fans of the notorious Beitar Soccer Club. The chants made by protesters on the balcony included "You
have no shame - no holiness in an occupied city!" and "Jews and Arabs Refuse to be Enemies". There were
signs "Standing together against the occupation! ", " Standing together to build hope! "and "The one who
shouts 'Death to the Arabs' is not a Jew! ". The most enraged for the Flag Dancers on the street was a
big banner reading in Arabic and Hebrew: " Ramadan Karim – we wish our Muslim friends an easy fast".
Many of them approached us with their flags, furiously shaking their fists, on their way to the Muslim
Quarter of the Old City. They repeatedly sung the national anthem "Hatikva", followed by "No fear, Jews / No fear! / For rampant lions you are/ Rampant lions! / When the lion roars / Who is not afraid?. This was
answered by the incessant drumming of the Peace Drummers, each drum roll accompanied by the
thundering chant "End the occupation! End the occupation! ". Only a short distance separated us from
them. Five steps on which the police stood guard to prevent any direct contact.

On the following day Jerusalem Post published my article:

Israel 2016: A house divided

A hundred and fifty-eight years ago, an American politician named Abraham Lincoln, running for
the Senate, made a famous campaign speech: "A house divided against itself cannot stand.

I believe this government cannot endure permanently, half slave and half free. It will become all
one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it
on the course of ultimate extinction – or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in
all the States, North as well as South."

Our own Israeli house became divided, its government "half slave and half free," in that week of
glorious victory in June 1967. Since then, inside the Green Line we have an elected government, issuing
from reasonably free multi-party elections. On the other side of the Green Line, the same government is a
military dictatorship. It rules by force over millions of disenfranchised Palestinians, making no pretense that
its rule there is based on anything remotely resembling the consent of the governed.

This was supposed to be a strictly "temporary" measure, pending unspecified negotiations at an
unspecified future time. Forty-nine years later, Israeli military rule over the Palestinians is still an
overwhelming reality, not substantially changed by the creation of a powerless "Palestinian Authority." Nor
was the essential fact of Israeli domination changed by the "disengagement from Gaza," whereby direct
military rule was replaced by a harsh siege, strangling Gaza's economy and effectively making it a huge
open-air prison.

Come Knesset elections time, a polling station is placed at the heart of Hebron. Entitled to cast
their votes there are about a thousand Israeli settlers. Excluded from the vote are some 200,000
Palestinian Hebronites.

These 49 years of Israeli military rule have seen the relentless advance of the settler movement,
spreading in ever greater numbers over the West Bank and taking up still more Palestinian land. Religious-
Nationalist Messianism, which burst on the scene in those euphoric days of June 1967, is becoming ever
more militant, ever more powerful and dominant.

Israelis who still adhere to such concepts as democracy, or human rights, or simply common
decency, increasingly feel beleaguered and threatened – and not only left-wingers.

Moshe Ya'alon, defense minister until a week ago, a peace skeptic and outspoken supporter of
continued military rule, still had some scruples about the outright killing of a disarmed prisoner. His place is
being taken by the blatantly brutal Avigdor Liberman – guaranteed free of such squeamishness.

The Israel of 2016 is getting increasingly out of tune with the international community. It is also getting out of tune with a growing number of Jews worldwide – especially the younger generation of American Jews, deeply imbued with those same democratic values which are under threat in the Israeli society. It is strange and unsettling to Israelis who have not given up the hope of peace to find that we can rely on the government of France rather than on the government of Israel.

A year from now, Israel’s occupation of the Palestinians will be 50 years old. It is common to call a 50-year anniversary "a jubilee" – a word which is derived from the Hebrew "yovel" and from the Jewish scriptures. There, it denotes far more than the simple passage of 50 years.

A Jubilee was supposed to be a very special kind of year – a time when slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven, and alienated land returned to its owners.

Inspired by this biblical verse, American Civil War soldiers sung "Hurrah! Hurrah! We bring the Jubilee!" when marching to set slaves free.

"You shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. You shall make the fiftieth year holy, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" so says the Book of Leviticus. Shall we still live to see the coming of the Jubilee to our land?

<<<<>>>>

VENEZUELA AND THE SILENCE OF THE LEFT

Pedro Lange-Churion*


Venezuela is nearing collapse It can turn violent soon. Last week Nicolás Maduro decreed a state of emergency and suspended constitutional rights. He fears “the Empire” is set to strike soon. This measure comes abruptly as the opposition demands Venezuelan Electoral Panel to ratify the 1.8 million signatures collected in just a few hours as a first step to constitutionally call for a referendum to remove him from power. And he is looking for ways to delay this process.

An article in Counterpunch written by Eric Draitser characterized the referendum as a coup orchestrated by the opposition to oust Maduro and destroy the legacy of Chávez’ revolution. It further argues that Venezuela’s economic predicament—already a humanitarian crisis—is the product of a plot of the Venezuelan right-wing elites that control the National Assembly and the U.S. imperial interests, comparing the current crisis in Venezuela with the overthrow of Allende in the seventies by Nixon, Kissinger, the CIA and the Chilean elites.

What Draitser and others do not mention is that the referendum is a constitutional right pursued by an opposition whose control of the National Assembly (Venezuela’s congress) is legitimated by a landslide electoral victory in December 2015. The article identifies the opposition with the right-wing elites when in reality the opposition is a coalition of parties and individuals that also include left and left-to-center ideological orientations. The President of the Assembly, for instance, Henry Ramos Allup has been the Vice-President of the Socialist International. Most importantly, the article also conveniently omits Maduro’s coup to the National Assembly. On December 30, 2015 he abruptly appointed twelve Supreme Court Justices as a way of invalidating any law passed by Venezuela’s elected legislative body, thus undermining the will of the Venezuelans who elected the members of the National Assembly.
The left acts as if all leftist governments must be unconditionally defended, no matter how authoritarian and corrupted they become. In acting this way they hark back to the Stalinist days of unconditional allegiance to the party, or to the Cold War years when even timid critiques to the left—even within the left-produced knee-jerk attacks and excommunications. The left has failed to critique a “leftist” government whose policies have led to the current crisis in Venezuela. It took Noam Chomsky ten years to realize that Chávez has become a dangerous authoritarian ruler who betrayed the grassroots movement born out of his initial emergence into the Venezuelan political scene. Slavoj Zizek is careful to remind us that Nicolás Maduro and Hugo Chávez are authoritarian caudillos not be compared to Pablo Iglesias from Podemos or Alexis Tsipras from Syriza. But Zizek is reluctant to use his acumen to shed light on Venezuela’s darkest hour. Venezuela was news while it was good news and while Chávez could be used as a banner for the left and his antics provided comic relief. But as soon as the country began to spiral towards ruination and Chavismo began to resemble another Latin American authoritarian regime, better to turn a blind eye.

