NONVIOLENT CHANGE

Journal of the Research/Action Team on Nonviolent Large Systems Change

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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.

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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 newsletter 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.

Nonviolent Change journal - ISDOC 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 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, Don 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.

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.

Submissions that have notes, must have them as end notes put in the text manually. We cannot work with automatic notes that use footers or headers). It is helpful to us.
if submissions are in 9 point Geneva, justified left and right, single spaced with a space between paragraphs, titles and sub titles; and paragraphs indented.

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE IS January 8

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, including ISODC International Conference 2020, likely in May 2020. 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-18-31, (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 (USIP) offers an ongoing series of short courses listed at: http://www.usip.org/academy/courses/date. USIP, 2301 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC, puts on numerous events beyond those listed here. For details go to: http://www.usip.org/events.

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.

HREA - Human Rights Education Association runs a series of workshops and on-line trainings. HREA offers self-directed e-courses and tutored e-learning courses in the following 13 areas: Armed Conflict, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law; Children’s Rights, Child Development, Participation and Protection; Communications and Advocacy; Corporate Social Responsibility, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Environment, Human Rights and Sustainable Development; Financial, People and Project Management; Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment; Governance and Human Rights; Human Rights Policy; Human Rights in Education; Human Rights in the Administration of Justice; Human Rights, Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Aid; Migration and Asylum. HREA also organizes two annual training programs: Four Freedoms Summer Program and Advocacy Institute. For details go to: http://www.hrea.org/learn.

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) puts on monthly free Tech Tuesdays, a series of learning events from NCDD focused on technology for engagement. These 1-hour events are designed to help dialogue and deliberation practitioners get a better sense of the online engagement landscape and how they can take advantage of the myriad opportunities available to them. For information, visit: http://ncdd.org/events.

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation offers a series of lectures and seminars throughout the year. For details go to: https://www.wagingpeace.org.

The International Center for Nonviolent conflict (ICNC) offers a series of on line and other courses. For information go to: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org.

University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica, UPEACE offers a series of on-site and online courses, year-round, including two summer institutes. For details visit: https://www.upeace.org/.
Monthly meetings of the Circles of Nonviolence/Community Collaborative and their adopted projects in Arizona into Texas: Circles of Nonviolence/Community Collaborative in Southern Arizona can be found through: Moji Agha (moji.agha@gmail.com, (520)325-3545 http://mossadeghlegacyinstitute.blogspot.com/p/america-for-nonviolence-avn.html.

The Ahimsa Center Upcoming Programs and Events on the teaching and learning of nonviolence and nonviolent social change, at the Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at Cal Poly Pomona include Conferences and Symposia. For details visit: https://www.cpp.edu/~ahimsacenter/ahimsa_home.shtml.

A large number of Human Rights Conferences is listed at, International Conference on Human Rights 2019: https://internationalconferencealerts.com/conference/human-rights.

The Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies at Liverpool Hope University, in Liverpool, England, puts on numerous peace related lectures, discussions and seminars. For details go to: http://tutu.hope.ac.uk/events/.

The Center for Global Justice puts on summer and winter seminars and holds numerous other events. For information visit: https://www.globaljusticecenter.org.

International Institute for Restorative Justice (IIRP) puts on numerous trainings and short courses, in addition to its conferences. For details visit: https://www.iirp.edu.

J Street offers numerous live conversation on Facebook. For more information go to: http://jstreet.org.

Kroc-Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is September 4, 2019, 12:30 pm at C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

The inaugural Global Sustainability Forum will be held September 4-6, 2019 on the shores of Fuxian Lake in Yunnan, China. For information go to: https://www.globaljusticecenter.org.

Catholic Peacebuilding and Mining: Integral Peace, Development, and Ecology is September 5, 2019, 5:30 pm at 1030 Jenkins Nanovic Halls, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.


Veterans for Peace (VFP) Trip to Vietnam is September 7-22, 2019. For information go to: https://www.veteransforpeace.org/pressroom/news/2019/04/19/veterans-peace-announces-tour-vietnam-2019#type=email&cid=4f26bfcf-c439-4e17-bbb7-1c4e0e5dc2a3.

Kroc-Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is September 11, 2019, 12:30 pm at C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Flash Panel: Hong Kong in Crisis is September 11, 2019, 5:00 pm - 6:30PM at Auditorium, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.
Campaign Nonviolence: Action Week - a global event is September 14-22, 2019. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.


Building a Culture of Peace Forum: Witness: Family Separation on Our Watch is September 19, 2019, 7:00-8:00 PM, UU Church, 274 Pleasant Street, Concord, NH. For details visit: https://paceebene.org/events/2019/9/19/witness-family-separation-on-our-watch.

Global Climate Strike and week of action is September 20-27, 2019 world-wide - in many places. For information go to: https://globalclimatestrike.net.

What’s Peace Got to Do with It? Peace Studies at the Intersection of Race, Class, and Gender is September 20, 2019, 11:00 am - 12:30PM at Auditorium, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Veterans for Peace (VFP) joining numerous groups in People’s Mobilization to Stop the US War Machine is September 20-22 in Washington, DC/ For details visit: https://popularresistance.org/peoples-mobilization-to-stop-the-us-war-machine/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=4f26bbcf-c439-4e17-bbb7-1c4e0e5dc2a3.

International Day of Peace: September 21, 2019.

Arts for Healing and Reconciliation in Colombia, Featuring Josefina Echavarria Alvarez, Co-Director of the Research Centre for Peace and Conflict and Senior Lecturer at the University of Innsbruck and Senior Lecturer, Kroc Institute Scholar in Residence, is Sep 24, 2019 4:00 pm - 5:30PM atC103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Development, Peace Implementation, and the Role of the Private Sector in Colombia: How can the private sector, through development, play a role in the successful implementation of peace agreements? And how is the University of Notre Dame strengthening peace accord implementation efforts and private sector development in Colombia? is Sep 26, 2019, 4:00 -6:00PM at 1050 Jenkins Nanovic Halls, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Shut Down Creech Assassin Drone Base: Opposing Drone Killing is at Creech Airforce Base in Nevada, September 29-October 5, 2019. For details go to: https://www.codepink.org/shut_down_creech_spring_actions_2019/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=4f26bbcf-c439-4e17-bbb7-1c4e0e5dc2a3.

International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC)’s Free Moderated Online Course on Civil Resistance is October 2, 2019 - November 22, 2019, on the web. For details go to: https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/people-power-the-strategic-dynamics-of-civil-resistance-icnc-online-course-fall-2019/.

Peace and Justice Studies Association Conference 2018 is October 4-6, 2019 at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Canada, For details go to: https://www.peacejusticestudies.org.

NoWar 2019 is in Limerick, Ireland, October 5-6, 2019. For information go to: worldbeyondwar.org.
WorldBeyondWar.Org, “No War 2019: Pathways to Peace,” World Beyond War conference, is in Limerick, Ireland, October 5-6, 2019. For details go to: https://worldbeyondwar.org/nowar2019/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=4f26bfcf-c439-4e17-bbb7-1c4e05dc2a3.

Is the Dream Alive? Reflections on Race, Nationality and the Legacies of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. King is October 8, 2019, 4:00-5:30PM at C103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

The Conference of the European Peace Research Association (EuPRA) 11th Biennial Conference is 10-12 October 2019, at Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Catania, Italy. For details visit: http://europepeace.org/eupra/.

Campaign Nonviolence: The Psalms of Peace: A Weekend Retreat with Rev. John Dear is October 11-13, 2019, For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

Pax Christi Northern California Annual Assembly is October 12, 2019, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM, at Newman Hall/Holy Spirit Church, 2700 Dwight Way, Berkeley, CA, 94704. For details go to: https://paceebene.org/events/2019/10/12/pax-christi-northern-california-annual-assembly.

Kroc-Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is October 16, 2019, 12:30-1:30PM at C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Common Bond Institute and collaborating organizations: International Muslim Mental Health Conference is October 20, 2018, in Amman, Jordan. For details go to: http://cbiworld.org/conferences/.


The Fourteenth MEDCOAST Congress on Coastal and Marine Sciences, Engineering, Management & Conservation (MEDCOAST 19) is October 22-26, 2019 at Club Yazici Turban Hotel, Marmaris, Turkey. For details visit: https://www.medcoast.net.

Common Bond Institute and collaborating organizations: 8th Annual International Conference on Transgenerational Trauma: Communal Wounds and Victim Identities is October 24-26, 2019 in Amman, Jordan. For details go to: http://cbiworld.org/conferences/.

International Institute for Restorative Practice Community Leadership: IIRP World Conference is in Bethlehem, PA, October 21-23, 2019. For details visit: http://www.iirp.edu.

World Resources Forum (WRF) 19 will take place in Geneva, Switzerland, October 22-24, 2019. For information visit: https://www.wrforum.org

The 15th International MEDCOAST Congress on Coastal and Marine Sciences, Engineering, Management & Conservation is in Marmaris, Turkey, October 22-26 2019. For details go to: http://www.medcoast.net/.

8th Annual International Conference on Transgenerational Trauma: Communal Wounds and Victim Identities is October 24-26, 2019 in Amman, Jordan. For information, go to: https://cbiworld.org/conferences/.
J Street’s National Conference is October 26-29, 2019, in Washington, DC. For information, go to: https://jstreet.org/conference/#.XFOALy3My9R.

6th International Center for Ethnic and Religious Conflict and Economic development: Is There a Correlation (ICERM) International Conference is in New York City, October 29-31 2019. Peace and conflict resolution scholars, practitioners, traditional rulers and leaders, indigenous leaders, policy makers, and students from many countries around the world are gathering for the first time in New York City to exchange ideas on the traditional systems of conflict resolution. For details visit: www.icermediation.org.

Slogans or Evidence-Based Decision making? The Knowledge Foundation of the UN’s Women, Peace, and Security Agenda is Oct 29, 2019, 4:00-5:30PM at C103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news.

Kroc Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is October 30, 2019, 12:30-1:30PM, C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

From Integral Development to Integral Ecology and from Integral Disarmament to Integral Peacebuilding is October 31, 2019, 4:00-5:30PM at C103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

10th International Conference on Human Rights Education may be in November 2019. For details go to: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/equity_diversity/equity_and_diversity/conferences/international_hu man_rights_education_conferences.


The National Conference on Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) Conference may be in November 2019. For details visit: http://ncdd.org


CSU Water in the West Symposium is rescheduled for November 6-7, 2019, at Gaylord Rockies, Denver, CO. For details visit: https://nwc.colostate.edu/water-in-the-west-2019/.

Kroc Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is November 6, 2019, 12:30-1:30PM, C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.


The Role of the Religious Leaders in Building and Sustaining Peace in Ethiopia is November 12, 2019, 4:00-5:00 pm, C103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

The 21st Annual Dialogues on Nonviolence, Religion and Peace is November 14, 2019, 11:30 am-2:00PM at Auditorium, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.
School of Americas Watch in Fort Benning, GA is November 15-17, 2019. SOAW strives to expose, denounce, and end US militarization, oppressive US policies and other forms of state violence in the Americas. U.S. military training of Latin American forces takes place at Fort Benning. For details visit: https://www.veteransforpeace.org/take-action/soa-watch?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=4f26bfcf-c439-4e17-bbb7-1c4e0e5dc2a3.

Witnessing Peace: Becoming Agents Under Duress in Colombia is November 19, 2019, 4:00-5:30 pm, C103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Kroc-Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is November 20, 2019, 12:30-1:30PM, C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Gender Equality Reforms in United Nations Mediation is November 21, 2019, 12:30-2:00PM, C103, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.

Kroc-Kellogg Peace, Conflict, Crime and Violence Workshop is December 4, 2019, 12:30-1:30PM, C104, Hesburgh Center for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/.


The 10th International Conference of Museums for Peace, will be held in Japan in 2020. Details are at: http://inmp.net.


World Sustainable Development Summit 2020 Sustainability Lessons in the "Global South": Priorities, Opportunities, and Risks is 29-31 January 2020, at Pontifical Catholic University of Chile & University of Chile, Santiago, Chile. For details go to: http://wsds.teriin.org.

World Sustainable Development Summit 2020: Toward 2030 Goals is January 29-31, 2020 at India Habitat Center, Lodhi Road, New Delhi, India., at India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi, India. For details visit: http://wsds.teriin.org.

World Resources Forum (WRF) may be in February 2020. For information visit: https://www.wrforum.org.


The Psychology and Peace 2018 Conference may be in March 2020 and is sponsored by the APA Peace Psychology Division 48. More information is available at www.peacepsychology.org.

The 2020 Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association Conference may be in March 2020. For details contact: http://appra.net/.

The Fifth International Symposium on Strengthening Peace through Education may be in August 2020. For details visit: http://www.esdfocus.org/education-sustainability-asia-conference/.
Coastal Promise Humanitarian and Peacebuilding Field Simulation may be in March 2020. For details visit: http://www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org/event/2018/03/the-forage-center-for-peacebuilding-and-humanitarian-educations-annual-coastal.promise-field-simulation/.

The 9th International Conference on "Livelihoods, Sustainability and Conflict: Religion, Conflict, and Reconciliation," may be in March 2020. For more information go to: http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs/.

2020 Gandhi-King Conference may be in March or April 2020, at The University of Memphis, 3720 Alumni Ave, Memphis, TN, for details visit: http://www.gandhikingconference.org or http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org.

79th Annual Meeting, Society for Applied Anthropology, is in Albuquerque, NM, March 17-21, 2020 at Hotel Albuquerque. For information go to: www.sfaa.net.


9th International Conference on Engaging The Other: The Power of Compassion may be in April 2020, by the Common Bond Institute. Details will become available at: http://cbiworld.org/conferences/eto/.

10th International Conflict Management Conference may be at Kennesaw State University (Atlanta suburb), at KSU Center, in April 2020. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/, or http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu/events-programs.

The annual workshop of Rising Voices: Collaborative Science with Indigenous Knowledge for Climate Solutions may be in April 2020. For details go to: itc.org.

14th International Conference on Conflict Resolution Education may be in April 2020. For details go to: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/.


Regional Institute for the Study & Practice of Strategic Nonviolent Action in the Americas is at FLACSO, Quito Ecuador, April 7-13, 2019. For details go to: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/.

The 12th International Conference on Climate: Impacts and Responses: Adaptations: Lessons from Venice is 16-17 April 2020, in Venice, Italy, at Ca' Foscari University of Venice. 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 visit: http://on-climate.com/the-conference. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar.

Peace Education Course: EMU Summer Peacebuilding Institute at Eastern Mennonite University, 1200 Park Rd., Harrisonburg, VA 22802, likely will have four sessions in May and June 2020. For details visit: https://emu.edu/cjp/spi/.

International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) Europe Conference may be in May 2020. For information go to: https://www.iirp.edu.

Venture Peacebuilding may be in May 2020. For details go to: https://ipsinstitute.org/symposiums/.

Justice Studies Association Annual Conference: JSA Annual Meeting 2020 may be in May 2020, For details go to: www.justicestudies.org.

Global Peace Research Summit may be in June 2020. For details go to: https://iprafoundation.org.

Fletcher Summer Institute for the Advanced Study of Nonviolent Conflict (FSI) may be in June 2019, at Tufts University, 419 Boston Ave, Medford, MA 02155. For information go to: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/mpi-2019-annual-peacebuilding-training/?instance_id=1317.

The 17th Annual Global Solutions Lab may be in June 2020, 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.

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.

21at Annual Kingian Nonviolence Summer Institute may be in June 2020. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/calendar/.


UPEACE Summer Peace Institute – Session 2: may be at University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica, perhaps in June and July 2020. UPEACE offers a series of online courses. For details visit: https://www.upeace.org/

6th International Summer School may be in June and/or July 2020, at International University of Sarajevo, Hrasnička cesta 15, Ilidža, Bosnia and Herzegovina. For details go to: www.ius.edu.ba.

Human Rights Education Associates, HREA FOUR FREEDOMS SUMMER PROGRAM 2020 may be in June and/or July 2020. HREA runs a series of human rights related trainings throughout the year. For details go to: http://www.hrea.org.
Campaign Nonviolence: Journey of Peace to Northern Ireland may be in June 2020. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

Campaign Nonviolence: Peace and Nonviolence Pilgrimage to Assisi, in Italy, may be in June 2020. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

Caux Scholars Program: A multi-disciplinary approach to conflict transformation, transitional justice, and principled leadership may be in June and/or July 2020, at Initiatives of Change conference center, Rue du Panoram, 1824 Montreux, Switzerland. For details go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

JEAN MONNET@CRONEM SUMMER SCHOOL 2019 may be in June and July 2020 at University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, UK. For details go to: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/.

2020 Bologna Symposium on Conflict Prevention, Resolution, and Reconciliation may be at Johns Hopkins SAIS Bologna Center, Bologna, Italy, in June and July 2020. For details visit: http://www.peace-ed-campaign.org or http://ipsinstitute.org.

The Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM), Centre for Research on Nationalism, Ethnicity and Multiculturalism (CRONEM), 15th Annual Conference 2019, is likely in June or July 2020, likely at the University of Surrey, UK; details may become available in late January. For details go to: http://www.surrey.ac.uk/cronem/.

Summer School in a variety of courses with different beginning dated from June through July, include some on alternative dispute resolution and on sustainability at Central European University, Budapest, Nádor u. 9, 1051 Hungary. For information go to: https://summeruniversity.ceu.edu/.

Kennesaw State University Conflict Management at Kennesaw State University, Summer Institute on Conflict Management in Higher Education is in Savannah, GA, perhaps in June 2020. For details visit: http://ccm.hss.kennesaw.edu.

Stony Point Center 11th Annual Summer Institute: Farm the Land, Grow the Spirit: A Multifaith Peace, Justice and Earthcare Program for Young Adults may be at Stony Point Center, Stony Point, NY, in June 2020. For details go to: https://www.peace-ed-campaign.org/event/stony-point-center-10th-annual-summer-institute/.

World Affairs Council, Leadership Academy, may be in June 2020. For details visit: https://www.worldaffairs.org/index.php.

Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Leading Nonviolent Change Projects: A Residential Summer Institute for Educators is on campus, may be in June 2020. For details see: https://www.worldaffairs.org/index.php.


2020 Columbia Symposium on Coordinated Stabilization and Peacebuilding may be in June and July 2020 at Calvary School, Bogota, Colombia. For details visit: https://ipsinstitute.org/symposiums.
CFP 17th Annual Imiscoe Conference: 2020 Luxembourg (FLSHASE) may be in June or July, in Luxembourg. For details visit: http://www.imiscoe.org/.

The 9th World Sustainability Forum (WSF2020) will be June 1-6, 2020. The conference will cover areas like the globe, extreme poverty and hunger have been reduced, and infant, child, and maternal mortality have decreased. For details, visit: https://10times.com/world-sustainability-forum.

Thirteenth Global Studies Conference, 2020 Special Focus—Globalization and Social Movements: Familiar Patterns, New Constellations? is June 4-5, 2020 at Concordia University, Montréal, Canada. For details go to: http://onglobalisation.com.


Teaching Peace in the 21st Century: 12th Annual Summer Institute for Faculty is June 8-12, 2020, at Jenkins Nanovic Halls, University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Notre Dame, IN. For information visit: https://kroc.nd.edu/news-events/events/page/2/.

2020 Canadian School of Peacebuilding Session II is June 8-12, 15-19, 2020, at Canadian School of Peacebuilding, 500 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2, Canada. For information visit: csop.cmu.ca. visit: https://conference.aclu.org/e/home/314332&reference=eml_nat___membconf18.

8th National Conference on Restorative Justice, is likely in the summer of 2020. Details are at: www.restorativejusticenow.org.

The 7th International Conference on Financing for Development may be in July 2020. For more information visit: http://www.un.org/.

Venice Academy of Human Rights 2020 may be on July 2020 at Monastery of San Nicolò, Venice Lido, Italy. The Academy and School run a number of programs and trainings. For details go to: http://www.eiuc.org/research/venice-academy-of-human-rights.html.

2020 Summer Peace Leadership Courses at the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, Santa Barbara, CA, may be in July 2020. 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 2020. For details visit: http://www.cpp.edu.

Fellowship of Reconciliation Conference/61st Regional FOR Seabeck Conference “Persevering FOR Peace” may be in July 2020. For details, including scholarships, visit: forseabeck.org or www.forusa.org.

Global Youth Rising Peace Summer Camp may be in July 2019, at Somesul Rece, Cluj, Romania. For information go to: http://globalyouthrising.org/.

Sarajevo Symposium on Post Conflict Transitions is in Sarajevo, Bosnia may be in July 2020. For information visit: http://ipsinstitute.org.

2020 DC Symposium on the New Frontiers of Peacebuilding may be in July and/or August 2020,
American University’s School of International Service (SIS), Washington, DC. For details visit: https://ipsinstitute.org/.

2020 Melaka International Youth Dialogue may be in July 2020. For information go to: https://www.youthop.com.

Summer Institute on Conflict Transformation Across Borders may be in July 2020, at the FLASCO campus in Quito, Ecuador, Ave Diego de Almagro, Quito 170517, Ecuador. For information visit: https://www.umb.edu/academics/caps/international/conflict_transformation.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu Centre for War and Peace Studies, Annual International Conference 2019: Peace, Conflict and Pedagogy may be in July 2020, at Liverpool Hope University, Hope Park Campus, Liverpool L16 9JD. For details visit: http://tutu.hope.ac.uk/.

Mahatma Gandhi Summer Institute: Building Peaceful Communities may be in July 2020 at Faculty of Education, University of Alberta, 11210 87 Ave NW, Edmonton, AB T6G 2T9, Canada. For details go to: https://www.ualberta.ca/registrar/registration-and-courses/spring-and-summer-studies/available-courses/mahatma-gandhi-summer-institute.

Summit Series may be in July 2020 at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Banff, Canada, and hosted by the University of Alberta and James Madison University. For details visit: www.jmu.edu/summitseries.


Teaching for Peace: An Indian Immersion Experience in Practical Nonviolence may be in July 2020 at the International School for Jain Studies (India: Delhi, Jaipur & Pune). For information go to https://www.isjs.in

IIPE 2020: International Institute on Peace Education may be in July 2020. For details go to: www.i-ipe.org.

The 2020 Youth Media Summit is Croatia, possibly in July and August 2020. For details visit: https://www.iyms.org.


WCCI 19th World Conference in Education is July 9-15, 2020 at Holiday Inn San Diego - Bayside. For details visit: http://www.wcci-international.org.


The Fifth International Symposium on Strengthening Peace through Education may be in August 2020. For details visit: http://www.esdfocus.org/education-sustainability-asia-conference/.

Institute for Peace and Dialogue (IPD) summer 2020 programs in Basel, Switzerland:

13th Summer Academy Period: likely early in August, 2020 (10 Days)
14th Summer Academy Period: likely later in August, 2020 (10 Days)
1st Basel Global Peace Conference: may be early in August, 2020
2nd Basel Global Peace Conference: may be mid August, 2020

3 Month Research Program Period: is likely August - November, 2020 (90 Days)
There is also a fall research program and a variable visitor research program.
For more information go to: https://www.ipd institute.ch.

Women's Human Rights Education Institute may be in Quito, Ecuador, in August 2020. For details visit: http://learnwhr.org/programs/whri/.

Venice Academy of Human Rights 2020 may be in August and September 2020 in Venice, Italy The Academy and School run a number of programs and trainings. For details go to: http://www.eiuc.org/research/venice-academy-of-human-rights.html.

Campaign Nonviolence: Annual Hiroshima Day Peace Vigil with Rev. John Dear is August 3, 2019, 2:00 PM-3:00 PM, at Ashley Pond, Los Alamos, NM. For information, go to: https://paceebene.org/events/.

The Campaign Nonviolence National Conference, is in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 6-9, 2020, in partnership with the August 6 and 9 peace vigils at Los Alamos, NM, marking the 5th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. For information go to: https://paceebene.org/events/2020/8/6/campaign-nonviolence-national-conference.

Bieinnel Performing the World 2020 may be in September 2020 in New York, NY.

The 8th World Sustainability Forum will be held from 14-19 September 2020 in Geneva, Switzerland. For details visit: http://wsforum.org.

The Ahimsa Center in the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (in suburban Los Angeles) Ninth biannual conference may be on campus, in November 2020. For details visit: http://www.cpp.edu/~ahimsacenter/ahimsa_home.shtml.

13th International Conference on the Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas (EMECS 12) is September 7, 2020, at University of Hull, Kingston upon Hull, U.K. For details go to: https://www.emecs.or.jp/en/topics/item385

The Women Deliver 2022 World Conference may in June 2020. A conference site and dates were not yet set on September 1, 2019. For more information go to: https://wd2019.org.

ONGOING ACTIVITIES

Steve Sachs

"Millions of school strikers have shown us they’re serious about climate action. Adults, will you join our youth?" Global Climate Strike, accessed July 1, 2019, https://globalclimatesrike.net, stated, "School strikers are calling on everyone: young people, parents, workers, and all concerned citizens to join massive climate strikes and a week of actions starting on September 20.

People all over the world will use their power to stop "business as usual" in the face of the climate emergency. We will join young people in the streets to demand an end to the age of fossil fuels and emergency action to avoid climate breakdown.

Climate Strike was the main upcoming event focus of 350.org, while it continues to engage in numerous local to world other efforts for: 1. A Fast & Just Transition to 100% Renewable Energy for All;

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS),
For more information visit: www.ucsusa.org.

Carbonfund.org Foundation (carbonfund.org) continues to promote projects that reduce carbon emissions, including through carbon trading programs. For details go to: https://carbonfund.org.

"Global Climate Strike, 20-27 September," 350.org, by E-mail August 9, 2019, https://actionnetwork.org/event_campaigns/us-climate-strike/?referrer=group-350org-network&source=350org-network&utm_medium=email&utm_source=actionkit, stated, "Everywhere, the signs are clear: our climate is on the brink of collapse, and our communities are already suffering from the impacts. But you wouldn't know that by looking at our political system.

Why not? Because the people in power aren't feeling this crisis like the rest of us, especially those of us who are poor or people of color. Across the Midwest, communities are still struggling to recover from unprecedented floods, particularly Indigenous nations. In refinery and coal plant communities around the country, black and brown people can barely leave their homes without worrying about the air they breathe.

As the climate crisis continues to claim lives, and our future becomes more uncertain by the day, our elected officials keep catering to the fossil fuel billionaires who created this problem instead of protecting people and the planet. It's no wonder young people around the world have been taking to the streets for more than a year. Now, the youth are calling on people of all ages to join in — and it's up to all of us to heed the call to action.

On September 20th, millions of people of all ages around the world will walk out of their classes, jobs, and homes as part of a Global Climate Strike. Nearly 100 events are already being organized across the US. Join one near you now, or sign up to host one where you live.

We need just solutions to the climate crisis that don't just address the symptoms. We know the root cause of this problem is a corporate-run economy built on systemic racism, wealth inequality, and all kinds of social injustice.

We know what is needed for science and justice, and we have the solutions already. If we band together, we have the collective power to make those solutions politically inevitable — all it takes is every one of us acting in unison to create change.

It's past time to start implementing the bold solutions we need that prioritize communities already facing the climate crisis. RSVP now to a Climate Strikes event where you live — and if there isn't one, sign up to host one yourself. Our organizers will support you every step of the way with the resources to help you plan it and make it a success.

One day of striking won't solve everything, but it will show those in power that we refuse to stand by in the face of climate crisis. It will show the world who the real villains in this story are. And if we're numerous and loud enough, it will be the spark that helps turn the tide. And that's all we really need."

Onwards,
Tamara Toles O'Laughlin - North America Director for 350.org."

Corporate Accountability, “It’s time to kick Big Polluters out of the climate talks!” June 17, 2019, in an E-mail linked to, http://act.corporateaccountability.org/p/dia/action4/common/public/?action_KEY=23677, said, "Today, as world leaders gather at the latest round of the U.N. climate talks, I’ll be there to ensure that your voice is heard.

But Big Polluters will be there too. Oil and gas corporations will have an army of shills and lobbyists who are there to push governments to protect their profits instead of addressing the climate crisis. From where we sit, it is the single biggest obstacle to making real progress and enacting just climate policy.

The solution couldn't be clearer: The U.N. must kick Big Polluters out of the climate talks. And over the last few years, more than 400 civil society organizations, nearly 650,000 people, and
governments collectively representing 70 percent of the world’s population have made it clear they want to address Big Polluters’ obstruction at the climate talks.

So what’s the hold up? Governments like the U.S., and the European Union (EU) standing on the side of Big Polluters, and refusing to heed the call to kick Big Polluters out.

Enough is enough. The EU claims to be a leader on climate ambition. Let’s show them what true climate leadership looks like. Urge the EU and other Northern governments – specifically New Zealand, Australia, and Norway -- to side with people and back a conflict of interest policy at the U.N. climate talks.

We are working alongside allies around the world to compel these obstructionist Northern governments to stand with their own people and hundreds of thousands of other people around the world demanding climate justice, not with Trump and Big Polluters.

The last thing these governments want is to be seen as siding with the Trump administration and Big Polluters – even if that’s exactly what they’ve been doing behind closed doors. Let’s show them that the world is watching, and we are demanding better.

Urge the EU, New Zealand, Norway, and Australia to stop working hand in hand with fossil fuel corporations and the climate change denying Trump administration!”

U.S. Youth Climate Strike stated in an E-mail, June26, 2019. "Tonight and tomorrow night, the first Democratic Presidential Primary Debate will be held in Miami, FL.

Not coincidentally, a massive forest fire is currently raging in the nearby Everglades National Park. The forest fire has already consumed 18,500 acres of wildlife, according to Brian Kahn of Earther, which is a not-so-subtle reminder of the severity of the climate crisis, and of the critical turning point that we are at in either avoiding or experiencing climate change’s worst impacts.

That is why we call upon you to continue to force the discussion around the climate crisis as you watch, listen, and discuss this first debate. You can do so by posting on social media about USYCS’ petition calling upon the DNC to host a #climatedebate, which can be found here, and calling out the DNC for their initial rejection of the proposition.”

"Day of Action: Protect the Protectors Rally! June 12, 2019: Protect Our Land - Water - Climate,” Indigenous Environmental Network and the American Civil Liberties Union, June 12, 2019, stated, "Today, June 12, 2019, the U.S. District Court in Rapid City will hear the case that challenges three South Dakota laws, including the newly-enacted “Riot Boosting” Act, that threaten advocates who encourage or organize protests – like protests against the Keystone XL pipeline or mining in the Black Hills – with fines, civil liabilities, and/or criminal penalties of up to 25 years in prison.

This case impacts so many people – activists, water protectors, organizations, and others. Before the lawyers make their arguments in front of the judge on Wednesday, Dakota Rural Action, NDNCollective, Black Hills Clean Water Alliance, the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Sierra Club South Dakota, the ACLU of South Dakota, and other organizers are gathering for a day of peaceful action.”

"This hearing is our opportunity to stand up in front of the judge and argue the plaintiff’s case. Up until now, both sides have been submitting written briefs to the judge asking him to rule on the case in general and specific sub-issues within the case.

What the ACLU will be arguing at the hearing: On behalf of the plaintiffs, the ACLU is asking Judge Piersol for a preliminary injunction – to make a ruling that there is enough of a likelihood that the challenged laws (the Riot Boosting Act and two criminal laws with similar language) are unconstitutional and to block the state from enforcing the anti-protest laws as the case goes forward. If this happens, the plaintiffs (and anyone else) can continue to prep for protests surrounding the Keystone XL pipeline or mining in the Black Hills without fear of penalty as long as the injunction is in place.

What will the defendants be arguing at the hearing? The defendants are asking for judgement on the pleadings, arguing that the laws are constitutional and that the court should throw out our entire case because none of our arguments have any merit.”
"The defendants have also asked that, if the court thinks there is a chance that the challenged laws are unconstitutional, the state Supreme Court should have the first opportunity to interpret the laws and decide whether they are constitutional.

Sheriff Thom of Pennington County is requesting the judge dismiss the lawsuit against him, arguing that his job is to enforce state laws not create those laws. The ACLU says Thom has discretion over how to enforce the law. The ACLU named Thom in the lawsuit because protests regarding the Keystone XL pipeline could take place near Rapid City.

Who is involved in this case?
The ACLU is representing four organizations and two individuals (collectively known as the plaintiffs) who are planning to protest the Keystone XL pipeline and/or encourage others to do so:
- Dakota Rural Action
- Indigenous Environmental Network
- NDN Collective
- Sierra Club
- Nick Tilsen

The defendants are: Kristi Noem, in her official capacity as South Dakota governor; Jason Ravnsborg, in his official capacity as South Dakota attorney general; Kevin Thom, in his official capacity as sheriff of Pennington County.

To read all the legal documents go to: https://www.aclusd.org/en/cases/freespeech.

"Dakota Access Announces Pipeline Expansion," Bold Iowa, E-mail June 13, 2019, stated, "As predicted, Dakota Access (DA) announced yesterday that it wants to increase the amount of oil flowing through its pipeline across Iowa. DA claims it needs no additional authorization from the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) to proceed.

Bold Iowa disagrees. Today, we filed the following request with the IUB. We need YOU to take action, too."

"June 13, 2019, Iowa Utilities Board, 1375 Court Ave, Des Moines, IA 50319
Re: Response to Dakota Access Informational Notice of June 12, 2019
Docket No. HLP-2014-0001
Dear Board Members and Staff:
Bold Iowa writes in response to the Dakota Access (DA) June 12, 2019 'informational notice' to the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) regarding its proposed expansion of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).
DA's filing raises so many unanswered questions it is not possible for Bold Iowa, the general public, the IUB, nor concerned state and local elected officials to fully grasp the impact of the proposed expansion without adequate time and study. The involvement of landowners along the route, Story County residents, and all Iowans concerned about the broader impacts of the pipeline is essential. Thus:

**Bold Iowa requests that the IUB hold a public hearing** in Story County where DA officials and IUB representatives are available to answer any and all questions from Iowans who have concerns about DA's proposed expansion.

Our staff and consultants have had less than 24 hours to review DA's filing. Many more issues will likely arise. At this point, here are the questions and concerns we would like the IUB and DA to address:

1. How much oil would flow through the pipeline once DA completes the proposed changes at the Cambridge Pumping Station?
2. What would be the proposed expansion's impact on climate change? (Note page 37 of the recent Iowa Supreme Court ruling in Puntenny v. Iowa Utilities Board, where Justice Mansfield in writing for the majority states, “We recognize that a serious and warranted concern about climate change underlies some of the opposition to the Dakota Access pipeline.”
3. Would the additional flow of oil increase the likelihood and severity of a spill?
4. What types of disruption and impact could landowners near the Cambridge Pumping Station expect during and after DA's proposed expansion?
5. Beyond modifications to the Cambridge Pumping Station, is DA considering adding other pumping stations in Iowa and/or other modifications at any other points along the pipeline route now or in the future?
6. DA references growing demand from shippers. How much of that demand is from overseas markets? We are concerned that, given the recent announcement about opening an office in Beijing, China, by DA’s parent company, Energy Transfer Partners, this proposed expansion has nothing to do with domestic oil consumption and everything to do with exportation.
7. Would DA have to add more Drag Reducing Agent (DRA) to accommodate the increased flow through the pipeline, and if so, would that constitute a change to the essential product, thus requiring DA to get approval from the IUB according to Rule 13.18?

8. DA indicates that one justification for the proposed expansion is that shippers have expressed “significant interest.” How many of these shippers are simply marketing affiliates of the company and/or any of its parent companies?

9. When would DA intend to begin and complete the proposed work?

10. How would DA intend to keep the public informed of its progress?

Thank you for your prompt consideration of our request.

Ed Fallon, director, Bold Iowa, (515) 238-6404 and ed@boldiowa.com.

"Stop the Proposed Fracked Gas Mountain Valley Pipeline and Southgate Extension," The Sierra Club, August 28, 2018, https://act.sierraclub.org/actions/National?actionId=AR0193988&id=70102000001w8MkQAI&data=a74bb7938539fa1a4343fad9e1765b27001e2baab7cb6d9869db0d9de90d5032833c10adaed207f87878818561&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sierraclub&utm_campaign= beyonddirtyfuels&utm_content=201908_MVPsgcmt1, stated.

The Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) is a threat to the environment and the communities in its path from West Virginia into Virginia. Now, the company behind this proposed 300+ mile pipeline are scheming to get approval for the "Southgate Extension" that would add an additional 70 miles of pipeline from southern Virginia into central North Carolina.