The position of the left has been either to suspend a critical stance or not to address Venezuela’s situation at all. The left media is quick to condemn the coup to Dilma Rousseff orchestrated by the Brazilian opposition—as it should, or Macri’s neoliberal initiatives in Argentina poised to undo the Peronista policies that produced an undeniable upward mobility in Argentina. But when Venezuela comes up the left intelligentsia draws a blank and changes the topic. As if critiquing an authoritarian regime disguised under a leftist rhetoric means condemning all the left. At this point, a good measure of self-criticism would be constructive to a left in peril in Latin America. What leftist leaders and thinkers should have said and didn’t say (with the exception of José Mujica in Uruguay, who wrote a letter to Nicolás Maduro pleading to cease the brutal repression of peaceful protests) was that Venezuela cannot be an example of a successful leftist government. After all, Maduro can do more harm in Venezuela than Mauricio Macri in Argentina. Macri attempted to name by decree two Supreme Court Judges in mid December (2015) and days later Judge Alejo Ramos Padilla issued an injunction blocking Macri’s appointments. A few days later Maduro appointed twelve Chavista judges to Venezuela’s Supreme Court. His decision, of course, was challenged by the National Assembly, but to no avail.

The default position in the left is to blame Venezuela’s dismal situation on American interventionism. To be sure, the U.S. did play a role in all this. There was the attempted coup in 2002 led by a misguided opposition, with the support of Bush’s government in the U.S. and Aznar’s government in Spain; it didn’t last more than two days in power. But as abhorrent as this intervention was, the U.S. did not have nearly as active a role as the hawkish U.S. interventions in the seventies, the one in Chile being, perhaps, the most infamous. American interventions have shifted focus to the Middle East. After the failed coup, the U.S. left Venezuela pretty much to its own devices, with a relative thawing of relations when Barack Obama came to power. In March 2015 Barack Obama declared Venezuela a national security threat, providing his government with the tools to block assets in the U.S. belonging to Venezuelan officials involved in corruption, implicated in drug trafficking and accused of violation of human rights. But this declaration has had negligible impact in Venezuela’s internal affairs. The truth is that the U.S. has been relatively indifferent to Venezuela’s problems since 2002. This indifference is not motivated by a genuine respect for Venezuela’s sovereignty. It has simply been more convenient and less costly to leave things as they are, as long as Venezuela continues to provide the U.S. with 17 % of its oil consumption. Ironically, despite Chavista anti-imperialist rhetoric, the U.S. has been and continues to be Venezuela’s most important commercial partner. How different a situation from that of Cuba, besieged for decades by an aggressive economic embargo. The debacle of Venezuela, its social decomposition, the demise of its middle class, the collapse of its economy, its scarcity of goods, its corruption and drug trade, its health care crisis and its alarming public safety record cannot be simply “dismissed” as a consequence of American interventionism.

Many historians argue that Venezuela’s plight is the eternal recurrence of countries cursed and blessed by oil riches. To prove their point they cite past civil unrest like “El Caracazo” in February 1989, a week long wave of protests and clashes that resulted in hundreds of casualties. True. But never has
Venezuela experienced a crisis of such proportions, never has the country been in such a generalized humanitarian calamity, never has its public safety record and its corruption been so dismal and unfettered. And as sound as these structural arguments are, it is important to realize that to a large extent this is a crisis mostly made in Venezuela.

Chavismo had a chance to do things differently, in ways which could have averted this meltdown. Save the hiccup of 2002, Chavismo has been in power uninterruptedly for seventeen years, holding the reins of all branches of civic and military power. Chavismo has also enjoyed oil revenues unprecedented in the history of the country. Much of this wealth was grotesquely mismanaged, fueling extravagant subsidies that peaked in the countless and expensive elections organized to barely disguise the government’s authoritarian inclinations behind a veil of legitimacy. The acts of corruption perpetrated by private officials and the military equals macro-economic cyphers: $300 billions disappeared in the last decade as the coffers of banks in Andorra, Switzerland and other fiscal paradises spill over with wealth stolen from Venezuelans. This cypher, by the way, was not provided by the Venezuelan opposition, but by renowned Chavistas who have been with the “revolution” from its beginnings. Jorge Giordani, an old communist who served as Minister of Economic Planning, was the first to blow the whistle and then other ministers joined, like Héctor Navarro and Ana Elisa Osorio, all in Chávez’ cabinet from 1999 through 2013. But nowhere does the left acknowledge these facts as contributing to the current crisis in Venezuela.

In his unbounded paranoia, Chávez made sure to arm his militias (Círculos Bolivarianos) with sophisticated weapons. Caracas boasts the highest murder rate in the world. Twenty-five thousand Venezuelans are killed every year (an undeclared war) and these militias are ready to disrupt peaceful protests with violence, or work for the interests of emerging drug lords inside and outside of government. Wary of perceived traitors to the revolution, Chávez reshuffled his increasingly smaller inner circle of aides to key posts in the government. Maduro followed his mentor. Anyone critical of Chávez’ policies could be expelled from his inner circle; some were even imprisoned. Venezuelans remember General Raúl Isaías Baduel, Chávez’ Minister of Defense, a die-hard Chavista instrumental in restituting Chávez to power after the coup in 2002. As Chávez attempted to centralize more power, Baduel criticized his authoritarian tendencies. Baduel was arrested at gunpoint from his home and thrown in jail. The case of judge María Lourdes Alfuni is better known internationally. In 2009, Chávez disagreed with one of her rulings and sentenced her to thirty years in prison, a glaring violation of judiciary independence. Alfuni was placed in a prison with convicts she had previously sentenced. Fearing for her safety—inmates tried to burn her alive—human rights organizations lobbied for her release and Noam Chomsky finally wrote an open letter demanding her release and distanciating himself from Chávez. She became ill with cancer and after emergency surgery was granted house arrest. Evidence later emerged that during her detention she was brutally raped by guards and officials from the Ministry of Justice. For years Venezuelans witnessed the same names play different roles in government, most of them deeply unqualified and many belonging to the military. No wonder all areas of Venezuela’s government and society in general have collapsed.

To assert that these ills are caused by American interventionism and by oil wars in the international market robs Venezuelans of agency and absolves them from the responsibility to reckon with the ways they shaped their current history. There are many oil rich countries currently enduring the dip in oil prices orchestrated by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, but not one of these countries resembles Venezuela’s devastation. Such assertions ignore that Chávez expropriated closed to seven thousand productive industries now in ruins, forcing the country to import with less money many of the goods it previously produced. Such assertions ignore that Chavismo ruined PDVSA—Venezuela’s oil company—by appointing inept and corrupt managers who turned the company into a platform to launder cash. Such assertions ignore that Chávez disregarded warnings from economists urging him to curb spending, urging not to impose price caps on products at the expense of producers reluctant to produce at a loss; to these warnings Chávez arrogantly replied that oil would reach the $200/barrel mark by 2015; it is merely $50 now and production costs almost exceed revenues. Such assertions ignore that people are dying in hospitals because medicines as basic as antibiotics cannot be found in Venezuela’s pharmacies and hospitals and doctors have to rush through surgeries because water and electricity might run out at any
moment, as it does daily throughout the country. There is a humanitarian crisis in the country’s health systems (public and private), but Maduro refuses humanitarian aid stating it is hard to find a country with a better healthcare system than Venezuela. Such assertions ignore that Venezuela is the most catastrophic economy in the world with a 700% inflation projected to reach 1200% as the country enters default in the third quarter of 2016, with a byzantine currency exchange policy stubbornly kept in place to facilitate embezzlement in the billions of dollars. Such assertions ignore that both, Chávez and Maduro feigned not to see how the drug business has permeated the highest spheres of power in the country, a reality now undeniable: the First Lady’s nephews await trial in a New York City prison, after been arrested in Honduras for trying to push 800 kg of cocaine into the U.S., a cargo of cocaine that took off from the presidential ramp in Caracas’s airport. The litany is long and can’t be blamed on U.S. intervention alone.

The left in Latin America has failed to criticize Chavismo, but the right has cunningly jumped to the opportunity. Right-wing politicians, in their electoral campaigns and in their attempts to impeach leftist leaders, love to use Venezuela as a convenient example of a political model to be avoided at all cost. Why hasn’t the left exercised a sensible measure of self-criticism and offer a candid reflection on the Venezuelan case as a way of countering right-wing opportunism?

In 2014, I attended the march celebrating Martin Luther King’s Day in Oakland. I met an old white American donning a cowboy hat and a t-shirt that flaunted a portrait of a radiant Chavez with the PSUV logo (United Socialist Party of Venezuela). I asked him if he had been to Venezuela, he said no. He told me he was eighty-four years old. I told him I was Venezuelan and he mumbled with a thick American accent: “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido.” I asked him what he thought of Chávez. He said: “He tells it like it is” and referred with admiration to Chavez’ performance in 2006 at the United Nations, when he compared Bush to the devil. To me that was one more display of demagoguery from a populist leader with a penchant for histrionics. It troubled me then that such performance would draw international support from people on the left. It was almost too easy. People seemed to relish in a South American leader who “tells it like it is” (this is, by the way, what Trump supporters say of their candidate: “Trump tells it like it is”). What troubles me even more, in the face of Venezuela’s hopeless present, is that such uncritical sympathy for Chávez cast a veil over the fact that Venezuela’s current ruination is in large measure the consequence of his policies and his political solipsism. Non-critizers still exonerate Chávez from responsibility: “Maduro is not Chávez,” I tire of hearing. And it is true, Maduro lacks Chávez’ charisma and political capital. But Maduro in a more substantial way is Chávez. In power for just three years, Maduro reaps now what Chávez sowed for fourteen years. Chávez was lucky and died just at the right moment. We shouldn’t forget that Chávez appointed Maduro as his successor as he left for Cuba to die. And there you have it: Maduro is Chávez’s most tangible legacy as everything dissolves into violence and misery.

In the famous opening of The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1852), Marx quotes Hegel’s affirmation, according to which historical events are first tragedy and then farce. I believe that the chapter written by Chavismo in Venezuela is simultaneously tragedy and farce.

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FEAR AND NONVIOLENT CHANGE: THE ECONOMICS OF EXTREME BEHAVIOR

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In recent (2016) political affairs in a number of countries pseudo-populism has influenced political outcomes in a variety of contexts. Similarly the breakdown in public order as exemplified by widespread inter-racial distrust in Europe, the USA and elsewhere poses renewed challenges to non-violent change. From the perspective of practitioners interested in non-violent change populism in political affairs may be seen as an act of violence impeding the normal course of political action by bending the will of one large
group to benefit the welfare of another less numerous group. In contemporary society such activity may include acts of social bullying by which one group endeavors to influence and intimidate another through fear. This article explores aspects of bullying behavior based on political populism that may be seen as affecting non-violent change in economic and political systems. The role of popular media in fomenting violent behavior is also discussed.

**Background: Whose Finger is on the Trigger?** In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries there have been a number of clear examples of the impact of manipulative populism on political processes. The most current (2016) example is the rise of such neo-fascist personalities as Vladimir Putin, Hugo Chavez and his successor Nicola Maduro and Donald Trump. As a counter balance, neo-socialist such as Bernie Sanders and moderate liberals with dynastic pretensions such as Hilary Clinton have relied on populist rhetoric and principles in their campaigns. A key behavior related to one type of populism is the manipulation of the middle and economically disadvantaged classes by those who are typically members of the economically advantaged class. This strategy, is currently exemplified by both Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump, and classically exemplified in U.S. politics by Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Eleonore Roosevelt and John Fitzgerald Kennedy. In the cases cited and others who have used populism to achieve their political ends have relied upon the mass media to manipulate public opinion.

The most recent attacks (2016) in France along with the racially charged disturbances and murders of police in the United States are testimonies to deadly violence exacerbated through intense media coverage and interpretation. Although the principles of professional journalism espouse neutrality and fair coverage, news in contemporary Western societies may be seen as an economic commodity driven by market factors. As a commodity, “bad” news, that is, news that shocks and that arouses the emotions may engender fear or anger is more valuable. Reporting that arouses passions is more economically rewarding than positive information.

The maintenance of a free flow of information to an informed public is a key hallmark of a democratic society. On the other hand, events focused upon the racial tensions within the United States as well as the unfavorable attitude of Europeans toward Muslim immigration raises the question of responsibility in reporting by mass media. It may be said, however, that in 2016 the mass media created Donald Trump as the Republican candidate for the United States Presidency. By focusing on the strange nature of Trump’s personality and his populist appeal, similar to the appeal of Mussolini in the last century, the mass media created a candidate by crystalizing the fears of a male white minority which perceives itself as increasingly oppressed by liberal interests. In the later stages of the campaign there has been a concerted effort by the same media to impede the effectiveness of Trump’s bid for the White House. Intentionally or unintentionally, the media have shaped the presidential campaign in such a way that there is effect only one viable candidate for the presidency of the United States. By focusing on the fear and violence engendered by the Trump candidacy, the media have all but assured the ascendency of Hilary Clinton.

**Economic bullying through the clash of cultures.** Recent (2016) manifestations of extreme violence in the United States and France have centered on animosity and mistrust among cultural elements in a pluralistic society. The basic element common to particular instances of intercultural violence may be identified as fear of the other. In some sense such fear is a natural characteristic of human societies. As with other communal species, human societies are concerned with maintaining the integrity of their group identities. Inclusion and the sense of the “other” has always been the key to national identity. Human groups have a need to distinguish themselves from other competing groups. This trait is a requirement of evolutionary realities. In order to achieve common ends, human beings have developed skills in working together in groups. Who is “in” and who is “out” is an important question for survival of a society. For most species, the economics of survival demand that there be ways to set perimeters around one’s own group in order to assure survival of the individuals who comprise it. The setting of such perimeters requires the development and recognition of markers that can be used to identify members of the group and to distinguish them from outsiders. These markers are variable for individual species but may include both physical and behavioral characteristics. Such physical characteristics as color, size, and body shape are common distinguishing marks between species. Types of behavior in food hunting and gathering and
mating are also identifiers. These features and others have always been distinguishing markers among many species, including human beings. In addition, human groups are distinguished by patterns of behavior which contribute to the construct which may be called “culture.” For human beings, markers of culture that can be used to identify who is “in” or “out” of a group include politics and language. Mathematics may be seen as a cross-cultural exception, although its expression in architecture and music have group identifiable tendencies. In recent months (2016) forces in Europe, Britain and the United States have focused on exclusionism engendered by fear of the other. Xenophobia is a natural phenomenon occurring among many species that are highly organized into group cultures. Uniquely among human groups rationality may serve to emphasize similarity and community in contrast to perceived differences that may lead to fear and violent behavior.