Right now there is an opportunity for you and other members of the public to comment on a draft environmental impact statement created by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission for the MVP’s Southgate Extension. They are ignoring the serious risks this pipeline poses to drinking water quality and does not properly assess the effect of greenhouse gas emissions on the environment. This is not a risk that affected communities and landowners should be forced to bear for the profit of corporate polluters.

The linking E-mail stated, “Construction of the fracked gas Mountain Valley Pipeline has already proven to be a disaster, with over 300 violations of commonsense water protections before it’s even finished. Despite this horrible track record, they want to make it longer, but you can help stop them. Don’t let federal regulators ignore MVP’s serious risk to water quality with an inadequate draft environmental impact statement of the pipeline extension.”

Beyond Extreme Energy stated in a July 4, 2019 Email, “Jordan Cove is a proposed gas terminal in Oregon that would be responsible for more than 36 million tons of global warming pollution. It would be fed by the Pacific Connector pipeline, which will require a 95-foot-wide clear-cut through southwest Oregon’s forests and farms.

In May the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) pipeline denied the Clean Water Act permit for this dirty and dangerous project. But that’s exactly the kind of state permit that Trump hopes to overrule with his pro-pipeline executive orders. Trump’s executive order is only triggered if a federal agency says yes after a state agency has said no, and that brings us back to, you guessed it, FERC (the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission).

FERC is reviewing Jordan Cove now, and their comment period closes this week. BXE and friends will be in DC on July 18 to deliver all the signatures in Person to FERC with our usual flair. Can you sign on now to say you’re with us and oppose Jordan Cove?

This is the latest example of how the fossil fuel industry pollutes our environment, drives climate chaos, and harms our communities -- all while reaping massive profits for its executives. But amazingly, even elected officials who claim to believe in climate science or support a Green New Deal have been slow to come out against Jordan Cove. This is unacceptable because we are at a tipping point to stop climate destruction.

The IPCC and the Trump Administration’s own National Climate Assessment give us less than 12 years to make massive changes in our economy and energy sector before we face devastating and irreversible climate chaos.
Within this context, our elected leaders face a stark choice. They could choose a Green New Deal that invests in renewable energy and puts communities on the front lines of environmental destruction at the center of the solutions. Or they could choose the Jordan Cove gas export terminal and Pacific Connector fracked gas pipeline. It’s time for our leaders to choose.

Simply put, Jordan Cove and the Pacific Connector would be a climate disaster. The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality recently denied Jordan Cove an important water quality permit. But that may not be enough to stop the project. And if FERC rules against Oregon’s communities, tribes and climate they can use eminent domain enforced by armed federal marshals to seize Oregon tribes’ and landowners’ property.

This is a dangerous moment – and our elected officials, including our senators and members of Congress, need to stand up to Trump and his fossil fuel agenda. Sign now to make sure they get the message and say NO to Jordan Cove and the Pacific Connector Pipeline NOW: https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/oppose-the-jordan-cove-export-terminal?source=email&referrer=group-beyond-extreme-energy.

Thanks,
Drew; Ted and the Crew at Beyond Extreme Energy

Sources and References:
https://youtu.be/d1r2T_QRr_k
https://www.198methods.org/2019/02/04/whats-a-green-new-deal-that-doesnt-ban-fossil-fuels/
https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/news/fracking-endgame-its-literally-us-or-frackers
https://twitter.com/RogueClimate/status/1144251675990884353

"Cultural Survival Stands In Solidarity With The Wet’suwet’en People In British Columbia," Cultural Survival, January 11, 2019, https://www.culturalsurival.org/news/cultural-survival-stands-solidarity-wetsuweten-people-british-columbia, stated, "Tla’wilh Timicahah: The Wet’suwet’en People in British Columbia, Canada is Cultural Survival’s Keepers of the Earth Fund grant partner. The Unist’ot’en Camp was founded in 2010 by Wet’suwet’en hereditary Chiefs. Its mission is to protect Unist’ot’en territory by re-establishing traditional Indigenous governance systems and enacting an FPIC protocol for all activities on Unist’ot’en land. The Unist’ot’en Camp sits in the "energy corridor" for pipelines in Canada and is under threat from oil spills and devastating destruction of the environment. They have been fighting the construction of a 416 mile (670 km) liquified natural gas pipeline, Coastal GasLink, which they have not consented to. The pipeline would cross through Wet’suwet’en territory. As a clan of the larger Wet’suwet’en Nation, the Unist’ot’en are represented by chiefs Knedlebaes, Well’, Lht’at’en, Maskaboo and Gohawk. Traditional Wet’suwet’en knowledge about the land is used to govern the types of activities that can take place on their territory, as the Indigenous Nation in British Columbia never signed a treaty with the colonial authorities, meaning that federal government operates in a vacuum of authority on their lands.

Despite this, on December 14, 2018, a provincial court in British Columbia granted an injunction to oil and gas company TransCanada, giving them access to the pipeline construction site. The land protectors have been camping out for weeks in bitter winter conditions at barricaded checkpoints to prevent gas pipeline construction vehicles from entering the territory of the Wet’suwet’en Nation. They have been effortlessly protecting the sacred water flows that provide life to all living beings in the area. The land protectors are peacefully defending the survival of all future generations for all nations.

On January 9, 2019, heavily armed Royal Canadian Mounted Police raided the camp and arrested 14 Indigenous land defenders. As many watched in horror, people pulled together to voice injustice. A call for international action was organized on January 8, where 67 national and international nations marched
in solidarity with Wet'suwet'en. All nations across Turtle Island united, standing together for Indigenous Peoples Rights. Cultural Survival condemns this act of violence and reiterates alongside the Wet'suwet'en Nation that their territory in British Columbia was never ceded by treaty and hereditary Chiefs retain authority over their lands. Additionally, in 2010, Canada endorsed the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and is obliged to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of Indigenous communities. As the Unist'ot'en camp says, "This fight is far from over."

Mark R. Tercek, Chief Executive Officer of the Nature Conservancy stated June 3, 2019, http://support.nature.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=130184.0&dv_id=147176&current=true&arc=edfrereg.wocean19, "Overfishing has decimated global fish populations. Climate change and ocean acidity are pushing coral reefs to the brink of extinction. Coastal communities are increasingly vulnerable to storms and rising sea levels.

That's why the big ocean conservation strategy we call 'Blue Bonds for Conservation' inspires so much hope. Our goal is to conserve ocean areas almost 10 times the size of California.

How? With an innovative model that paves the way for small island nations to protect at least 30 percent of their surrounding ocean waters in just a few years by refinancing their debt. That will help bring fish populations back, breathe new life into coral reefs that help protect coasts, and make the complex web of life in our oceans healthier for the long-term.

We're making plans to put this approach into action with as many as 20 countries in the next five years, but there are as many as 85 island nations where this approach could make a major impact.

So this is just the beginning of a very promising road ahead."

Kendra Chamberlain, "Navajo government officials, environmental groups want review of BLM’s Chaco Canyon leases," New Mexico Political Report, July 16, 2016, http://nmpoliticalreport.com/2019/07/16/navajo-government-officials-environmental-groups-want-review-of-blms-chaco-canyonleases/?mc_cid=9fc33cf88e&mc_eid=cde7993ced, reported, "Environmental groups and Navajo government officials are criticizing the U.S. Bureau of Land Management over the bureau’s handling of oil and gas leases approved in the Greater Chaco area. Navajo leaders and 16 tribal and environmental organizations addressed their concerns in a letter sent to BLM’s New Mexico state director Tim Spisak last week calling for more public hearings on the issue."

The letter is available at: http://nmpoliticalreport.com/2019/07/16/navajo-government-officials-environmental-groups-want-review-of-blms-chaco-canyonleases/?mc_cid=9fc33cf88e&mc_eid=cde7993ced. It reads in part, "We urge you to reject the U.S. Bureau of Land Management’s Findings of No Significant Impact and Environmental Assessments... developed in response to the Tenth Circuit’s ruling in Diné Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment v. Bernhardt , 923 F.3d 831 (10th Cir. 2019) [holding that BLM violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) when it approved environmental assessments for five sets of oil and gas wells that did not address the cumulative water impacts of nearly 4,000 horizontal Mancos Shale wells in the Greater Chaco region]. The undersigned also request that the BLM provide a 60-day public comment period and hold public hearings in conjunction with the proposals in question."

"Here, BLM fails to account for the cumulative impacts of oil and gas development on our water and climate within New Mexico as well as regionally and nationally.

Given this, the BLM’s administrative actions are similarly legally invalid. With regard to climate, it is indefensible for BLM to continue to claim that its fossil fuel program, which is responsible for more than ten percent of the nation’s total climate pollution, is 'insignificant.'"

In 2019, there is no denying that continued expansion of oil and gas production and infrastructure is simply incompatible with any reasonable climate mitigation strategy. As you know, a massive and growing body of science, including the Fourth National Climate Assessment and IPCC 2018 Special Report provides overwhelming evidence that climate hazards are more urgent and more severe than previously thought, and that aggressive reductions in emissions within the next decade are essential to avoiding the most devastating climate change harms. The IPCC report concludes that pathways to limit warming to
That battle starts with the Alaska LNG pipeline. The Greater Chaco region is more than a handful of iconic ruins. Rather, the region is an interconnected fabric of Ancestral Puebloan cultural influence and impact. As such, preservation of the historical values of this region requires a landscape-level approach to analysis and conservation. Unfortunately, the BLM is not assuring landscape-level cultural protections in the Greater Chaco region. Rather, the agency is addressing only direct impacts to isolated ruins and/or discrete archaeological sites that have been previously identified. Worse, in spite of a commitment to analyze more than 5,000 cultural sites in the region, the agency has yet to follow through with this analysis.

Furthermore, the short 10-day public comment period provided for these environmental assessments once again signals to the public that the agency does not intend to provide adequate time for the public to meaningfully comment on its cumulative impacts analysis for these EAs. The BLM has provided a deadline for comments on these proposals by Wednesday, July 10, 2019. Given the immense environmental controversy surrounding the agency’s proposal, as well as substantial public interest, we request the agency do more than provide a 10-day comment period that ultimately only includes seven work days. We request the BLM bring a higher level of respect and consideration to its public process."

"The letter included support from local organizations Southwest Native Cultures, the Counselor Chapter of the Navajo Nation, Tewa Women United, Native American Voters Alliance Education Project, Pueblo Action Alliance, Torreon Community Alliance, Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment, San Juan Citizens Alliance, WildEarth Guardians, Earth Holder Community, MoveOn New Mexico and New Energy Economy as well as five out-of-state organizations."

Friends of the Earth stated August 9, 2019, , "Help protect endangered wildlife: Tell FERC to put the breaks on the Alaska LNG pipeline!"

From the Williams pipeline in New York to the Jordan Cove pipeline in Oregon, fracking is threatening our communities.

Now Trump is considering a new pipeline in Alaska -- the Alaska LNG pipeline. It would transport up to 20 million tons of fracked liquid natural gas through the heart of caribou habitats each year. It would also threaten endangered polar bears, endangered beluga whales, and their habitats. We can’t let this happen. The good news: It’s not too late to stop this project. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is accepting public comments on the draft environmental impact statement. So it’s up to engaged environmentalists like you, Stephen, to demand FERC reject this disastrous proposal. Can we count on your support?

Fracked gas is far too dangerous to be transported through our wild places. Just this April, a gas leak in North Carolina forced officials to evacuate a nearby building. And while they were evacuating, there was a massive explosion. One person died and more than a dozen others were injured.

FERC’s own environmental impact study shows that this pipeline would devastate surrounding wetlands. It would result in permanent loss of forests and permanently devastate caribou wildlands. This is an unacceptable risk for our environment.

On top of the safety risks, if we want to avert the worst impacts of climate chaos, we can’t keep fracking. Instead, we need to rapidly transition away from all fossil fuels. FERC should not be accepting any projects with such destructive impacts on our environment. But the agency will only change course if they feel pressure from people like you!

All across the country, people are standing up to the fossil fuel industry’s destruction. States from Maryland to Florida have banned or are considering banning fracking altogether due to the environmental harm it causes. There has never been a better moment to stand up to the fossil fuel industry. But it’s an uphill battle. That battle starts with the Alaska LNG pipeline.

That’s why we need a strong grassroots movement to end fossil fuels. With the help of Friends of the Earth members like you, Stephen, we can pressure FERC to reject this disastrous pipeline proposal. But we must act fast!"
Persian Gulf and create the condition I ran, a totally unnecessary and destructive war with Iran. Veterans for Peace, "No War on Iran," June 24, 2019. "Veterans For Peace firmly opposes U.S. attempts to increase tensions in the Persian Gulf and create the conditions for war against Iran.

WEBINAR: New Threats & Next Steps: Resistance to the Escobal Mine in Guatemala: Panelists from the Xinka Parliament and the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network will lead a discussion on the current situation on the ground two years since the mine was suspended, and how to support communities in resistance. Time: Jun 20, 2019 6:00 PM Eastern Time. E-mail received June 13, 2019, https://www.eventbrite.com/e/new-threats-next-steps-resistance-to-the-escobal-mine-in-guatemala-tickets-62505054300, stated. "For two years, since June 2017, the Peaceful Resistance of Santa Rosa, Jalapa and Jutiapa and the Xinka Parliament of Guatemala have achieved a rare victory: halting the highly-profitable Escobal mine in southeastern Guatemala through 24-hour community encampments and precedent-setting court decisions.

While the encampments continue, the Constitutional Court has ordered the Ministry of Energy and Mines to carry out a consultation with Xinka People as set out in their September 2018 ruling.

Unable to manage the costs of having its flagship mine stopped, Tahoe Resources sold out to Vancouver-based Pan American Silver in early 2019.

Despite Pan American's conciliatory rhetoric that it will learn from Tahoe's mistakes, the fight isn't over: Pan American Silver has made it clear it intends to re-open the mine. At the company AGM on May 8th, Pan American chairman Ross J. Beaty stated "there is no sensible reason, social, environmental or political not to, disregarding the broad-based resistance that communities have demonstrated against this project since 2011.

With threats and intimidation against key leaders in the movement once again on the rise, we need to strengthen solidarity with the Peaceful Resistance of Santa Rosa, Jalapa and Jutiapa and the Xinka Parliament.

Join us on June 20 (English) to find out how you can get more involved and to hear from local leaders about the court-ordered consultation process, threats against leaders, and what the sale to Pan American has meant for communities on the front-lines."

Additional resources:
- Conservationists have long worked to protect the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness in northwest Montana from one of the world’s largest proposed copper and silver mines. This Wilderness of high peaks and clear lakes is home to a small population of threatened grizzly bears, as well as threatened Canada lynx and bull trout. The water from its streams is some of the cleanest in the country.
- Mining is fundamentally incompatible with wilderness preservation. The proposed Montanore mine would dry up streams and would destroy critical habitat for lynx, bull trout, and grizzly bears. Additionally, the Forest Service has failed to adequately address the mine's potential impacts to the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness or the effects of climate change paired with mining on wildlife and water availability.
- The Montanore mine has a long, complicated history, with the courts having several times rejected its approval by the U.S. Forest Service (FS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because it would violate multiple laws including the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Forest Management Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.
- The FS has released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) for the Evaluation (or Exploration) Phase of the mine and is currently accepting public comments. Comments are due August 8.
- The mine currently has no permit to operate or begin construction, so we need you to take action to ensure that this mine in the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness is never built.

Eva Allapaa and Jutiapa and the Xinka Parliament of Guatemala have achieved a rare victory: halting the highly-profitable Escobal mine in southeastern Guatemala through 24-hour community encampments and precedent-setting court decisions.

Time: Jun 20, 2019 6:00 PM Eastern Time. E-mail received June 13, 2019, https://www.eventbrite.com/e/new-threats-next-steps-resistance-to-the-escobal-mine-in-guatemala-tickets-62505054300, stated. "For two years, since June 2017, the Peaceful Resistance of Santa Rosa, Jalapa and Jutiapa and the Xinka Parliament of Guatemala have achieved a rare victory: halting the highly-profitable Escobal mine in southeastern Guatemala through 24-hour community encampments and precedent-setting court decisions.

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The U.S. has created ongoing tensions with Iran by leaving the Iran Nuclear Deal, by imposing punishing economic sanctions, and by making questionable accusations against Iran. Veterans know firsthand how dangerous lies and exaggerations can lead the American public into war. It is imperative that the U.S. immediately begins seeking diplomatic solutions to conflicts instead of creating pretexts for war. Veterans For Peace calls on the U.S. to:
- Draw down all its military forces from the Persian Gulf
- End its economic war against Iran, lifting sanctions immediately
- Re-join the six-country Iran Nuclear Deal
- End the 2001 Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF) that administration after administration has used to fund military expeditions around the globe under the guise of fighting the Islamophobic "War on Terror."

MoveOn.org has been active with other organizations in fighting the Trump administration's human rights violating immigration policies. At the end of August, "Stop Trump's Deportation Machine: Join a National Organizing Call, August 29 at 7 pm ET - MoveOn/Defund Hate; #DefundHate #ClosetheCamps," https://www.crowdcast.io/e/national-organizing-call/register, saying, "Immigration should be a safe and empowering choice. Everyone should have the freedom to move and freedom to stay based on what is best for them to thrive.

The Trump administration has continued to escalate brutal attacks that intentionally hurt immigrant communities. Trump's deportation forces—ICE and CBP—defy court orders, ignore spending limits from Congress, and continue to prioritize terrorizing immigrants.

But we have the power to rein in these agencies—including by demanding Congress take action.

Join the call on Thursday to hear from leaders at MoveOn, United We Dream, and National Immigrant Justice Center. Find out how you can take action to tell Congress to #ClosetheCamps, hold ICE and CBP accountable in the upcoming budget, and #DefundHate.

Overall, MoveOn focuses on, "Championing Progressive Values: Whether it's supporting a candidate, fighting to pass legislation, or working to change our culture, MoveOn members are committed to an inclusive and progressive world. We envision a world marked by equality, sustainability, justice, and love. And we mobilize together to achieve it" and "Focusing on Big Issues: Our values form the groundwork of our organizing and campaigns. Here are just a few of our focus areas: Elections; Healthcare; Trump Is Not Above the Law; Diplomacy, Not War."

For details go to: http://www.moveon.org/.

United for Peace & Justice continues to focus on: "End Endless War; Military Spending; Injustice At Home; Nuclear Disarmament," with numerous campaigns concerning: "The Poor People’s Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival; Divest from the War Machine; No Foreign Bases Campaign; Global Days of Action on Military Spending; and Korea Peace Network."

For more information go to: www.unitedforpeace.org/.

CODEPINK continues to be involved in a large number of actions and campaigns in the areas of:
- "President for Peace; No War with Iran; Justice for Palestine; Its time to sever ties with the Saudi Regime; No War on Venezuela; Divest from the War Machine; Accountability ("Hands off Chelsea," "Exposing Crimes isn’t a Crime: #Free Assange," and holding war criminals accountable); and a Local Peace Economy."
- CodePink also runs a number of tourism and peace journeys.
- For more information visit: http://codepink.org.

Veterans for Peace (VFP) is an international organization made up of military veterans, military family members, and allies. We accept veteran members from all branches of service. We are dedicated to building a culture of peace, exposing the true costs of war, and healing the wounds of war. Our networks are made up of over 140 chapters across the United States and abroad.

Statement of Purpose

We, as military veterans, do hereby affirm our greater responsibility to serve the cause of world peace. To this end we will work, with others both nationally and internationally
To increase public awareness of the causes and costs of war
To restrain our governments from intervening, overtly and covertly, in the internal affairs of other nations
To end the arms race and to reduce and eventually eliminate nuclear weapons
To seek justice for veterans and victims of war
To abolish war as an instrument of national policy.
To achieve these goals, members of Veterans For Peace pledge to use non-violent means and to maintain
an organization that is both democratic and open with the understanding that all members are trusted to
act in the best interests of the group for the larger purpose of world peace."
For a list of actions that VFP is involved in, usually with other organizations, go to:
https://www.veteransforpeace.org/who-we-are/our-mission.

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. Actions by the
peace movement include, "TODAY FRIDAY 23.8 - Protest in Issawiya and in Sheikh Jarrahh - End Police
Violence!" As a result of widespread police violence and harassment in Issawiya and increasing violence
towards peaceful demonstrators in Sheikh Jarrahh, we will go out to the streets to protest in Issawiya and
in Sheikh Jarrahh TODAY (FRIDAY).
We will meet at 12:30PM in Issawiya and stand together with the residents in solidarity for a public
Friday prayer and protest.
From Issawiya we will then continue together to protest in Sheikh Jarrahh. The protest in Sheikh
Jarrahh will begin at 3PM.
Our presence is critical - join us in declaring to the police: We see your violence and we will not
allow it to continue! We stand with the residents of Issawiya and of Sheikh Jarrahh in their struggle, until
the end of the Occupation!
For more details please check the EVENT - join us and share with you friends! (E-mail from Adam
Keller, August 23, 2019)."

"Protest Vigil Today (Thu. July 25) 8.00 Pm At Prime Minister's Residence, Jerusalem: No More
Demolition Of Palestinian Homes!
Initiator: Standing Together, Jewish-Arab Action Groups (E-mail from Adam Keller, July 25,
2019)."
Chemi Shalev, "In the Face of Netanyahu's Threat to Democracy, Israel's Opposition Makes Rare
Show of Unity," Gush Shalom E-mail, May 26, 2019, reported, "In the Face of Netanyahu's Threat to
Democracy, Israel's Opposition Makes Rare Show of Unity At Saturday's protest, the speakers were more
impassioned than usual, the messages sharper, and the listeners angrier. It could herald a new era in
Jewish-Arab relations."
"An overflow crowd of close to 100,000, which exceeded the most optimistic expectations, came
to see the leaders of the opposition parties standing together and speaking in one voice, after trying to
avoid each other like the plague during the election campaign."
"End the Seige for the Sake of US All," pressintl@mailman.gush-shalom.org, E-mail, May 13, 2019,
stated, "Today Tue. 14 May, marking one year after 64 protestors were shot dead during the Great
March of Return Protests in Gaza, we will take to the streets to demand an end to the siege on Gaza and a
better future for all of us. We will meet Tuesday, May 14, 2019 at 7 PM in Habima square, Tel Aviv."
Itay Stern, ""Dare to Dream – of Freedom": Anti-occupation Billboard Greets Eurovision Tourists:
Breaking the Silence invite tourists to Israel to visit Hebron and 'see the full picture; Israeli minister blasts
'lies',
Israel’s occupation of the West Bank was put up Sunday on the road leading from Ben-Gurion International
Airport to Tel Aviv, two days ahead of the Eurovision Song Contest, by anti-occupation NGO Breaking the
Silence.
The billboard features on one half of it the Tel Aviv Eurovision official slogan, 'Dare to dream,' with the city's coastline in the background, and the words 'forces of freedom' on its second half, with the Israeli military watch tower in the background.

Breaking the Silence's Executive Director Avner Gvaryahu said: 'We invite Eurovision guests from all over the world to celebrate with us in Israel, and join a tour of Hebron to see the full picture.'

The organization, which gathers testimonies by Israeli soldiers who were stationed in the West Bank and Gaza, runs regular tours to the Palestinian city of Hebron. The organization said dozens of people already booked places for its tours in the upcoming week.

Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan, who is tasked with combatting the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, called Breaking the Silence a 'despicable hate organization,' saying it once again finds the time to spread lies against the State of Israel.'

'Here's a tip,' Erdan added, 'Instead of inciting against the pioneering settlers in the City of the Patriarchs, take tourists on an introductory tour of the dreadful human rights violations by the Hamas government in Gaza, or a tour to get an impression of the Palestinian Authority, which insists on sponsoring terrorists and praising despicable murderers.'

The online protest against holding the song contest in Israel has intensified over the past few days, but failed so far to score any major achievements.

'The Palestine Project,' a Facebook page with over 75,000 followers, has been consistently posting messages arguing that Eurovision is being used to whitewash the Israeli occupation. It noted Expo Tel Aviv, where the contest is held, stands on the lands of Palestinian village Sheikh Munis, conquered by Israeli forces in the 1948 war.

Israel has launched a PR campaign to counter calls for a boycott, using Google ads which refer to the boycott but lead to a glossy website extolling Israel. Internet advertisements on Google featuring the words "boycott" and "Eurovision" encourage viewers to click on a link that, in fact, leads them to a pro-Israel website which – in a play on the BDS initials – extols Israel as 'Beautiful, Diverse, Sensational'.

The advertisement makes no obvious mention of the Israeli government. But the Strategic Affairs Ministry - which runs the government's anti-BDS taskforce – confirmed to Reuters that it was behind the campaign 'to promote the positive aspects' of Israel.

"Ashkenazi petition against Israeli State-Nation Law, Press Release," E-mail from From: Adam Keller <1453ak@gmail.com>, June 11, 2019, stated, "A new petition was filed to High Court of Justice in Jerusalem, in a bid to strike down the newly passed Nation-State Law. The petition argues that the law discriminating against the non-Jewish - mainly Palestinian - citizens of Israel, as elaborated in a similar petition submitted by Adalah against the same law. Furthermore, the petition supports the petition of some 60 Mizrahi Israelis who argued that the law discriminates against Jews of Arab extraction as it degrades the Arabic language to that of a 'special status'.

In addition to these main arguments, Ashkenazi Israelis argue that the Nation-State Law defines them as superior to non-Jews as well as Mizrahi Jewish-Israelis. We refuse to inhabit the privileged position allocated to us. We demand a full equality for all the residents of this country. We see ourselves as the bearers of a tradition pioneered by Ashkenazi Jews who lived in this country and mastered the Arabic language out of respect for the language of the region, rather than the "enemy language" which is the way it is often perceived in Israel nowadays.

There were also Jews in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries who saw the studying of Arabic language and culture as an important tool to emancipate themselves as Jews. This is the Israeli Ashkenazi identity we wish to champion, against a racist colonial one.

Read at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/ee48f0_c550f039453743e990f0d0ec088f176c4.pdf the full text of the petition in English (and Hebrew, Arabic, French).

Watch at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edP-41KsbXE&t=2s an interview with Eitan Bronstein Aparicio (with subtitles in English) on "Kalman & Segal" show in Kan 11, 12.5.2019.

For more information contact Eitan Bronstein Aparicio: +972(0)50-6314229, eytan.bronstein@gmail.com.

"Conquer and Divide: B'Tselem launches new interactive map to mark
52 years since the Israeli occupation began,” B’Tselem, June 4, 2019, E-mail from Tamar Lehahn, <tamarleh@gmail.com>, reported, “Today – 52 years to the day since Israel began occupying the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, and against the backdrop of measures undertaken by the Trump administration to promote its ‘deal of the century’– B’Tselem launched a new interactive project illustrating Israel’s encroachment upon Palestinian space over the decades, shattering the land into small, isolated units, and keeping Palestinians apart from one another and from Israelis.

A collaboration with independent research agency Forensic Architecture, the Conquer and Divide project traces how government resolutions, military orders and state planning have created ever-expanding Israeli settlements and infrastructure, promoting Israeli interests at the expense of Palestinians’ rights. The map throws into stark relief the current situation of Palestinian communities, which have been intentionally cut off from one another and exist as islands in a vast sea of Israeli control.

This visualization of the occupation shows how a combination of measures – annexation; establishment of settlements; declaration of “state land,” firing zones, nature reserves and national parks; construction of the Separation Barrier; division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C with varying forms of control; and severing the Gaza Strip from the West Bank – has broken up Palestinian space into separate units that are easier to control in isolation. While Israel imposes restrictions on Palestinian movement as a major means of control, Israelis enjoy freedom of movement within the West Bank, within Israel, and between the two areas.

B’Tselem Executive Director Hagai El-Ad said: “Since the occupation began, governments have
come and gone, and countless declarations have been made. Yet one thing has remained unchanged: all the people who live between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea have been ruled by a single government — one elected only by Israeli citizens, who enjoy the benefit of political rights which Palestinian subjects do not. Israel has doggedly chipped away at Palestinian space, breaking it up into conveniently exploitable pieces, the easier to control and oppress. But the future of all 14 million people who live here cannot be founded on Israeli dominance — and separation and oppression of Palestinians. We invite you to explore the maps in the project not merely as an academic exercise; it is an invitation to see reality for what it is — and demand an entirely different future.

Link to project: https://conquer-and-divide.btselem.org/map-en.html.”


Grassroots International reported via E-mail, June 17, 2019, http://act.grassrootsonline.org/p/dia/action4/common/public/?action_KEY=26824, "We received an urgent notice for international action from our partners in Palestine and I'm reaching out to see if you can add your voice to their appeal.

Since the beginning of the year, settler attacks on Palestinians and their property - particularly farmers - have been on the rise. A few weeks ago as Palestinians were preparing for the Eid al-Fitr holiday, a group of settlers burned down nearly 75 acres of agricultural land in Jalud that destroyed 1,000 olive trees that were over 65 years old!

There are more than 650,000 settlers in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, living in more than 215 settlements and outposts established on Palestinian land and the Israeli government plans to nearly double the number of settlers to one million in the coming years.

The Israeli newspaper Haaretz reported that settler violence and attacks against Palestinians has nearly tripled in 2018 reaching 462 attacks. So as the number of settlers and right-wing rhetoric grows, more than likely so will the extreme violence against Palestinians and their lands. And these attacks often lead to increased appropriation of Palestinian lands and resources across the West Bank.

Our partners are calling on compassionate, social justice activists like you to raise your voice against these violent attacks and systematic trampling of the human rights to land, water, food and dignity.

Please contact US officials in the Middle East to let them know that you support the right to freedom and self-determination for Palestinians living in the occupied territories. By taking action action, you are also denouncing Israel's settlement policy and expansion plans, and demanding that they comply with UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which calls for "an immediate halt to all settlements activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.”

Jewish Voice for Peace stated in an E-mail, July 1, 2019, https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org, "Last week, Trump and Kushner made clear, yet again, that the real goal of their economic plan for the Middle East is not political solutions and peace, but land acquisition for Israel and control of Palestinian lives and futures.

And right before the Bahrain workshop, David Friedman, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, effectively gave a thumbs up to Prime Minister Netanyahu’s plan to annex the West Bank.
This is just the latest effort in a decades-long strategy to exert control over Palestinians and their land. We see it with Israeli soldiers and bulldozers razing Palestinian homes, the expansion of the Apartheid Wall, and the growth of still more Israeli settlements.

As Palestinian land is shrinking, the global movement that has arisen in protest is getting stronger. But the attempts to silence us are also growing in intensity and number in the U.S. and worldwide.

Israel has honed a strategy of insisting that if you are critical of Israel you are anti-Jewish, rather than anti-apartheid and for human rights and equality. To be clear: this has nothing to do with the scourge of actual antisemitism that is frighteningly resurgent.

I don’t know about you, but I’m beyond tired of Jewish identity and history being used against the humanity of Palestinians. I refuse to be silenced.

Join me in taking this pledge, cosponsored by Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD), to #ReclaimYourSpace, support Palestinian freedom and rights and fight all forms of hate, discrimination and racism.

Scurrilous attacks on advocates for Palestinian rights are commonplace and frightening. You can be a Holocaust survivor, long-time civil rights activist, teacher, journalist, or person in any walk of life and be branded as antisemitic for speaking up for Palestine.

And yet what we SHOULD be talking about is what is happening on that map and what it means for the people living there.

The obstacles put in the way of our movement are huge: billionaires pour tons of money into PR war chests to try and keep human rights activists cowed; the Israeli government recruits scores of people
to attack critics on social media; and lawmakers attempt to pass legislation to try and make boycotting a crime. Our very ability to protest is at risk.

In these times, it is all the more remarkable that human rights activists have made incredible headway with members of Congress and presidential candidates. But we can’t let that progress mask the pain and challenge that many people feel when smeared with bad-faith accusations of antisemitism, and we need to do everything we can to end that. This pledge is one way to show our support. It sends the message that we won’t back down and we will speak up and support others around the world working for Palestinian rights and freedom. You can help us make this huge by adding your support.

Take this pledge to #ReclaimYourSpace, support Palestinian freedom and rights and fight all forms of hate, discrimination and racism.

Thanks for all you do,
Rebecca Vilkomerson
Executive Director

Jewish Voice for Peace, July 24, 2019 via E-mail, stated, "Last night the House voted to pass H.Res 246 – a toothless, but threatening anti-BDS resolution demonizing the non-violent boycott of Israel – and the timing was disgusting.

On Monday, Israeli soldiers and border police, 100 strong, launched a militarized demolition of homes in Sur Baher. They claimed the homes were too close to Israel’s Apartheid Wall – even though Israel had built the Apartheid Wall through the middle of that village.

Meanwhile, instead of condemning this huge violation of international law, 398 Members of Congress put all their energy into condemning people like you and me who use our right to boycott to bring pressure for justice in Israel/Palestine.

Boycotting is one of the most effective, time-honored tools of protest. It worked in South Africa, and it will work to end Israeli war crimes like this week’s heartbreaking destruction of Palestinian homes. It’s unacceptable that Congress is trying to silence our protests – even when its attempt is purely symbolic. It is singling out the BDS Movement and demonizing all of us."

Union of Concerned Scientists stated, June 3, 2016, "Tell Congress: Don’t Fund a Dangerous New Nuclear Weapon," "The Trump Administration has proposed a new nuclear weapon—the W76-2 warhead—which is intended to be a more “usable” nuclear weapon designed for war-fighting.

Experts at the Union of Concerned Scientists know that this new weapon would lower the threshold for nuclear war. That’s outrageous. We must stop this weapon."

Lisbeth Gronlund, Memo to Congress: America Already Has Low-yield Nuclear Warheads. Union of Concerned Scientists, January 8, 2019, reported, "The Trump administration plans to build new 'low-yield' nuclear weapons that would be launched from Trident submarines. Its rationale? It insists they are needed to counter Russia’s low-yield weapons.

This plan has resulted in a lot of confused—or perhaps deceptive—verbiage on the part of some of our elected officials. They seem not to know or neglect to mention that the United States already deploys a wide array of low-yield nuclear weapons.

Or it could be that they have their own set of alternate facts?

Alternate Facts in the House
For example, on May 22, Mike Roger (R-Ala.), who chairs the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, laid out his reasons for supporting the new warhead. Discussing the possibility of a Russian attack with low-yield weapons, he said:

'...We have to understand Russia has this capability. ... I think one of the reasons they don’t believe we would respond is we don’t have the capability [emphasis added] to do it without all-out nuclear war. They have to understand that we can, with precision, do exactly what they would do to us.'

Given Roger’s position in Congress, you would expect him to know quite a bit about US nuclear weapons. Yet he seems to believe that the United States has no low-yield nuclear weapons, so that the only US option would be to use its regular-size nuclear weapons and start an all-out nuclear war. (He also
seems to believe that using low-yield nuclear weapons could not itself lead to an all-out nuclear war, but let’s ignore that for now.)

**Alternate Facts in the Senate**

More recently, Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), who was then serving on the Senate Armed Services Committee, weighed in with a November 29 op-ed on The Washington Post website, “Why America needs low-yield nuclear warheads now.” He and his co-author Michael Morell, who is a former deputy director and acting director of the CIA, argue that the United States needs the new low-yield Trident warhead ‘because a high-yield, long-range U.S. response to Russia’s first, limited use of a low-yield nuclear weapon against a military target is not credible. The Russians believe we are not likely to risk a global thermonuclear war in response to a ‘tactical’ nuclear attack by them.’

Again, the claim is that if Russia were to use low-yield nuclear weapons, the United States would have only two options: no response or launching a global thermonuclear war by using its regular-size weapons.

Again, given the responsibilities and experience of these two men, one would expect them to know a fair amount about the US arsenal. Yet they seem not to know—or at least don’t acknowledge—that the United States has other options because it already deploys a wide array of low-yield nuclear weapons, and has for decades.

**The Real Facts**

Exactly what low-yield weapons does the United States have in its arsenal?

The B61 bombs—which include 150 deployed at US air bases in six NATO countries—have variable explosive yields. The lowest available option has an explosive power of 0.3 kilotons of TNT—just 2 percent of the yield of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima. The bombs also can be set to a yield of 1.5, 10, 45 or 60 kilotons.

The United States also deploys air-launched cruise missiles with yields of 5 to 150 kilotons.

The United States is upgrading these weapons to extend their lifetimes for several decades and to add improvements, such as greater accuracy.

The planned new warhead—the W76-2—will have a yield of 6.5 kilotons and will replace some of the existing 100-kiloton W76 warheads on US submarines. It would add yet another weapon to the low-yield nuclear arsenal that our elected officials apparently don’t know exists.

You have to admit, though, the W76-2 will nicely fill in the gaping hole between 5 and 10 kilotons in the figure below.
Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR), at: http://www.psysr.org, among its many activities, "WATER PROTECTION IN THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY"

"Please join PsySR in supporting the documentary NECESSITY: OIL, WATER, AND CLIMATE RESISTANCE" (currently in post-production). Co-directed by Samantha Praus and PsySR member Jan Haaken, the film traces the fight in Minnesota against the expansion of pipelines carrying toxic tar sands oil through North America. When official channels of protest fail or fall short, activists turn to civil disobedience and lawyers seek to make the courts more just in responding to the climate crisis. The film follows indigenous and non-indigenous activists and allies in their resistance to the pipelines traversing native lands and essential waterways. We look forward to showing the film in August 2019 in the PsySR suite during the APA Convention in Chicago.

View the trailer and find out more at: https://www.facebook.com/flx/warn/?u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.necessitythemovie.com%2F&h=AT2LJuQ1AOwcbflpKuhHZs1YYs8dk64JEsrJrJcCSSAOvZWNHBcHzQZn32XSkvOvD1s3wHiOB6c5eOEPQc-TAUykJvY1SFXDmJnsbWFZo7t5xhbtmVtGCR6x_Sq6lyet3SgrYyTDxgjHNT3nuRgtXDi7eqtj6j6y1nY6oaiUuWbHuWjHhAdz3wVQ59-77PH6qzjk9aazDdhp0j4m4_2gGEKjd-oXBIAN2sR7dik0SpDcW8mvQwkdeXOZspjL7wtS9yDrV7oEyVFNFlY3TFD6vRx_iu4QJULig88USQxOlxRjBcXw_BscBp0ZoZsZ3kNotoqYdfz7meDQaCSydnlzTK0pTitA7AyapKAgJ66lnlGmu9u2p6GndVc3-ALsLxszsp2aG0-5rhAgCITBbba149wLehr6UWJydydCPeE2uygcdQJGdT4bK7C5ZRY_SEIWW7fdpvsqBb74SH5opONpqH8CKJEVEA2dS3jXWmHvH_y2XUfnZVAJ1_Ek2uHkHItJbcsxSWhkpncGkQ-X2015C-yTkn-hssGzri42Zop4bph669Y7v1beOMj3qMw6GDSYq059_SFgj3cbpC-WeltLSWyayZqv."
Win without war stated, June 18, 2019. https://actionnetwork.org/petitions/sign-the-petition-end-wasteful-military-spending?source=2019PentagonCuts_WWW&referrer=group-win-without-war, “Sign the petition: End wasteful military spending.” “When it comes to military spending, the United States’ defense budget is astronomical. The U.S. spends as much as the next seven countries combined on the military. The staggering amount of money available has resulted in wasteful military spending. It’s time to stop misdirecting hundreds of billions of dollars away from domestic and human needs to pad unnecessary budget lines for endless wars, failed weapons and the Pentagon’s corporate handouts. Doing so will make our country stronger and more just. Military spending should be reduced by at least $200 billion annually, freeing up $2 trillion or more over the next decade for domestic and human needs priorities. With those spending cuts, the Pentagon’s budget would remain more than enough to keep America safe at a level well above our nation’s post-World War II historical average.

Participating Organizations:
American Family Voices
Daily Kos
CREDO
Demand Progress
Friends of the Earth Action
Just Foreign Policy
National Priorities Project
Peace Action
Progress America
Public Citizen
RootsAction.org
Social Security Works
Win Without War
World BEYOND War


The Trump administration and Oklahoma Governor Stitt are putting forth a plan to re-open the concentration camp at Fort Sill to once again incarcerate children. For twenty years beginning in 1894, our Apache relatives were held as prisoners of war at Fort Sill. We, as Indigenous peoples, know the pain and generational trauma that comes from Fort Sill and camps just like it. It is our moral responsibility to take a stand with our Indigenous relatives trying to cross the so-called “border.” Generations of Indigenous youth have suffered and have been forced to assimilate at Fort Sill’s boarding school. We cannot stand by as this happens again.

Fort Sill is also the same place where 700 Japanese immigrant men were detained without due process during World War II. We will not allow anymore pain to happen at Ft. Sill.

This multiracial coalition of organizations was led by immigrant youth, their families, and Japanese American, Black, Indigenous, Jewish and white allies who all vehemently reject this administration’s immigration policies including the concentration camps that have been built across the country to incarcerate immigrants and children, and which have resulted in severe abuse, trauma and multiple deaths by the deportation force of ICE and CBP.

Throughout the action, we called on Oklahoma Governor Kevin Stitt to get ICE out of Oklahoma and to stop supporting Trump’s administration as they criminalize immigrants, separate families, and kill asylum seekers.

The local and national organizations Indigenous Environmental Network organized this action with include: Dream Action Oklahoma, United We Dream, Black Lives Matter Oklahoma City, Democratic Socialists of America - Oklahoma City, Native Voice Network, Tsuru for Solidarity, Oklahoma Call for Reproductive Justice, ACLU OK, Women’s March OK, Indian Territory behind American Indian Movement, NACA-Inspired Schools Network, The Majority, Workers Defense, Bend the Arc, Sunflower Community Action, Center for Popular Democracy, Sunrise Movement, The International Union of Painters and Allied Trades, and others.

We have just begun but we need you to join us, scroll down to find out how.
Join Us in Taking Action, Tell Governor Stitt to Abolish ICE in Oklahoma."

The Indigenous Environmental Network reported via E-mail, July 25, 2019, "Yesterday a spokesperson for Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe told media that Fort Sill will not be reopened as a concentration camp for our relatives trying to cross the so-called 'border.'"

"Tens of thousands of us mobilized to 'Close the Camps.'" MoveOn.org, July 22, 2019 E-mail, stated, "Mothers, children, and families are immigrating to seek refuge and asylum in the United States. And the Trump administration is terrorizing them with its xenophobic policies and rhetoric. With partners in the immigration movement, MoveOn has been running an emergency campaign to close camps, keep families together, and push Congress to defund the agencies that cause fear and harm in immigrant communities.

On Tuesday, July 2, as the news about inhumane conditions at Trump's immigrant concentration camps was breaking, MoveOn members led more than 175 #CloseTheCamps protests, with tens of thousands of participants gathering at local congressional offices. More than 800 letters were hand-delivered to members of Congress, ensuring they received our demands and feel the pressure to act. The actions generated significant national media coverage and had a tremendous presence on local TV, with a total of more than 1,600 TV hits. And they helped establish 'Close the Camps' as a rallying cry that organizers and activists across the country continue to amplify.

We produced hard-hitting video and social content to put Congress in the hot seat—demanding that members of Congress step up and rein in the Trump administration or face the outrage of their constituents. A video we produced in collaboration with Physicians for Human Rights was screened at the Human Rights Council in Geneva at an event focusing on the treatment of children being detained by federal immigration agencies."
Public Citizen, https://publiccitizen.salsalabs.org/gunviolencetrump/index.html?eType=EmailBlastContent&eld=afa94b43-09ba-470e-acbf-2071c5577422, stated August 5, 2019, "Trump absolutely is responsible for the mass shootings over the weekend."

Add your name: Trump is responsible.

Holding Trump responsible doesn’t excuse the shooters who pulled the triggers, nor does it absolve anyone contributing to the problem of violence and hate in our country.

But we must not overlook the singular role of the President of the United States. Trump and the Republicans in Congress have blocked the most common sense, modest, first-step measures to stop mass shootings and address gun violence: Impose meaningful background checks on gun purchases and ban weapons of war from the streets.

That, of course, continues a long history of total deference to the NRA and the gun lobby.

But Trump has added something totally new to the toxic cultural mix that spews forth mass shooters: A constant stream of racist, anti-immigrant, sexist and hateful rhetoric.

We’ve never had a president in modern times do anything like this.

The truth is, there’s nothing shocking about the shooting in El Paso, which appears motivated by a sickening anti-immigrant white supremacist ideology.

What would be shocking is if Trump’s constant attacks on people of color and immigrants did not spur more violence and encourage white nationalism.

A couple hours ago, Trump read prepared remarks about the weekend shootings.

He suggested a few policy responses that would do little or nothing to prevent future mass shootings, and which in any case he has little intention of pursing (save, perhaps, increasing use of the death penalty).

He also said, “In one voice, our nation must condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy. These sinister ideologies must be defeated. Hate has no place in America.”

No one is fooled by the words Trump reads from a teleprompter in the wake of a national tragedy.

Not when his more genuine, off-the-cuff remarks and tweets serve as daily evidence of his own racism and bigotry.

By word and by deed, he has fostered a national culture of meanness and hatred.

Together, let’s send a clear statement that Trump is responsible."

"Faith-Based Peace Activists, Facing 25-Year Sentence, Defend Disarmament Action at Nuclear Submarine Base, ‘I would argue our communal criminal history has been all about upholding the basic tenets of love and providing for the common good,’” Common Dreams, reported, Advocates for seven faith-based peace activists are calling on the public to support the group as they fight federal charges and a potential 25-year prison sentence for disarming a nuclear submarine base.

The Kings Bay Plowshares Seven (KBP7) nonviolently and symbolically disarmed the Trident nuclear submarine base in Kings Bay, Georgia on April 4, 2018. Last week in federal court, District Judge Lisa Godbey Wood heard the peace advocates’ pre-trial arguments asking her to dismiss the felony and misdemeanor charges against them.

Lawyers for Mark Colville, Father Steve Kelly, Elizabeth McAlistier, Martha Hennessy, Clare Grady, Patrick Michael O’Neill, and Carmen Trotta say the federal government violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) when it charged the KBP7 with conspiracy, trespassing, and destruction and depredation of property.

The activists say they were acting in the name of their Catholic faith when they cut through fencing and wire at the submarine base and allegedly vandalized a building and static missiles.

‘All of my actions and those of my co-defendants have been measured and guided by the principles of nonviolence expressed in Sacred Scripture. I would argue our communal criminal history has been all about upholding the basic tenets of love and providing for the common good,’ said O’Neill in his oral argument. ‘My actions are an extension of my beliefs. This connection between sincerely held religious beliefs and sacramental practice (action) are one and the same.’

Under the RFRA, their lawyers argued, the government is required to take each of the defendants’ beliefs into consideration and to levy the least restrictive charge against the group possible.
A prosecution on three felonies and a misdemeanor was not close to that standard," argued attorney Stephanie McDonald, according to The Brunswick News in Brunswick, Georgia.

Colville said in his argument that the group doubts the government ever considered a punishment less restrictive than the felony and misdemeanor charges and the potential 25-year prison sentence the group now faces.

"Despite being given numerous opportunities, the government has yet to produce any evidence that it ever considered any less-restrictive means of protecting its so-called 'compelling interest,' while its own witnesses indicated that there were/are several such means available," Colville said. 'The question this begs, then, is: did the government consider something more restrictive, and then talk themselves down? To this? What exactly could that have been? Is there still some federal statute on the books that allows for a public flogging?'

The KBP7's case marks the first time the RFRA has been invoked in this way.

In the courtroom last Wednesday, three of the defendants were seeing each other and the other advocates for the first time in 16 months after being incarcerated in a county jail in Georgia. Colville, Kelly, and McAllister argue that their civil rights have been violated by their prolonged imprisonment, during which they have not had access to in-person legal preparation.

The courtroom last Wednesday overflowed with supporters, with about 60 people in the room as the KBP7 gave their arguments, and another 25 outside.

Actor and activist Martin Sheen was among the advocates who assembled in the court.

'I've been inspired most of my life by people who take the gospel seriously and live the gospel as a basic truth,' Sheen told The Brunswick News. "If what you believe doesn't cost you anything, then what is it good for? I think that's the fundamental value of the Plowshares' action."

Circulating their petition on social media after the hearing, the KBP7's support committee called on the public not only to join their call for the government to dismiss their charges, but also to help rebuild the anti-nuclear weapons movement 'that helped disarm the world's nuclear arsenals from 90,000 down to 15,000 weapons in the 1980s.'

'We who share the moral vision of the Kings Bay Plowshares Seven proclaim our support for their courage and sustained sacrifice and call for the immediate dismissal of all charges against them,' reads the petition, addressed to Attorney General William Barr. "The defendants invite us to act creatively. They invite us to join global coalitions working to promote governments' adherence to, and full implementation of, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. They also invite us to participate in campaigns for divestment from nuclear weapons as complementary efforts towards the realization of a world free of nuclear weapons."

A number of global peace advocates and Nobel Peace Laureates are among the signers of the petition, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Poor People's Campaign leaders Rev. William Barber and Rev. Liz Theoharis, and Medea Benjamin.

Judge Wood is currently considering the KBP7's arguments.

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Today, Bangkok Criminal Court is scheduled to hold a second preliminary hearing to consider whether there is merit to pursue a criminal case against Ngamsuk in relation to a Facebook post about Thammakaset's criminal defamation charges against other human rights defenders in Thailand."

"India: Protect Refugees, Prevent Forced Returns: Video footage shows Indian security forces dragging Rakhine
India should prevent forced returns of refugees from Myanmar, Fortify Rights said in a short video today (At:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qq-zg772qAs&feature=youtu.be). Fortify Rights received mobile-phone footage
showing Indian security forces dragging an unknown Rakhine refugee woman from a bamboo hut and carrying an infant
child in Mizoram State.

This week, Indian security forces reportedly forced more than 100 Rakhine refugees back to Myanmar, where they had
fled armed conflict and ongoing human rights violations and abuses.

"India authorities have a legal obligation to protect refugees," said Matthew Smith, Chief Executive Officer at Fortify
Rights. They’re sending them back to a situation of war crimes and persecution."

"Myanmar: Lift Internet-Blackout in Rakhine and Chin States: Ensure access for aid groups and monitors," Fortify Rights,
July 22, 2019, https://www.fortifyrights.org, stated, "Myanmar State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi should immediately
lift an Internet blackout that the government has imposed for more than one month in western Myanmar, Fortify Rights
said today. On June 21, the government ordered the shutdown of Internet services in nine townships—eight in Rakhine
State and one in Chin State—severely impeding humanitarian aid, business, media access, and human rights
monitoring."

"Protect Rohingya Refugees: 'Repatriation' scheduled to begin August 22," Fortify Rights, , August 21, 2019,
https://mailchi.mp/fortifyrights/myanmarbangladesh-prevent-forced-returns-protect-rohingya-refugees?e=24e6ca1455, stated, "The governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh should suspend any immediate
plans to return Rohingya refugees to Myanmar, said Fortify Rights today. The authorities should ensure Rohingya
have basic rights and protections in Myanmar and engage in meaningful consultations with Rohingya refugees
before facilitating future refugee returns to Myanmar.

Bangladesh and Myanmar authorities agreed to begin refugee returns tomorrow, August 22, 2019."

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD) recent activities include: NCDD
Sponsor Shares Housing Engagement Best Practices: http://ncdd.org/30160; Upcoming IAP2 Trainings
with The Participation Company: http://ncdd.org/30243; Sign up by Sept. 20th to Join "The Lovable City"
Effort: http://ncdd.org/30257; New Report Published on Modernizing Congress: http://ncdd.org/30208;
Participatory Budgeting Project Launches Global PB Hub: http://ncdd.org/30197; NCDD Co-Produces New
Docuseries Called Divided We Fall: http://ncdd.org/30146.

Global Exchange campaigns at the end of August 2019 included: "Voices for Global Justice; 2020
Global Vision (with a debate guide); 10 Top Corporate Criminals; Mexico Human Rights; Engaging Cuba; and
Legacy Campaigns."

Global Exchange also runs Reality Tours to various places where "travel can be educational and
positively influence international affairs."

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

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WORLD DEVELOPMENTS

Environmental Developments

Naomi Oreskes, Michael Oppenheimer, Dale Jamieson, "Scientists Have Been Underestimating the
Pace of Climate Change: A book entitled Discerning Experts explains why—and what can be done about it,”
Scientific American, August 19, 2019, https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/scientists-have-
been-underestimating-the-pace-of-climate-change/, reported, "Recently, the U.K. Met Office announced a
revision to the Hadley Center historical analysis of sea surface temperatures (SST), suggesting that the
oceans have warmed about 0.1 degree Celsius more than previously thought. The need for revision arises
from the long-recognized problem that in the past sea surface temperatures were measured using a
variety of error-prone methods such as using open buckets, lamb’s wool-wrapped thermometers, and
canvas bags. It was not until the 1990s that oceanographers developed a network of consistent and reliable measurement buoys.

Then, to develop a consistent picture of long-term trends, techniques had to be developed to compensate for the errors in the older measurements and reconcile them with the newer ones. The Hadley Centre has led this effort, and the new data set—dubbed HadSST4—is a welcome advance in our understanding of global climate change.

But that’s where the good news ends. Because the oceans cover three fifths of the globe, this correction implies that previous estimates of overall global warming have been too low. Moreover it was reported recently that in the one place where it was carefully measured, the underwater melting that is driving disintegration of ice sheets and glaciers is occurring far faster than predicted by theory—as much as two orders of magnitude faster—throwing current model projections of sea level rise further in doubt.

These recent updates, suggesting that climate change and its impacts are emerging faster than scientists previously thought, are consistent with observations that we and other colleagues have made identifying a pattern in assessments of climate research of underestimation of certain key climate indicators, and therefore underestimation of the threat of climate disruption. When new observations of the climate system have provided more or better data, or permitted us to reevaluate old ones, the findings for ice extent, sea level rise and ocean temperature have generally been worse than earlier prevailing views.”

Jake Johnson, ""Single Most Important Stat on the Planet": Alarm as Atmospheric CO2 Soars to ‘Legit Scary’ Record High: ‘We should no longer measure our wealth and success in the graph that shows economic growth, but in the curve that shows the emissions of greenhouse gases,” Common Dreams, June 05, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/06/05/single-most-important-stat-planet-alarm-atmospheric-co2-soars-legit-scary-record?

...
Climate scientist Peter Gleick noted that the "last time humans experienced levels this high was... never. Humans didn't exist."

NOAA's new data for the month of May as a whole comes amid a global wave of youth-led marches and civil disobedience demanding immediate climate action from political leaders.

In her forward to 350.org campaigner Daniel Hunter's newly published Climate Resistance Handbook, Greta Thunberg—the 16-year-old Swedish activist who helped inspire the worldwide surge in youth climate mobilizations—argued that the success or failure of the global climate movement will be determined by one measure: 'the emission curve.'

'People always tell me and the other millions of school strikers that we should be proud of ourselves for what we have accomplished,' Thunberg wrote. 'But the only thing that we need to look at is the emission curve. And I'm sorry, but it's still rising. That curve is the only thing we should look at.'

"Every time we make a decision we should ask ourselves: how will this decision affect that curve?" Thunberg added.

'We should no longer measure our wealth and success in the graph that shows economic growth, but in the curve that shows the emissions of greenhouse gases.'

'We should no longer only ask: 'Have we got enough money to go through with this?' but also: 'Have we got enough of the carbon budget to spare to go through with this?' Thunberg wrote. "That should and must become the center of our new currency."

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With campaigners across the world demanding leaders respond to the crisis of the rapidly heating planet as the "climate emergency" it is, Sanders was responding to a tweet by 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben noting new data released by the UN-supported Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) that showed global temperatures last month were the highest ever recorded for June since records began in the late 19th century.

As the story by the Independent newspaper on the temperature data was poorly worded or incorrectly reported, McKibben later returned to Twitter to clarify the report's findings, but he made it clear the reality should still be met with serious alarm:

"According to C3S, average temperatures across Europe "were more than 2° C above normal" and the "global-average temperature for June 2019 was also the highest on record for the month."

"Globally, the temperature average, the group noted, was about 0.1° C higher than that of the previous warmest June, in 2016, following a strong El Niño event."


'We must act collectively,' retired Australian Admiral Chris Barrie writes in the foreword to the new study, 'We need strong, determined leadership in government, in business and in our communities to ensure a sustainable future for humankind.'

Though the paper acknowledges that total civilizational collapse by 2050 is an example of a worst-case scenario, it stresses that 'the world is currently completely unprepared to envisage, and even less deal with, the consequences of catastrophic climate change.'

David Spratt, Breakthrough's research director and a co-author of the group's paper, told Vice's tech vertical Motherboard that "much knowledge produced for policymakers is too conservative," but that his new paper, by showing the extreme end of what could happen in just the next three decades, aims to make the stakes clear.

'Because the risks are now existential, a new approach to climate and security risk assessment is required using scenario analysis,' said Spratt.
The paper called on national security forces in Australia and across the world to step up to the challenge presented by the crisis.

"To reduce this risk and protect human civilization, a massive global mobilization of resources is needed in the coming decade to build a zero-emissions industrial system and set in train the restoration of a safe climate," the report reads. "This would be akin in scale to the World War II emergency mobilization."

On Tuesday, the idea of emergency mobilization akin to a world war was echoed by Nobel-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz in an opinion piece for The Guardian.

Stiglitz called on world governments to recognize the level of threat that the climate crisis presents and to act accordingly:

"Yes, we can afford it; with the right fiscal policies and collective will. But more importantly, we must afford it. Climate change is our World War II. Our lives and civilization as we know it is at stake, just as they were in World War II. Spratt agreed that a sense of collective urgency must be seen as the crucial element for world governments.

"A short window of opportunity exists for an emergency, global mobilization of resources, in which the logistical and planning experiences of the national security sector could play a valuable role," Spratt said.

"We are in a tipping point that could unleash mass extinction events: 'Once we're over the threshold...you're dealing with how the Earth works, and it goes on its own ride' Common Dreams, July 09, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/09/completely-terrifying-study-warns-carbon-saturated-oceans-headed-toward-tipping?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=A0&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&cd_medium=Email, reported, "The continuous accumulation of carbon dioxide in the planet's oceans—which shows no sign of stopping due to humanity's relentless consumption of fossil fuels—is likely to trigger a chemical reaction in Earth's carbon cycle similar to those which happened just before mass extinction events, according to a new study.

MIT geophysics professor Daniel Rothman released new data on Monday showing that carbon levels today could be fast approaching a tipping point threshold that could trigger extreme ocean acidification similar to the kind that contributed to the Permian-Triassic mass extinction that occurred about 250 million years ago.

Rothman's new research comes two years after he predicted that a mass extinction event could take place at the end of this century. Since 2017, he has been working to understand how life on Earth might be wiped out due to increased carbon in the oceans.

Rothman created a model in which he simulated adding carbon dioxide to oceans, finding that when the gas was added to an already-stable marine environment, only temporary acidification occurred. When he continuously pumped carbon into the oceans, however, as humans have been doing at greater and greater levels since the late 18th century, the ocean model eventually reached a threshold which triggered what MIT called 'a cascade of chemical feedbacks,' or 'excitation,' causing extreme acidification and worsening the warming effects of the originally-added carbon.

Over the past 540 million years, these chemical feedbacks have occurred at various times. Rothman noted.

But the most significant occurrences took place around the time of four out of the five mass extinction events—and today's oceans are absorbing carbon far more quickly than they did before the Permian-Triassic extinction, in which 90 percent of life on Earth died out.

"The planet may now be 'at the precipice of excitation,'" Rothman told MIT News.

On social media, one critic called the study's implications about life on Earth 'completely terrifying.'

The study, which was completed with support from NASA and the National Science Foundation, also notes that even though humans have only been pumping carbon into the oceans for hundreds of years rather
than the thousands of years it took for volcanic eruptions and other events to bring about other extinctions, the result will likely be the same.

‘Once we’re over the threshold, how we got there may not matter,’ Rothman told MIT News. ‘Once you get over it, you’re dealing with how the Earth works, and it goes on its own ride.’

Other scientists said the study, which will be published this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, represents a clear call for immediate action to drastically reduce the amount of carbon that is being pumped into the world’s oceans. Climate action groups and grassroots movements have long called on governments to impose a moratorium on fossil fuel drilling, which pumps about a billion metric tons of carbon into the atmosphere every year.

‘We already know that our CO2-emitting actions will have consequences for many millennia,’ says Timothy Lenton, a professor of climate change and earth systems science at the University of Exeter. ‘This study suggests those consequences could be much more dramatic than previously expected.’

‘If we push the Earth system too far,’ Lenton added, ‘then it takes over and determines its own response—past that point there will be little we can do about it.’

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The forthcoming report from a U.N. body that assesses science related to the human-caused planetary emergency is due to be released to the public Sep. 25, after diplomats and experts meet in Monaco to approve the final Summary for Policymakers.

AFP, which obtained a draft of the U.N. assessment, reported:

Destructive changes already set in motion could see a steady decline in fish stocks, a hundred-fold or more increase in the damages caused by superstorms, and hundreds of millions of people displaced by rising seas, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) “special report” on oceans and Earth’s frozen zones, known as the cryosphere.

As the 21st century unfolds, melting glaciers will first give too much and then too little to billions who depend on them for fresh water, it finds.

Without deep cuts to manmade emissions, at least 30 percent of the northern hemisphere’s surface permafrost could melt by century’s end, unleashing billions of tonnes of carbon and accelerating global warming even more.

The Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate will follow the IPCC’s recent reports about what the world would look like with 1.5°C of warming above pre-industrial levels—the lower target of the global Paris climate agreement—and the need for transformative changes to land use to address both planetary heating and hunger.

In a statement earlier this year, Debra Roberts, co-chair of IPCC Working Group II—which focuses on the vulnerability of socio-economic and natural systems to the climate crisis—noted that the U.N. body’s October report showed the broad benefits to people and natural ecosystems of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.

‘The Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate takes this story one step further by evaluating how human and natural communities will be affected by the impacts of climate change on two earth systems that touch all of our lives directly or indirectly, the ocean and the frozen areas of the world,’ Roberts said. ‘It also assesses how we can set the course for a more sustainable and equitable future by reducing or better managing this impact.’
While those working on the IPCC's ocean report aim to provide the international community with yet another tool to help avert the most catastrophic potential consequences of rising temperatures, AFP pointed out that the crucial advice for policymakers will be released "too late to be considered by world leaders gathering two days earlier for a summit convened by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to extract stronger national commitments in confronting the climate crisis."

When it comes to the September summit, which is focused on the key goals of the Paris accord, AFP reported that 'Guterres may be disappointed by what the world's major greenhouse gas emitters put on the table, according to experts tracking climate politics in China, the United States, the European Union, and India.'

'The Big Four—accounting for nearly 60 percent of global fossil fuel-based emissions—all face devastating ocean- and ice-related impacts, but none seem prepared just announce more ambitious goals for purging carbon from their economies.' AFP continued, detailing some of those impacts based on the IPCC draft.

By 2050, many low-lying megacities and small island nations will experience 'extreme sea level events' every year, even under the most optimistic emissions reduction scenarios, the report concludes. By 2100, 'annual flood damages are expected to increase by two to three orders of magnitude,' or 100 to 1,000 fold, the draft summary for policymakers says.

Even if the world manages to cap global warming at 2°C, the global ocean waterline will rise enough to displace more than a quarter of a billion people.

Experts are divided on the anticipated timeline for such mass displacement due to sea level rise. However, Ben Strauss, CEO and chief scientist of the U.S.-based research group Climate Central, told AFP that 'even if the number is 100 or 50 million by 2100, that's still a major disruption and a lot of misery.'

Strauss, whose research informs some of the IPCC report's conclusions, added that 'if we warm the planet by 2°C by 2100 we will only be at the beginning of a runaway train ride of sea level rise.'

In an op-ed published Thursday by Reuters, Greenpeace International executive director Jennifer Morgan declared that 'tackling the climate emergency and protecting our oceans go hand-in-hand,' noting that 'the oceans naturally take in huge amounts of carbon dioxide and are a key defense against the worsening impacts of climate change.'

Morgan called on world leaders attending the U.N. summit in September to 'commit to adopting a strong Global Ocean Treaty in 2020.' She wrote:

'The scope of this new global agreement could be huge: almost half of the planet. The High Seas, oceans beyond borders, cover more space on our planet than all continents combined. Sadly, today these international waters are being ruthlessly exploited. In addition to climate change, pressures from overfishing, deep sea mining exploration, oil drilling, and plastic pollution are pushing our oceans to the verge of collapse. Only around 1 percent of the global seas are properly protected. There is no effective legal instrument that allows the creation of ocean sanctuaries—areas off-limits to harmful human activities—on international waters.

'Scientists are clear that we need to protect at least 30 percent of our global oceans by 2030 if we are to safeguard wildlife and to help mitigate the impacts of climate change,' Morgan added. "But that will only happen if an ambitious ocean treaty is adopted fast and opens the door to creating effective ocean sanctuaries in international waters."

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Eoin Higgins, "'We Are Literally Sawing Off the Branch We All Live On': Amazon Deforestation Increasing Under Bolsonaro: 'People who destroy forests feel safe and those who protect forests feel threatened,' Common Dreams, June 05, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/06/05/we-are-literally-sawing-branch-we-all-live-amazon-deforestation-increasing-under-cd-origin=rss&utm_term=%27We%20Are%20Literally%20Sawing%20Off%20The%20Branch%20We%20All%20Live%20%20Bolsonaro&utm_campa IGN=The%20Branch%20We%20All%20Live%20%2C%20You%20%20Week%20in%20Review%20&utm_content=email&utm_source=Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software-_email_-_
The information comes from Brazilian space research institute INPE’s DETER alert system, "Satellite images reviewed by the Brazilian government show massive deforestation in the Amazon rainforest, a grim reminder of the devastation wrought by the country’s new president, Jair Bolsonaro.

According to Reuters, 285 square miles of forest was cleared in May, the highest one month total in a decade. The information comes from Brazilian space research institute INPE’s DETER alert system, "If this upward curve continues, we could have a bad year for the Amazon forest," said INPE satellite monitoring head Claudio Almeida.

The Amazon deforestation is just part of a global problem, said youth activist Greta Thunberg.

‘Disastrous deforestation like this must come to an end,’ Thunberg said. ‘And not just in the Amazon... We are literally sawing off the branch we all live on.’

Green advocates blame the Bolsonaro government’s attack on regulations on deforestation and general anti-environmental policies for the jump in clear-cutting.

The Bolsonaro administration in January announced its plans to open the Amazon for resource exploitation—a move that came before the new presidency was even a month old. At the time, Bolsonaro’s chief of strategic affairs Maynard Santa Rosa referred to the Amazon as an "unproductive, desertlike" area that would benefit from development.

In April, as Common Dreams reported, indigenous activists in Brazil sounded the alarm over the Bolsonaro government’s attack on the rainforest and made a non-violent demonstration at the country’s capital city of Brasilia.

‘The white man is our finishing off our planet and we want to defend it,’ Alessandra Munduruku, a representative of the Munduruku tribe from the northern state of Pará, said during that protest.

Bolsonaro appears committed to that project.

‘With Bolsonaro, people who destroy forests feel safe and those who protect forests feel threatened,’ Marcio Astini, public policy coordinator for Greenpeace Brazil, told Reuters.

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Manuela Andreoni and Christine Hauser, “Fires in Amazon Rain Forest Have Surged This Year: The fires, most of which have been set by farmers clearing their land, are raging in uninhabited areas of rain forest and intruding on populated areas in the country’s north,” The New York Times, August 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/world/americas/amazon-rainforest. Amazon rain forest at one of the fastest paces in years, Brazil’s space research center said this week.

The center, the National Institute for Space Research, which monitors fires using satellite images, reported on Wednesday that it had detected 39,194 fires this year in the world’s largest rain forest, a 77 percent increase from the same period in 2018.”

“The blazes are so large and widespread that smoke has wafted thousands of miles away to the Atlantic coast and São Paulo, the country’s most populous city, according to the World Meteorological Organization.”

Most of the Brazilian Amazon fires are not in old growth forest and involve farmers and ranchers clearing farming and grazing land, but this does include some land not previously farmed or grazed. The biggest problem is that without enforcement of laws making deforestation illegal, there has been a huge increase in the cutting down of the rainforest in Brazil. This is important, not only for global warming - as trees absorb huge quantities of carbon from the air - but also because 20% of the world’s oxygen is produced by the Amazon rainforest as it takes the carbon from carbon dioxide.

World wide, in 2018, the world lost about 30 million acres of tree cover, including 8.9 million acres of primary rain forest. In Brazil, under President Bolsonaro, cutting down of the rainforest has greatly accelerated. In the first half of 2019, 1,330 square miles of forest has been cut down, 39% more than in the same period in 2018.

International pressure has been so strong to the news of the fires, that the Brazilian President has said he is sending the army out to enforce laws protecting the forest. (Alexandria Symonds, “Amazon Rain Forest Fires: Here’s What’s Really Happening. The rain forest, critical to absorbing the planet’s carbon dioxide, has seen an increase in deforestation under Brazil’s president, Jair Bolsonaro,” The New York

Most of the fires have been started by farmers, clearing fields an annual practice. But in this year’s unusually dry weather many of the fires have been burning out of control.

Lisa Song, ProPublica, and Paula Moura for ProPublica, “If carbon offsets require forests to stay standing, what happens when the Amazon is on fire?, New Mexico Political Report, August 27, 2019, http://nmpoliticalreport.com/2019/08/27/if-carbon-offsets-require-forests-to-stay-standing-what-happens-when-the-amazon-is-on-fire/?mc_cid=607911b243&mc_eid=cde7993ced, reported, “Now that record fires are engulfing the Amazon, started by humans seeking to log, mine and farm on the land, supporters are using the international emergency to double down on their case for offsets. The Environmental Defense Fund posted a petition urging that state officials endorse the standard: ‘The people — and wildlife — who call the Amazon home are running for their lives,’ it said. ‘The entire world is counting on [the board] taking action.’ Ivaneide Bandeira Cardozo, who helped manage a Brazilian offset project that was derailed by illegal logging, said, ‘People who are against carbon credits are not suffering and don’t want to keep the forest standing.’

But the devastating blaze encapsulates a key weakness of offsets that scientists have been warning about for the past decade: that they are too vulnerable to political whims and disasters like wildfires. As a recent ProPublica investigation noted, if you give corporations a pass to pollute by saying their emissions are being canceled out somewhere else, you need a way to guarantee that continues to be the case.

Julie Turkewitz, "The Amazon Is on Fire. So Is Central Africa," The New York Times, August 27, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/27/world/africa/congo-angola-rainforest-fires.html, “As images of wildfires in South America’s Amazon region draw global attention, a large and potentially devastating series of fires is raging in Central Africa and parts of Southern Africa.” This is the world’s second largest rainforest in terms of acting to absorb carbon from the atmosphere. Some fires amidst the forest of Africa occur naturally, and others are from farmers burning fields. But when they get out of control in Africa, the nation’s there have far less ability to fight them than in most other places.

Kendra Pierre-Louis, "The Amazon, Siberia, Indonesia: A World of Fire: The growing intensity of wildfires and their spread to new corners of the globe raises fears that climate change is exacerbating the dangers," The New York Times, August 28, 2019; reported, “While the Brazilian fires have grown into a full-blown international crisis, they represent only one of many significant areas where wildfires are currently burning around the world. Their increase in severity and spread to places where fires were rarely previously seen is raising fears that climate change is exacerbating the danger” of hotter and drier seasons.

In addition to the Amazon and Africa, areas in the Arctic, forest and tundra, that did not previously burn have been experiencing serious wildfires in summer 2019. Since July, Fire has consumed about six million acres of Siberian forest, since July. In Alaska, fires have burned more than 2.5 million acres of snow forest and tundra, while Greenland also suffered from fire. The western United States continued to experience fires in summer 2019, but at a lesser rate than in recent years after a wet winter. But a dry summer may bring much more burning in the fall. And other places in the U.S. now suffer fires that did not previously, or at a greater rate, including in Florida.

Palko Karasz, "Ethiopia Says It Planted Over 350 Million Trees in a Day," a RecordJuly 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/30/world/africa/ethiopia-tree-planting-deforestation.html, reported, "Ethiopia’s prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, has been getting his hands dirty this summer, and this week he got much of the nation to join him."

"It was part of Mr. Ahmed’s campaign to plant four billion trees in Ethiopia before the fall to combat deforestation and global html, reported, "Fires are burning in the warming.”

"The aim was to put at least 200 million seedlings in the ground a day, and by day’s end, government officials said that more than 350 million had been planted." This work is intended to reverse the huge deforestation of Ethiopia since the end of the 19th century

The figures could not be verified, but they far exceed the previous record. That is held by the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, which in 2016 planted more than 50 million trees in one day, according to Guinness World Records."