**Culture and fear: Impact of the BREXIT.** The non-binding referendum vote in Great Britain to exit from the European Union (June 2016) has made the world a much more dangerous place. The British Government has accepted the plebiscite as an expression of the will of the people and preparatory plans for the exit from the European Union are under way. The loss of Britain as an integral part of the European Economic Community will have a major global impact. Especially in regard to the expansionist behaviors of Russia, the weakening of Europe in both psychological and concrete terms has made the Russian position in Europe more threatening. By weakening the unity of the European Union the proposed exit by Britain limit the ability of Europe to act as a unity in imposing non-violent measures in opposing Russian expansionist adventures. Although according to spokespersons for both nations ties with the United States and NATO will remain, the concept of an united Europe makes non-violent measures against Russian aggression more problematic. The likelihood of reliance on military action as a last resort has become more probable. Current (2016) British Prime Minister Theresa May whose immediate focus will be on the British exit from the European Union has sought to reassure allies that Britain intends to abide by its NATO commitments including the maintenance of a nuclear arsenal. According to a recent (2016) PEW pole

There is little doubt that the British decision to leave the European Union has been influenced by fear and xenophobia. Arguably England, has never really seen itself as an integral part of the European identity. Although for a significant period of time a good portion of the British Isles were part of the Roman Empire and maintained steady economic and political contact with the continent, Britain has traditionally maintained a spirit of exceptionalism and a semi-European identity. “Britania” has often prided itself on its stature as a world cultural and economic force. In contrast to France and Germany, for the British, economics rather than culture have been the key to influence on the global scale. For Europeans culture is an important aspect of identity. This has historically been less the case with Britain, where European culture has always been an imported commodity and the main cultural forces driven by the English language have been assumed by its former colonies. At this time there are major issues with regard to the reality of a weakened European Union and the subsequent reduced. While the structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is not directly tied to that of the European Union (EU), the British decision impacts the ability of the EU to use sanctions as non-physically violent means of coercion on states that are deemed to be aggressors. These issues will be especially critical for the fostering of world peace as the United States faces a change in presidential leadership. While the Obama administration has attempted to avoid direct conflict with Russia, this strategy has depended upon the ability to form a coalition with Europe to apply economic pressures on Putin and his associates in power. With the European economic leverage reduced by the exit of Britain, deterrents will increasingly focus on North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) military capabilities.

Adding to increasing global instability, the United States is facing internal social turbulence. Incited by the campaign of Donald Trump for the presidency of the U.S. as well as by other factors, radical elements have gained increasing voice and influence, increasing the likelihood of violent internal conflict. The United States and other Western nations, including Germany and France are facing increasing stressors based on conflict between groups representing disparate racial, social, economic and generational identities. As noted by Kaneman (2014), fear of loss often is a major factor in decision making. Such fear
has historically lead to violent conflict among constituent elements of a society, and move dictatorial leaders to divert attention from internal failures to perceived internal threats.

With the United States facing the election (2016) of one of two highly manipulative personalities as President, the danger of intentional or unintentional conflict has become significantly greater. While Clinton has significant experience in international affairs, if elected she will be under significant pressure to address the issues raised by both Sanders and Trump.

A significant factor in the increasing threat of violent conflict is the stress that both British and U.S. publics place on nationalism and the management of immigration. According to recent data gathered by the Pew Foundation, the attitude of U.S. residents is much more favorable to the acceptance of a diverse population than the attitude of Europeans toward immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries. Clear evidence indicates that this tolerance on the part of the U.S. does not extend to internal race relations. In addition, the separatist positions of Donald Trump have pinpointed the deep resentment and fear of a significant minority of Americans toward social restructuring and non-violent change.

In the 1950’s and 60’s the threat of nuclear attack by the Russia was an ever-present danger. Those born in the later part of the Twentieth Century and in the first part of the Twenty-first can have only a slight idea of the psychological stress on children and adults due to constant reminders that the world as we know it might end on any given day. Partisans often credit U.S. President Ronald Reagan with winning the “Cold War.” In fact, the “War” was a complex economic game of “chicken” played according to complex if not well specified rules. These rules were based on the assumptions on the part of both the Western democracies and the nations aligned with the Russian Soviet system that their respective economic systems were superior. Nations in Asia the Mid-East were coerced into choosing sides. For the Soviet Union, the faith that, per dialectical materialism, history would inevitably lead to victory provided the motivation for the Soviet leaders to prefer economic competition to armed conflict. This faith was to lead to catastrophic economic results and the end of the Soviet empire in its Marxist-Leninist form. Similarly, for the United States and the West, a naive belief that the forces of capitalism and the market economy would prevail ensured that the United States would use nuclear weapons as a last resort. The game to be played was one of economic pressure and military intimidation and brinksmanship. Current Russian President Vladimir Putin seems intent upon renewing this game in order to solidify his power.

As conceptualized in Dialectical-Materialist terms, politically based violence is a struggle of the masses against the capitalist oligarchy and therefore justified in terms of the evolution of society toward appointment in which political orientation in the form of the state is no longer necessary. However one views the result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there are at present no rules through which to conceptualize the Russian society except through the lens of sate-directed capitalism. There are no longer any ideological guarantees in Russia of the ultimate victory of political ideology. Marxism-Leninism is no longer the dominant force in Soviet policy. The capitalist oligarchs are once more in control in Russia and Putin represents a new wave of nationalist sentiment not unlike the forces engendered by Donald Trump during the recent (2016) US campaigns and elections. In the case of both Putin and Trump, bravado and bullying behavior seem to be strategies designed to gather support among those who have little grasp of international affairs and who are themselves prone to see violence as a solution to differences of opinion and policy. In some respects the political stature and status of both men seems to resemble that of Mussolini rather than that of Hitler.

In contrast, Hillary Clinton represents a centrist view which would seem to be more conducive to negation and non-violent problem resolution. Her service as Secretary of State would indicate that she espouses a balanced approach to the management of internal and external events. The fact that there are challenged to her leadership not only from Republicans but also from members of her own party with regard to her credibility and honesty make her vulnerable. Faced with threats from Putin’s Russia she may be swayed to choose a more aggressive stance than required in order not to appear weak.
China has a China-specific mixed economic model, and North Korea is ruled by a family of dictators while Iran is controlled by a religious oligarchy. Economic isolation is a useful pretext for all enabling them to avoid the core needs of their people. Blaming external powers and nations for perceived “aggressions” allows populist leaders to avoid criticism for economic and social failure. At this writing the strategy of focusing the blame on external factors and foreign governments can be seen in the behaviors not only of Russia and China but in Venezuela and North Korea as well.

The military-industrial complexes in the West profit from arms sales, and there seems to be no viable ethical standard for behavior on any level. Acting as the oppressed is an enabling strategy for oppressors. George W. Bush famously looked into Vladimir Putin’s eyes and remarked that he saw Putin’s soul. Perhaps what he saw was a mirror image of his own oligarchic political philosophy. At this writing, there is a significant probability of the re-initiation of the tensions of the last century. Helping to provide non-violent technologies aimed at providing solutions will be a major challenge. The Russian Federation’s recent seizure of Crimea and the current struggles for dominance or hegemony in countries in the Middle East provides material for comparative case analyses contrasting economic intervention with armed strategies based on violence or the threat of violence. The fact that response by the West to Russia’s seizure of Crimea to the detriment of Ukraine has been based on economic sanctions does not automatically characterize the response by the West as a non-violent approach to large systems change. On the contrary, economic factors have been linked to conditions that were major factors that led up to the outbreak of World War II and both the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts.