The effort is part of the project of the Earth Day Network to plant 7.8 billion trees worldwide. Almost 3.5 million square miles of the planet's land is not used by people, and if planted fully with trees in a few years could absorb two-third of the carbon dioxide put into the atmosphere since the start of the industrial revolution. One of the organizations involved, Farm Africa, has been working on reforestation and helping farmers in several African nations develop forest compatible enterprises, including bee keeping and producing bamboo furniture, while making available fuel efficient stoves to reduce cutting of trees.

Jessica Corbett, "Bad News for All Species': New Study Shows Nearly 600 Plants Wiped Out Over the Past 250 Years: 'Plants underpin all life on Earth, they provide the oxygen we breathe and the food we eat, as well as making up the backbone of the world’s ecosystems,'" Common Dreams, June 11, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/06/11/bad-news-all-species-new-study-shows-nearly-600-

The Chilean crocus was believed extinct until a small population was discovered in 2001. At least 571 plant species, from the Chile sandalwood to the St. Helena olive, have gone extinct in the wild over the past 250 years, according to a new study that has biodiversity experts worried about what the findings suggest for the future of life on Earth.

'Plants underpin all life on Earth, they provide the oxygen we breathe and the food we eat, as well as making up the backbone of the world's ecosystems — so plant extinction is bad news for all species,' study co-author Emirar Nic Lughadha of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew said in a statement.

For the first-of-its-kind study, published Monday in the journal Nature Ecology and Evolution, researchers at Key Stockholm University compiled all known plant extinction records. That effort, Nature reported, stems from a database that Kew's Rafael Govaerts started in 1988 'to track the status of every known plant species.'

The researchers' new findings, according to co-author Aelys M. Humphreys of Stockholm University, 'provide an unprecedented window into plant extinction in modern times.'

'Most people can name a mammal or bird that has become extinct in recent centuries, but few can name an extinct plant,' Humphreys said. 'This study is the first time we have an overview of what plants have already become extinct, where they have disappeared from, and how quickly this is happening.'

The Guardian noted how the figure compares with other analyses of species loss:

'The number of plants that have disappeared from the wild is more than twice the number of extinct birds, mammals, and amphibians combined. The new figure is also four times the number of extinct plants recorded in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list.

'It is way more than we knew and way more than should have gone extinct,' said Dr. Maria Vorontsova, also at Kew. 'It is frightening not just because of the 571 number but because I think that is a gross underestimate.'

Citing the study, Nature reported that 'the world's seed-bearing plants have been disappearing at a rate of nearly three species a year since 1900 — which is up to 500 times higher than would be expected as a result of natural forces alone.'

While the study sparked alarm, researchers expressed hope that their work will be used to improve conservation efforts — particularly on islands and in the tropics, where plant loss is common, and in areas where less is known about plant extinction such as Africa and South America.'

To prevent the loss of more plant species, 'we need to record all the plants across the world,' Vorontsova said. 'To do this we need to support herbaria and the production of plant identification guides, we need to teach our children to see and recognize their local plants, and most importantly we need botanists for years to come.'

Another positive takeaway from the study was rediscovery: the researchers found that 430 species previously believed extinct are actually still around. However, they noted, 90 percent of those species face a high risk of future extinction.

The Chilean crocus, for example, had seemed to disappear by 1950s — but a small population was discovered south of Santiago, Chile in 2001. That population is currently being protected from livestock, and the species is being cultivated in the U.K., but it is still listed as 'critically endangered' on the red list.

The new survey follows an 'ominous' analysis published last month by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services which found, as Common Dreams reported at the time, 'that human exploitation of the natural world has pushed a million plant and
animal species to the brink of extinction—with potentially devastating implications for the future of civilization."

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Julia Conley, "'Unprecedented' Decline of Plants and Animals as Global 'Red List' Reveals Nearly One-Third of Assessed Species Under Threat: 'We must act now both on biodiversity loss and climate change,'" Common Dreams, July 18, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/18/unprecedented-decline-plants-and-animals-global-red-list-reveals-nearly-one-third?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=A0&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email, reported, "Calling on global policymakers to act immediately to preserve biodiversity and save tens of thousands of species from extinction, the group behind the world's most definitive list of endangered animals and plants has added more than 2,600 threatened species to its annual report.

The Red List, published Thursday by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), reveals that a third of all species the group has assessed are now under threat due to overfishing, pollution, illegal logging and trafficking, threats to water sources and habitats due to the climate crisis, and other factors, including many human activities.

Of the approximately 9,000 species the IUCN assessed over the past year, the group determined about 2,600 to be endangered, critically endangered, or threatened, bringing the total number of vulnerable species to about 28,000 of the more than 100,000 that have now been studied.

'Nature is declining at rates unprecedented in human history,' said Jane Smart, global director of the IUCN Biodiversity Conservation Group. 'Decisive action is needed at scale to halt this decline; the timing of this assessment is critical as governments are starting to negotiate a new global biodiversity framework for such action.'

A quarter of all mammals are threatened with possible extinction, while 40 percent of the world's amphibians and a third of reefs and corals—which in addition to providing thousands of species with habitats, also protect humans' habitats by halting the erosion of coastlines—are now endangered.

On social media, climate action and conservation advocates decried the "bleak assessment" and wrote that the Red List only bolsters the case for taking immediate action to move toward sustainable energy sources and curb the climate crisis.

The updated Red List was released less than a year after the World Wildlife Federation revealed that 60 percent of all animal species have been wiped out since 1970 due to human activity.

Plummeting biodiversity observed by scientists has prompted the IUCN to call for the United Nations, at its biodiversity summit planned for next year in China, to move toward bold reforms aimed at curbing fossil fuel emissions which have contributed to the climate crisis and ending other human activities linked to the decline of thousands of species.

'Loss of species and climate change are the two great challenges facing humanity this century.'

Lee Hannah, a scientist with Conservation International, said. 'The Red List addresses both, by letting us know the extinction risk faced by all species, including climate change, in that assessment. The results are clear, we must act now both on biodiversity loss and climate change.'

'This update clearly shows how much humans around the world are overexploiting wildlife," said the IUCN's acting director, Dr. Gretel Aguilar.

Species newly listed as 'critically endangered'—the category most disconcerting to scientists after regional extinction and extinction in the wild—include the bleeding toad, the Northern Muriqui, the angelshark, and the Rabb's fringe-limbed treefrog.

The South Asian river dolphin and the tri-spine horseshoe crab were also added as 'endangered.'

A number of trees, including the formerly-common American elm tree, are now considered endangered. About 90 percent of forest trees native to Madagascar, whose wood is widely used and illegally trafficked around the world, are now threatened with extinction.

'The implications for people are that we lose valuable resources such as rosewoods and elms, and we also lose ecosystem resilience, undermining the essential ecosystem services that forests provide,' said
Paul Smith, secretary general of Botanic Gardens Conservation International. 'It is imperative that we not only halt the loss of tree species diversity but that we restore habitats with a diverse range of tree species where these have already been degraded by human activities.'

On the IUCN's assessment of more than 105,000 species around the world, no endangered or vulnerable animal or plant species was listed as having an improved outlook for its survival.

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It's the earliest the date—known as Earth Overshoot Day—has ever come, the Global Footprint Network, which tracks the metric, said in a statement.

'Systemic change isn't radical, it's what we need to survive,' said the Sunrise Movement in response to the milestone.

Impacts of the overshoot back up Sunrise's call for sweeping action.

'The costs of this global ecological overspending,' says the Global Footprint Network, 'are becoming increasingly evident in the form of deforestation, soil erosion, biodiversity loss, or the buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.'

The trend of overspending is clear: last year the day was on Aug. 1; in 2017 it was on Aug. 2; and in 2016 it was on Aug 8. In fact, say the network, Earth Overshoot Day has crept up two months over the past 20 years.

Put another way, says the group, the world is using up resources like fisheries and forests 1.75 times faster than the planet's ecosystems can regenerate them. If everyone lived like U.S. population, we’d need five planets.

'It is an ecological debt, and the interest we are paying on that mounting debt—food shortages, soil erosion, and the build-up of CO₂ in our atmosphere—comes with devastating human and monetary costs,' says the Global Footprint Network.

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg called attention to the milestone on Twitter, writing that for the rest of the year, 'we are stealing from future generations and poorer parts of the world.'

To help nudge the Earth Overshoot Day further back, the network is encouraging people to take a number of steps.

People can share solutions they are employing on a 'move the date,' interactive map and are encouraged to commit to taking individual actions such as calling on their local officials to adopt more ecologically-friendly policies, or committing to a more plant-based diet. 'If we reduced global meat consumption by 50 percent and used more calories from plants, we would move Overshoot Day 5 days!' says the Global Footprint Network.

People can also calculate their personal overshoot day at the Footprint Calculator.

But the scale of the problem necessitates that those who wield power commit to action. That has some looking towards the upcoming United Nations climate conference in Chile known as COP25.

'With Earth Overshoot Day occurring ever earlier in the year, and a big part of it being the growing amounts of CO₂ emissions, the importance of decisive action is becoming ever more evident,' said Marla Carolina Schmidt Zaldivar, who serves as Chile's environment minister and will chair COP25. 'For this reason,' she said, 'we are working with all parties to find effective approaches.'

The stakes, as Mathis Wackernagel, co-inventor of Ecological Footprint accounting and founder of Global Footprint Network, said, couldn't be higher.

'We have only got one Earth,' he said, 'this is the ultimately defining context for human existence.'

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Leticia Casado and Ernesto Londoño, "Under Brazil’s Far Right Leader, Amazon Protections Slashed and Forests Fall," The New York Times, July 28, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/28/world/americas/brazil-deforestation-amazon-bolsonaro.html, reported, "The destruction of the Amazon rain forest in Brazil has increased rapidly since the nation’s new far-right president took over and his government scaled back efforts to fight illegal logging, ranching and mining.

Brazil’s part of the Amazon has lost more than 1,330 square miles of forest cover since Mr. Bolsonaro took office in January, a 39 percent increase over the same period last year, according to the government agency that tracks deforestation.

In June alone, when the cooler, drier season began and cutting trees became easier, the deforestation rate rose drastically, with roughly 80 percent more forest cover lost than in June of last year.

The deforestation of the Amazon is spiking as Mr. Bolsonaro’s government pulls back on enforcement measures like fines, warnings and the seizure or destruction of illegal equipment in protected areas.

A New York Times analysis of public records found that such enforcement actions by Brazil’s main environmental agency fell by 20 percent during the first six months of the year, compared with the same period in 2018. The drop means that vast stretches of the rain forest can be torn down with less resistance from the nation’s authorities."

Jessica Corbett, "NOAA’s Finding That Last Month Was Hottest June Ever Recorded Bolsters Calls for Radical Climate Action: ‘Action is urgently needed at the world, federal, state, and local levels to rapidly cut fossil fuel pollution and to protect and rebuild naturally stored carbon,’" Common Dreams, July 18, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/18/noaas-finding-last-month-was-hottest-june-ever-recorded-bolsters-calls-radical?cid=origin=rss&utm_term=A0&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email, reported, "As meteorologists warned Thursday that temperatures above 100°F are expected to impact two-thirds of the country this weekend, U.S. government scientists revealed that last month was the hottest June ever recorded—bolstering calls for radical global action on the climate emergency.

The revelation came in a new monthly climate report from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Scientists at the agency’s National Centers for Environmental Information found that ‘the global land and ocean surface temperature departure from average for June 2019 was the highest for the month of June in the 140-year NOAA global temperature dataset record, which dates back to 1880.’

Meteorologist Jeff Masters, co-founder of Weather Underground, explained that ‘the global heat in June is especially impressive and significant given that only a weak (and weakening) El Niño event was in place. As human-produced greenhouse gases continue to heat up our planet, most global heat records are set during El Niño periods, because the warm waters that spread upward and eastward across the surface of the tropical Pacific during El Niño transfer heat from the ocean to the atmosphere.’

According to NOAA, ‘Regionally, South America, Europe, Africa, the Hawaiian region, and the Gulf of Mexico had their warmest June in the 110-year record.’ Central and Eastern Europe, North-Central Russia, Northeastern Canada and Southern parts of South America endured the most notable departures from average June temperatures.

And, as Masters noted, that high heat came with consequences:

Three billion-dollar weather-related disasters hit the Earth last month, according to the June 2019 Catastrophe Report from insurance broker Aon: a severe weather outbreak in Europe ($1.1 billion), flooding in China ($94 billion, including losses up until July 16), and a drought in India ($1.75 billion). In addition, severe weather outbreaks in the U.S. in late May and mid-March accumulated more than $1 billion in losses by the end of June, bringing the 2019 tally of billion-dollar weather disasters to 14.

Five of the disasters documented by Aon were in the United States. NOAA, in the climate anomalies and events section of its report, noted that higher than average rainfall across the Mississippi and Ohio Valleys and East Coast contributed to destructive flooding in those areas. Experts warn that as
human behaviors continue to warm the planet, extreme weather events will become more intense and common.

NOAA scientists found that January through June tied with 2017 for the second-highest average temperature ever recorded in that six-month period over the past 140 years. Though 2016 still remains the hottest first six months of the year on record, last month beat 2016’s June temperature average by 0.04°F, with an average global temperature 1.71°F above the 20th century average.

Jonathan Erdman, a senior meteorologist at The Weather Channel, wrote Thursday that although the increases may seem small, ‘ultimately, what’s most important is not whether a given month is a fraction of a degree warmer or colder; rather, it’s the overall trend, which continues its upward climb since the late 1970s.’

In response to NOAA’s report, climate scientist Phil Duffy, president and executive director of Woods Hole Research Center, told Reuters that ‘action is urgently needed at the world, federal, state, and local levels to rapidly cut fossil fuel pollution and to protect and rebuild naturally stored carbon.’

The NOAA report, as Erdman noted, echoes conclusions about June temperatures by researchers at NASA’s Goddard Institute for Space Studies, the Japan Meteorological Agency, and Europe’s Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

Reacting to the C3S report earlier this month, the environmental advocacy group 350.org declared, ‘We need to act like this is the climate emergency it is.’

The findings about June come on the heels of new research from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) that shows without urgent global action to curb planet-heating human activities, ‘the number of days per year when the heat index—or ‘feels like’ temperature—exceeds 100°F would more than double from historical levels to an average of 36 across the country by midcentury and increase fourfold to an average of 54 by late century.’

The USC report warned that the global community must pursue ambitious climate action “if we wish to spare people in the United States and around the world the mortal dangers of extreme and relentless heat.”

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Hunter, "The world’s biggest companies have identified $1 trillion in climate risks, and that’s just a start," Daily Kos, June 08, 2019, reported, "It's when corporate America, the names behind the symbols on the stock market tickers, begins to take hits to the bottom line that we'll begin taking truly urgent action on climate change. And the good and bad news is that we are very close indeed to that point.

Last year's Carbon Disclosure Project reports show that the responding 215 of the world's 500 corporations expect to lose, by their own measures, $1 trillion in climate-related costs. The individual warnings suggest that corporate accountants, at least, are planning for a future in which climate change fundamentally alters entire regions and industries.”

 Adding%20to%20Planetary%20Alarm%20Bells%2C%20Top%20US%20Finance%20Official%20Wants%20Climate%20Crisis%20%20Recipe%20for%20Global%20Economic%20Collapse, reported, "Demanding action from industries and government, a top federal regulator warned this week that the human-caused
climate emergency poses a threat to the economy which rivals the subprime mortgage meltdown that led to the 2008 financial crisis.

Rostin Behnam is part of the five-member Commodities Futures Trading Commission, an independent federal agency. As the sponsor of CFTC's Market Risk Advisory Committee, he convened a public meeting Wednesday to discuss climate-related financial threats and the formation of a panel to produce a report which reviews those threats and offers solutions.

"As most of the world’s markets and market regulators are taking steps towards assessing and mitigating the current and potential threats of climate change, we in the U.S. must also demand action from all segments of the public and private sectors, including this agency," Behnam said in his opening statement Wednesday.

"The impacts of climate change affect every aspect of the American economy—from production agriculture to commercial manufacturing and the financing of every step in each process," he continued. "Any solutions seeking to address and mitigate climate risk must be equally focused on ensuring the safety and continued prosperity of our urban cores and rural communities. Failing to address financial market risks associated with climate change will impede economic growth, and most likely hit rural communities the hardest."

Behnam pointed to extreme weather that scientists say is exacerbated by the climate crisis, from the heightened threat of wildfires in Northern California to catastrophic floods following heavy rainfall in the Midwest this spring, which could have a long-term negative impact on both farmers and food prices. "I believe it is time to examine the relationship of these terrible, and sadly, more frequent events, to financial market risk and more generally, market stability," he said.

The commissioner's comments at the meeting echoed his interview with the New York Times from earlier this week.

"If climate change causes more volatile frequent and extreme weather events, you're going to have a scenario where these large providers of financial products—mortgages, home insurance, pensions—cannot shift risk away from their portfolios," Behnam told the Times. "It's abundantly clear that climate change poses financial risk to the stability of the financial system."

Behnam was appointed by President Donald Trump to a CFTC seat that legally must be filled by a Democrat, the newspaper noted—and the forthcoming report he initiated will likely put his agency at odds with an administration that caters to the polluting industries driving the climate crisis.

Because the report, expected late this year or early next, would be a product of the federal government, it would most likely put Mr. Behnam in direct conflict with the policies of the Trump administration. The report, which Mr. Behnam said he expected would focus in particular on potential harm to the nation's agriculture sector, is likely to emerge at a moment when Mr. Trump will be making the case to farm states, which have already been hurt by his crop tariffs, to re-elect him in 2020.

Though Behnam efforts and the panel's recommendations may not be welcomed by the Trump administration, Democratic Sens. Brian Schatz (Hawaii) and Sherrod Brown (Ohio)—both members of the Senate Banking Committee—thanked the commissioner for his leadership on climate in a letter Wednesday.

"Climate change impacts are likely to exacerbate market volatility, erode investor confidence, and increase the risk of financial crashes," the senators wrote. "We strongly support your decision to assess climate-related risks to our financial markets and the impact on the stability of the global financial system. We encourage you to reach out to other financial regulatory agencies to urge them to follow your lead. We also encourage you to engage with the group of 36 international central banks and bank supervisors working together to develop analytic tools to assess climate-related financial risks."

"All of our financial regulatory agencies and Congress must work together to build resilience to this looming threat in our economy and financial markets," they concluded. "We look forward to working with you on this going forward."

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84790c14170290245238c0cd4f927&reg_i=52235981, reported, “Moody’s Corporation has purchased a controlling stake in a firm that measures the physical risks of climate change, the latest indication that global warming can threaten the creditworthiness of governments and companies around the world.”

Dave Levitan, "The Green New Deal Costs Less Than Doing Nothing: Republicans keep saying Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s plan is too expensive. But their own plan—to ignore the climate crisis—is even more so,” The New Republic, May 3, 2019, https://newrepublic.com/article/153702/green-new-deal-costs-less-nothing, reported, "As the planet warms, we won’t just lose more beachfront property to rising seas, and more riverfront property to rising rivers. An increase in air pollution will cause a concomitant increase in hospitalizations. Bridges and roads will buckle and melt under rising temperatures. The agriculture industry will wither under more frequent, more severe droughts. Wildfires will burn hotter and longer, and further encroach on urban areas. Diseases that we didn’t formerly contend with, like Dengue fever, will spread. Ski season will shorten.”

Various reports have looked into some of the projected costs. "The Stern Review, a massive 2006 publication covering all aspects of climate economics, arrived at an eventual annual loss of between five and twenty percent of the global GDP, which would run into the tens of trillions of dollars.” More specifics in more recent reports include: The Climate Lab modeled the costs associated with things like agricultural output decline, mortality due to temperature extremes, and increases in electricity demand. They found that by the end of the century, the U.S. could be losing between one and four percent of its GDP—or a few trillion dollars, most likely—every single year. The estimated impact was geographically varied: Some parts of the country might fare better, losing little or none of its GDP, while others could be losing hundreds of billions every year (https://science.sciencemag.org/content/356/6345/1362)."

A paper (https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-019-0444-6) in Nature Climate Change projected $26 billion in annual losses due to worsened air quality by 2090; $140 billion due to temperature-related deaths; another $160 billion in lost labor; and $120 billion in yearly damage to coastal property, totaling $450 billion a year, in just four of the 22 sectors that would be impacted. In addition, shifts in electricity demand and supply would cost $9.2 billion annually. Damage to rail systems would cost $5.5 billion, and to roads and bridges $21 billion. Increased rainfall totals stress on urban drainage systems, would cost $5.6 billion per year. The expansion north of the mosquito-borne West Nile virus would costing $3.3 billion annually [and what about other costs from diseases spreading?]. Increased inland flooding would cost $8 billion more, plus $4.6 billion from increased water quality issues, and $2 billion in lost winter recreation revenue. Damage to various ecosystems will carry extreme costs, from $3.1 billion in damage to freshwater fish stocks to $1.4 billion in losses on coral reefs. The study projects that overall, if current trends continue, global warming climate change would cost some $250 billion dollars by 2090. [This does not include additional costs, most particularly from damages in the rest of the world that would impact the U.S., including from climate change forced mass migration, illness and death, damage to agriculture and the world economy. Even more important, global warming is accelerating increasingly faster than science has been predicting, increasing its costs in the process]. The report suggests, that if the U.S. and the world act sufficiently and quickly to avoid the worst outcome of the already expanding damages from climate change, the cost of climate could be reduced to $295 billion by 2090.

[Furthermore, not only are the falsely claimed cost of the Green New Deal clearly too high, and the actual costs - really investments can’t be stated until specifics of the plan are worked out - not only would a Green New Deal save billions - perhaps many trillions - by preventing losses, but it would create jobs and economic development that would add money to the economy. In addition, some of the costs in the proposal, such as moving to single payer health care, would save more money than those costs by greatly reducing the cost of providing health care].

would unleash a runaway clean energy revolution, according to a new report, significantly cutting the carbon emissions that are driving the climate crisis.

Coal, oil and gas get more than $370bn (£305bn) a year in support, compared with $100bn for renewables, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) report found. Just 10-30% of the fossil fuel subsides would pay for a global transition to clean energy, the IISD said.

Jessica Corbett, "Citing $69 Trillion Price Tag by 2100, Moody’s Warns Central Banks of Far-Reaching Economic Damage of Climate Crisis: 'There is no denying it: The longer we wait to take bold action to curb emissions, the higher the costs will be for all of us.'” Common Dreams, July 3, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/03/citing-69-trillion-price-tag-2100-moody-s-warns-central-banks-far-reaching-economic?cd-origin=rs&utm_term=AO&utm_campaign=Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email, reported, "Noting previous warnings that the human-caused climate crisis could cause trillions of dollars in damage to the global economy by the end of the century, a new report from Moody's Analytics explores the economic implications of the international community's failure to curb planet-warming emissions.

Moody's Analytics chief economist Mark Zandi told The Washington Post—which first reported on the new analysis—that this is 'the first stab at trying to quantify what the macroeconomic consequences might be' of the global climate crisis, and it comes in response to European commercial banks and central banks. The climate emergency is 'not a cliff event. It's not a shock to the economy. It's more like a corrosive,' Zandi added. But it is 'getting weightier with each passing year.'

The financial research and consulting firm's analysis (pdf) highlights a few key projections from a report published last October by the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): if the average global temperature soars to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels—the lower limit of the Paris climate agreement—the cost to the global economy is estimated to be $54 trillion in 2100, and under a warming scenario of 2°C, the cost could reach $69 trillion.

Moody's—whose clients include multinational corporations, governments, central banks, financial regulators and institutions, retailers, mutual funds, utilities, real estate firms, insurance companies, and investors—notes researchers have found that 'warming beyond the 2°C threshold could hit tipping points for even larger and irreversible warming feedback loops, such as permanent summer ice melt in the Arctic Ocean.'

One of the key takeaways, the report emphasizes, is that economically, 'the more draconian effects of climate change are not felt until 2030 and beyond. And they do not become especially pronounced until the second part of the century.'

'That's why it is so hard to get people focused on this issue and get a comprehensive policy response,' Zandi told the Post. 'Business is focused on the next year, or five years out.'

'Most of the models go out 30 years,' he said, 'but, really, the damage to the economy is in the next half-century, and we haven't developed the tools to look out that far.'

Responding to the Post report, which emphasized Moody’s warning of the anticipated damage to the global economy, some advocates of ambitious global action to slash human-generated greenhouse gas emissions pointed to recent findings from climate experts that the world's temperature could rise 3°C or higher by 2100, implying that the economic costs could exceed the IPCC's upper estimate.

Linking to the Post report, Defend Our Future— a project of the Environmental Defense Fund that aims to empower young people interested in advancing climate and clean energy solutions—tweeted: 'There is no denying it: The longer we wait to take bold action to curb emissions, the higher the costs will be for all of us.'

Moody’s analysts examined the climate emergency's expected economic damage across six impact channels—sea-level rise, human health effects, heat effect of labor productivity, agricultural productivity, tourism, and energy demand—and created forecasts through 2048.

'This analysis reveals that some countries are significantly exposed to rising temperatures while others, particularly in Northern Hemisphere climates, are well insulated,' the report says. Those at the greatest risk, analysts found, are 'countries in hot climates, particularly those that are emerging..."
economies such as Malaysia, Algeria, the Philippines, and Thailand, and oil producers such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Oman.’

On the agricultural front, rising temperatures are expected to impact both the health of farmworkers and crop yields, which particularly threatens less-developed nations that are economically dependent on farming. Echoing a U.N. report published this week, Moody’s notes that ‘heat stress, determined by high temperature and humidity, lowers working speed, necessitates more frequent breaks, and increases the probability of injury.’

The report says that in terms of human health, the number of heat-related deaths worldwide is expected to increase as the global temperature does, and a hotter world “can lengthen the season and increase the geographic range of disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas, allowing them to move into higher altitudes and new regions.”

Recognizing some limitations of its analysis, Moody’s acknowledges that ‘there are a number of factors that were not considered in this work. The foremost of these is the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters.’ The report points to a U.S. government calculation that in the United States alone, disasters caused more than $300 billion in damage in 2017.

As the environmental legal organization Earthjustice concluded in response to the report, ‘We literally cannot afford inaction on this crisis.’

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Rising seas as a result of global warming are increasingly creating climate refugees. Simon Montlake, Alaska’s Climate Refugees, Christian Science Monitor Weekly, July 1, 2019, reports that increasingly Alaska Native villages on the coast are being forced to move because of rising oceans and rivers and melting permafrost. This is not simply a matter of relocating, which is expensive and difficult to do, but relocation also threatens to destroy traditional culture and current livelihoods.


The study, published Monday in the journal the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, was conducted by researchers at the Georgia Institute of Technology, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and the University of Washington.

Though this team focused on the Thwaites Glacier—which is about the size of Florida or Britain—the report follows several others that have raised alarm about how rapidly ice is disappearing in Antarctica, including one study from May which found that the continent’s ice sheets are thinning five times faster than they were in the 1990s.

In a statement Monday, Georgia Tech explained that researchers found “instability hidden within Antarctic ice is likely to accelerate its flow into the ocean and push sea level up at a more rapid pace than previously expected.”

In the last six years, five closely observed Antarctic glaciers have doubled their rate of ice loss, according to the National Science Foundation. At least one, Thwaites Glacier, modeled for the new study, may be in danger of succumbing to this instability, a volatile process that pushes ice into the ocean fast.

The Thwaites Glacier is often called ‘one of the world’s most dangerous glaciers’ because of its potential contributions to sea level rise. As Common Dreams reported in January, NASA scientists recently discovered a 1,000-foot deep cavity in the glacier large enough to have held about 14 billion tons of ice before it melted, which heightened concerns about the glacier’s future.

Researchers behind the new study weren’t able to project exactly how much ice the Thwaites Glacier will lose in the next 50 to 800 years, ‘due to unpredictable fluctuations in climate and the need for
more data,' but they factored the instability into 500 ice flow simulations for the glacier, which 'together pointed to the eventual triggering of the instability,' according to the Georgia Tech statement.

'If you trigger this instability, you don't need to continue to force the ice sheet by cranking up temperatures. It will keep going by itself, and that's the worry,' said lead author Alex Robel, an assistant professor in Georgia Tech's School of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences. However, he added, 'climate variations will still be important after that tipping point because they will determine how fast the ice will move.'

The simulations spanned several centuries, as is common for studies on sea level rise. The models suggested that the glacier could reach the tipping point 'in the next 200 to 600 years,' said co-author and NASA scientist Hélène Seroussi. 'It depends on the bedrock topography under the ice, and we don't know it in great detail yet.'

'Aafter reaching the tipping point, Thwaites Glacier could lose all of its ice in a period of 150 years.' Seroussi said. 'That would make for a sea level rise of about half a meter (1.64 feet).'

Experts have also raised alarm about how quickly ice is melting in Greenland and the Arctic, but Antarctica is of particular concern because, as Robel pointed. 'there's almost eight times as much ice in the Antarctic ice sheet as there is in the Greenland ice sheet and 50 times as much as in all the mountain glaciers in the world.'

While the researchers acknowledged the need for further study, they also emphasized the importance of preparing for rising seas—which increasingly endanger island nations and coastal communities.

'You want to engineer critical infrastructure to be resistant against the upper bound of potential sea level scenarios a hundred years from now,' said Robel. 'It can mean building your water treatment plants and nuclear reactors for the absolute worst-case scenario, which could be two or three feet of sea level rise from Thwaites Glacier alone, so it's a huge difference.'

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Jessica Corbett, "'This Is the Beginning': New Study Warns Climate Crisis May Have Been Pivotal in Rise of Drug-Resistant Superbug Research argues that deadly Candida auris 'may be the first example of a new fungal disease emerging from climate change,'" Common Dreams, July 23, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/23/beginning-new-study-warns-climate-crisis-may-have-been-pivotal-rise-drug-resistant, reported, "A new analysis warns that 'global warming may have played a pivotal role' in the recent rise of a multidrug-resistant fungal superbug, sparking questions and concerns about the emerging public health threats of the human-caused climate crisis.

Reporting on the research Tuesday, CNN outlined the history of Candida auris:

"Until recently, scientists considered it a mystery how C. auris popped up in more than 30 countries around the globe a decade after it was first discovered in 2009. It emerged simultaneously on three continents—in India, Venezuela, and South Africa—between 2012 and 2015, each strain being genetically distinct." The study—published Tuesday in mBio, an open-access journal of the American Society for Microbiology—argues that Candida auris "may be the first example of a new fungal disease emerging from climate change."

'The argument that we are making based on comparison to other close relative fungi is that as the climate has gotten warmer, some of these organisms, including Candida auris, have adapted to the higher temperature, and as they adapt, they break through human's protective temperatures," lead author Arturo Casadevall, chair of molecular microbiology and immunology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, said in a statement.

Fungal diseases are relatively uncommon in humans because of body temperature—but if they adapt to rising temperatures, and aren't easily treatable with medications, they could increasingly endanger human health on a global scale. Casadevall warned that while C. auris may be the first fungal disease whose emergence scientists have tied to rising temperatures, it potentially won't be the last.

'Global warming may lead to new fungal diseases that we don't even know about right now," he said. 'What this study suggests is this is the beginning of fungi adapting to higher temperatures, and we are going to have more and more problems as the century goes on.'
Stat News published a piece Tuesday that mentions the new study but also addresses a series of pressing questions about the emerging superbug with help from experts who include Tom Chiller, chief of mycotic diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Tejas Boukas, an assistant professor in the department of biomedical sciences at Long Island University.

Among those questions is: Could C. auris help other fungi adapt to be bigger threats to humans?

That’s a question Boukas is wondering about. "The more ubiquitous it becomes, the more problematic. Because now it could potentially transmit DNA to other Candida species. And maybe even bacteria," she said.

That idea is not far-fetched. Fungi can mate sexually, Chiller pointed out, allowing them to swap large amounts of DNA.

In light of the potential impacts of the climate crisis on public health highlighted in the study, Casadevall charged in his statement that "we need to make investments in better surveillance of fungal diseases."

‘We are pretty good at surveilling influenza and diseases that cause diarrhea or are contagious, but fungal diseases are not usually contagious and therefore nobody has really bothered to document them well," he said. ‘If more fungi were to cross over, you really wouldn’t know until somebody started reporting them in the literature.’

Chiller, in his interview with Stat News, agreed that more research on the superbug is vital to protecting the public.

Understanding C. auris's backstory is crucial, Chiller said, because "these things are going to continue to emerge. And understanding how they emerge and where they emerge might lead us to prevention strategies or reactive strategies or preparation strategies for the next big thing."

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Somini Sengupta, "Restoring Forests Could Help Put a Brake on Global Warming, Study Finds July 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/05/climate/trees-forests-climate-change.html, reported, 'What if we stopped cutting down forests to produce palm oil and cattle? What if we grew new forests on every available parcel of land on Earth, where they could go, and what impact could that have on our survival?"

They concluded that the planet could support nearly 2.5 billion additional acres of forest without shrinking our cities and farms, and that those additional trees, when they mature, could store a whole lot of the extra carbon — 200 gigatons of carbon, to be precise — generated by industrial activity over the last 150 years.

Critics agree on the amount of carbon that would be absorbed by the additional trees, but pointing out that a fair amount of that would be absorbed by the soil or seas, anyway, say that planting many trees would take out of the air half as much carbon as the study predicts, still a very important part of solving the global warming problem, taking out of the air one-third, but not the studies projected two-thirds, of historic carbon emissions.

"In Just One Decade, Corporations Destroyed 50 Million Hectares of Forest—An Area the Size of Spain: These companies are destroying our children’s future by driving us towards climate and ecological collapse," Common Dreams, June 11, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/06/11/just-one-decade-corporations-destroyed-50-million-hectares-forest-area-size-spa?ol-origin=rss&utm_term=ln%20Just%20One%20Decade%20Corporations%20Destroyed%2050%20Million%20Hectares%20of%20Forest%5Cu%202014%20Area%20the%20Size%20of%20Spain&utm_campaign=This%20Boat%20Captains%20Faces%2020%20Years%20in%20Prison%20For%20Saving%20Refugees%20%7C%20News%20%2526%20Views&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email%20ccm_mmc=Act%20On%20Software--email--This%20Boat%20Captains%20Faces%2020%20Years%20in%20Prison%20For%20Saving%20Refugees%20%7C%20News%20%2526%20Views--In%20Just%20One%20Decade%20Corporations%20Destroyed%2050%20Million%20Hectares%20of
Major corporations involved with commodities like beef, palm oil, and soya pledged in 2010 to end deforestation over the next decade—but instead of fulfilling that promise, a new Greenpeace International analysis found the companies are set to destroy at least 50 million hectares of forest worldwide by 2020.

That estimate—the environmental advocacy group noted in a statement announcing its Countdown to Extinction report (pdf at: https://storage.googleapis.com/planet4-international-stateless/2019/06/31708abd-081acff75-gp_cte_pages.pdf) Tuesday—is comparable to the size of Spain.

It is also ‘a conservative estimate,’ the group said, based on a combination of data on deforestation, tree cover loss, and forecasting through 2019. Given recent increases in tree loss cover, ‘the actual figure could be much higher.’

Companies named in the report include General Mills, IKEA, Johnson & Johnson, Kellogg, L’Oréal, Mars, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Procter & Gamble, and Unilever.

Greenpeace released its new report as over a thousand corporate executives were in Vancouver for the global summit of the Consumer Goods Forum (CGF), a group led by various CEOs that brings together retailers and manufacturers.

In 2010, the CGF’s board approved a resolution to achieve zero net deforestation by 2020 ‘through the responsible sourcing of these key commodities—soy, palm oil, paper and pulp, and cattle—so that the sourcing of these key commodities will not deplete tropical rainforests.’

The Greenpeace report, released just months away from the CGF’s deadline, details how consumer goods companies have failed to meet the deforestation goal, and the consequences of it. As Greenpeace U.K.’s Anna Jones put it, ‘these companies are destroying our children’s future by driving us towards climate and ecological collapse.’

‘They’ve wasted a decade on half-measures and in that time vast areas of the natural world have been destroyed,’ said Jones, the group’s global project lead for forests. ‘They should be in crisis talks right now, but they’re still trying to grow demand for products that will drive forest destruction even further.’

The CGF told The Guardian in a statement Tuesday that ‘members have moved substantially closer to our goal of 100 percent sustainable sourcing of the four commodity groups. But over the last nine years we have also learned that the forces driving deforestation are more complex than almost any stakeholder realized in 2010.’

Member companies, the newspaper reported, no longer see the ‘sustainable commodities’ approach as effective, so they have spent the past 18 months working with outside stakeholders on a new strategy that will be discussed at the summit this week and unveiled during U.N. climate week in September.

As leaders of consumer goods companies have spent the past decade learning their approach was flawed from the start, the Greenpeace report explains, ‘the trade in high-risk commodities has boomed.’

Since 2010, the area planted with soya in Brazil has increased by 45, Indonesian palm oil production is up 75 percent, and Côte d’Ivoire’s cocoa footprint has grown by 80 percent. And the trend is set to continue: by 2050, global meat consumption (and hence production) is forecast to rise by 76 percent, soya production by nearly 45 percent, and palm oil production by nearly 60 percent.

‘In the Congo Basin, we are witnessing widespread environmental and human rights violations in the name of development and the global commodities trade,’ said Victoria CheThoen of Greenpeace Africa. ‘It’s all a kleptocracy where governments and companies collude to loot our natural resources and ordinary people pay the price.’

Meanwhile, in Brazil, ‘the soya and cattle industries have been trash[ing] the Cerrado—destroying the local environment, aggravating the climate crisis, and displacing and committing violence against Indigenous and traditional populations that have occupied the territory for hundreds of years,’ Romulo Batista of the group’s local chapter said. ‘Global brands must bring their suppliers under control.’

Greenpeace analyzed the devastation caused not only by members of the CGF, but also signatories to the New York Declaration on Forests and those that ‘had a cross-commodity forest protection policy, or had expressed on their websites an ambition, goal, or commitment to eliminate deforestation from their supply chains.’
Earlier this year, the advocacy group asked more than 50 traders, retailers, producers, and consumer goods companies to 'demonstrate their progress towards ending deforestation,' the report says. "Not a single company was able to demonstrate meaningful effort to eradicate deforestation from its supply chain.'

The report outlines how deforestation relates to recent warnings from global scientists about the rising likelihood of climate catastrophe and devastating biodiversity loss unless the international community works together to rapidly reform energy, transportation, and agricultural systems.

Halting deforestation and restoring the world's forests is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure rapid carbon uptake. In conjunction with phasing out fossil fuels, such action is essential if we are to limit global temperature rises to 1.5°C. Some 80 percent of global deforestation is a result of agricultural production, concentrated in tropical countries whose forests store enormous amounts of carbon and are most urgent to protect. The destruction of forests and other natural ecosystems by industrial agriculture is also wiping out the Earth's biodiversity; around 1 million species are now at risk of extinction.

Preventing climate and ecological breakdown requires 'transformatory changes' to the way forest and agricultural commodities are produced, traded, and consumed, producing and consuming less meat and dairy, and phasing out crop-based biofuels and bioplastics. Such changes would also deliver major gains for human health and the health of our planet. Companies face a stark choice: clean up the industrial food system or clear out of the global commodities trade.

With the release Greenpeace's analysis, Jones said, "Our message to companies is simple: evolve your business to prevent climate and ecological breakdown.'

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"Alaska hits 90 degrees on July 4th, breaking 50-year-old record," Daily Kos, July 5, 2019, https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/7/5/1869652/-Alaska-hits-90-degrees-on-July-4th-breaking-50-year-old-record, reported, "Alaska has been seeing a heat wave this spring and summer. Temperatures have been up in place like Utqiagvik (formerly known as Barrow), 18.6 degrees Fahrenheit above normal. This Fourth of July was no exception to the record-breaking heat, as CNN reports that 90 degree temperatures in The Last Frontier were recorded July Fourth. The record-setting heat number was taken at Anchorage's airport and broke the previous record set in 1969." This is all part of heat waves seen round the world this spring and summer.


Videos have surfaced on social media in which the raging floodwaters turned roads into rivers. One social media user captured a video while driving through high floodwaters in the Virginia Avenue Tunnel on Monday morning and said, "You’re going to need a boat to pass underneath the Virginia Ave. underpass on I-66 in NW D.C."

Several water rescues were performed as high waters overflowed the roads. Local officials urged motorists to stay off the roads on Monday morning due to flash floods. Numerous roads in downtown Washington, D.C., as well as surrounding areas, were closed on Monday morning due to the heavy floodwater."

Wild Earth Guardians, "Forest Service Halts Massive Logging and Road Building Project," reported, June 21, 2019, https://wildearthguardians.org/press-releases/u-s-forest-service-pulls-medicine-bow-landscape-analysis-vegetation-project/, "Yesterday, we learned that, thanks to Guardians and allies, the Forest Service put the brakes on perhaps the largest logging and road building project in Wyoming’s history, the massive Landscape Analysis Vegetation (LaVA) Project."
Located on the Medicine Bow National Forest, this project covered 850,000 acres and would have logged 360,000 acres, including 123,000 acres across 25 different Roadless Areas. It would also have included punching in 600 miles of temporary roads that rarely get completely removed.

The Forest Service failed to provide the necessary details in its general analysis required under the National Environmental Policy Act, such as where it would build the roads or where it would actually log trees. Instead, with this 'leap first, look later' approach, the agency said it would determine these crucial details after approval. By halting the project, we hope forest officials now understand they cannot continue to propose these massive projects that circumvent our laws to protect the environment and wildlife habitat."

Christopher Flavell, "With More Storms and Rising Seas, Which U.S. Cities Should Be Saved First?" The New York Times, June 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/climate/seawalls-cities-cost-climate-change.html, reported, "As disaster costs keep rising nationwide, a troubling new debate has become urgent: If there's not enough money to protect every coastal community from the effects of human-caused global warming, how should we decide which ones to save first?

After three years of brutal flooding and hurricanes in the United States, there is growing consensus among policymakers and scientists that coastal areas will require significant spending to ride out future storms and rising sea levels — not in decades, but now and in the very near future. There is also a growing realization that some communities, even sizable ones, will be left behind."

Climate change has brought severe drought in Panama, lowering the water levels in the Panama Canal and reducing its navigability (Henry Fountain, "Water Levels Drop at Panama Canal, as Climate Change Alters Weather Patterns," The New York Times, May 18, 2019).


Solar experts and environmentalists blame the state’s utilities. The utilities have hindered potential rivals seeking to offer residential solar power. They have spent tens of millions of dollars on lobbying, ad campaigns and political contributions. And when homeowners purchase solar equipment, the utilities have delayed connecting the systems for months."

Other Republican controlled states have also made it more difficult and expensive to install solar power.


"By the end of the meeting, however, leaders were only able to agree on a compromise resolution to study ways to make the bloc ‘climate neutral’ without mentioning a target date."

Ireland to ban new petrol and diesel vehicles from 2030," BBC, 17 June 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-4668791, reported, "The Irish government plans to ban the sale of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030, as part of a major strategy to protect the environment.

The aim is to ensure that all new cars and vans on Irish roads in 11 years’ time are electric vehicles.

The proposed legislation was among 180 measures in the government’s Climate Action Plan, published on Monday."
"The Climate Action Plan states that the Republic of Ireland is 'way off course' in its attempts to achieve its emissions targets.

Unveiling the plan on Monday, the Environment Minister Richard Bruton said Ireland was 'currently 85% dependent on fossil fuels.'

'Mr Bruton said the plan was a roadmap to achieving existing 2030 emissions targets and would put Ireland 'on a trajectory to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050'.

The hope is that by the time the petrol and diesel vehicle ban is introduced in 2030 there will be 950,000 electric vehicles on Irish roads.

'The government is set to invest in a 'nationwide' charging network to power the new vehicles.

By 2025, at least one recharging point will be required at new non-residential buildings with more than 10 parking spaces.'

'Mr Bruton said climate targets would be set for every relevant sector of government and public body, including housing; transport; agriculture and the public sector.'


The farm, known as the Lake Turkana Wind Power (LTWP) will generate around 310 megawatts of power to the national grid and will increase the country's electricity supply by 13%, President Uhuru Kenyatta said at the launch of the project on Friday."


The declaration came in a letter—which other education institutions are encouraged to sign—that was organized by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC), U.S.-based higher education climate action organization Second Nature, and U.N. Environment Program's (UNEP) Youth and Education Alliance.

The letter, according to a statement from organizers, 'marks the first time further and higher education establishments have come together to make a collective commitment to address the climate emergency,' and outlines the three-point plan:

Mobilizing more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation; and increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curricula, campus, and community outreach programs.

'The young minds that are shaped by our institutions must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and capability to respond to the ever-growing challenges of climate change,' the letter says. 'We all need to work together to nurture a habitable planet for future generations and to play our part in building a greener and cleaner future for all.'

The letter, which calls on other institutions and governments to declare a climate emergency and pursue urgent action to combat it, was presented at a Wednesday event hosted by the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative—a partnership of various United Nations agencies—at U.N. headquarters in New York City.

'The expectation is that over 10,000 institutions of higher and further education will come on board before the end of the 2019, with governments invited to support their leadership with incentives to take action," said the organizers' statement. So far, the letter has been signed by 25 networks that..."
represent approximately 7,050 institutions and 59 individual institutions that, combined, have about 652,000 students.

The individual institutions that have joined the declaration include five in the continental United States and two in Puerto Rico as well as colleges and universities in Argentina, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Germany, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Kenya, Kuwait, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Panama, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela.

'What we teach shapes the future. We welcome this commitment from universities to go climate neutral by 2030 and to scale-up their efforts on campus,' said UNEP executive director Inger Andersen. 'Young people are increasingly at the forefront of calls for more action on climate and environmental challenges. Initiatives which directly involve the youth in this critical work are a valuable contribution to achieving environmental sustainability.'

The declaration follows months of students—from all levels of education—taking to the streets around the world as part of the school strike for climate movement, which calls on governments and powerful institutions to pursue bolder policies targeting the human-caused climate crisis.

Praising the college and universities' letter on Wednesday, Charlotte Bonner of Students Organizing for Sustainability (SOS) said that 'young people around the world feel that schools, colleges, and universities have been too slow to react to the crisis that is now bearing down on us.'

'We welcome the news that they are declaring a climate emergency, we have no time to lose,' Bronner added. 'We will be calling on those who haven't yet supported this initiative, to come on board. Of course, the most important element is the action that follows.'

Read the full letter below. Representatives for education institutions can sign the letter here.

As institutions and networks of higher and further education from across the world, we collectively declare a Climate Emergency in recognition of the need for a drastic societal shift to combat the growing threat of climate change.

The young minds that are shaped by our institutions must be equipped with the knowledge, skills and capability to respond to the ever-growing challenges of climate change. We all need to work together to nurture a habitable planet for future generations and to play our part in building a greener and cleaner future for all.

We are today committing to collectively step up to the challenge by supporting a three-point plan which includes:

- **Mobilizing more resources for action-oriented climate change research and skills creation;**
- **Committing to going carbon neutral by 2030 or 2050 at the very latest;**
- **Increasing the delivery of environmental and sustainability education across curriculum, campus and community outreach programmes.**

We call on governments and other education institutions to join us in declaring a Climate Emergency and back this up with actions that will help create a better future for both people and our planet.

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Isabella Kwai, "Sydney to Declare a Climate Emergency in Face of National Inaction," The New York Times, June 21, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/21/world/australia/sydney-climate-emergency.html, reported, "Sydney, the largest city in a country acutely vulnerable to global warming, moved on Friday to declare a climate emergency, joining hundreds of local governments around the world in calling for urgent steps to combat the crisis, some in the face of inaction by national politicians."

The declaration does not include any major new actions. But Mayor Clover Moore said it was important that Sydney, which has already made ambitious pledges to reduce greenhouse emissions, raise its voice in a global demand for action."

Indigenous people on the Torres Strait Island of Masig, Australia, filed a claim with the United Nations, in May 2019, saying that by failing to take adequate action to counter global warming which is causing rising seas and more frequent and vigorous storms to erode their island home and destroying sacred and historic sites, and thus destroying their culture, Australia is infringing on their human rights.


Walter Einenkel, "Trump administration sabotages the largest U.S. offshore wind farm project," Daily Kos, August 19, 2019, https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/8/19/1879969/-Trump-administration-sabotages-the-largest-U-S-offshore-wind-farm-project, "Last May, Massachusetts announced that Vineyard Wind—a project to build 800 megawatts worth of wind turbines off the coast of Martha's Vineyard, had won a bid to begin production. The project promises to be the largest 'offshore wind complex' in the United States. The Massachusetts project was announced along side Rhode Island’s decision to allow Deepwater Wind to begin production on a 400 megawatt offshore facility. This is good news and in line with Bay State’s 2016 decision to build 1.6 gigawatts of offshore wind power by 2027.’

Now, Inside Climate News reports that the Trump administration, best known for expediting fossil fuel production in tandem with deregulating the industry, is slowing down the start of production—set for this year—on the Massachusetts' project. The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), under Donald Trump’s Executive Order 13807, wants to really dig down deep on their new expanded review of the Vineyard Wind project.

Inside Climate News explains that this delay impacts a big tax credit, set to end this year, which was a motivator for the beginning of construction; and while developers say they are still committed to the project, the potential loss of the tax credit could lead them to rethink their plans."


The three car companies joining California in the agreement are Honda, Ford, Volkswagen and BMW, with Mercedes-Benz preparing to join, as of August 21.

Jessica Corbett, "Not 'Freedom Gas' But 'Failure Gas': First-of-Its-Kind Report Details Planetary Perils of US Fracking Infrastructure Boom: 'These projects aren't just associated with health and safety risks: if even a fraction of them come to fruition, they will condemn the planet to a future of climate chaos,'" Common Dreams, June 5, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/06/05/not-freedom-gas-failure-gas-first-of-its-kind-report-details-planetary-perils-us-fracking-infrastru...Kind%20Details%20Planetary%20Perils%20of%20US%20Fracking%20Infrastructure%20Boom&utm_campaign%27Pay%2YYou%2Workers%20a%20Living%20Wage%2C%27%20Sanders%20Tells%20Walmart%20Its%20Face%20%7C%20News%20%526%20Views&utm_content%2Get%2050%20Software%2527%20Pay%20Workers%20a%20Living%20Wage%2C%27%20 Sanders%20Tells%20Walmart%20Its%20Face%20%7C%20News%20%526%20Views--Not%20Freedom%20Gas%27%20But%207%27Failure%20Gas%27%3A%20First-of-Its-Kind%20Reports%20Details%20Planetary%20Perils%20of%20US%20Fracking%20Infrastructure%20Boom, reported,'A first-of-its-kind report released Wednesday by Food & Water Watch (at: https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/problems/fracking) details the more than 700 new U.S. facilities that have been recently built or proposed for development 'to capitalize off of a glut of cheap fracked gas,' and the consequences for the planet and its inhabitants if these projects are allowed to continue.
The report comes a week after top Energy Department officials, in a press release about natural gas exports, referred to fossil fuels as 'molecules of U.S. freedom' and 'freedom gas.' Climate campaigners characterized that widely ridiculed language as just another example of the Trump administration’s demonstrated commitment to planetary destruction.

'The Trump administration calls it 'freedom gas,' but what we're really talking about here is failure gas,' Food & Water Watch's Seth Gladstone told Common Dreams about the report. 'Continuing to invest in fracked gas would represent a failure to address plastics pollution, a failure to prioritize human health and safety, and a failure to protect future generations from climate chaos.'

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, has raised concerns about public health in nearby communities—numerous studies have tied fracking to frequent hospitalizations for genital, skin, and urinary conditions as well as increased rates of asthma, cancer, and motor vehicle fatalities. But the concerns don't end there.

'These projects aren't just associated with health and safety risks: if even a fraction of them come to fruition, they will condemn the planet to a future of climate chaos.' Food & Water Watch executive director Wenonah Hauter warns in the forward of the report.

Reflecting on what research on fracking has revealed in recent years, Hauter writes: 'Natural gas, touted as a “bridge fuel” to a clean energy future, was actually helping to tip the scales of climate stability past the point of no return. Fracked gas was found to be a climate killer.'

The group’s new report—entitled Fracking Endgame: Locked Into Plastics, Pollution, and Climate Chaos (pdf)—focuses on three key industries that are both benefiting from and helping to drive the country’s fracking boom: the petrochemicals and plastics industries that use natural gas liquids as a key feedstock for their manufacturing; gas exporters building liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals to ship gas overseas; and natural gas-fired power plants.

This new analysis paints a devastating picture of what our world will look like if fracking and fossil fuel infrastructure rollout aren't halted soon. But the damage to our bodies is already happening,' Dr. Sandra Steingraber, a biologist, environmental activist, and author, said in a statement. 'It needs to stop now.'

Fracking Endgame breaks down how each of these industries forms a symbiotically profitable business alliance with the fracking industry; and how they are rapidly expanding, with hundreds of projects recently completed or in the pipeline:

*Proliferation of plastics plants to capitalize on fracking: Industry experts project that the plastics industry will have added 28 million tons of plastic production between 2011 and 2020, and more than $202 billion is slated to be invested in 333 new facilities and expansions to take advantage of fracked gas, including 20 ethylene crackers to turn shale gas into feedstock for plastics manufacturing plants.*

*Pushing natural gas exports to raise domestic prices: The industry and the Trump administration are promoting LNG exports to reduce the domestic gas supply and raise U.S. natural gas prices. In 2018, there were only three active LNG export facilities in the contiguous United States, but 22 more were either already being built or were approved for construction, and another 22 were pending federal review.*

*Wave of new fracked gas-fired power plants: The power industry has 364 new gas-fired power plants under development for 2018 to 2022, and gas deliveries to power plants rose 57 percent between 2006 (before the fracking boom) and 2017. The gas-fired generation capacity from plants added in 2017 and 2018 alone could power 24 million U.S. households, an expansion that is creating a power surplus in some areas.*

*U.S. exporters of fracked gas, the report points out, rely in part on political allies—both in Congress and the Trump administration.*

Food & Water Watch was among the more than 200 groups that sounded the alarm last month over federal legislation—which has passed the House but still lacks Senate approval—that would provide billions of dollars in support for natural gas infrastructure projects and, critics warn, lock "both the United States and Europe into decades of continued fossil fuel dependence under the guise of national security."

The report outlines how "the Trump administration has been pushing exports by trying to rush the approvals of new LNG export facilities," from Energy Secretary Rick Perry—who once claimed 'my job is to sell a lot of [LNG] around the world' and labeled opposition to fossil fuels ‘immoral’—to Gary Cohn, the president’s then-top economic adviser, who in 2017 demanded a new review of the proposed Jordan Cove
LNG export terminal, even though the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission had rejected the Oregon project the previous year.

"What we see in this report is the industry blueprint for ensuring decades more of fossil fuel dominance over our society. If it becomes realized, the endgame would be a scary, dangerous world of omnipresent plastic waste, expanding air and water pollution, unacceptable health impacts and irreversible climate chaos," Hauer said in a statement. "The solution is simple: We must cut off this filthy production stream at its source, by banning fracking and halting the runaway buildout of fracked gas infrastructure that is spreading like a toxic web all over the country."


The Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed rule aims to eliminate federal requirements that oil and gas companies install technology to detect and fix methane leaks from wells, pipelines and storage facilities. It would also reopen the question of whether the E.P.A. had the legal authority to regulate methane as a pollutant.

The rollback plan is particularly notable because major energy companies have, in fact, spoken out against it — joining automakers, electric utilities and other industrial giants that have opposed other administration initiatives to dismantle climate-change and environmental rules."

One of the reasons that it makes sense for energy companies to support rules preventing/reducing methane leaks is that these leaks cause them to use valuable gas. If all energy facilities are required to have them, there is no competitive loss from having them to save money.


Doug Norlen, director of the economic policy program at Friends of the Earth, called EXIM’s decision 'irresponsible' and said it 'proves the agency can't be trusted to manage billions of dollars in public funds.' By approving $5 billion in fossil fuel financing, EXIM is accelerating the climate crisis while causing local environmental damage and propelling human rights violations in Mozambique," Norlen said in a statement. "Either EXIM financing for fossil fuels must be stopped or the agency should not be reauthorized by Congress.'

Climate groups have repeatedly raised alarm over the bank’s funding of fossil fuel projects and demanded fundamental reforms.

According to Reuters, the Mozambique natural gas plant is the agency’s largest export deal in years.

"The project would be the single biggest financing deal since EXIM’s full lending powers were restored in May with the confirmation of three new board members," Reuters reported Thursday. ‘EXIM said the Mozambique [liquefied natural gas] project would begin to develop the Rovuma Basin, one of the world’s most extensive untapped reserves of natural gas.'

U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross applauded the project as a 'win for American companies and workers' as well as 'the people of Mozambique.'

Daniel Ribeiro of Friends of the Earth Mozambique said the opposite is true, warning in a statement that—in addition to its significant climate impact—the project will "fuel the numerous local land conflicts, the
human rights abuses, and infrastructure bottlenecks in the African nation, which was devastated by two powerful cyclones earlier this year.

'If there is a project with serious alarm bells, it's this one,' said Ribeiro. 'This dirty project is located in a sensitive world biosphere, embroiled in an emerging extremist armed conflict. It is being pushed by a government that has recently faced one of the biggest corruption cases in Africa.'

'It makes one worry about Mozambique's future,' Ribeiro added. 'Investment from the U.S. will only amplify all of the troubles and conflicts in Mozambique caused by this project and push them out of control.'

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Andrew E. Kramer, "Radiation Is Said to Be Released in Russian Military Accident," The New York Times, August 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/world/europe/russia-radiation-accident.html, reported, 'A fire that broke out on Thursday at a weapons testing range in northern Russia killed two people, briefly raised radiation levels and prompted the authorities to prohibit shipping and sailing in parts of the White Sea for a month, according to officials and news media reports.'

Russia's military said that the fire occurred when a liquid-fueled rocket engine exploded at the testing site, but that radiation levels remained at normal background levels, contradicting reports from the municipal authorities in nearby Severodvinsk. It was the second lethal accident involving the Russian Navy in just over a month.'

The Russian military generally has been slow to admit accidents and harm that may stem from them. However, the Russian military has confirmed that radioactive material was involved in the event, and that there was a spread of radiation (Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Confirms Radioactive Materials Were Involved in Deadly BlastAndrew E. Kramer, August 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/world/europe/russia-explosion-radiation.html).


Boston University professor Neta C. Crawford details the U.S. Department of Defense’s massive contributions to the global climate emergency in a paper (pdf) published Wednesday by the Costs of War Project at Brown University’s Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs.

'The U.S. military's energy consumption drives total U.S. government energy consumption,' the paper reads. 'The DOD is the single largest consumer of energy in the U.S., and in fact, the world's single largest institutional consumer of petroleum.'
'Absent any change in U.S. military fuel use policy, the fuel consumption of the U.S. military will necessarily continue to generate high levels of greenhouse gases,” the paper warns. “These greenhouse gases, combined with other U.S. emissions, will help guarantee the nightmare scenarios that the military predicts and that many climate scientists say are possible.”

Crawford, co-director of the Costs of War Project, estimates U.S. military emissions—which largely come from fueling weapons and equipment as well as operating more than 560,000 buildings around the world—from 1975 to 2017, relying on data from the Energy Department because the Pentagon does not report its fuel consumption numbers to Congress.

In the paper, she also examines patterns of military fuel use since 2001 in relation to emissions and the Pentagon’s views on “climate change as a threat to military installations and operations, as well as to national security, when and if climate change leads mass migration, conflict, and war.”

Writing about her research for The Conversation Wednesday, Crawford noted that DOD's annual emissions have declined since reaching a peak in 2004, as the Pentagon has, over the past decade, "reduced its fossil fuel consumption through actions that include using renewable energy, weatherizing buildings, and reducing aircraft idling time on runways.”

The paper’s opening summary outlines four major benefits of further decreasing DOD’s fossil fuel use:

First, the U.S. would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This would thereby mitigate climate change and its associated threats to national security.

Second, reducing fossil fuel consumption would have important political and security benefits, including reducing the dependence of troops in the field on oil, which the military acknowledges makes them vulnerable to enemy attacks. If the U.S. military were to significantly decrease its dependence on oil, the U.S. could reduce the political and fuel resources it uses to defend access to oil, particularly in the Persian Gulf, where it concentrates these efforts.

Third, by decreasing U.S. dependence on oil-rich states the U.S. could then reevaluate the size of the U.S. military presence in the Persian Gulf and reevaluate its relationship with Saudi Arabia and other allies in the region.

Finally, by spending less money on fuel and operations to provide secure access to petroleum, the U.S. could decrease its military spending and reorient the economy to more economically productive activities.

Crawford, in her piece for The Conversation, concluded that “climate change should be front and center in U.S. national security debates. Cutting Pentagon greenhouse gas emissions will help save lives in the United States, and could diminish the risk of climate conflict.”
She is far from the first to highlight how the Pentagon is fueling the world’s climate crisis and call for urgent reforms. Just last month, Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) released a climate “resiliency and readiness” plan for the U.S. military as part of her 2020 campaign for president. However, as Common Dreams reported at the time, anti-war critics of Warren’s plan charged that “trying to ‘green’ the Pentagon without addressing the destructive impacts of its bloated budget and American imperialism is a misguided way to combat the emergency of global warming.”

Author and advocate Stacy Bannerman, in an op-ed for Common Dreams last year, warned that “if we don’t get serious about stopping the United States War Machine, we could lose the biggest battle of our lives.”

“In order to achieve the massive systemic and cultural transformations required for mitigating climate change and advancing climate justice,” Bannerman wrote, “we’re going to have to deal with the socially sanctioned, institutionalized violence perpetrated by U.S. foreign policy that is pouring fuel on the fire of global warming.”

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Air travel produces large amounts of global warming increasing gases, raising the question of whether people should avoid unnecessary flights (Andy Newman, “Travel’s Climate Problem: If to see the world is to destroy it, should we just stay home,” The New York Times, June 7, 2019).

dirty energy in the ground, the United Nations chief said Tuesday that fossil fuel subsidies amount to 'using taxpayers’ money... to destroy the world.'

'Climate disruption is upon us, and it is progressing faster than our efforts to address it,' said U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres in Vienna at the climate-focused R20 Austrian World Summit.

While near-daily global disasters including floods, droughts, and wildfires make clear that the impacts of the climate crisis are already occurring, Guterres said, 'there is a silver lining to the looming cloud.'

That’s because 'if we do what we must to combat climate change, the benefits for societies around the world would be profound,' he said, pointing to ‘cleaner water and air’ and ‘reduced biodiversity loss.’

But the scope of the task at hand is huge, explained Guterres, as it necessitates a total transformation of all aspects of society.

'What is needed for effective mitigation and improved resilience,' he said, 'is quite simply a rapid and deep change in how we do business, how we generate power, how we build cities, and how we feed the world.'

Another key change, said Guterres, is to stop using taxpayer funds to prop up the coal, oil, and gas industries.

'We need to tax pollution, not people, and to end subsidies for fossil fuels.' said Guterres. He also debunked the wrongful assumption by some that fossil fuel subsidies improve people’s lives.

'There is nothing more wrong than that,' he said. 'What we are doing is using taxpayers’ money—which means our money—to boost hurricanes, to spread droughts, to melt glaciers, to bleach corals. In one word—to destroy the world.'

'As taxpayers,’ continued Guterres, 'I believe we would like to see our money back rather than to see our money used to destroy the world.'

The two-day summit also featured speeches by 16-year old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg and former California governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who launched the R20 climate initiative. Thunberg said that ‘for too long the people in power... have gotten away with stealing our future and selling it for profit.’

'We are not going to let you get away with it anymore," she said.

Schwarzenegger, in his remarks, praised young people like Thunberg who are school-striking and otherwise mobilizing to demand swift climate action.

'Their vision should lead us to action,’ said Schwarzenegger.

Their comments came a day after the Pope spoke to a group of financial ministers from around the world and urged them to back the goals of the Paris climate accord. 'We must achieve what we have agreed upon, for our survival and well-being depend on it.’

Among the worrisome signs he pointed to are that ‘Investments in fossil fuels continue to rise, even though scientists tell us that fossil fuels should remain underground.’

Like the U.N.'s Guterres, the pontiff referenced the increasingly frequent extreme weather events, which he said ‘are only a dire premonition of things much worse to come, unless we act and act urgently.’

Among the tasks the Pope said the financial ministers should take are ‘to put an end to global dependency on fossil fuels’ and ‘to open a new chapter of clean and safe energy, that utilizes, for example, renewable resources such as wind, sun and water.’

'Time is of the essence," Pope Francis added. 'We await your decisive action for the sake of all humanity.'

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Jesse McKinley and Brad Plumer, "New York to Approve One of the World’s Most Ambitious Climate Plans," The New York Times, June 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/18/nyregion/greenhouse-gases-ny.html, reported, 'New York lawmakers have agreed to pass a sweeping climate plan that calls for the state to all but eliminate its greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, envisioning an era when gas-guzzling cars, oil-burning heaters and furnaces would be phased out, and all of the state’s electricity would come from carbon-free sources.
Under an agreement reached this week between legislative leaders and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act would require the state to slash its planet-warming pollution 85 percent below 1990 levels by 2050, and offset the remaining 15 percent, possibly through measures to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. By 2030, New York State aims to have 70% of its electricity from non-greenhouse sources.


'Health, prosperity and environmental sustainability are fully compatible but require decoupling economic well-being and poverty reduction from fossil fuel emissions.'—Philip Alston, U.N. special rapporteur

"Perversely, while people in poverty are responsible for just a fraction of global emissions, they will bear the brunt of climate change, and have the least capacity to protect themselves," U.N. special rapporteur Philip Alston, author of the new report, said in a statement.

Even if warming is held to 1.5°C by the end of the century, Alston said, 'tens of millions will be impoverished, leading to widespread displacement and hunger.'

Alston’s 21-page report (pdf), which will be presented to the U.N. human rights council on Friday, predicts that millions of people across the planet could ‘face malnutrition due to devastating drought’ over the next few decades due to the climate crisis, ‘and many more will have to choose between starvation and migration’

To prevent this nightmare scenario, the report calls for ‘a fundamental shift in the global economy’ aimed at protecting vulnerable populations from climate impacts while dramatically slashing carbon emissions.

"Maintaining the current course is a recipe for economic catastrophe,’ Alston said in a statement. ‘Economic prosperity and environmental sustainability are fully compatible but require decoupling economic well-being and poverty reduction from fossil fuel emissions.’

Climate change... could push more than 120 million more people into poverty by 2030 and will have the most severe impact in poor countries, regions, and the places poor people live and work,’ Alston added. ‘We risk a ‘climate apartheid’ scenario where the wealthy pay to escape overheating, hunger, and conflict while the rest of the world is left to suffer.’

The report specifically calls for a ‘robust social safety net and a well-managed transition to a green economy’ and points to growing support for the Green New Deal in the United States and other nations as a positive development.

But there is alarming evidence that many countries are moving in the wrong direction. The report highlights U.S. President Donald Trump’s efforts to roll back environmental regulations and Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro’s deforestation in the Amazon as two prominent examples.

"Time is running out to limit global warming,‘ the report warns, ‘and states are failing to meet even their current inadequate commitments.”

Alston closes his report with a harsh assessment of U.N. human rights bodies, which he accuses of pushing "forms of incremental managerialism and proceduralism which are entirely disproportionate to the urgency and magnitude of the threat.”

'Ticking boxes,’ the report states, ‘will not save humanity or the planet from impending disaster,'
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Eoin Higgins, "The Changes Are Really Accelerating": Alaska at Record Warm While Greenland Sees Major Ice Melt: "The numbers needing relocation will grow, the costs are going up, and people’s lives and cultural practices will be impacted." Common Dreams, June 14, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/06/14/changes-are-really-accelerating-alaska-record-warm-while-greenland-sees-major-ice?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=%27The%20Changes%20Are%20Really%20Accelerating%27%3A%20Alaska%20at%20Record%20Warm%20While%20Greenland%20Sees%20Major%20Ice%20Melt&utm_campaign=Think%20US%20Media%20Won%27t%20Help%20Lead%20Nation%20Into%20Another%20War%20Based%20on%20Fibmsy%20Intelligence%20%7C%20News%20%26%20Views&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email&cm_mmc=Act-On%20Software--_email--Think%20US%20Media%20Won%27t%20Help%20Lead%20Nation%20Into%20Another%20War%20Based%20on%20Fibmsy%20Intelligence%20%7C%20News%20%26%20Views--_%27The%20Changes%20Are%20Really%20Accelerating%27%3A%20Alaska%20at%20Record%20Warm%20While%20Greenland%20Sees%20Major%20Ice%20Melt", reported, "The climate crisis is rapidly warming the Arctic, and the effects are being felt from Alaska to Greenland.

The northernmost point on the planet is heating up more quickly than any other region in the world. The reason for this warming is ice-albedo feedback: as ice melts it opens up land and sea to the sun, which then absorb more heat that would have been bounced off by the ice, leading to more warming. It’s a vicious circle of warmth that’s changing the environment at the north pole.

In Alaska, the crisis led this year to the warmest spring on record for the state; one city, Akiax, may turn into an island due to swelling riverbanks and erosion exacerbated by thawing permafrost and ice melt. Massachusetts-based Woods Hole Research Center scientist Susan Natali told The Guardian that what’s happening in Akiax is just an indicator of the danger posed to Alaska by the climate crisis.

"The changes are really accelerating in Alaska," said Natali.

Thawing will result in people losing their homes—in cities like Akiax, it already has—and, Natali warned, eventually the scope of the problem will be beyond the capabilities of the U.S. government to handle.

"It’s a real challenge because in the U.S. there isn’t the precedence to deal with this and there isn’t the political framework to deal with it either," Natali told The Guardian. "The numbers needing relocation will grow, the costs are going up, and people’s lives and cultural practices will be impacted."

Meanwhile, in Greenland, 45 percent of the island’s massive ice sheet is melting—much higher than the 10 percent that is normally melting at this point in the year. While much of the melt is expected to refreeze once temperatures stabilize, the integrity of the ice after the early melt makes it more likely to accelerate later in the year.

That means the unprecedented June melt will likely combine with the ice-albedo feedback for record melting. Xavier Fettweis, a Greenland researcher at Belgium’s University of Liege, told science hub Earther.

"Due to a lower winter accumulation than normal, the bare ice area has been exposed very early in this area enhancing the melt due to the melt-albedo feedback," said Fettweis. "Therefore, at the beginning of the melt season, the snowpack along the west coast is now preconditioned to break records of melt."

As Earther put it, the ice melt could lead to a repeat of a frightening situation in the Arctic not seen in almost a decade:

"It remains to be seen if we’ll get a meltdown like July 2012 when the entire ice sheet’s surface destabilized, but regardless, it’s a disconcerting June for an ice sheet that, if it completely melted away, would raise sea levels by about 24 feet.

The problem just isn’t going away, Alaska Center for Climate Assessment and Policy climate specialist Rich Thom said news-channel KTUU.

"It’s surely going to be the case that by the time we get to late September, there’s going to be no sea ice within hundreds of miles of Alaska," said Thomann.

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The study, published Wednesday in the journal Science Advances, concluded that the glaciers have lost a foot and a half of ice every year since 2000, melting at a far faster pace than in the previous 25-year period. In recent years, the glaciers have lost about eight billion tons of water a year. The study's authors described it as equivalent to the amount of water held by 3.2 million Olympic-size swimming pools.

The study adds to a growing and grim body of work that points to the dangers of global warming for the Himalayas, which are considered the water towers of Asia and an insurance policy against drought.

Neil MacFarquhar, "Siberia Dispatch: Russian Land of Permafrost and Mammoths Is Thawing: Global warming is shrinking the permanently frozen ground across Siberia, disrupting everyday life in one of the coldest inhabited places on earth," The New York Times, August 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/world/europe/russia-siberia-yakutia-permafrost-global-warming.html, reported, "the Arctic, including much of Siberia, warms at least twice as fast as the rest of the world, the permafrost — permanently frozen ground — is thawing."

"The thawing of the permafrost — along with other changes triggered by global warming — is reshaping this incredibly remote region sometimes called the Kingdom of Winter. It is one of the coldest inhabited places on earth, and huge; Yakutia, if independent, would be the world’s eighth largest country. The loss of permafrost deforms the landscape itself, knocking down houses and barns. The migration patterns of animals hunted for centuries are shifting, and severe floods wreak havoc almost every spring.

The water, washing out already limited dirt roads and rolling corpses from their graves, threatens entire villages with permanent inundation. Waves chew away the less frozen Arctic coastline. Indigenous peoples are more threatened than ever. Residents jostle constantly with nature in unpredictable ways, leaving them feeling baffled, unsettled, helpless, depressed and irritated."