The Korean Conflict has continued to present proximate danger for violent conflict, with North Korea serving in some ways as a “stalking horse” for Chinese economic and global political interests. With the possession of nuclear technology and the increasing ability to “weaponized” nuclear materials, North Korea is an increasingly significant threat to world peace. By alleging that the economic difficulties faced by North Korea are caused by the West and in particular by the United States, Dictator Kim is able to divert attention from his own disastrous economic policies. Like others who rely upon bullying tactics, Kim’s strategy, echoing the strategies of his father and grandfather before him, relies on intimidation through blustering and fear. In these strategies he is joined by both Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. Similarly, the approaches of Erdogan in Turkey and Maduro in Venezuela rely on bombast that masks underlying political agendas and economic results. Using these populist approaches increases the probability of violence as a lever when dialogue fails.

Summary and Discussion:

The current (2016) international political environment favors the threat of violence as a strategy for ensuring political support. Intense focus of the mass media on violence may well be a contributor to the willingness of individuals to see violence as a solution to conflict situations. In recent decades the polarization of opinion concerning economic and racial differences and the stress put upon cultural identities in Europe by large numbers of refugees from the Middle have decreased the stability of the European Union, with a resulting impact on the ability of the EU and the United States to apply non-violent pressures on the Russian Federation and China. Behavioral scientists who are dedicated to the cause of non-violent change can make a contribution to world peace by analyzing and interpreting these conditions in international fora. For a population that apparently has little knowledge of political history and less understanding of the consequences of poor choices, the role of behavioral scientists can be critical. In particular initiatives that address the role that the social and media have in presenting truthful and not exploitative coverage of events may be an important contribution by behavior scientists to the cause of non-violent change.

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MOROCCAN DECENTRALIZATION - CHALLENGES TO GENUINE IMPLEMENTATION

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The Moroccan decentralization initiative bears great promise to achieve human development goals that are truly ‘of the people’. As turmoil engulfs so much of the MENA region, the Moroccan model stands out as a potential means of empowering and engaging citizens in peaceful, productive action to shape their futures. Through decentralization, local communities select and carry out to completion projects that will deliver the vital benefits in health, education, business creation and other areas of life they deem important. Furthermore, the Moroccan design is truly exceptional in that it rallies both national and regional level support to implement the determined schemes.

I have long been – and remain unabashedly – an admirer and supporter of Moroccan decentralization. Perhaps because of this, I am, too, acutely aware that the challenge to its realization to national scale may well be vast enough to ensure that implementation will be a multi-decades undertaking. I should like to offer some current examples of the gap between the theory and the reality, followed by some recommendations as to how to overcome the significant barriers remaining in order to achieve genuine, functioning and systemic decentralization.

Decentralization as a state of mind

Firstly, with regard to Moroccan public administrative culture, the habit of many decades of deferring to Morocco’s capital, Rabat, remains extremely difficult to overcome, even with the existence of decentralized structures. Provincial and regional directors oversee human service delivery or the protection of the environment over huge areas of the Kingdom. However, sometimes they cannot bring themselves to make an autonomous decision regarding a hectare or two of land, or the provision of authorization to expand an existing service within their jurisdiction, without asking their agency head in Rabat for approval – a clear recipe for dysfunction.

For example, the region of Marrakesh has the authority to make a decision regarding the expansion of the number of beds in a rural high school dormitory. Waiting for the stamp of approval from Rabat may well result in beds remaining unfilled for the duration of a full school year, while rural youth are turned away.

Similar delays in implementation might be avoided by agricultural extension centers, which should already have the power (together with their regional supervisors) to decide for themselves whether or not to build a fruit tree nursery to serve neighboring communities. In the north and south of Morocco, protectors of the forest and natural life may determine the most appropriate form of community engagement and implement it with immediate effect, without having to sit on their hands waiting for an answer from Rabat.

Decentralization, then, is as much a state of mind as an official directive. Even when laws and policies confer decision-making ability on regions, provinces and municipalities, it is still down to subnational officials to exercise their newly acquired ability. Otherwise, with Rabat still effectively holding sway in the official consciousness, precious time passes and opportunities for vital progress remain forlorn.
hopes.

Communities and their leaders

Secondly, and in common with other advocates of decentralization, I have maintained that power ought to be transferred as close to the people as possible, which in Morocco means to the municipal level. The creation by municipalities of community development plans based on people’s participation is the law of the land and can serve as a vital cornerstone to a viable decentralized system. The Kingdom’s most recent municipal elections, in September 2015, were framed so as to remind voters of the importance of choosing their local leaders in the context of decentralization and of the greater grassroots decision-making authority thus implied. As a result, in many municipalities, new and young leadership stepped forward; however in others, entrenched powers remained.

In amongst all of this lies a serious dual concern: to whom – and at what speed - is authority being transferred? First-hand experience in working closely with local leaders in different parts of the country has made me highly sympathetic towards a gradual approach to decentralization.

Hastily-implemented decentralization may and in places will further entrench disappointing local leaders who follow narrow self-interest, and display intransigence in their positions while forsaking the long term benefit of the many, for the immediate, much smaller benefit of the few.

Decentralizing power in this context will most likely result in further social and economic stratification at the community level and greater levels of social control. The cruel truth remains that today, in a large number of rural municipalities, not a single girl attends secondary or high school. Right now, even with provision free of charge of dormitories and public education, a mere ten percent of children in many rural villages and municipalities attend secondary school.

In part this is a travesty of parents’ own decision-making. Adding the factor of decentralization, with participatory decision-making practices, into a social context whereby those making the choices routinely engage in entrenched thinking does too little to produce the result intended.

Learning by doing

I personally have been moved many times by the deep-seated desire of local leaders to implement truly popular, communal participation. However, they simply do not know how. What can be done on this level? The answer is to ensure the opportunity of learning by doing. Members of municipal councils, associations, and cooperatives need to experience community-based applications of participatory planning methodology and assessments of local needs. There are fine examples of such experiential learning taking place in the Kingdom, including in the municipalities of Ait Taleb, Boujdour, Ourika, Mohammedia, Tnine Ourika and Toubkal.

Finance matters

That decentralization and participatory methodology are embedded at many levels in key policy documents is in itself immensely commendable. Building a decentralized system, then, requires actualizing progressive policies and employing experiential learning techniques in order to build capacity.

Critically, all of this has to be supported by increased funding, with increased ease of access to the financial support available. Currently the National Initiative for Human Development, which should be the natural vehicle for project finance, remains largely inaccessible to the vast majority of people and their local associations owing to its challenging proposal format, inconsistent timing of calls for proposals and a requirement for local partial funding which is simply impossible for the majority of rural groups.
True decentralization is a Moroccan national priority for which there is a keen sense of urgency, given the accompanying empowerment and human development advancement at stake. However, the funding for projects and training here described must be increased in order for the local partnerships, procedures, and system of decentralization to emerge.

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DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SITES CONDEMNED BY INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Rene Wadlow, August 24, 2016

On 22 August 2016, Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi pleaded guilty to organizing and helping to carry out the destruction of nine tombs of Sufi saints in Timbuktu, northern Mali. This is the first trial of the International Criminal Court in which the destruction of UNESCO-designated cultural heritage of humanity sites is a major element of the accusation. The trial is an important milestone in the protection of cultural goods in times of armed conflict.

The evidence against Al Faqi Al Mahdi was overwhelming as originally he was proud of his iconoclastic reputation and spoke openly in public meetings and in his talks to the “moral police” of which he was the intellectual guide. Much of Islamic practice in northern Mali is Sufi-influenced, a devotional current with an emphasis on personal practice rather than communal worship. Sufi leaders are considered “saints” – the Roman Catholic terminology being the closest equivalent. At the death of certain Sufi saints, a mausoleum is built. In the case of north Mali, the mausoleum is of dried mud and brick, rather easily destroyed if that is one’s aim. The mausoleum of a saint becomes a pilgrimage goal for members of the Sufi order of which the saint was a member. Some tombs of saints with a particular reputation become pilgrimage sites for ordinary people in the area, the site is often considered to have healing qualities or to provide protection.

For most of Malian history, Sufi practices co-existed with little tension with other Islamic practices. However, the iconoclastic and anti-Sufi positions of Saudi Arabia have been spread both by Saudi preachers going to preach in other countries and by people going to study Islam in Saudi Arabia. Al Faqi Al Mahdi was trained in both a non-Sufi Koranic school in north Mali not far from Timbuktu and in Saudi Arabia. He was also trained in a Mali Government school for teachers, and Al Faqi Al Mahdi had been the chief teacher of a primary school in north Mali.

In March 2012, Mali was effectively divided into two by an armed uprising in the north. The two half were of roughly equal size, each half about the size of France. Of the 9 to 10 million inhabitants of Mali, about 90 per cent live in the south. In the northern half of the country, there is 10 per cent of the population. The majority of those in the north are Songhoy who are settled agro-pastoralists growing rice, wheat and sorghum. Also in the north but a minority in contrast to the Songhoy are the Touareg, some 850,000, originally a nomadic cattle-herding people also found in southern Algeria and Niger. They refer to themselves as “Kel Tamacheq” – those who speak the Tamacheq language. Touareg was first a derogatory term. However the term Touareg was so widely used that they have taken to using it for themselves.

In March 2012, the northern half of Mali came under the control of two rival Touareg groups with additional non-Touareg fighters coming from other Sahel countries and northern Nigeria. The larger Touareg faction was the “Movement national de liberation de l’Azawand” (MNLA). It was larger than its rival but less well armed. Its main aim was to create an independent State, to be called Azawad.
The Touareg rival was the “Ansar Dine” – defenders of the faith – a more Islamist group which wanted to apply Islamic law to all of Mali. Many of the Ansar Dine fighters had been trained in Libya. A portion of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi’s Libyan army and militias was made of Touaregs who returned to northern Mali with weapons on Qaddafi’s fall from power.

Although Al Faqi Al Madhi was not at first a member of Ansar Dine, he drew increasingly close to the movement and its vision of an Islamist Mali. From March 2012 until January 2013 when French troops were sent to Mali under a mandate of the UN Security Council, much of northern Mali was under the control of Ansar Dine which tried to impose its understanding of Islamic law in all its most narrow and repressive forms. Music, smoking, and alcohol were banned, and the Sufi tombs were destroyed.

There has been growing international concern about the wanton destruction of cultural heritage. On 27 February 2015, the UN Security Council condemned “the deliberate destruction of irreplaceable religious and cultural artifacts housed in the Mosul Museum and burning of thousands of books and rare manuscripts from the Mosul Library.” A few days earlier, thousands of books from the Mosul, Iraq, University Library had also been burned. The Mosul Museum had a large number of statues from the pre-Islamic Mesopotamian civilizations as well as statues from the Greek Hellenistic period. The spokesman for the Islamic State (ISIS) faction which carried out the destruction maintained that the statues represented gods which had been worshiped, while only the true god should receive worship. This approach to pre-Islamic faiths and their material culture is the same as had led to the destruction of the large Buddha statues in Bamiyan, Afghanistan – monuments that attested to the rich culture along the Silk Road.

However, the destruction of the Sufi tombs in Timbuktu highlights new and dangerous currents of division within the Islamic community itself – anti-Sufi actions which need to be watched and countered.

There have been earlier efforts to preserve cultural heritage in times of armed conflict in particular the Pan-American Roerich Pact of 1935 and the Hague Convention of 1954. The International Criminal Court trial of Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi is the first case of an international court dealing with the deliberate damage of UNESCO-designated cultural sites. Although the Sufi tombs have been rebuilt, largely by the efforts of the local population, the concept of the criminalization of deliberate destruction of cultural heritage is slowly become part of world law. A trend to be encouraged.

*Rene Wadlow is the President of the Association of World Citizens, an international peace organization with consultative status with ECOSOC, the United Nations organ facilitating international cooperation on and problem-solving in economic and social issues.

MEDIA NOTES

Simona Sharoni, Julia Welland, Linda Steiner, Jennifer Pedersen, eds., Handbook on Gender and War, is $2980 cloth, $252 web, from Edward Elgar, https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/books/?_sort=_score&_query=Simona+Sharoni%2C.

The books and other writings of long time leading Israeli peace activist Uri Avnery are available on line at: http://uriavnery.com/en/.

Gary Goertz, Paul F. Diehl, and Alexandru Balas, The Puzzle of Peace moves beyond defining peace as the absence of war and develops a broader conceptualization and explanation for the increasing peacefulness of the international system. The book is 2 64 pp. from Oxford University Press, https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-puzzle-of-peace-9780199301034?cc=us&lang=en&.

In a new paper released today by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), Marc Probst, Diasporas as catalysts for dialogue: the cases of Laos and Papua. A new publication in the Oslo Forum Paper series,
examines, from a mediation practitioner’s perspective, the roles that diasporas can play in peace processes. The study is available on HD's website: http://www.hdcentre.org/en/resources/publications/. For more information about this paper, the Oslo Forum Papers series or HD, please contact pr@hdcentre.org.

HD Centre, *On Peacemaking: A Decade of Reflections 2006-2015: A Compendium of Oslo Forum Background Papers*, considers, "The issues facing mediators of armed conflict and actors in peace processes are both numerous and complex, and peacemaking is often undertaken in highly competitive and politically-sensitive environments. To help mediation practitioners face these challenges, every year the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) organizes the Oslo Forum jointly with the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This annual series of informal and discreet retreats brings together prominent mediators, high-level decision-makers and key peace process actors to share their experiences and debate the latest peacemaking developments and techniques. The Oslo Forum has been taking place since 2003 and is regarded as the leading international event in the field.

In a new publication released today, *On Peacemaking: A Decade of Reflections 2006-2015*, HD draws together some of the most noteworthy papers written by mediators, thinkers and peace process actors for the Oslo Forum retreats.

These papers were originally developed exclusively for participants in the Forum and they are being made available to a wider audience for the first time. They cover a wide range of topics from the role of the United Nations in mediation, to the complex interplay between peace and justice, the inclusion of women and civil society in peacemaking, the normative framework in which mediators operate, and the challenges of the implementation phase. They address some of the thorniest issues mediators face in designing peace processes and pursuing peaceful settlements to armed conflicts. The compendium provides a collage of reflections from across the Oslo Forum network and unique insights into peacemaking.

*On Peacemaking* is the first of two compendia of reflections from the Oslo Forum Series to be published in 2016. It will be followed shortly by the release of a compendium of interviews carried out with mediators, thinkers and peace process actors to reflect on their work. For more information go to: http://www.hdcentre.org/en/resources/publications/.

A new publication published by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) *Mediation through a media lens: Interviews from the Oslo Forum 2016 on the nexus between mediation and the media*. For more information go to: http://www.hdcentre.org/en/resources/publications/.