It's clear that the climate crisis is already here. For quite some years weather and climate conditions in the U.S. and world wide have become increasingly worse causing more and more serious harm and damage. And now, Mark Sumner, “This is the climate crisis, it’s happening now, and here is what it looks like,” Daily Kos, May 29, 2019, https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/5/29/1861212/-This-is-the-climate-crisis-it-s-happening-now-and-this-is-what-it-looks-like?detail=emailrk, reported, "Twelve straight nights of raging storms have produced 365 reported tornadoes across 22 states. Where the total for May averages 276, this year has seen that number almost doubled ... and May isn’t over yet. CNN had a word for this. They called it “unprecedented.”

Those storms have brought record floods to Oklahoma and Texas, but those aren’t the first states to suffer floods this year. The Midwest, from Minnesota to Missouri, has spent much of the spring fighting other record floods after parts of the Mississippi Basin received more than 200% of the normal levels of rain and snow and a “bomb cyclone” exploded like a cold hurricane over the center of the nation. Some of those towns that went under back in March or April are still underwater today. Time had a word for it. They said it was “unprecedented.”

The fire season that began last spring in California had already earned an “unprecedented” from The New York Times by August after the normal seasons of rain and drought in the West seemed almost flipped ... but the 600,000 acres that had been burned by summer was far from the end. Record-setting fires continued through the fall and into the start of winter.

While those fires were burning in the west, the opposite coast suffered a hurricane season in which Hurricane Florence dumped unprecedented rainfall. And Hurricane Michael plowed into the Florida panhandle with unprecedented strength, destroying homes and doing billions of dollars of damage to a military base."
Discussion on the Tom Hartmann Radio Program, May 20, 2019, reported that the severe weather in central and Eastern North America is part of a climate change - or now better called "climate crisis" - in which the jet stream no longer keeps extreme weather well to the north. It is now normal - instead of once in decades - to have long seasons of great precipitation, bringing extensive flooding, and wind - including large long ground touching tornados - regularly across much of the regions. A current result is that the flooding and wet fields were well behind their normal achievement in crop planting with further delay from weather likely and some crops already wiped out or heavily damaged. This is expected to bring a poor harvest with food shortages and quite significant food price inflation.

The unprecedented storms, with climate change often staying over areas for previously unusual lengths of time, bringing flooding and tornados to the central and southern U.S. this spring were continuing in April and May, 2019. At the end of May, "After One More Day of Tornadoes, Hope for a Respite," The New York Times, May 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/us/tornadoes-weather.html, reported, "a record-setting run of severe storms that has spawned hundreds of tornadoes across the nation over the past two weeks appeared on Wednesday to be nearing an end."

Powered by a high pressure system in the South and a trough that hung atop the West, the burst of storms pushed the United States to a total of 38 tornado-linked deaths so far this year, the highest count since 2014. Wednesday was the 13th consecutive day when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration received at least eight preliminary reports of tornadoes.

And of the roughly 300 tornado or severe thunderstorm watches that forecasters have issued this year, more than 40 percent have come since May 17, when this pernicious round of bad weather began.

Hurricane Dorian, as of September 2, 2019, was unusual - likely because of climate change - because it was impossible to predict its movement, while at category 5 with 220 MPH winds was the strongest storm ever known to hit the northern Bahamas, and if it continued as expected would be the strongest storm to hit the U.S. southeast since the 1935 Labor Day hurricane (Richard Fausset, Nicholas Bogel-Burroughs, Patricia Mazzei and Frances Robles, "Along Hurricane Dorian's Tortured Path, Millions Are United in Fear," The New York Times, September 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/02/us/along-hurricane-dorians-tortured-path-millions-are-united-in-fear.html).

Jake Johnson, "’It Is Pure Hell Here’: Videos From Bahamas Show Devastation Left by Hurricane Dorian as Category 5 Storm Heads Toward US Coast: ‘We are surrounded by water with no way out. Absolute devastation, there really are no words.’” Common Dreams, September 2, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/09/02/it-pure-hell-here-videos-bahamas-show-devastation-left-hurricane-dorian-category-5cd-origin=rss&utm_term=AO&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email, reported, “Videos posted online late Sunday and early Monday provided the first glimpse of the scale of destruction Hurricane Dorian—a historic Category 5 storm—left in its wake in the Bahamas as it slowly moves toward the southeastern coast of the United States, forcing nearly a million residents of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas to evacuate.

’I have seen utter devastation here... We are surrounded by water with no way out,’ said ABC News correspondent Marcus Moore, who was on the ground in Marsh Harbour.

‘Absolute devastation, there really are no words.’ said Moore, surveying destroyed homes and buildings. ‘It is pure hell here on Marsh Harbour on Aboca Island in the northern part of the Bahamas.’

The Guardian characterized Dorian as ‘the biggest storm to hit the Caribbean island chain in modern times,’ with wind gusts reaching as high as 220 mph.

During a press conference Sunday, Bahamian prime minister Hubert Minnis said:Dorian ‘will put us to a test that we’ve never confronted before.’

‘This is probably the most sad and worst day of my life to address the Bahamian people,’ said Minnis. ‘I just want to say as a physician I’ve been trained to withstand many things, but never anything like this.’
According to the National Hurricane Center, the storm remained at Category 5 strength Monday as it drifted over Grand Bahama Island, unleashing heavy rainfall and severe wind.

"This is a life-threatening situation. Residents on Grand Bahama Island should not leave their shelter when the eye passes over, as winds will rapidly increase on the other side of the eye," the center said. "These hazards will continue over Grand Bahama Island during most of the day, causing extreme destruction on the island."

Forecasters on Monday said the storm could get "dangerously close to the Florida east coast" as early as Monday night.

Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina have declared a state of emergency as the hurricane crawls toward the U.S. coast.

South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster on Sunday issued a mandatory evacuation order for 830,000 people along the state's coastline. The order is set to take effect Monday at noon.

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Mitch Smith, "Paralysis on America's Rivers: There's Too Much Water," The New York Times, June 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/10/us/flooding-river-shipping.html, reported, "The devastating flooding that has submerged large parts of the Midwest and South this spring has also brought barge traffic on many of the regions' rivers to a near standstill. The water is too high and too fast to navigate. Shipments of grains, fertilizers and construction supplies are stranded. And riverfront ports, including the ones Mr. Shell oversees in Van Buren and Fort Smith, Ark., have been overtaken by the floods and severely damaged."

Juan Declet-Barreto, climate scientist. "The Wettest 12 Months: New Analysis Shows Spikes in Flood Alerts in the US," Union of Concerned Sciences, May 23, 2019, https://blog.ucsusa.org/juan-declt-barreto/spikes-in-flood-alerts-in-us, (An early version of this post initially stated the findings were for the continental US but has since been changed to reflect that the results were for the contiguous US, as Alaska was not included in the analysis), reported, "April 2019 marked the wettest 12-month period in the United States since record-keeping began 124 years ago, breaking the previous record set from May 2015–April 2016. In most places in the contiguous US, by April 2019 it had already rained more than the annual average during the 20th century. This week, heavy rain is dumping up to 1 foot of rain in northern and central parts of the US. It’s evident that extreme precipitation events are getting more extreme, and also that climate change is one of the culprits."

But what does this mean to flood risks? We already know that more frequent, heavier rainfall is causing higher risk of flooding. As of May 21, 2019, hundreds of counties in states in the Great Plains and Midwest were under active flood or flash flood warnings and advisories (in light green, dark green, and dark red on the National Weather Service (NWS) map below). But it’s unclear what the 'wettest 12-month period' ever on record means in terms of flood risks to the population, so we took a look at flood alerts, warnings, and advisories issued by the NWS to get some clarity.

A key function of the NWS is to communicate to government agencies and the public when life-threatening extreme weather events are likely or certain to occur. One key way in which the NWS does that is by issuing alerts based on meteorological forecasting models and data.
Active flood or flash flood warnings and advisories (in light green, dark green, and dark red) on May 21, 2019.

**Flood risks are increasing—and climate change is playing a large role**

One useful way that climate scientists assess change over time is by looking at change in climatological variables (e.g., precipitation) between a recent period and a historical period—the difference is called a “climate anomaly.” I’ve taken that concept and applied it to calculating the difference between the average number of flood alerts issued between 1986-2017 (the historical period) and the number of alerts issued between May 2018 and April 2019—what the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) just declared to be the wettest 12-month period on record (the recent period).

My calculations for the contiguous US—based on data from NWS alerts archived at the Iowa Environmental Mesonet—are alarming. I found that out of 3,108 counties in the contiguous US, 71 percent (2,197) had more flood watches, warnings, and advisories during the last 12 months than the average for the 1986-2017 historical period. Many of the counties with the largest estimates of increased alerts (in red on the map) host large populations in metropolitan areas, for example Los Angeles (CA), Indianapolis (IN), Chicago (IL), Phoenix (AZ), Dallas and southeastern Texas, Sioux Falls (SD), Nashville (TN), Columbus (SC), Asheville (NC), and Pittsburgh and Philadelphia (PA). Risks are high in these urban regions, many of which have large impermeable surface areas that can contribute to flood risks. And many have insufficient flood protection to deal with increased water volumes during the heaviest precipitation events.
Change in National Weather Service flood watches, warnings, and advisories. 71 percent of counties in the contiguous US had more flood watches, warnings, and advisories during the last 12 months than the average for the 1986-2017 historical period.

Slicing the data by region over time also shows that regional patterns are similar to the observed changes in heavy precipitation in the National Climate Assessment over the longer period from 1958-2016 (99th percentile precipitation panel in the linked figure), which found the largest increases in the Northeast and Midwest. These regions also experienced the largest rapid increases in flood watches, warnings, and advisories, with the Great Plains, Southeast, and Alaska also showing some rapid increases.
Flood watches, warnings, and alerts issued by NWS, 1986-2018

We are clearly in a new normal in terms of extreme precipitation and that raises questions about the new normal of flood risks. Certainly, the Arctic is getting hotter, and the US Northeast has been chilly and gloomy. The March bomb cyclones contributed a ton of snow to Midwestern places that were quickly flooded as temperatures increased shortly after—and did you see that it snowed in New England in May?

But besides climate factors, the increase in flood alerts also points to increased risks to population due to new development (i.e., population increase) in areas of the country that did not have so many people. Recall that extreme weather alerts are issued by NWS to protect lives and property—so extreme weather that happens in non-populated areas does not typically trigger an alert. But as more places are populated, the people and infrastructure there become vulnerable to flood risks. That seems to be the case in places with large population growth over the last few decades.

Case in point: four of the counties with 50 or more alerts in the 12 wettest months on record are Arizona counties that experienced large population growth since the 1980s—and Maricopa County, where metro Phoenix is located, had the second-highest number of alerts (Yavapai County is number one). And along the Mississippi river banks, scientists say that farmland, residential, and commercial development on floodplains, and too much reliance on levees and other forms of flood protection, have given people a false sense of security. Yet that security is eroding, because the floodgates along the Mississippi have had to be opened more frequently. Floodwaters are intentionally diverted away from urban locations and onto agricultural or rural areas, often leading to economic damages in the agricultural sector.

Obviously, there is a complex set of factors contributing to localized increased flood risks—it’s not lost on me that even if Arizona counties had the largest increases, the Southwest as a region had the smallest growth in NWS alerts—expected for a semi-arid region. However, when it does rain, it is more likely to be more intense and overwhelm the infrastructure constructed for dry river beds that were constructed to handle flash flood flow rates of the past. We know that climate is a growing contributor to risks in many parts of the country. And these risks are happening more frequently in the same places—as the map above shows—which is exacerbating impacts on people and property.

Building resilience to increased flood risks from climate and other factors

With flood risks growing, it’s urgent to do more to help build resilience. Building resilience to flood risks requires integrated actions and resources by the federal family (e.g., FEMA, HUD, Corps of Engineers,
USGS, NOAA, NASA, DOD, etc.), and NWS flood warnings are just one part of this. A few obvious places to start would be for the federal government to consider climate risks and make other improvements to mapping flood risks, investing in pre-flood risk reduction measures, thinking carefully about where and how we develop, preserving non-paved areas, and paying attention to low-income and other vulnerable communities who are typically overburdened with climate risks such as flooding.

In addition, the country relies on a network of government agencies, universities, non-government organizations, and the private sector for advancing and communicating the science on extreme precipitation and riverine flooding to communities, policymakers, planners, and engineers. Congress should continue to support adequate funding for the following key agencies and programs:

- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration provide weather forecasting and scientific research on extreme weather events and a changing climate.
- The US Geological Survey leads the Federal Priority Stream gauges program (part of the larger National Streamflow Network), Flood Inundation Mapping program, and the 3D Elevation Program, which the nation depends on for accurate flood risk mapping and planning.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency provide valuable resources for families and communities to help them stay safe and healthy before, during, and after floods.
- Funding should be increased for both the stream gauge and mapping programs. Flood risk maps exist for only about one-third of the nation and many of these are out of date and limited in scope. Congress and states with federal and state agencies could take three critical actions that would address the science and data needs by expanding research on extreme precipitation events, increasing the river gauge network, and ramping up flood mapping programs.
- Finally, the analysis presented here fills one critical gap in tracking cumulative flood warnings—a task that should be routinely done by the NWS and communicated to the public by FEMA. All of these actions led by government agencies can help strengthen the science that keeps us safe from emerging flood and climate-related risks.

And the results of this winter-spring Midwest climate change caused flood keep coming. Mitch Smith, Summer on the Swollen Great Lakes,” The New York Times, August 25, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/24/us/great-lakes-water-levels.html, reported, "The lakes rose this year to levels not seen in decades. A 1,234-mile drive around one of them revealed what all that water has left behind — vanishing beaches, closed roads, new islands." 


Kendra Pierre-Louis, "Climate Change Fills Storms with More Rain, Analysis Shows," The New York Times, July 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/11/climate/hurricane-tropical-storms.html, reported, "When a tropical storm is approaching, its intensity or wind speed often gets the bulk of the attention. But as Tropical Storm Barry bears down on the Gulf Coast in the coming days, it’s the water that the storm will bring with it that has weather watchers worried."

"Climate change is in general increasing the frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall storms," said Andreas Prein, a project scientist with the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

This week’s rainfall came after the region experienced an extremely wet spring, causing the region’s rivers to swell, and raising concerns that the upcoming storm may overtop levees in New Orleans. "If you look at the records, mostly it’s the water that kills most people," Dr. Prein said.

States—broils-on-what-could-be-the-hottest-weekend-in-history?detail=emalidkre, reported, "The heat wave that has baked more than half the country over much of this week hits its peak in many areas this weekend with blazing heat, stifling humidity, and a combined heat index that's not just a recipe for misery, but a serious health threat. Though only a handful of locations are expected to break their all time temperature records, the extent of this heatwave could still make for the hottest weekend ever recorded.

Heat emergencies have been declared in over a dozen cities and scheduled events in many areas, including the New York Triathlon, have been cancelled because of the heat this weekend. However, many Americans are still working in positions that require them to be out in the sun. That includes utility workers trying to deal with an electrical grid straining under near record demand. If you have to be in the heat this weekend, watch yourself — and others around you — for signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

The National Weather Service has noted that this heat wave has been particularly prolonged and is especially dangerous because temperatures have also been well above normal overnight. High nighttime temperatures are regarded as a indicator of high risk to public health. So ... watch it."


In Arizona, the annual number of deaths attributed to heat exposure more than tripled, from 76 deaths in 2014 to 235 in 2017, according to figures obtained from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heat-related deaths in Nevada rose almost fivefold during the same period, from 29 to 139.

Most of those deaths were in the Phoenix and Las Vegas areas."

Christopher Flavelle, "Toxic Stew" Stirred Up by Disasters Poses Long-Term Danger, New Findings," The New York Times, July 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/15/climate/flooding-chemicals-health-research.html, reported, "New research shows that the extreme weather and fires of recent years, similar to the flooding that has struck Louisiana and the Midwest, may be making Americans sick in ways researchers are only beginning to understand.

By knocking chemicals loose from soil, homes, industrial-waste sites or other sources, and spreading them into the air, water and ground, disasters like these — often intensified by climate change — appear to be exposing people to an array of physical ailments including respiratory disease and cancer."

Olivia Rosane, "Wildfires Force 10,000 to Flee as Alberta Repeals Carbon Tax," EcoWatch, May 31, 2019, https://www.ecowatch.com/alberta-wildfires-carbon-tax-2638572137.html, reported, "More than 10,000 people have been forced to evacuate as wildfires spread in northern Alberta, Canada’s CBC News reported Thursday. Smoke from the fires has choked skies across the province, raising the Air Quality Health Index in its capital city of Edmonton to a 10+ Thursday, the Edmonton Journal reported.

In an ironic turn, the fires prompted Alberta Premier Jason Kenney to cancel a celebration of the repeal of the province’s carbon tax, Canada’s National Observer reported."

"This event has been cancelled so the premier can receive an internal, real-time briefing on the status of Alberta’s wildfires,” the government said in a statement reported by Canada’s National Observer."

"Kenney had promised to repeal the carbon tax and roll back other climate change policies in the April 16 general election."

"Fires destroyed 11 homes in the Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement, the Edmonton Journal reported further.

The roads are melted,” Blake Desjarlais, director of public and national affairs for the Métis Settlements General Council, told the Edmonton Journal.

Desjarlais was frustrated by the lack of support his community was receiving from the Alberta government, Global News reported. He said they were not fighting the fire on the western side, which
would most protect the evacuated community, and also that they were not doing enough to help evacuees.

Desjarlais also said the fire could have a long-term economic impact on the community. "We've lost trap lines, they're a strong economic driver for us," he said, as Global News reported. 'Most of the regional farmers have had to cut animals loose.'

"On Thursday, smoke covered Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago, Detroit and Kansas City and reached as far south as Denver. Global News reported."

Amanda Schmidt, "Storm leaves city looking like dead of winter in middle of summer," AccuWeather, July 1, 2019, https://www.accuweather.com/en/weather-news/is-it-snow-is-it-hail-sweating-mexican-city-experiences-extreme-summer-event/70008700, reported, "The Mexican city of Guadalajara woke up to a wintry surprise on Sunday morning [June 30, 2019]. The city, which has been experiencing a hot, sweaty summer, was blanketed with up to 3 feet of ice in some areas following a heavy hailstorm.

Astonishing photos have appeared on the internet of what appears to be a winter display in the city, which is located in the western part of the country, about six hours west of Mexico City."

Somini Sengupta, "A Heat Wave Tests Europe's Defenses. Expect More," The New York Times, July 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/climate/europe-heat-wave.html, reported, "Across Europe in June, from the Czech Republic to Switzerland to Spain, new heat records tested the Continent's defenses. Schools were shuttered. Villages were evacuated. Soldiers battled wildfires. And social workers raced to the homes of older people to prevent mass deaths. It wasn't only monthly records that shattered. On Friday, a town in the south of France felt like Death Valley, Calif., in August: According to the French national weather agency, Gallargues-le-Montueux was 45.9 degrees Celsius, or 115 degrees, the hottest temperature ever recorded in the country.

It is part of an unmistakable trend: The hottest summers in Europe in the last 500 years have all come in the last 17 years. Several of those heat waves bear the fingerprints of human-caused climate change, scientists say. In years to come, many more are likely to batter what is naturally one of the world's temperate zones."

Henry Fountain, "Europe's Heat Wave, Fueled by Climate Change, Moves to Greenland," The New York Times, August 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/02/climate/european-heatwave-climate-change.html, reported, "Climate change made the stifling heat that enveloped parts of Europe last week much more likely and hotter, researchers said Friday. The heat wave, the second to hit Europe since late June, set temperature records in Paris, as well as in Germany, the Netherlands and other countries. Nuclear reactors in France and Germany were forced to reduce output or shut down because the water used to cool them was too warm.

The hot air, which was trapped over Europe after traveling from northern Africa, lingered for about four days. It has since moved north over Greenland, causing the surface of the island's vast ice sheet to melt at near-record levels."


Energy producers are upgrading hydroelectric power plants and experimenting with burning carbon dioxide in rock, to keep it out of the atmosphere. Proposals are being floated for a new port in Finnsfjord, now a barren landscape in the east, to capitalize on potential cargo traffic as shipping companies
in China, Russia and Arctic nations vie to open routes through the melting ice. The fishing industry is slashing fossil fuel use with energy-efficient ships.

Glaciers occupy over a tenth of this famously frigid island near the Arctic Circle. Every single one is melting. So are the massive, centuries-old ice sheets of Greenland and the polar regions. Where other countries face rising seas, Iceland is confronting a rise in land in its southernmost regions, and considers the changing landscape and climate a matter of national urgency."

Henry Fountain, "How Hot Was July? Hotter Than Ever, Global Data Shows," The New York Times, August 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/climate/july-hottest-month-climate.html, reported. "European climate researchers said Monday that last month was the hottest July — and thus the hottest month — ever recorded, slightly eclipsing the previous record-holder, July 2016. 'While July is usually the warmest month of the year for the globe, according to our data it also was the warmest month recorded globally, by a very small margin,' Jean-Noël Thépaut, head of the Copernicus Climate Change Service, said in a statement."

Madeleine Gregory, "The Arctic Is on Fire, and It Might Be Creating a Vicious Climate 'Feedback Loop': The worst Arctic wildfire season in recent history is releasing unprecedented emissions that feed into climate change, creating the conditions for more fires," Vice, July 29 2019, https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qv7g3m/the-arctic-is-on-fire-and-it-might-be-creating-a-vicious-climate-feedback-loop, reported. "Wildfires have been raging across the Arctic for over a month now, releasing huge amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Now, scientists worry that the fires are contributing to a climate change feedback loop that could make Arctic blazes more common."

In June, unprecedented fires burned across the Arctic, breaking emissions records. The fires have continued to grow, spreading to other parts of Siberia and Alaska, according to Mark Parrington, a senior scientist working on wildfire emissions at the European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF). As they grow, the fires are dumping so much smoke into the atmosphere that it can be seen from space.

The smoke has already blanketed some Russian cities, making it hard to breathe." The larger problem is that the huge amounts of carbon dioxide released increase atmospheric heating and making more fires likely."


The hardest-hit country appeared to be Nepal, where the police said on Monday that 67 people had died as a result of the monsoonal rains that began on Thursday night and set off widespread flooding, particularly in the country’s southern plains along the Indian border. "Flooding and landslides injured at least 68 others, with 30 people known missing, while 3,366 people had been rescued and 16,520 households had been displaced, with rescue efforts slowed by blocked and flooded highways and bad weather limiting air efforts."

"In India, at least 25 people have died so far from the rains and floods. Mohamad Farukh, the chief executive of Rapid Response, a nongovernmental charity focusing on disaster relief, said in a text message on Sunday. Indian officials said a day earlier that about 750 people from the worst-affected states, Assam and Bihar, had been rescued over the preceding three or four days."

"In Bangladesh, 14 deaths have been recorded as a result of flooding in low-lying areas of the country since July 9, and 60,000 families in those areas were still 'marooned in their home or community shelters' as of Sunday, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society said in a report."

The rains have also flooded parts of the world’s largest refugee camp, in southeastern Bangladesh, which is home to more than half a million Rohingya Muslim refugees who fled violence in neighboring Myanmar, according to the United Nations."
Amy Qin, "Death Toll From Typhoon Lekima in China Rises to 30," The New York Times, August 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/world/asia/china-typhoon-lekima.html, reported, "The death toll from a powerful typhoon sweeping across China's east coast rose to 30 on Sunday, with at least 18 still missing, after torrential downpours forced over one million to leave their homes. The state news media reported."

Typhoon Lekima caused the worst flooding in the city of Linhai in the 70-year history of the People's Republic of China with water levels as high as 36 feet, while over all the storm impacted 5 million people, interrupted land and air transportation, damaging more than 400,000 acres of crops and 34,000 homes in Zhejiang, bringing economic losses of over $2.2 billion.

Food shortages in North Korea were worsened by its worst drought in 37 years, as of May 2019, with the country receiving only 43% of normal rainfall in the first four and a half months of 2019 (Choe-Sang-Hun, "Long North Korean Drought Aggravates Food Shortages," The New York Times, May 16, 2016).

Mujib Mashal, "India Heat Wave, Soaring Up to 123 Degrees, Has Killed at Least 36," The New York Times, June 13, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/13/world/asia/india-heat-wave-deaths.html, reported, "One of India's longest and most intense heat waves in decades, with temperatures reaching 123 degrees, has claimed at least 36 lives since it began in May, and the government has warned that the suffering might continue as the arrival of monsoon rains has been delayed."

* Heat waves in India have become more intense over the last few years with nighttime lows becoming higher as well as day time highs as the number of days in heat waves become longer. The range of the heat waves in northern and central India has also been expanding, having struck nine states in 2015 and 19 in 2018, to reach 23 in 2019. The extreme heat has also been drying up needed lakes and other water sources. In India's capital, New Delhi, temperatures reached a record 118.4 F. on June 10.

Extreme drought and poor water management have left half of the 4.5 million residents of Harare, capital of Zimbabwe, with running water only once a week. (Patrick Kingsley and Jeffrey Moyo, "In Zimbabwe, the Water Taps Run Dry and Worsen ‘a Nightmare’," The New York Times, July 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/31/world/africa/zimbabwe-water-crisis.html).

Loughborough University, Researchers Solve Scientific Puzzle That Could Improve Solar Panel Efficiency, phys.org, May 15, 2019, https://phys.org/news/2019-05-scientific-puzzle-solar-panel-efficiency.html, reported that new solar panels created from the semiconducting material cadmium telluride (CdTe), "have been found to produce electricity at lower costs than silicon panels and there has been a dramatic gain in efficiency brought about by adding selenium to the cadmium telluride."

Tran Ngoc Huan, Daniel Alves Dalla Corte, Sarah Lamaison, Dilan Karapinar, Lukas Lutz, Nicolas Menguy, Martin Foldyna, Silver-Hamill Turren-Cruz, Anders Hagfeldt, Federico Bella, Marc Fontecave, and Victor Moulé, "Low-cost high-efficiency system for solar-driven conversion of CO2 to hydrocarbons," PNAS, May 14, 2019, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1815412116, reported, "Significance: Carbon dioxide electroreduction may constitute a key technology in coming years to valorize CO2 as high value-added chemicals such as hydrocarbons and a way to store intermittent solar energy durably. Based on readily available technologies, systems combining a photovoltaic (PV) cell with an electrolyzer cell (EC) for CO2 reduction to hydrocarbons are likely to constitute a key strategy for tackling this challenge. However, a low-cost, sustainable, and highly efficient PV-EC system has yet to be developed. In this article, we show that this goal can be reached using a low-cost and easily processable perovskite photovoltaic minimodule combined to an electrolyzer device using the same Cu-based catalysts at both electrodes and in which all energy losses have been minimized."

reported that the Israeli manufacturer, Eviation, has developed an electric powered aircraft, called Alice, that carries 9 passengers and can travel more than 650 miles at speeds up to 400 MPH before having to land and recharge batteries. Regional carrier Cape Air purchased at least 10 of them. How large electric aircraft may ultimately be possible to build, and how far they will be able to fly is not yet clear. So far, the need for many heavy batteries is a limitation. But this is a first, and even if it is limited in use, still reduces the great amount of greenhouse gas and other pollution produced by airplanes.

Food and Water Watch reported in an E-mail, May 29, 2019, "Williams Pipeline Permit Denied!" New York Governor Cuomo’s administration denied the permit for the Williams pipeline, which would have carried fracked gas along the shores of New York City, threatening the communities hit hardest by Superstorm Sandy. It’s an amazing victory for Food & Water Watch activists and our allies who fought for over two years to block this dangerous project."

The New York Department of Environmental Conservation denied Transco Williams a water quality permit, in part, because, 'construction of the proposed project would result in significant water quality impacts from the re-suspension of sediments and other contaminants, including mercury and copper. In addition, the proposed project would cause impacts to habitats due to the drift of shellfish beds and other benthic resources.'

"But the fight is not over yet. Williams has already re-applied for permits."

For more go to: https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/news/new-york-grassroots-movement-defeats-fracked-gas-pipeline?

"New Mexico Begins Effort to Reduce Methane Pollution and Waste," New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light, June 7, 2019, http://www.nn-ipl.org, reported, "Today, New Mexico launched its effort to reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas industry. The state announced a stakeholder process, including a series of public meetings this summer, to inform new rules aimed at reducing the excessive amount of methane – a potent climate pollutant and valuable energy resource – that oil and gas companies release into the atmosphere through leaks, venting and flaring. The announcement follows Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham’s Executive Order that directs state agencies to develop comprehensive, statewide methane rules and to work together to reduce 45 percent of the state’s greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Last weekend faith leaders from New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light in Albuquerque traveled to South East New Mexico to meet with faith leaders and people of faith in Hobbs and Carlsbad for conversations about concerns around methane pollution. Several field trips were made with Earthworks to see the methane pollution with special infrared cameras. People of faith heard stories, witnessed challenges in the Permian Basin, listened and prayed with our brothers and sisters.

New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light has worked for a number of years to get methane rules to protect those with vulnerable health problems and care for the future as we face a changing climate. We have been concerned that we are wasting a sacred resource that is gift and not receiving royalties for our education funds and our children. The announcement today offers a way forward to care for creation and our communities because it is the ethical and moral thing to do." - Sr. Joan Brown, of, Executive Director, New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light."
The Nebraska Supreme Court, in late August 2019, approved the route of the Keystone XL oil pipeline through Nebraska. This is a major step toward its being built, but there remain other hurdles. Several landowners have refused to sign agreements for the pipeline to cross their land and a federal lawsuit in Montana challenging the pipeline construction has yet to be resolved. In addition, American Indian and environmental activists are prepared to take steps to prevent completion of construction, or at least delay the project long enough for a new administration to kill it (Mitch Smith, "Court Ruling Clears Path for Pipeline in Nebraska," The New York Times, August 24, 2019).

Judge Gail Hagerty of the North Dakota Judicial District, December 31, 2018, dismissed 45 cases as being without merit in which water protectors had been charged with crimes for protesting against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline, casting in doubt the remaining 49 ("Court agrees on dismissal of 45 DAPL cases," APIC, February 2019).


Weeks after an unexpected gush of crude oil from an offshore well sent an inky stain across 12 miles of shoreline that is home to a dozen villages, Sedari's fishermen are still grounded by the huge spill from an offshore oil well owned by the national oil company, which was slow to react to the leak.

Fossil Free News reported in an E-mail July 4, 2019, https://act.350.org/mailling/view/80827?e=1&akid=80827%2E51426%2EwWgjrX, "Breaking: A Kenyan court just revoked the license for Lamu coal plant. First proposed in 2015, the Lamu community have fought for years to stop Kenya’s first coal-fired power plant being built. It’s been challenged fiercely by local residents, activists, scientists & lawyers not only for its climate implications, but also because Lamu is a UNESCO heritage site preserved for its biodiversity and rich multicultural heritage. Watch: https://350.org/the-lamu-coal-plant-project-in-kenya-has-been-stopped-by-a-court-decision/?aq=08875.51426.WggfXrd=1&fit=6.

On to the next one: Another site of impressive natural heritage at risk from coal is due for its own decision. The Sundarban mangrove forest in Bangladesh is home to 4.5 million people and the royal Bengal tiger. Despite a years-long resistance from residents, the government is still pushing construction of Rampal coal plant in the forest. Earlier this month, the international union for nature conservation called for the site to be placed on UNESCO’s endangered list, because of danger from the plant and other industry. UNESCO officials are currently meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan, where they’ll make the final decision soon. More: https://350.org/unesco-has-a-chance-to-protect-sundarbans-will-it/?a=80827.51426.WggfXrd=1&fit=7.

Iliana Magra, "Europe Suffers Heat Wave of Dangerous, Record-High Temperatures," The New York Times, July 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/world/europe/record-temperatures-heatwave.html, reported, "People across Western Europe are suffering through an intense heat wave this week, with the worst still to come on Thursday, when Britain, France, Germany and the Low Countries are expecting life-threatening, record-breaking temperatures.

Officials sounded high-temperature health alarms on Wednesday, mindful that some previous heat waves have claimed thousands of lives across a region where people are not used to such weather, structures are not built for it and few homes have air conditioning.

Paris is expected to record the highest temperature in its history on Thursday, with a predicted high of 42 degrees Celsius, or 107.6 Fahrenheit, shattering the record of 40.4, set in July 1947, according to Météo France, the national weather service. Bordeaux, in southwestern France, broke its record on Tuesday, reaching 106.1 Fahrenheit."

Global heating: India has been suffering from sustained deadly temperatures with some cities reaching 50°C degrees and Europe was sweltering under record-breaking temperatures last week too. Scientists are still reeling from the desperate new data showing Greenland's unexpectedly rapid ice loss,"

Youth Power: Hundreds of youth in cities across South Africa marked the anniversary of the Soweto youth uprising, a historic turning point in the movement against apartheid. This time, they’re standing up against ecological apartheid and climate crisis. Their actions resonated far and wide, with President Ramaphosa responding in his annual State of the Nation address. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-06-17-this-youth-day-young-people-are-demanding-climate-justice/.

No further: From June 20 to 24, thousands from across Europe came together to shut down a coal mine through peaceful direct action. Every year the number of jump-suited activists willing to descend into the dirty heart of Germany’s lignite mines grows. And this time, 40,000 more striking students stood with them in solidarity. Read more: https://350.org/one-struggle-one-fight/?aid=80827.51426.wWqrfX&rd=1&t=10.

Wait, what?: One day after declaring a climate emergency in Canada, Justin Trudeau approved the Trans Mountain Expansion pipeline to transport Alberta’s tar sands to the western coast. Trudeau’s hypocrisy is in stark contrast to the 7,000 people who showed up at over 200 town halls to develop the detail of a Green New Deal for Canada. Spoiler alert: there’s no room for tar sands expansion in the deal. Read more: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/18/canada-trans-mountain-pipeline-expansion-approved-trudeau.


Released Tuesday by human and environmental rights group Global Witness, the report (pdf) shows how the U.S. is on track to dwarf other nations’ shares of new oil and gas production over the next decade. In fact, says the analysis, 61 percent of all new global production is likely to come from the United States.

'The scale of new production forecast from the U.S. is staggering,' said Murray Worthy, senior campaigner at Global Witness, in a statement. 'No other country comes even close.'

The projected scenario, which relies on data from industry analysts Rystad Energy, reveals the country is on a path to ramp up oil and gas production by 25 percent—even in the face of the climate crisis, which has triggered global protests and demands for bold legislative action.

Over the 2020-2025 period, seven of 10 biggest new oil and gas producers are expected to be U.S. states, with Texas projected to produce more than a quarter of all this new production.

Along with Texas, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, North Dakota, and Oklahoma together would account for 75 percent of all U.S. production over the time frame.

An action plan for a different energy trajectory, says Global Witness, must include two key steps—ending fossil fuel subsidies and curbing political influence of the fossil fuel industry.

'Given that nothing less than planetary stability is at stake,' the group is part of a chorus of climate campaigners demanding the issue be given the full focus of a Democratic presidential debate.

'The next U.S. president needs to have a credible plan for tackling climate change,' Global Witness says in a related briefing paper. 'And any credible plan to tackle climate change has to prevent the U.S. from drowning the world in oil.'

With that concern in mind, the group lays out specific questions for candidates to answer:

- What action do you intend to take to curb oil and gas production from public lands and waters?
- Will you end government subsidies for oil and gas production? How will you ensure the money saved benefits the communities affected?
Will you commit to not approving new oil and gas pipelines, export terminals, and other infrastructure?

How will you ensure your appointees to key agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of the Interior serve the public interest and not the fossil fuel lobby?

"We urge the Democratic National Committee to vote yes to holding a dedicated climate debate," said Worthy. "Presidential candidates should have the opportunity to clearly outline for the American people where their priorities lie and what their plan is to tackle this looming carbon time bomb."

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"Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking (Unconventional Gas and Oil Extraction), Sixth Edition, Concerned Health Professionals of New York and Physicians for Social Responsibility, June 19, 2019, https://concernedhealthny.org/compendium/, reported, "The Compendium of Scientific, Medical, and Media Findings Demonstrating Risks and Harms of Fracking (the Compendium) is a fully referenced compilation of evidence outlining the risks and harms of fracking. The Compendium is organized to be accessible to public officials, researchers, journalists, and the public. In addition, the Compendium is complemented by a fully searchable, near-exhaustive citation database of peer-reviewed journal articles pertaining to shale gas and oil extraction, the Repository for Oil and Gas Energy Research, that was developed by PSE Healthy Energy and which is housed on its website (https://www.psehealthyenergy.org/our-work/shale-gas-research-library/).