*Peace Science Digest*, an online quarterly is "developed to provide a mutually beneficial link between the field’s academic community and its practitioners, the media, activists, public policy-makers and other possible beneficiaries. Our issues are formulated to enhance awareness of literature addressing key issues relating to war and peace by making available an organized, condensed and comprehensible analysis of top academic research." It can be accessed and contacted at: http://us10.campaign-archive1.com/?u=fae8790db2ceaa834af33cc95&id=ebea797536&e=710a38ffed.

**USEFUL WEB SITES**

**UN NGO Climate Change Caucus**, with numerous task forces, is at: http://climatecaucus.net.


**350.org** works around the world on climate change related issues, at: www.350.org.

Greenpeace engages on many environmental concerns, at: greenpeace.org/usa/ and greenpeace.org/.
**Friends of the Earth** is involved world wide in environmental advocacy, at: foei.org.

**The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)** works on a range of environmental issues, including global warming endured climate change, at: www.edf.org.

The **Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)** works on a variety of environmental, as well as other, issues, at: www.ucsusa.org.

**Environmental Action** is active on numerous environmental issue, at: environmental-action.org.

**Environment America** works on environmental issue in the U.S. at: https://environmentamerica.webaction.org.

**Food and Water Watch** is active on a variety of issues relating to water and food, at: https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org and https://secure.foodandwaterwatch.org.

The **Wilderness Society** works on environmental issues, particularly concerning preserving "wild places." at: wilderness.org.

**Ocean River Institute** works on river and other water issue, at: oceanriver.org.

**The National Wildlife Federation**, at: nwf.org, and **The National Wildlife Federation Action Fund**, at: https://online.nwf.org/site/SPageNavigator/ActionCenter, are concerned with environmental issues involving wildlife in the U.S.

The **Audubon Society** reports on and works on issues focused on birds, at: audubon.org.

**The Nuclear Information and Resource Service** includes in its work nuclear environmental issues, at: nirs.org.

**The National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)** includes in its concerns environmental issues relating to U.S. national parks, at: npca.org and https://secure.npca.org/

**Earth Policy Institute**, dedicated to building a sustainable future as well as providing a plan of how to get from here to there: www.earthpolicy.org.

**Wiser Earth** lists more than 10,700 environmental and environmental justice organizations at: http://www.wiserearth.org/organization/

**Earthwatch**, the world’s largest environmental volunteer organization, founded in 1971, works globally to help the people of the planet volunteer realize a sustainable environment: http://www.earthwatch.org/.

**Avaaz.org** works internationally on environmental and peace and justice issues: http://www.avaaz.org.

**The Environmental Defense Fund** works on environmental issues and policy, primarily in the U.S.: http://edf.org.

**Earthjustice** focuses on environmental issues and action: http://action.earthjustice.org.

SaveOurEnvironment.org, a coalition of environmental organizations acting politically in the U.S.: http://ga3.org/campaign/0908_endangered_species/xuninw84p7m8mxxm.

The National Resources Defense Council works on a variety of environmental issues in the U.S.: NRhttp://www.nrdconline.org/

Care 2 is concerned about a variety of issues, including the environment: http://www.care2.com/.

Rainmakers Oceania studies possibilities for restoring the natural environment and humanity’s rightful place in it, at: http://rainmakers-ozeania.com/0annexanchorc/about-rainmakers.html.

Green Ships, in fall 2008, was asking Congress to act to speed the development of new energy efficient ships that can take thousands of trucks off Atlantic and Pacific Coast highways, moving freight up and down the costs with far less carbon emissions and more cheaply:  http://www.greenships.org.


Grist carries environmental news and commentary: http://www.grist.org/news/,


Planting Peace is, "A Resource Center for news and activities that seek to build a powerful coalition to bring about cooperation and synergy between the peace movement, the climate crisis movement, and the organic community." Their web site includes extensive links to organizations, articles, videos and books that make the connections, at: http://organicconsumers.org/plantingpeace/index.cfm, Planting Peace is sponsored by the Organic Consumers Association: http://organicconsumers.org/.

The Global Climate Change Campaign: http://www.globalclimatecampaign.org/.


Georgetown University’s Conflict Resolution Program and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) have created an online database of multimedia resources related to conflict management, as well as best practices for designing and using them at: Peace Media http://peacemedia.usip.org. For information, contact: Dr. Craig Zelizer, Associate Director, Master of Arts in Conflict Resolution, Department of Government, Georgetown University, 3240 Prospect Street, Washington, DC 20007, (202)687-0512, cz52@georgetown.edu, http://conflictresolution.georgetown.edu, http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org.

Learn Stuff has a long list of groups that deal with international conflicts and crises at: http://www.learnstuff.com/learn-about-international-crisis-groups/.

Global Beat, has been an excellent source of information and further sources for Nonviolent Change, at: http://www.nyu.edu/globalbeat. Global Beat also has an E-mail list serve.

The International Crisis Group (ICG) carries regular reports and sets of recommendations about difficult
developing situations around the globe, and has been an extremely helpful source of information and ideas for this journal: http://www.crisisgroup.org/. ICG also has a regular E-mail report circulation service that can be subscribed to on its web site. The International Crisis Group (ICG) has launched a frequently updated website on “the nexus of issues surrounding Cyprus, Turkey and the European Union,” at: http://www.crisisgroup.org/.

The International Relations Center (IRC): http://www.irc-online.org/.

"Models of Unity", at: http://www.modelsofunity.net/, is a new web site that seeks to explore where people have come together across racial, ethnic, and religious divides to work for the betterment of their communities.

Tikkun, the Network of Spiritual Progressives is at: http://www.tikkun.org

IMRA – Middle East News and Analysis: http://www.imra.org.il/.

Transcend Africa, provides reports from across Africa at: www.transcendafrica.net.

Americas Program: www.cipamericas.org, which includes a blog.


Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) http://wozazimbabwe.org/.

The Pulitzer Center, whose mission is to promote in-depth coverage of international affairs, focusing on topics that have been under-reported, mis-reported or not reported at all: http://www.pulitzercenter.org/.

Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR): www.acr.net.

Peace Voice, a source for thoughtful articles on the world today by Peace Professionals including members of academia and the non-profit sector, Home page is: http://www.peacevoice.info.. To view abstracts of unpublished current offerings, which are available at no charge, go to www.Abstracts.PeaceVoice.info. To view pieces that have been published and are also available for reprint at no charge: http://www.peacevoice.info.


The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation is at: www.wagingpeace.org, providing educational information on nuclear weapons abolition and other issues relating to global security

The Open society Institute and the Soros Foundation: http://www.soros.org/

Conciliation Resources (CR) has re-launched its website http://www.c-r.org.


Noviolenciaactiva.com is a collection of posts that cover the importance of nonviolent action, events, and news in Spanish. Nonviolent Action, in English, presents a diversity of points of view about nonviolent action and nonviolence at: http://org2.democracyinaction.org/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=lfIV4N6x%2B8od%2FyOP7%2F2hEePjkCiqRSZQ. Additional resources in Spanish are on-line at the website: TrainingforChange.org. Mostly training materials, plus some articles on nonviolent strategy.


Gush Shalom has a project at: http://settlement-products.wikia.com/wiki/Settlement_Products_Wikia. "Wiki Settlement Products is a project by the Gush Shalom Movement (Israeli Peace Bloc). Its goal is to organize and make available to the public, in the most systematic and up to date manner possible, information about the factories and businesses that operate in settlements beyond the Green Line (pre-1967 border) and the products that they produce."


Peace and Collaborative Development Network “is a free professional networking site to foster dialogue and sharing of resources in international development, conflict resolution, gender mainstreaming, human rights, social entrepreneurship and related fields. Feel free to explore the site content and features”, at: http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/.

World Security Institute and the Center for Defense Information: www.worldsecurityinstitute.org. The World Security Institute (WSI) offers audio podcast programming in its list of interactive communication features at the iTunes Music Store, WSI’s podcasts will include audio recordings of press conferences, panel discussions, and interviews with WSI experts hosted by WSI or in collaboration with other media outlets. Download iTunes at www.apple.com/itunes. Find WSI podcasts by searching for “World Security Institute” under the podcast section of the iTunes Music Store, or by clicking this link: http://phobos.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewPodcast?id=215717216, The WSI Brussels Security Blog aims to continue and expand the efforts of the World Security Institute, Brussels, to inform, stimulate, and shape the debate around the security and defense dilemmas facing Europe and the world, with a view to formulating effective and lasting solutions, posting regular commentary related to: Afghanistan, the Balkans, Darfur, ESDP, Iran, Iraq, Missile Defense, NATO, OSCE, Peace Support Operations, and Terrorism, at: http://wsibrusselsblog.org/.

The Universal Human Rights Index Website is a database for finding information and documents produced by the various components of the UN human rights system. It can easily do searches, by keywords and other methods on inquiry, at: http://www.universalhumanrightsindex.org/.

The Peace and Justice Studies Association (PJSA): http://www.peacejusticestudies.org/.


The International Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) Program a American University web site, including bi-monthly newsletters, is at: newsletter at www.aupeace.org.


Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue (formerly the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century), is at: http://www.ikedacenter.org/publications.htm.

The Network of Spiritual Progressives: http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/.


The Stanley Foundation, “brings fresh voices and original ideas to debates on global and regional problems. The foundation seeks a secure peace with freedom and justice, built on world citizenship and effective global governance,” is at: www.stanleyfoundation.org.

Global Peace Hut: http://www.globalpeacehut.org/

Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream runs on line discussions of “the most critical issue and greatest opportunity of our time and what you can do about it,” at: http://www.awakeningthedreamer.org/.


Peace and Collaborative Development Network is at: http://internationalpeaceandconflict.org).


The International Journal of Conflict and Violence focuses on one specific topic in each semi-annual on line issue while also including articles on other, unrelated subjects. In the Fall 2007 issue the focus will be on terrorism. The Journal is at: http://www.ijcv.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=14&Itemid=27.

Culture of Peace Online Journal is at: http://www.copoj.ca/.

The Journal of Stellar Peacemaking is at: Error! Hyperlink reference not valid..

Peacework Magazine, "Global Thought and Local Action for Nonviolent Social Change" (also in print), published by the American Friends Service Committee - New England, 2161 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA 02140 (617)661.6130, pwork@igc.org, is at: www.peaceworkmagazine.org.

Peace Science Digest is at: http://us10.campaign-archive1.com/?u=fae8790db2ceaa834af33cc95&id=ebea797536&e=710a38ffed.


Jewish Voice for Peace and Jewish Peace News: www.jewishpeacenews.net.

Settlement Products Wiki - a systematic informational research about businesses in the settlements and their products; businesses that have left the settlements and relocated to within the Green Line; and the misleading tactics with which businesses attempt to cover up and conceal their location in the settlements, is at: http://settlement-products.wikia.com/.


The Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution (JLCR) is a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal published monthly by Academic Journals: http://www.academicjournals.org/JLCR.


Peace Action is at: www.Peace-Action.org

Caucasus Context is at: http://www.worldsecurityinstitute.org/showarticle.cfm?id=218.

The National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)’s Learning Exchange, as of August 2007 included over 2200 resources, is at: www.thataway.org/exchange/.

The Africa Peace and Conflict Network (APCN) offers open-access publications, including full research papers, Briefings, and a photo journal, at: www.africaworkinggroup.org/publications.

The Global Development Briefing, the largest circulation publication designed specifically for international development professionals, is at: www.DevelopmentEx.com.

UN Millennium Development Goals, indicators of levels of success on ending poverty: http://www.mdgmonitor.org/.

Peace and Collaborative Development Networking at: http://internationalpeaceandconflict.ning.com/, is a free professional networking site to encourage interaction between individuals and organizations worldwide involved in development, peace, conflict resolution and related fields.

The Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC) at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University blog, entitled "Conflict and Collaboration" is at: http://conflictandcollaboration.wordpress.com/about/.


Ideologies of War and Terrorism Web Site is at: http://www.ideologiesofwar.com/.

The Global Nonviolent Action Database, as of March 26, 2013, was offering over 560 cases in its expanding database, in both formats: 2-3 page narratives that tell the story of the campaign, and searchable fields that enable the viewer to research many questions, from how other movements have used the occupation method (or nearly two hundred others!), to which countries have done what kinds of campaigns as researched so far, to finding dozens of examples of struggles for environmental justice and overthrowing dictators. It includes a map that enables one to search by clicking on a graphic "pin" located on any of six continents. Just click on Browse cases by geographic location: http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu.

H-Net-Peace carries announcements, etc., relating to peace at: http://www.h-net.org/~peace/.

The Journal of Peacebuilding and Development (JPD) is at: www.journalpeacedev.org, or email: jpd@american.edu.

Conflitti is the journal of Centro Psicopedagogico per la Pace e la gestione dei conflitti (in Italian) available from the center at: http://www.cppp.it/il-numero_12012.html.

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation publishes an E-mail newsletter, The Sunflower, carrying its purpose, positions, programs and relevant developments, which can be accessed via: www.wagingpeace.org/sunflower-newsletter-february-2015.

The M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, is at University of Rochester, Interfaith Chapel, Box 270501, Rochester, NY 14627 (585)276-3787, tgoodman@admin.rochester.edu, gandhiinstitute.org

The Peace Education Center, IIPE, and Global Campaign for Peace Education invite have a global online initiative “the Peace Education Online Communities,” at: www.c-i-p-e.org/forum. The Peace Education Online Community is an interactive website that enables members of the global community to communicate and interact with eachother through a number of tools including: online discussions, collaborative working spaces, an updatable calendar of events, member profiles, reports of institutes, the sharing of files and papers including sample curricula and best practices from local communities, and much, much more. This web-based initiative was developed to support the members and participants of the International Institute on Peace Education, Community-based Institutes on Peace Education, and the Global Campaign for Peace Education, and other concerned educators. For more information contact: peace-ed@tc.edu. The Global Campaign for Peace Education Newsletter is usually published as a list serve monthly, with subscription and back issues at: www.tc.edu/PeaceEd/newsletter.
The Global Campaign for Peace Education (GCPE) e-newsletter provides a monthly bulletin of GCPE news, events, action alerts and reports of peace education activities and developments from around the world. Back issues of the newsletter are archived online at www.tc.edu/PeaceEd/newsletter. To subscribe via E-mail go to: http://c-i-p-e.org/elist/?p=subscribe&id=2.


The online Encyclopedia of Peace Education is at: http://www.tc.edu/centers/epe/.

The Plowshares site has on it a section for Syllabi from Courses Related to Peace Studies (from various sources) at: http://www.plowsharesproject.org/php/resources/index.php.


The Organization Development Institute is a nonprofit educational association organized in 1968 to promote a better understanding of and to disseminate information about organization development, at: http://www.odinstitute.org/.