For this sixth edition of the Compendium, as prior ones, we compiled findings from three sources: articles from peer-reviewed medical or scientific journals; investigative reports by journalists; and reports from, or commissioned by, government agencies. Peer-reviewed articles were identified through databases such as PubMed and Web of Science, and from within the PSE Healthy Energy database. Our entries briefly describe studies that document harm, or risk of harm, associated with fracking and summarize the principal findings.

The studies and investigations referenced in the dated entries catalogued in Compilation of Studies & Findings are current through April 1, 2019.

In our review of the data, seventeen compelling themes emerged; these serve as the organizational structure of the Compendium. Readers will notice the ongoing upsurge in reported problems and health impacts, making each section top-heavy with recent data. The Compendium focuses on topics most closely related to the public health and safety impacts of fracking. These include risks from fracking infrastructure, including compressor stations, pipelines, silica sand mining operations, natural gas storage facilities, the manufacture and transportation of liquefied natural gas (LNG), and, for the first time, gas-fired power plants. Fracking, a major source of two greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide and methane, is incompatible with climate solutions. Climate change is a public health crisis and receives our close attention in the sixth edition.

Given the rapidly expanding body of evidence related to the risks and harms of unconventional oil and gas extraction, we plan to continue updating the Compendium approximately every year. It is a living document, housed on the websites of Concerned Health Professionals of New York and Physicians for Social Responsibility. Read more about the process and scope of our work in the "About this Report" and the "Foreword to the Sixth Edition" sections of the Compendium.

toward a treaty to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of the high seas—the two-thirds of the world’s ocean beyond the jurisdiction of any country.

At this meeting—the third of four substantive sessions—governments will be working to agree on the details of a global mechanism to establish marine protected areas and standards for assessing the environmental impacts of human activities in these international waters. The high seas are currently governed by a patchwork of international bodies that is failing to protect this vast and ecologically vital wilderness, which is also the last global common.

The recent Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, prepared by 145 experts from 50 countries, found that roughly 66 percent of Earth’s marine environment has been significantly altered by human activity, and that the numbers and health of flora and fauna are declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history. This is due to numerous factors, including climate change, and to help slow the damage and better safeguard biodiversity, the report recommended expanding the current network of marine protected areas.

In another international forum, the Convention on Biological Diversity, governments are starting to call for protecting and conserving at least 30 percent of the ocean and sustainable management of the whole ocean by 2030. With this backdrop, the U.N. talks to protect the high seas are taking place at a critical time. It is now up to world leaders to finalize this treaty before humankind runs out of chances to secure the health of our oceans for present and future generations.”

“Tell Credit Suisse to Ditch Norway’s Ocean Dumpers! ‘They won’t get our fjord,’” Earthworks, August 8, 2019, http://org.salsalabs.com/o/676/p/dia/action4/common/public/?action_KEY=23753&okay=true, stated, “Since 2016 Sámi Indigenous People have said no to the Nussir copper mine that would dump 30 million tonnes of mine tailings into their fjord. This pollution will smother important fishing grounds and threaten the Sámi way of life.

But the mine is moving forward, thanks to Credit Suisse.

Credit Suisse props up Nussir, along with other irresponsible companies whose mines threaten ecosystems and Indigenous communities. Mine waste dumping is an outdated practice that should be banned once and for all – not backed by big banks.

Take Action: Sign the petition calling on Credit Suisse to respect Sámi Indigenous communities and Ditch Ocean Dumping.”

No rest for Australian activists: Adani received approval for the enormous Carmichael Mine, which plans to export coal through the Great Barrier Reef. Snap ‘climate emergency’ actions are being held across the country in response. More on the approval: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jun/14/campaigners-criticise-reckless-approval-adani-mine-australia.”

The U.S. Department of Transportation, following a number of fiery and polluting oil train wrecks, issued a rule requiring railroads to establish regional response teams along oil train routes and to provide information about such trains to state and tribal emergency response organizations, identifying a coordinator for each zone (JohnRaby, “Feds requiring regional response teams to oil train wrecks,” NFIC, April 2019).

Senior officials at EPA did not follow the advice of agency scientists and lawyers, when issuing a rule in April 2019, restricting, but not banning as recommended, the use of highly carcinogenic asbestos (Lisa Friedman, “E.P.A. Ignores Experts on Asbestos Ban, Memos Say,” The New York Times, May 8, 2019).
Lisa Friedman, "E.P.A. Won't Ban Chlorpyrifos, Pesticide Tied to Children’s Health Problems," *The New York Times*, July 18, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/18/climate/epa-chlorpyrifos-pesticide-ban.html, reported, "The Trump administration took a major step to weaken the regulation of toxic chemicals on Thursday when the Environmental Protection Agency announced that it would not ban a widely used pesticide that its own experts have linked to serious health problems in children."


The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) ensures there is public review of projects that impact birds, other wildlife, and the places they need. The law requires federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service take a hard look at the environmental consequences of their actions, base their decisions on accurate scientific data, and give the public a chance to weigh in before approving actions like logging, roadbuilding, and energy development. NEPA requires federal agencies to prepare environmental assessments or environmental impact statements to thoroughly evaluate potential harm to resources, and this analysis ensures they consider ways to address those impacts, including choosing different measures to reduce impacts. Right now, the Forest Service is in the midst of revising its NEPA regulations, with its avowed intent to "increase[e] the pace and scale of work accomplished on the ground." Unfortunately, the Forest Service would accomplish this goal by removing requirements for environmental review and public participation, undermining this bedrock conservation law and putting the resources of our National Forests at risk.

Under the proposed changes to the current regulations, the majority of decisions would be made without any environmental analysis or public review, including high impact activities such as logging of up to 6.6 acres (4,200 acres), and construction of up to 5 miles or reconstruction of up to 10 miles of roads. In addition, the Forest Service would sidestep NEPA analysis on even more activities by allowing use of older environmental assessments or environmental impact statements, even though they were not prepared to specifically address the proposed logging, roadbuilding, or other activity in question. The new regulations would also eliminate the requirement to provide public scoping for categorical exclusions or preparation of environmental assessments, which is often the only notice the public would receive and the only chance to weigh in before the Forest Service moves forward to authorize potentially destructive activities. Further, the Forest Service would remove the presumption that projects in inventoried Roadless areas and potential wilderness areas require more extensive analysis through preparation of environmental impact statements, even though these more intact lands require more scrutiny—and, of course, often provide the best habitat.

A host of other proposed changes to the Forest Service’s NEPA rules all fit this theme: Approve potentially damaging activities in a way that totally avoids or limits environmental review, prevents a thorough analysis of impacts, and excludes the public from serving the vital function of overseeing how the Forest Service is managing these public resources. This is not how NEPA works and these regulations are in stark opposition to the letter and the spirit of this important law.

The Forest Service seems to have lost sight of its obligation to manage our national forests in a way that supports the many resources they contain, including birds and the places they need to survive. We’re working to remind them and you can too—if you haven’t already, please submit your public comments through our Action Center. The deadline to comment is August 26."

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fragile ecosystems by prioritizing industry interests over science.

As the New York Times reported, the Trump administration's rollbacks will 'very likely clear the way for new mining, oil and gas drilling, and development in areas where protected species live.'

Noah Greenwald, the Center for Biological Diversity's endangered species director, said the dramatic rule changes 'could be the beginning of the end' for hundreds of species such as wolves and monarch butterflies. 'We'll fight the Trump administration in court to block this rewrite, which only serves the oil industry and other polluters who see endangered species as pesky inconveniences,' said Greenwald. The Washington Post summarizes the Trump administration's sweeping changes to the widely popular law.

Potential threats to business opportunities and other costs of listing a species [as endangered] must now be considered and shared with the public...

The administration will also shrink the number of habitats set aside for threatened wildlife. Currently, land that plants and animals occupy is set aside for their protection, in addition to areas that they once occupied but abandoned.

For the threatened species, unoccupied habitat might not be protected, opening it up for oil and gas exploration or other forms of development.

Conservationists and some politicians decried the changes as a major rollback of the 46-year-old law credited with saving the bald eagle, grizzly bear, humpback whale, American alligator, and Florida manatee from extinction.

The administration's rollbacks, which sparked a torrent of public opposition, come just months after a dire United Nations report warned that human activity has pushed a million plant and animal species to the brink of extinction.

The Sierra Club said in a statement that the administration's far-reaching rule changes, which the group dubbed Trump's 'extinction plan,' will accelerate that alarming trend:

'Undermining this popular and successful law is a major step in the wrong direction as we face the increasing challenges of climate change and its effects on wildlife," said Lena Moffitt, director of Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign. "The Endangered Species Act works; our communities—both natural and human—have reaped the benefits. This safety net must be preserved.'

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Lisa Friedman, "States Sue Trump Administration Over Rollback of Obama-Era Climate Rule," The New York Times, August 13, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/13/climate/states-lawsuit-clean-power-ace.html; "A coalition of 29 states and cities on Tuesday sued to block the Trump administration from easing restrictions on coal-burning power plants, setting up a case that could determine how much leverage the federal government has to fight climate change in the future."


The report put together by over 100 specialists from 52 nations finds that the initial problem is overuse, misuse and conflicting use of land as populations increase. Some of the initial problem is
development encroaching on lands that can be used for farming and grazing. This includes taking land out of food production for palm oil and other biofuel production as well as from urban sprawl. All of this is being greatly exacerbated by global warming induced climate change bringing drought, flooding and changes in weather patterns throwing farming out of sync with the weather. This sometimes changes what crops can be grown well, if at all, where, and when to plant and take various steps in the agricultural process. Since the change is continual and variable, along with the local weather, it often becomes unpredictable for agriculturalists what to do when. On top of that, the extreme weather may suddenly seriously damage, destroy, or make impossible even the best timed actions, such being unable to plant at the proper moment because of extreme flooding.

The world food situation is already seriously deteriorating with 10% of the planet’s population undernourished, and many being forced to migrate because of long term agricultural failure, as has occurred in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Syria, a number of areas in Africa and other places. Unless significant appropriate action is taken soon, the reduction of agricultural lands will continue increasing food insecurity and escalating the number of climate refugees. There is a clear danger that food crises could occur simultaneously on several continents causing world wide food shortages, deaths and suffering amid economic chaos and civil unrest bringing political and violent conflict. The report found that currently half-billion people y live in locations turning into desert, while soil is being lost between 10 and 100 times more rapidly than it is forming.

'The report also offered a measure of hope, laying out pathways to addressing the looming food crisis, though they would require a major re-evaluation of land use and agriculture worldwide as well as consumer behavior. Proposals include increasing the productivity of land, wasting less food and persuading more people to shift their diets away from cattle and other types of meat.’


The data is part of the World Resources Institute’s (WRI) Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas, a publicly available database and interactive tool designed to enhance global understanding of water scarcity, which WRI calls ‘one of the defining issues of the 21st century.’

‘The newly updated Aqueduct tools allow users to better see and understand water risks and make smart decisions to manage them,’ WRI president and CEO Andrew Steer said in a statement. ‘A new generation of solutions is emerging, but nowhere near fast enough. Failure to act will be massively expensive in human lives and livelihoods.’

‘Water stress is the biggest crisis no one is talking about,’ said Steer. ‘Its consequences are in plain sight in the form of food insecurity, conflict and migration, and financial instability.’

The WRI statement noted that ‘the world has seen a string of water crises in recent years, as what’s now known as ‘Day Zero’—the day when the taps run dry—has threatened major cities from Cape Town to São Paolo to Chennai.’

Betsy Otto, who directs WRI’s global water program, told The New York Times that ‘we’re likely to see more of these Day Zeros in the future.’

Otto, speaking to The Guardian, added that ‘our populations and economies are growing and demanding more water. But our supply is threatened by climate change, water waste, and pollution.’

In a blog post announcing the new data, WRI outlined three ways that communities and countries around the world can reduce water stress, regardless of where they rank on the group’s list:
Increase agricultural efficiency by using seeds and irrigation techniques that require less water, investing in developing technology that improves farming, and cutting back on food loss and waste;
Invest in 'grey' and 'green' infrastructure, improving everything from pipes and treatment plants to wetlands and watersheds.
Treat, reuse, and recycle 'wastewater.'
The blog explained that countries rank at WRI's highest level for water stress if their 'irrigated agriculture, industries, and municipalities withdraw more than 80 percent of their available supply on average every year.'
A dozen of the top-ranked countries are located in the Middle East and North Africa. 'The region is hot and dry, so water supply is low to begin with,' wrote WRI, 'but growing demands have pushed countries further into extreme stress.'
India, which has a population exceeding 1.3 billion, also ranks among the most water-stressed nations.
Shashi Shekhar—former secretary of India’s Ministry of Water Resources and a senior fellow at WRI India—noted that 'the recent water crisis in Chennai gained global attention, but various areas in India are experiencing chronic water stress as well.'
'India can manage its water risk with the help of reliable and robust data pertaining to rainfall, surface, and groundwater to develop strategies that strengthen resilience.' Shekhar said. 'Aqueduct can help identify and prioritize water risks in India and around the world.'
Behind the 17 nations at WRI's top level are 44 countries—collectively home to another third of the world's population—that face 'high' water stress, withdrawing on average more than 40 percent of their available supply annually. However, as WRI's blog post pointed out, 'pockets of extreme water stress exist even in countries with low overall water stress.'
'For example, South Africa and the United States rank #48 and #71 on WRI's list, respectively, yet the Western Cape (the state home to Cape Town) and New Mexico experience extremely high stress levels,' the group explained. 'The populations in these two states rival those of entire nations on the list of most water-stressed countries.'
The data is clear: There are undeniably worrying trends in water, WRI concluded. 'But by taking action now and investing in better management, we can solve water issues for the good of people, economies and the planet.'

See the group’s full ranking—which is based on United Nations member countries and does not include some small island nations due to model limitations—below:
### National Water Stress Rankings

#### EXTREMELY HIGH BASELINE WATER STRESS
1. Qatar
2. Israel
3. Lebanon
4. Iran
5. Jordan
6. Libya
7. Kuwait
8. Saudi Arabia
9. Ethiopia
10. United Arab Emirates
11. San Marino
12. Burundi
13. India
14. Pakistan
15. Turkmenistan
16. Oman
17. Botswana

#### HIGH BASELINE WATER STRESS
18. Chile
19. Cyprus
20. Yemen
21. Andorra
22. Morocco
23. Belgium
24. Mexico
25. Pakistan
26. Greece
27. Afghanistan
28. Spain
29. Algeria
30. Tunisia
31. Syria
32. Turkey
33. Albania
34. Armenia
35. Bhutan
36. Bangladesh
37. Brazil
38. Kyrgyzstan
39. Niger
40. Nepal
41. Portugal
42. Iraq
43. Egypt
44. Italy

#### MEDIUM-HIGH BASELINE WATER STRESS
45. Thailand
46. Armenia
47. Sudan
48. South Africa
49. Luxembourg
50. Australia
51. Tajikistan
52. Moldova
53. South Korea
54. Bulgaria
55. Mongolia
56. China
57. Guatemala
58. Estonia
59. France
60. Kazakhstan
61. Mozambique
62. Germany
63. Lesotho
64. Dominican Republic
65. Indonesia
66. Peru
67. Venezuela
68. Cuba

#### LOW-MEDIUM BASELINE WATER STRESS
69. North Korea
70. Romania
71. United States
72. Zimbabwe
73. Democratic Republic of the Congo
74. Haiti
75. Japan
76. Angola
77. Sri Lanka
78. El Salvador
79. Tanzania
80. Netherlands
81. Ecuador
82. Lithuania
83. Philippines
84. South Sudan
85. Ukraine
86. Poland
87. Chad
88. Senegal
89. United Kingdom
90. Russian Federation
91. Georgia
92. Argentina
93. Portugal
94. Russia
95. Bohria
96. Ethiopia
97. Bosnia and Herzegovina
98. Swedish
99. Russia
100. Slovenia

#### LOW BASELINE WATER STRESS
101. Rwanda
102. Liechtenstein
103. Guinea-Bissau
104. Mozambique
105. Vietnam
106. Kenya
107. Costa Rica
108. Canada
109. Sierra Leone
110. Zambia
111. Switzerland
112. Brazil
113. Hungary
114. Cape Verde
115. Senegal
116. Romania
117. Slovenia
118. Colombia
119. Malaysia
120. Belize
121. Montenegro
122. Malaysia
123. Mali
124. Finland
125. Slovakia
126. Ireland
127. Iceland
128. Afghanistan
129. Cambodia
130. Bhutan
131. Lithuania
132. Malaysia
133. Honduras
134. Austria
135. Uganda
136. Panama
137. Nicaragua
138. Grenada
139. Bosnia
140. Chad
141. Papua New Guinea
142. New Zealand
143. Sao Tome and Principe
144. Seychelles
145. Bangladesh
146. Cameroon
147. Lesotho
148. South Africa
149. Sierra Leone
150. Paraguay

Note: This is based on IRI number countries. Palestine is a non-member observer and would place between Lebanon and Laos. Small island nations could not be added to the rankings because of limitations of the model. Scores for these countries are available separately.

Source: wri.org/water
Groundwater levels have dropped significantly across much of the West in recent years, impacting food production and drinking water access. Aquifers are being pumped dry in an effort to meet demand for water as populations boom throughout the West.
There are thousands of potential Flint, MI's in the U.S. In California, Jose A. Del Real, "The Crisis Lurking in Californians' Taps: How 1,000 Water Systems May Be at Risk: The troubled districts, which operate in mostly poor areas on thin budgets, receive little oversight and face a host of problems," The New York Times, July 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/24/us/the-crisis-lurking-in-californians-taps-how-1000-water-systems-may-be-at-risk.html, reported, "As many as 1,000 community water systems in California may be at high risk of failing to deliver potable water — one out of every three — according to a previously undisclosed estimate by senior officials at the California State Water Resources Control Board, which regulates drinking water. These troubled districts, which include Sativa, often operate in mostly poor areas on thin budgets. With little oversight, they face problems ranging from bankruptcy to sudden interruptions in water capacity, to harmful toxins being delivered through taps."

Emma G. Fitzsimmons, "In Echo of Flint Lead Crisis, Newark Offers Bottled Water: Federal officials warned that home filters provided by the city were not enough," The New York Times, August 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/nyregion/newark-water-lead.html, reported that officials in Newark, NJ had been slow to admit that the city had a serious problem with lead in much of its drinking water. "two days after a scathing letter from the E.P.A. raised concerns about the safety of the city's drinking water — officials said they would start offering bottled water to residents.

Gov. Philip D. Murphy of New Jersey and Newark’s mayor, Ras Baraka, said in a joint statement that they would provide bottled water at four local centers, starting as early as Monday afternoon." Filters had been distributed earlier, but were ineffective. Some 285,000 people were involved.


According to the Yurok Tribe, the resolution 'establishes the Rights of the Klamath River to exist, flourish, and naturally evolve; to have a clean and healthy environment free from pollutants; to have a stable climate free from human-caused climate change impacts; and to be free from contamination by genetically engineered organisms.'

'This resolution provides another powerful tool to protect our river, which has sustained the Yurok people since time began," said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe.'We have always and will always do everything in our power to preserve and enhance the Klamath for all future generations.'

'We are sending a strong message that we now have an additional legal mechanism to shield the Klamath against those who might harm our most sacred resource,' added Toby Vanlindingham, the Weitchpec District Representative on the Yurok Tribal Council. 'It is and always will be our responsibility to defend this river by any means necessary.'

The Yurok Tribe says that the Klamath River has supported 'uncountable generations of Yurok people', explaining that the river is central to the Tribe’s ceremonial practices, food security and other important facets of the Yurok lifeway.

With this resolution, the Yurok Tribe becomes the fourth Native American Tribe to adopt the Rights of Nature.

In 2016, the Ho-Chunk Nation amended their Tribal constitution to enshrine the Rights of Nature after enduring years of significant environmental impacts stemming from frac sand mining, the transport of Bakken oil and industrial agriculture.

In 2017, the Ponca Nation in Oklahoma passed a statute recognizing the rights of nature in response to their own struggle with fracking. ‘We all know that water is life. The years of fish kills related to the fracking and injection wells amount to environmental genocide,’ said Casey Camp-Horinek. ‘It is going to take all of us humans because we’re speaking for those without voices, for the deer, the cattle, those that fly. In our Tribe we have a funeral a week now. We’re being fracked to death and It’s time to take a stand for our people and defend the earth.’

Earlier this year, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe adopted a Rights of Manoomin law to protect the legal rights of manoomin, or wild rice, and the fresh water resources and habitats on which it depends. The White Earth Tribal resolution explained that the Rights of Manoomin law was adopted because ‘it has become necessary to provide a legal basis to
Protect wild rice and fresh water resources as part of our primary treaty foods for future generations. This comes as wild rice, a traditional staple and sacred food for this Nation, faces significant impacts from habitat loss, climate change, development, genetic engineering, and other threats."

Jake Johnson, "'Alarming' Explosion of Toxic Pesticide Use Causing Insect Apocalypse in United States: Study: 'Insect abundance has declined 45 percent. This is a global crisis—we must ban neonics to save the bees!' Common Dreams, August 7, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/08/07/alarming-explosion-toxic-pesticide-use-causing-insect-apocalypse-united-states-study?cd-origin=rss&utm_term=AO&utm_campaign=Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Weekly%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email, reported, "The rapid and dangerous decline of the insect population in the United States—often called an 'insect apocalypse' by scientists—has largely been driven by an increase in the toxicity of U.S. agriculture caused by the use of neonicotinoid pesticides, according to a study published Tuesday in the journal PLOS One.

The study found that American agriculture has become 48 times more toxic to insects over the past 25 years and pinned 92 percent of the toxicity increase on neonicotinoids, which were banned by the European Union last year due to the threat they pose to bees and other pollinators.

Kendra Klein, Ph.D., study co-author and senior staff scientist at Friends of the Earth, said the United States must follow Europe's lead and ban the toxic pesticides before it is too late. "It is alarming that U.S. agriculture has become so much more toxic to insect life in the past two decades," Klein said in a statement. 'We need to phase out neonicotinoid pesticides to protect bees and other insects that are critical to biodiversity and the farms that feed us.'

'Congress must pass the Saving America's Pollinators Act to ban neonicotinoids.' Klein added. 'In addition, we need to rapidly shift our food system away from dependence on harmful pesticides and toward organic farming methods that work with nature rather than against it.'

According to National Geographic, neonics 'are used on over 140 different agricultural crops in more than 120 countries. They attack the central nervous system of insects, causing overstimulation of their nerve cells, paralysis, and death.'

With insect populations declining due to neonic use, 'the numbers of insect-eating birds have plummeted in recent decades,' National Geographic reported. "There's also been a widespread decline in nearly all bird species.'

As Common Dreams reported in February, scientists warned in a global analysis that by decimating insect populations, widespread use of pesticides poses a serious threat to the planet's ecosystems and ultimately to the survival of humankind.

Klein said the 'good news' is that neonics are not at all necessary for food production.

'We have four decades of research and evidence that agroecological farming methods can grow our food without decimating pollinators,' said Klein.

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"Mexican Government Takes Action On Pesticides," International IndianTreaty Council (IITC), Via E-mail August 30, 2019, http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/1383891/f6447b7b48/545554959/aa063f1824/, reported, "On May 8th, 2018, the Mexican Government created the Inter-ministerial Group for the Regulation of Pesticides, composed of the Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT) and several other Mexican government agencies. On May 31, 2019 representatives of the Mexican Government National Institute on Indigenous Peoples (INPI) met with the Yaqui Traditional Authorities and IITC in Vicam, Sonora Mexico to discuss the ongoing urgent need for the Mexican government to implement the 2015 recommendations made to Mexico by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as a result of IITC's submission documenting the severe impacts on child and maternal health as a result of toxic pesticides used in Río Yaqui, many of which are banned in the countries that export them to Mexico including the US and Germany. A follow-up letter sent by INPI's Director Adelfo Rufino Montez to a Commission member, cc’d to IITC and the Yaqui Authorities, on June 19, 2019, called attention to the need to implement the CRC recommendations (available at: https://www.iitc.org/wp-content/uploads/Letter-from-INPI-re-CRC-
The letter from INPI affirmed that "the use of highly dangerous pesticides has significantly harmed the population of indigenous communities, as is the case of the Yaqui People-Tribe of the State of Sonora, which presented the effects that its members have been subjected to in the framework of the Meeting entitled, "Human Rights Legal Review by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes, and the United Nations Conventions on hazardous chemicals and wastes, in particular the Rotterdam Convention".

This Expert Group Meeting in Mexico City on 19-20 January 2019 available at: https://www.itc.org/wp-content/uploads/IMMEDIATE-RELEASE-UN-Expert-Meeting-2019-1.pdf, and in which INPI and several UN bodies participated, was co-hosted by ITC, CADPI and FILAC and included presentations of community-based studies by Indigenous Peoples from Rio Yaqui and other parts of Mexico, Argentina, Guatemala, Peru, Boriken (Puerto Rico), Nicaragua, Arizona and New Mexico United States, Brazil (Amazon region) and Alaska (Arctic region) [on the human rights and intergenerational health impacts of environmental toxics]. The Rapporteur’s Study and Legal review will be presented to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the UN General Assembly in 2020.

Andrea Carmen, ITC’s Executive Director stated the "ITC expresses its deep appreciation to all those who have contributed to the recognition by the United Nations of these urgent human rights and environmental health violations and to the current government of Mexico for taking steps to ensure that the CRC recommendations regarding toxic pesticides use in Rio Yaqui are finally implemented. We also share the heartbreak of the families who have lost so many children to this pernicious form of environmental violence which continues to enrich corporations at the expense of Indigenous children, women and families in Rio Yaqui, elsewhere in Mexico and around the world."


The problem of growth of an increase in blooms of cyanobacteria, which produces toxic substances, in lakes has caused bans on fishing and other uses of waters from the Mississippi coast to the Pacific Northwest in summer 2019. This is a result of global warming bringing unusually heavy rains flushing sewage, fertilizer and other nutrients into streams and lakes, combined with an increase in hot sunny days that stimulate growth of the organism.

Christine Hauser, "Algae Can Poison Your Dog: Dogs have become fatally ill after frolicking in water infused with the toxic algae, owners said," The New York Times, August 12, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/12/us/blue-green-algae-dogs.html, reported, "Dog owners have reported this summer that their pets became fatally ill after swimming in freshwater lakes and ponds, apparently after ingesting water laden with toxic blue-green algae."

Jessica Corbett, ‘Example of ‘Unknown Unknowns,’ Study Detailing ‘Almost Instant Mortality of Corals’ Suggests Crisis Worse Than Previously Understood: “The water temperatures are so warm that the coral animal doesn’t bleach… the animal dies and its underlying skeleton is all that remains,” Common Dreams, August 9, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/08/09/example-unknown-unknowns-study-detailling-almost-instant-mortality-corals-suggests?cid=origin=rss&utm_term=AO&utm_campaign=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_content=email&utm_source=Daily%20Newsletter&utm_medium=Email, reported, "As the human-caused climate crisis drives up ocean temperatures at a rate that has scientists worried, a study published Thursday in the journal Current Biology reveals that warming waters are an even bigger threat to coral reefs than experts previously realized.

Past research has raised alarm about how ocean pollution and rising temperatures cause coral bleaching—which is when coral expels algae, its main food source, and turns white. Although more
susceptible to disease and death, bleached coral can recover if temperatures fall, so some scientists have been hopeful that urgent climate action could revive impacted reefs.

However, the new study—conducted by researchers at the University of New South Wales Sydney, the University of Newcastle, the University of Technology Sydney, James Cook University, and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)—heightens concerns about the future of coral reefs in a warming world.

According to the study:

Severe marine heatwaves have recently become a common feature of global ocean conditions due to a rapidly changing climate. These increasingly severe thermal conditions are causing an unprecedented increase in the frequency and severity of natural events in marine ecosystems, including on coral reefs... [M]arine heatwave events on coral reefs are biologically distinct to how coral bleaching has been understood to date.

"Until now, we have described coral bleaching as an event where the symbiotic relationship between coral and its microbes breaks down and corals lose their main source of nutrition, and the coral can die if the symbiosis is not restored," co-author Tracy Ainsworth, an associate professor at Australia's University of New South Wales Sydney, explained in a statement.

"But what we are now seeing is that severe marine heatwave events can have a far more severe impact than coral bleaching," Ainsworth continued. "The water temperatures are so warm that the coral animal doesn't bleach—in terms of a loss of its symbiosis—the animal dies and its underlying skeleton is all that remains."

"We find that the skeleton is immediately overgrown by rapid growth of algae and bacteria," said co-author Bill Leggat, an associate professor at the U.K.'s University of Newcastle. By CT scanning the coral skeleton, Leggat said, the team found that "this process is devastating not just for the animal tissue, but also for the skeleton that is left behind, which is rapidly eroded and weakened."

Laura Richardson at the U.K.-based Bangor University's School of Ocean Sciences—who was not involved in the study—told BBC News that the team's significant discovery was "the rapidity with which the reef skeleton breaks down when you have these severe heatwaves."

They are the first researchers, as Richardson noted, to document that such events are causing "almost instant mortality of corals."

'Climate scientists talk about 'unknown unknowns'—impacts that we haven't anticipated from existing knowledge and experience,' said study co-author Scott Heron of Australia's James Cook University. 'This discovery fits into this category.'

"As we begin now to understand this impact," Heron added, "the question is how many more of these 'unknown unknowns' might there still be that could bring faster and greater damage to coral reefs from climate change."

Though the study generated alarm, the researchers expressed hope that it will spur public outcry for policymakers to pursue bolder efforts to combat the climate crisis—and, specifically, protect coral reefs, particularly considering the anticipated consequences of inaction.

PBS News Hour reported that "without the option to recover, the world may start seeing corals die off faster than expected. And the death of corals would come with a steep cost for humans: flood protection that's worth tens of millions in the U.S. alone, plus an estimated value of almost $30 billion each year globally in tourism, fishing, and other benefits."

"Across the globe coral reefs are still a source of inspiration and awe of the natural world, as well as being critically important to the communities that rely upon them," said Ainsworth. "Given that the degradation of coral reefs will result in the collapse of ecosystem services that sustain over half a billion people, we urgently need actions both globally and locally that protect and conserve these truly wonderful places."

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Walter Einenkel, "Alaska's water temperatures have been so hot this summer that salmon are dying off in large numbers," Daily Kos, August 21, 2019, https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/8/21/1880433/-Alaska-s-water-temperatures-have-been-so-hot-this-summer-that-salmon-are-dying-off-in-large-numbers?detail=emailkre, reported, "Salmon are..."
showing up dead in record numbers across Western Alaska this summer, and scientists believe it is due to an unprecedented heat wave. Stephanie Quinn-Davidson, a scientist and director of the Yukon Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, led a group of fellow scientists to investigate along the Koyukuk River and counted "850 dead unspawned salmon on that expedition, although they estimated the total was likely four to 10 times larger." The scientists saw no signs of disease or infections. These salmon, they believe, are dying off in record numbers due to the heat."

Oceana reported via E-mail, June 19, 2019, https://oceana.org, "Starving and emaciated gray whales are dying and washing up on West Coast beaches. Nearly 150 gray whales have died in U.S., Canadian and Mexican waters already, and right now there’s no end in sight.

Gray whale mothers and their young are especially at risk. The mothers reach the limits of their fat storage earlier than males because of feeding their calves. The calves, in turn, face slim odds of survival without their mothers.

Gray whales are just the tip of the iceberg. Whenever a large, high-visibility species suffers like these whales are, it can signal that the greater ocean ecosystem is in trouble. The stakes are sky-high for the entire Pacific and Arctic coast ecosystem and all the marine life that call it home.

Overfishing of crabs that shorebirds in Delaware Bay feed on, as of June 4, 2019 was leaving several migrating bird species that pass their hungry and in danger of extinction (Jon Hurdle, "Delaware Bay Shorebirds Go Hungry," The New York Times, June 4, 2019).

Warming weather with mild winters allowing wasps to survive, in spring 2019, brought an increase of super wasp nests with up to 18,000 aggressive wasps from the usual on or two to perhaps 90. The wasps are quite territorial, and pose a serious danger to people, sometimes for quite young people ("Officials Warn of Wasp ‘Super Nests’ in Alabama: A colony can grow to be as big as a Volkswagen Beetle and can have 15,000 wasps. The last time scientists saw such an unusually high number of enormous nests was in 2006 "Officials Warn of Wasp ‘Super Nests’ in Alabama," The New York Times, June 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/climate/yellow-jackets-wasp-nests.html).

Kai Schultz, "India’s Wild Tiger Population Rises, Despite Conflict With Humans July 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/29/world/asia/india-tiger.html, reported, "India’s population of endangered Bengal tigers is on the rise, officials said Monday. According to a government estimate, there are nearly 3,000 Bengal tigers in the wild in India, a 33 percent increase since 2014. Wildlife experts say better safety monitoring and stricter wildlife policies have helped the tiger population grow to its largest in about two decades."

"But as the number of tigers has increased, so have the human-tiger conflicts in India, a country of 1.3 billion."

Palko Karasz, "200 Reindeer Starved to Death. Experts Call It a Sign of Climate Change," The New York Times, July 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/31/world/europe/norway-reindeer-climate-change.html, reported, "Two hundred reindeer died of starvation last winter on a remote Arctic archipelago, researchers in Norway reported, highlighting what they said were the effects of climate change on vulnerable ecosystems."

"Ashild Onvik Pedersen, a terrestrial ecologist at the institute, said on Wednesday that climate change had increased the frequency and amount of rain in the high Arctic. Heavy winter rains had then turned to ice, preventing reindeer from reaching their usual vegetation."

Palko Karasz, "France to End Disposal of $900 Million in Unsold Goods Each Year," The New York Times, June 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/05/world/europe/france-unsold-products.html, reported, "France plans to outlaw the destruction of unsold consumer products, a practice that currently results in the disposal of new goods worth 800 million euros, or more than $900 million, in the country each year."
By 2023, manufacturers and retailers will have to donate, reuse or recycle the goods. Prime Minister Edouard Philippe said on Tuesday of the measure, which the government billed as the first of its kind.


The global population of 7.7 billion will increase to 9.7 billion by midcentury and may peak at 10.9 billion by around 2100, the United Nations said. The findings are a downward revision from the previous forecast by the global body, when it projected 11.2 billion people would inhabit the planet by century's end.

Jessica Corbett, "Scientists Urge UN to Add Environmental Destruction to Geneva Conventions' List of War Crimes: 'Despite calls for a fifth convention two decades ago, military conflict continues to destroy megafauna, push species to extinction, and poison water resources," common Dreams, July 24, 2019, https://www.commondreams.org/news/2019/07/24/scientists-urge-un-add-environmental-destruction-geneva-conventions-list-war-crimes, reported, "In a letter to the editor published Tuesday by the journal Nature, two dozen scientists from around the world urged the United Nations' International Law Commission to adopt a Fifth Geneva Convention that creates protections for the environment in armed conflicts."

World Overview


Crucial Reforms Languish as Colombia Seeks to Consolidate Peace

Almost a year into President Iván Duque's administration, a polarised Colombia faces many obstacles in consolidating a fragile peace. Hardline elements of Duque's administration and his Democratic Centre Party continue to take aim at the Special Jurisdiction for Peace – a rehabilitation-oriented tribunal at the core of the transitional justice arrangement reached under the November 2016 peace deal – which they argue is too lenient toward members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Although Duque recently was forced to enact legislation to complete the legal framework for the tribunal after Congress and the Constitutional Court rejected his efforts to change it, it is not clear whether he and his administration are prepared to move past their focus on altering the tribunal and pay more attention to languishing aspects of the peace arrangements.

With the countryside still wracked by violence, coca cultivation on the rise, and the growth of armed groups (including dissident FARC factions, National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas and drug trafficking organisations), the government should invest more time and resources into implementing the
peace agreement’s rural reforms. These provide the most promising path toward developing a licit agricultural economy that can displace coca production and deprive organised armed groups of their principal funding source. They also can help begin to introduce state presence into regions of Colombia’s countryside outside of official reach.

EU political encouragement and financial support can help Colombia prioritise these reforms, as well as meet the enormous humanitarian burden created by the recent influx of 1.3 million Venezuelan migrants and refugees fleeing the ongoing crisis in their homeland, and the millions of internally displaced Colombians who have fled their homes because of armed conflict over the last 25 years.

**The EU and its member states can help to address this complex set of challenges by:**

Continuing to voice strong support for the Special Jurisdiction for Peace in dialogues with the government and in multilateral fora, encouraging the government not to change or undermine the tribunal, and noting that keeping faith with the terms struck in 2016 will be important to the peace deal’s durability and Colombia’s stability.

Urging the government to step up progress on crucial land reforms and other measures implementing the peace agreement’s rural reform chapter, to which the EU is a major donor.

Increasing support for economic development in rural areas – especially those where coca production is rife – including by directly funding alternative livelihood or crop substitution projects.

Increasing its funding for humanitarian work to help Colombia shoulder the massive humanitarian burden created by the Venezuelan refugee and migrant influx, as well as internal displacement.

**Struggling with Transitional Justice**

The question of how to bring to justice former FARC members accused of serious crimes during the conflict has been highly contentious for years. Consistent with the 2016 peace agreement, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace favours reparatory community service work over jail time for FARC members who cooperate, which many in Colombia see as too lenient. President Duque came to power in August 2018 after campaigning on promises to introduce more stringent consequences for offenders, and his party spent much of the last year working toward this goal. In spring 2019, Duque lodged six “objections” to implementing legislation that Congress had already passed in accordance with the 2016 accords to establish a durable legal framework for the tribunal. But in May, Congress overrode the objections and, with the Constitutional Court upholding the override in June, Duque was forced to sign the legislation into law.

Although the fight over the implementing legislation appears to be over, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace remains controversial. A recent source of dispute is the tribunal’s May 2019 decision to thwart a U.S. extradition request and order the release of a former FARC commander, known as Jesús Santrich, who the U.S. wishes to prosecute for allegedly conspiring to traffic cocaine in 2018. After the tribunal ordered Santrich’s release, he was rearrested on “new” evidence, released again (this time under order of the Supreme Court), and sworn into one of the ten congressional slots allocated to the FARC under the 2016 deal – all before disappearing from a FARC reintegration cantonment, with leaked intelligence reports suggesting he fled to Venezuela.

Whatever the particulars of this and other high-profile cases, the government’s quarrels with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace are counterproductive. The terms by which the tribunal operates, however imperfect, are at the heart of the 2016 deal and cannot be altered without jeopardising it. Moreover, the time and attention of senior officials is urgently required elsewhere, as discussed below. The government’s recent proposal to cut 30 per cent of the tribunal’s and other transitional justice funding suggests, however, the divisive political battles around it are not over.

**Rural Reform: An Uneven Track Record**

Whereas the Duque administration has overwhelmingly focused its political attention on the Special Jurisdiction for Peace and bringing the FARC to justice, its implementation of the accord’s other elements – some critically important to establishing lasting peace in Colombia – has been uneven at best. On the positive side of the ledger, the government has undertaken important steps to reintegrate FARC members back into mainstream Colombian society, including through the National Reintegration Council’s approval of 24 economic projects and other initiatives to provide ex-combatants opportunities in the licit economy (up from two at the time Duque took office). The government has also finalised sixteen regional development plans, known as PDETs (Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial), designed through a
participatory process led at the community level in 170 municipalities. These plans contain thousands of proposed measures – which the government is winnowing down based on their assessed “viability” – that are meant to promote local economic development and improve the presence of state institutions in the countryside by, among other things, investing in infrastructure and expanding access to education and health services.

In other important respects, however, the government has ignored or dragged its feet on implementing the rural reform chapter. According to the Kroc Institute, which tracks peace agreement progress, 51 per cent of the initiatives in the rural reform chapter have made such little progress that it is unclear they will ever be fully implemented and a further 38 per cent have made no progress at all.

**Land reforms – strongly opposed by the Democratic Centre’s political base of elite land owners (who see rural reform as a threat to their power and interests) – need particular attention.** The peace agreement envisages three main measures to distribute land more equitably, create legal protections for owners, and encourage landholders to grow crops other than coca. One is to formalise the ownership of almost seven million hectares of untitled land by affording titles to the farmers working it. Before Duque took office, the National Land Agency had already titled 1.6 million hectares in just over a year, but its efforts appear to have slowed; as of June 2019 the number was only 1.9 million hectares. A second major measure – the creation of a government-owned “land fund” to distribute three million hectares to peasants with little or no land – is also faltering. Under the prior administration of Juan Manuel Santos, the fund’s holdings reached 525,000 hectares, but under the current administration they increased by only 32,000 hectares. The third measure – to establish a land registry to track ownership and better enable the collection of taxes – is faring better, as the High Advisor for Stabilisation secured financing to proceed with its creation.

**Managing insecurity and coca production in conflict-affected areas**

As Colombia struggles with implementing the 2016 accord, organised violence continues to rise in rural areas. ELN guerrillas, FARC dissidents who did not join the peace process or left it after it began, and drug trafficking groups still control large parts of the countryside. They regulate and participate in illegal economies, seek to control the communities where they operate through makeshift justice and other governance mechanisms, and fight each other as well as the state, causing great harm. More than 145,000 people were displaced by this violence in 2018, up from 139,000 in 2017.

Bogotá feels it is under unrelenting pressure from both domestic constituents and foreign partners to deal more firmly with rural crime and violence. In response, the Duque administration has increased deployments of troops and police officers in places like Catatumbo along the border of Venezuela and Bajo Cauca in the north west. It emphasised killing and capturing criminal or armed group leaders, such as the infamous FARC dissident known by the alias “Guacho”. But in general these efforts have not allowed the government to wrest territorial control away from illegal armed groups, nor have they weakened their power in general.

In the meantime, coca and cocaine production, which fund these illegal groups and motivate them to compete and fight with each other, are at historic highs in Colombia. In 2017, (the last year for which there is reliable data) coca production reached 1.300 metric tonnes. The U.S. has been especially critical of Bogotá for its inability to curb production, and President Trump has threatened to decertify Colombia as a partner to the U.S in counter-narcotics efforts, which would make the country ineligible for most U.S. assistance.

Whether or not this is likely to happen, the Colombian government has taken the White House’s discontent very seriously. It has committed to combat coca production through increasing forced eradication, promising to destroy 80,000 hectares of coca this year, and to substitute another 20,000 for legal crops. The Ministry of Defence appears to be preparing to return to aerial fumigation even though it is highly likely that the Constitutional Court – which has previously prohibited fumigation because of the alleged carcinogenic effects of the weed killer glyphosate – will force the spraying to stop.

Beyond issues of legality, a return to fumigation would be counterproductive policy. Prior efforts to control the coca economy through aerial fumigation (Colombia fumigated over one million hectares between 2000 and 2015) have failed. Part of the problem is that the technique is ineffective: multiple studies have shown that spraying a hectare of coca only destroys a small fraction of the crop, and that any minimal inroads it can make are unsustainable over time. Because farmers are
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For better or worse, the most promising fix for the persistence of organised armed groups and
illicit economies in Colombia’s rural communities lies with the rural reforms set forth in the 2016 peace
plan. Only by addressing the deep socio-economic disparities that grip these communities can Colombia
truly move past the legacy of violence.

The Venezuelan Crisis

On top of its domestic challenges, Colombia faces an increasing humanitarian burden caused by
the crisis next door. Since the Venezuelan economic and political crisis dramatically worsened in 2017,
more than one million Venezuelans have fled to Colombia, swelling the ranks of the more than 300,000
internally displaced Colombians due to violence in that same time period and millions of Colombians
displaced during a quarter century of conflict who have not yet returned home.

While the government has proved generous and welcoming to Venezuelans by providing temporary
residency and access to health and education, infrastructure along the border is woefully inadequate and
many migrants choose instead to live in squalor in Colombia’s big cities. Although Colombia is a middle-
income country, additional donor support is urgently needed. The UN and other humanitarian agencies
estimate the funding needs for Venezuelan refugees in Colombia are around €280 million for 2019, of
which only €67 million are currently covered by donors. Bogotá is contemplating relaxing deficit targets so
that it can spend an extra €800 million on meeting the needs of Venezuelan refugees and reallocating
money that should be spent on other priorities, including implementation of the 2016 peace deal.

The Road Ahead

The best way forward for Bogotá lies in faithfully implementing the 2016 peace accords. As a
major donor – an EU Trust Fund will have disbursed €120 million in support for rural development and
reintegration by the end of 2020 – the EU and its member states are well positioned to press Bogotá to
drop polarising disputes about FARC accountability and bear down on critically important rural reforms.
Given EU leadership on justice and accountability issues, it can be a strong voice for pressing the Duque
government to turn the page on its disputes with the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, making the point that
the tribunal is the imperfect product of a political compromise, but undermining it would jeopardise lasting
peace in Colombia. It should also push the government to fully fund all transitional justice mechanisms,
including the Special Jurisdiction, in its 2020 budget, notwithstanding recent announcements that it will
seek to cut funding for the transitional justice mechanisms by 30 per cent.

The EU and member states should also underline how important it is for political leaders to
dedicate more attention to languishing aspects of the peace accords. They should make clear that they
see these reforms as the key to a stable and prosperous future for Colombia, and in particular for the rural
areas that continue to face rampant violence. Much as Bogotá deserves credit for the progress it has
made on FARC reintegration, too many reforms have either stalled or failed entirely to get started. At the
top of the list are land reforms that have largely stalled since Duque took office.

While peace and security in the countryside ultimately depend on these reforms, in the shorter
term, the EU should continue to help the Colombian government strengthen its presence and capacity to
provide services in impoverished rural areas, including by funding projects for conflict resolution, promoting
criminal accountability and building infrastructure. In addition, the EU should encourage the government to
focus less on coca eradication, and more on efforts to stimulate the development of licit economies in
conflict-affected areas through alternative livelihoods and crop substitution.

Given these challenges, and the fact that successful rural development and peace agreement
implementation are envisioned to take fifteen years in Colombia and cost billions of euros, the EU should
begin to consider extending the Trust Fund beyond 2020, and adding more resources to it. In a similar
vein, the EU should consider increasing its humanitarian assistance to meet the needs created by the
growing Venezuelan influx, and to help Colombia shoulder the burden without taking funds away from the
crucial reform effort that is still in its early stages.

Preventing Further Conflict and Fragmentation in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is being buffeted by deadly unrest as it attempts a rapid transition to multi-party democracy
under Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. His government has chalked up significant achievements during the last
eighteen months of political and economic liberalisation. But the challenges it faces were laid bare on 22
June when the president of one of the country’s regional states, Amhara, and the Ethiopian military’s chief of staff were assassinated in concurrent events in separate cities. The killings came after intercommunal clashes in more than ten areas in 2018 led almost three million Ethiopians to flee their homes, the world’s largest conflict-related internal displacement in any one country that year.

Strains within the ruling coalition, the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), have contributed to the unrest. The EPRDF is almost inseparable from the Ethiopian state itself, controls all tiers of the federal system and has ruled for 27 years with an iron grip. Tensions among its four member parties have aggravated the country’s challenges while at the same time undercutting the government’s authority and ability to manage them. Ascendant ethno-nationalist and other opposition movements have exploited the ensuing political opening and further exacerbated instability. Particularly urgent is an evolving crisis in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, where the Sidama, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia’s south, pledge to declare a new regional state on 18 July, potentially setting off unrest and clashes between Sidama activists and other ethnic groups. Political tensions and insecurity have also led officials, opposition actors and diplomats to question whether it will be possible to hold credible parliamentary elections, currently scheduled for May 2020 and which Aby promises as a milestone toward more open politics, on time.

Calming rising tensions before they derail Ethiopia’s transition is becoming critical. Each of the country’s major flashpoints likely requires its own set of de-escalatory measures. But Ethiopia’s leaders can take some general steps. Aby and other EPRDF leaders should do everything within their power to rein in intra-EPRDF discord. Aby himself should avoid fueling the perception he is favouring his own Oromo political base. In this light, his recent appointment of General Adem Mohammed, an Amhara, as new military chief of staff, instead of the Oromo deputy chief who was next in line, was sensible. Central authorities should rely on federal security forces to deal with disturbances in regions only as a last resort, instead trusting regional forces where possible, lest federal forces stir up local anger; deploying the army in an attempt to thwart the Sidama’s self-declaration of statehood would likely backfire, for example. Regional EPRDF parties should avoid appointing hardliners to top slots. On some intra-EPRDF disputes, the mediation of respected former Ethiopian statesmen or military or religious leaders might help.

The EU and its member states should use the influence their good relations with Aby’s government and their important aid bring by:

- Continuing to engage Prime Minister Aby and the EPRDF leadership and encourage them to adopt the measures above, notably seeking to dial back dangerous inter-communal tensions.
- Given the urgency of the Sidama crisis, considering increasing European development assistance to accompany the south’s likely administrative rearrangement, in the event that the Sidama do unilaterally pursue their own regional state from 18 July. This could help avert protests among activists of other groups in the south by demonstrating that their concerns are also being attended to.
- Aiming to cushion with financial aid and technical support any negative side effects of economic liberalisation, while EU diplomats can advise that economic reform be implemented carefully to avoid shocks, such as a severe reduction in construction jobs due to reduced infrastructure investment, or the rapid removal of subsidies on items like wheat, cooking oil and electricity that could exacerbate political problems.
- Expediting the release of the EU’s planned electoral support package, with its first disbursements in September 2019, to help move forward preparations for the parliamentary vote.

Rising Ethno-nationalism and Potential Flashpoints

Ethiopia’s ruling coalition is fraying. The EPRDF has controlled all tiers of government from federal to village level since coming to power in 1991, routinely using repressive tactics to sideline challengers. Since taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Aby and his government have carried out bold and significant reforms, overhauling the federal security apparatus, making peace with neighbouring Eritrea, releasing more political prisoners and inviting exiles back home. But while these steps were long overdue, they have further weakened the EPRDF’s unity and authority, particularly as they came on the back of three years of anti-government protests before Aby took office.

Disagreements have worsened over power sharing, regional autonomy and territory among the EPRDF’s four component parties, the Amhara National Democratic Movement (now the Amhara Democratic Party), the Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (now the Oromo Democratic Party), the Southern
Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF). At the same time, ethno-nationalist movements are on the rise in some regions, squeezing EPRDF parties, who have themselves taken harder line positions in response. These dynamics risk contributing to burgeoning inter-ethnic violence, which already over the last few years has reached levels unprecedented in decades. The 22 June assassinations and alleged attempted regional coup came as a stark illustration of the gravity of the crisis affecting both ruling party and country as a whole.

A handful of inter and intra-ethnic flashpoints are particularly worrying. First is friction between the Tigray and the Amhara. The main source is the Amhara’s longstanding claim to the Wolkait and Raya territories that are currently part of Tigray regional state and border Amhara. Tigray security forces have repressed protesters in Raya that were seeking to be part of Amhara and, previously, Amhara protesters and militia have killed and evicted Tigrayans from Amhara, particularly the Gondar area in northern Amhara state. The former Amhara regional security chief, Asaminew Tsige, whom the federal and Amhara governments blamed for the 22 July killings of Amhara’s regional president and two colleagues, also promoted the return of parts of Tigray’s territory to Amhara.

Second are rising tensions between the Amhara and Oromo, Ethiopia’s two largest groups. The EPRDF parties representing them – the Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and the Oromo Democratic Party – united to propel Abiy to power and reverse the TPLF’s longstanding domination of the ruling coalition. But friction between them has mounted since, over matters including high-level appointments and disputes over the capital Addis Ababa. In the case of the capital, which is multi-ethnic but surrounded by Oromia regional state, in February Amhara and other groups opposed the Oromia government’s demolition of illegal housing on the capital’s outskirts, while in early March Oromo protested the transfer of new government apartments built in Oromia by the city administration to Addis Ababa residents. Addis Ababa, founded in 1887, is an autonomous city accountable to the federal government, but some Oromo factions say it is a colonial settlement on Oromo land and should be administered by Oromia region, or that the city’s encroachment into Oromia must be reversed.

Tensions between the Amhara and Oromo have been aggravated by the 22 June assassinations and events leading to them. The appointment of Asaminew, an Amhara nationalist who was jailed in 2009 for his part in a coup attempt and released by the federal government in February 2018, as regional security chief by the Amhara government in November 2018 reflected the ADP’s growing ethno-nationalism and its desire to outflank the one-year-old National Movement of Amhara, an opposition party espousing Amhara nationalism. Asaminew fuelled Amhara-Oromo friction by using provocative rhetoric about what he portrayed as impending Oromo domination and involving regional security forces in clashes with Oromo militia in an Oromo enclave of Amhara in early April 2019 that left dozens dead. Since the 22 June assassinations, doubts over the federal government’s account of the killings and a sweep of arrests of Amhara nationalists and others have hardened regional opposition to the Orom0-led federal government. Large crowds of Amhara gathered for Asaminew’s funeral, including uniformed security forces.

The third fault line is between the TPLF – which rules Tigray and, until last year, had long dominated the EPRDF and the security apparatus – and the federal government led by Abiy, the head of the Oromo Democratic Party. The TPLF’s main sources of grievance are its loss of federal power; what it argues are selective prosecutions of Tigrayan top officials – notably of TPLF Executive Committee member and former national intelligence chief Getachew Assefa – for human-rights abuses and corruption; and opposition to a federal commission that is tasked with assessing interregional boundary disputes, such as the Amhara claims on Wolkait and Raya. The TPLF sees the commission as likely to rule against it and rejects it as unconstitutional because its mandate allegedly clashes with that of the upper house of parliament. The TPLF-run regional authorities apparently refuse to detain Getachew, whose whereabouts are unknown but suspected to be in Tigray, despite the federal authorities issuing his arrest warrant.

Fourth is continuing unrest in Oromia. Three years of anti-government protests since 2015, which largely took place in that state, forced the internal shifts that brought Abiy to power. Violence has continued since. The September 2018 return of leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a formerly banned armed group campaigning for Oromo rights and autonomy, sparked ethnic skirmishes, as Oromo youth replaced national flags in the capital and surrounding areas with the OLF banner, provoking the anger of, and clashes with, other groups. If the electoral board registers the OLF, which is seen as the
standard bearer of the Oromo liberation struggle, as a political party, it could sap votes in 2020 from Abiy’s Oromo Democratic Party: while leaders like Abiy are popular with youthful protesters, many Oromo regard the ruling Oromo party as ineffective and for years subservient to the TPLF. Moreover, OLF-linked factions are still fighting the military in western Oromia, with each side accusing the other of being the aggressor.

Lastly, the Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, home to 45 indigenous groups, is in disarray. In 2018, the south’s largest ethnic group, the approximately four million strong Sidama, took advantage of EPRDF incoherence to renew claims to its own regional state. The federal government for months largely neglected the problem, neither preparing to meet its constitutional obligation to hold the referendum (the electoral authority that should administer the vote has also been undergoing reform) on forming a new state that the Sidama had requested nor reaching an agreement with Sidama leaders on rescheduling their statehood bid. Sidama leaders say they will self-declare their own regional state on 18 July, which the authorities are set to reject as an unconstitutional move. This risks triggering violence between Sidama and federal security forces in Hawassa City, currently the administrative seat of the Southern Nations but which the Sidama intend to make the capital of their new regional state. The Sidama statehood demand, and any attendant violence, could have a domino effect across the southern state, leading to its fracturing and more conflict and displacement.

Re-railing the Transition

Prime Minister Abiy’s government has rapidly advanced vital reforms, accelerating a transition set in motion under his predecessor, Hailemariam Desalegn. But the 22 June killings and alleged attempted regional coup throw into sharp relief the enormous challenges remaining. Of these, rising tensions among Ethiopia’s regions, and among the EPRDF parties that govern them, pose the most immediate risks. A different set of de-escalatory measures is likely necessary for each flashpoint. Moreover, some grievances date back many years and will take time to resolve: the Amhara and Tigray are unlikely to settle their territorial dispute any time soon, for example, and aimed provocative statements at each other on 10 and 11 July 2019. But Ethiopia’s leaders can take some general steps that could help rein in intra-EPRDF tensions, lower the temperature overall and buy time for further reforms that would help build a more democratic system that is able to address such issues.

Abiy himself should avoid any action that might aggravate the perception he favours his own Oromo community, in both his high-level appointments and the government’s action against protesters and activists. He made a sound decision when appointing of General Adem Mohammed, an Amhara, to replace the military chief of staff killed on 22 June, instead of the Oromo deputy chief who was next in line. But the mass arrest of National Movement of Amhara activists and other opponents in the wake of the 22 June killings appears to have backfired.

The government should also be cautious about using federal security forces to deal with disturbances in regions. It should do so only as a last resort if there is a grave threat to the country’s stability or a risk of bloodshed that regional forces cannot contain. It should be wary about using federal forces to try and obstruct the Sidama’s declaration of statehood, for example. Similarly, the deployment of those forces to try and arrest former national intelligence chief Getachew Assefa would be highly likely to stir up local Tigray resistance. Instead the federal government should tackle such issues through concerted dialogue with the relevant regional leaders. For their part, the EPRDF parties should refrain from further inflammatory rhetoric and avoid appointing hardliners to top slots; finding leaders inclined toward compromise for the Amhara regional president and security chief may well prove a challenge but is critical. Respected former Ethiopian statesmen or military or religious leaders could potentially play a role in mediating among EPRDF leaders to find at least immediate fixes to problems related to existing grievances in order to achieve some short-term stability and set the transition back on track.

Increased EU development assistance could prop up government spending if necessary and support the authorities in undertaking economic reform.

They can also take a handful of concrete steps to help minimise risks. First, if the Sidama self-declare their regional state on 18 July, the EU and European governments could offer financial support to accompany the broader administrative rearrangement that a new Sidama state would likely trigger in the south. The promise of additional funds for development projects could help assuage frustration among other groups – some of whom have concerns about the new Sidama state or harbour statehood aspirations.
of their own – and thus possibly avert protests by their activists that could turn violent. Any plan for increased aid should, however, guard against incentivising future attempts by local leaders to attract extra government resources through agitation, possibly by ensuring that the new arrangements represent a comprehensive settlement backed by all southern groups.

Secondly, increased EU development assistance could prop up government spending if necessary and support the authorities in undertaking economic reform in a manner carefully sequenced and guards against a slowdown, which could aggravate political instability. European financial aid and technical support could be critical to such reforms.

Lastly, while parliamentary elections are still some way off, preparations are lagging. The new electoral board was formed only last month, for example; electoral laws are not yet finalised, parties may still table potentially far-reaching changes to the electoral system; and some parties are registered while others are not. Furthermore, the mounting tensions, intercommunal bloodshed and general instability since Abiy took office and for three years before could make conditions for the vote fraught. The Ethiopian authorities themselves need to move forward on the basis of consensus among the main political factions, inside and outside the EPRDF. But by expediting the release of its planned electoral support package, with its first disbursements in September 2019, the EU can help advance preparations.

**How the EU Can Soften Iran-U.S. Tensions**

Tensions between Iran and the U.S. have grown at an alarming pace in recent months. The Trump administration’s ‘maximum pressure’ campaign, following its withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, has inflicted significant harm on Iran’s economy – an estimated 80 per cent of which is now under unilateral sanctions. Yet economic coercion has so far failed to either compel Iran to change its behaviour in the desired direction or bring it to the negotiating table. Instead, it has responded by shooting down a U.S. drone, claiming it had entered Iranian airspace; it is also accused by many of attacking tankers near the Strait of Hormuz and by the U.S. of encouraging its Shi’ite militia allies in Iraq to target U.S. assets.

This escalation poses three distinct threats: the unravelling of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which constrained Iran’s nuclear program; the possibility of a direct military engagement between Iran and the U.S.; by design or miscalculation; and broader regional spillover across a series of flashpoints. These threats could jeopardise European security, especially the latter two scenarios. Europe should save the JCPOA by honouring its commitments and trying to contain (and de-escalate) tensions between Tehran and Washington.

The EU, working closely with its member states, should take the following steps to:

- **Intensify ongoing efforts to facilitate trade with Iran through the special-purpose vehicle (INSTEX) by injecting export credit into it and expanding it to other EU and non-EU states to pre-empt further incremental breaches of the JCPOA’s nuclear restrictions by Tehran. To ensure compliance, the EU should continue to strike a careful balance between supporting the consolidation and expansion of INSTEX and criticising Iran’s missile program, regional policies and human rights record; and it should stay united in its response to any further breaches of the JCPOA by Iran.**

- **In parallel, expand, deepen, and broaden existing cooperation with Iran on development projects to demonstrate its willingness to invest in Iran and help improve the Iranian people’s economic well-being regardless of Washington’s hostile policies toward Iran. In this vein, the EU should consider hiring a Persian-language spokesperson to better communicate its goals and plans to Tehran and the Iranian public.**

- **Explore opportunities for expanding the existing E4-Iran dialogue framework for Yemen and Syria to include other regional issues, such as stability in Iraq and Afghanistan.**

- **Forge discreet channels for dialogue on areas of disagreement with Tehran, such as Iran’s ballistic missiles program and human rights record, and help open communication channels between Iran and regional actors as well as between Iran and the U.S. to de-escalate tensions and prevent a military conflict by miscalculation.**

- **Explore the possibility of initiating and supporting a regional dialogue on reducing tensions and preventing the inadvertent outbreak of conflict.**

**Safeguarding a Beleaguered Deal**

The EU played a key role in shepherding the arduous negotiations that yielded the Iran nuclear deal four years ago. Today it has an even more critical role in preventing the JCPOA from unravelling. Since the agreement was implemented, and especially after the U.S. withdrawal in May 2018, Iran has seen the
JCPOA’s core bargain (limiting its nuclear program in return for economic normalisation) break down under the pressure of intensified U.S. sanctions. In May 2019, Tehran began to take incremental (but still reversible) steps reducing its compliance. These became concrete in early July, when Iran surpassed the 3.67 per cent uranium stockpile threshold, which the JCPOA capped at 300kg, and started enriching above that level in violation of the deal’s terms. It also threatened to take additional steps by 6 August if the remaining parties to the deal fail to salvage its economy in the face of U.S. sanctions. The challenge, now and over the coming year, is to protect an accord that has delivered crucial non-proliferation gains.

A second growing concern is the possibility of a direct military clash between the U.S. and Iran. Washington has been progressively bolstering its military presence in the region in response to assessments of heightened Iranian threats. The fact that the U.S. came close to launching a retaliatory strike in mid-June after Iran shot down a U.S. drone it claimed had breached Iranian airspace underscores how precarious the situation has become. If Washington continues to pursue a coercive maximalist strategy whose endgame is Iran’s capitulation rather than diplomatic engagement, the short- to medium-term prospects point to growing friction rather than de-escalation, let alone a major diplomatic breakthrough of the type President Trump says he is championing.

Rising tensions could ignite a confrontation in several ways. Should Iran continue to breach the JCPOA limits, its activities could reach a point that the U.S. and Israel find intolerable and conduct a military operation against Iran’s nuclear installations. From its side, Iran, through its own forces or local allies, could target U.S. interests or those of its partners; the U.S. has asserted that any American deaths would prompt a muscular response. May and June already saw a string of attacks against shipping in and around the Gulf of Oman, responsibility for which Washington explicitly pinned on Tehran. The spark need not be intentional: deep mistrust and limited communications channels could allow an isolated and accidental incident to quickly spin out of control. Should a clash occur, it could draw in other state and non-state actors in the region, rapidly devolving into a larger conflagration.

A third challenge is that developments in another theatres – for example, in Yemen, Syria or Iraq – could draw the U.S. and Iran in more deeply, exacerbating tensions between them. Take, for instance, a possible attack by Afghanistan’s Taliban in Afghanistan or an Iraqi paramilitary group against a U.S. military or diplomatic facility, resulting in loss of life or substantial damage. In the current environment, the U.S. may assign blame to Iran and launch retaliatory attacks without first ascertaining whether Iran or other local actors bear primary responsibility.

**Recommendations for the EU and its Member States**

European action is essential for addressing the first of the three challenges laid out above, and important in tackling the other two. While France, Germany and the UK (the E3) have established INSTEX, the EU should encourage its consolidation and expansion to other European (and perhaps even non-European) states. The E3 should inject several billion euros worth of export credit into the mechanism to render it operational and allay concerns of Europeans firms and banks, which remain fearful of U.S. penalties and would welcome backing from their governments. Seven other EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden) announced on 1 July their interest in joining INSTEX.

Involving non-EU states such as China, which continue to import oil from Iran, or Russia, which is willing to be a conduit for exporting petrochemical derivatives from Iranian oil to Europe, could generate much needed funds for European exports to Iran. Europe should clearly state – and warn the Trump administration – that targeting INSTEX or its Iranian counterpart will entail consequences.

Separately, but in parallel to these efforts, the EU should deepen and expand technical and development cooperation with Iran across a range of fields, such as water, narcotics, refugees and private sector promotion. It should also consider expanding the E4-Iran dialogues on Yemen and Syria to other regional conflicts, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. At the same time, it should seek discreet avenues for discussing other sensitive issues with Tehran, be it on Iran’s missile program or human rights record. These channels can help maintain diplomatic contacts and help prevent dangerous escalations.

Success on this front could help not just stabilise the nuclear deal but build leverage and cooperation for non-nuclear discussions, including on de-escalating Iran’s role in regional conflicts. While the U.S. continues to pursue a sanctions-driven strategy, the EU, particularly member states such as France, whose president has a direct channel to his U.S. counterpart, should strongly press for a freeze in the escalatory cycle between Tehran and Washington. From Washington’s side, this would need to include,
at a minimum, waivers to loosen the noose on Iran’s oil exports; and from Tehran’s, a return to full JCPOA compliance, releasing U.S. prisoners and agreeing to broader talks about the JCPOA’s future and other areas of dispute.

Be it on the nuclear issue or less time-critical initiatives elsewhere, the EU should enhance its image in Iran, which, because of its inability to shield the Iranian economy from U.S. sanctions, has been damaged to such a degree that Iranians widely view it as “good cop” to the Trump administration’s “bad cop” rather than an independent diplomatic partner. This requires the EU to hire a Persian-speaking spokesperson to communicate its goals to Tehran and the Iranian public. Balancing expressions of concern and criticism with constructive and mutually beneficial discourse, and striking a balance between public and more discreet methods of messaging, could prove the best approach to influencing Tehran’s decision making in these dangerous times.

Avoiding a Protracted Conflict in Libya

Since the outbreak of violence in Tripoli last April, the prospect of a negotiated settlement to end the competition for power in Libya has only grown more remote. The military offensive launched by the Libyan National Army (LNA), which is headed by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and based in the east, against forces allied with the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli has thwarted UN-led efforts. Those had been aimed at forging a new power-sharing deal or charting a consensual roadmap to reunify critical Libyan state institutions, split between east and west since 2014. The pursuit of outright victory has displaced earlier strategies aimed at reconciling the two rival political and military authorities. For Haftar-led forces, success means capturing the capital, expelling armed groups opposed to the LNA, imposing transitional arrangements that would sideline Prime Minister Faiez Serraj’s GNA, and gaining control of state funds held by the Central Bank of Libya. For the Tripoli-based government, winning entails pushing the besieging forces outside the boundaries of western Libya and implementing a political roadmap that marginalises Haftar.

Diplomatic paralysis pervades this state of affairs. UN Security Council members are divided and unable to call for a cessation of hostilities, mostly owing to U.S. opposition to a draft resolution that would have done just that. The U.S. claims it resisted the draft resolution because it lacked a mechanism to ensure compliance, but its stance more likely reflected White House sympathy for Haftar and for his Saudi, Emirati and Egyptian supporters. More broadly, continued military support (in violation of a UN arms embargo) and funding for Haftar from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, France and Russia, and to pro-GNA forces by Turkey and Qatar, are fuelling both sides’ willingness to continue the fight.

Much is at stake for Europe. A protracted conflict in Libya would further destabilise its southern neighbourhood with direct economic and security ramifications, and would continue undermining EU cohesion in dealing with migration. Against the backdrop of UN Security Council paralysis, however, the EU and its member states likely have little leverage to stop the war, especially as European capitals are divided between those that betray a bias toward either Haftar (as in Paris) or the GNA (as in Rome). Still, the EU and member states could and should contribute to de-escalating tensions in the following ways:

Urge governing authorities in Tripoli and eastern Libya to reconsider their uncompromising positions and nudge them toward agreement on an internationally-monitored ceasefire, followed by negotiations for new political, military and financial arrangements under UN aegis and with EU technical and financial support; through joint or concerted high-level diplomatic missions representing all EU member states, or by tasking the EU foreign policy chief Mogherini to represent a common EU position, persuade Abu Dhabi, Riyadh and Cairo to recognise that a prolonged LNA offensive is unlikely to produce the swift or “clean” victory that would stabilise Libya and that their interests are better served at the negotiating table. They should similarly seek Ankara’s and Doha’s cooperation in persuading the GNA to sit with the LNA; seek to persuade President Donald Trump’s advisers, who themselves appear somewhat divided, to adopt a more even-handed approach toward the Libyan conflict by calling for a cessation of hostilities, including through the UN Security Council;

If and when a ceasefire is in place, support an economic dialogue to reconcile the Central Bank of Libya’s two separate administrations and address financial grievances that deepen the conflict, thus paving the way for a military de-escalation and a return to talks.

Tanks and Banks

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After three months of war, more than 1,000 battlefront deaths and 100,000 displaced civilians, neither Haftar nor Serraj is near victory. Tripoli government forces scored a tactical win in late June when their fighters expelled Haftar’s forces from Gharayn, a town 80km south of the capital. But in Tripoli’s southern suburbs, where front lines might shift daily, rival forces have been locked in a stalemate for the past three months and airstrikes from both sides continue. Despite this, and the casualty toll, neither side shows appetite to accept a ceasefire, as both view the conflict as existential and believe they can prevail on the battlefield. This means the deadly war around Tripoli likely will drag on and this, in turn, could bring additional military support from both sides’ external backers, triggering new fighting and likely further stalemate, but with even greater destruction.

The fighting around Tripoli is unlikely to end without greater regional support for a ceasefire. Libya’s institutional fractures, which have become conflict lines, and the existential narratives embraced by both sides reflect deeper geopolitical divides through the Middle East and North Africa. Haftar receives support from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, who argue he is the only Libyan leader who can rein in Islamists of all stripes, whether the Muslim Brotherhood, jihadists or Qatari and Turkish-backed GNA-aligned militias in Tripoli, all of whom they view as a single undifferentiated enemy. The support offered to Haftar by his regional backers, like that offered to the GNA by its own Qatari and Turkish defenders, reveals the depth of the schism and the significance of this dividing line in regional politics. Tacit U.S. support for this worldview (dictated more by White House priorities elsewhere in the region than by a concrete U.S. vision for Libya), and the push to reshape the regional order espoused by the Emirati, Saudi and Egyptian axis, has also deepened Libya’s internal divides.

While international rifts and competing regional ambitions remain an overarching conflict driver, locally, interlocking competing narratives of political and military legitimacy, a battle for power, tribal rifts and recriminations, and a deeply polarised media are making the war even more intractable. But another important, often overlooked, conflict driver is competition over oil revenues, specifically management of and access to state funds, held by the Central Bank of Libya. Since 2014, the Central Bank has been divided into two rival administrations reflecting the country’s broader institutional divides: the internationally-recognised headquarters in Tripoli and the Benghazi branch, which operates as the central bank but is loyal to the east-based government and parliament. The Benghazi branch, which funds Haftar, has no access to the country’s oil revenues, which have accrued to the Central Bank in Tripoli. Instead, eastern authorities have funded themselves – illegitimately, in Tripoli’s eyes – by issuing almost $30 billion in promissory notes processed by east-based commercial banks. But this parallel funding scheme has strained the banks, which began to show signs of stress just as Haftar launched his offensive in April. De-escalating the Libyan conflict necessitates resolving this longstanding financial dispute and the immediate banking problems it poses. Failure to mend the financial rift could prompt the Haftar-backed government to pursue independent oil sales, which would ultimately deepen the split between the duelling authorities in east and west.

Zero-Sum Logic and Muddled Roadmaps
Although neither side is likely to win on the battlefield, the LNA and GNA-aligned forces, both captive to zero-sum logic, have rejected calls for a ceasefire and resuming talks. Instead, they propose conflicting political roadmaps that exclude their opponents from future negotiations. Haftar repeatedly declared that the assault on Tripoli will proceed and that, once it succeeds, he will impose a new transitional government. This would entail dismantling the governing bodies created by the 2015 UN-backed Skhiriat agreement, disbanding his opponent’s militias, forming a constitutional committee and holding a referendum on a draft constitution, followed by elections. In this, Haftar sees no role for the UN or those who have risen to power as a result of UN mediation.

For his part, Serraj has publicly refused talks with Haftar. Apparently convinced that pro-GNA forces were close to military victory, he announced his own roadmap in June, from which he specifically excluded Haftar. Serraj’s plan consists of holding a nominally inclusive National Conference under UN aegis that would appoint a judicial committee to draft a new election law. In an attempt to bring east-based leaders to his side, he made vague promises about economic decentralisation and fairer resource distribution. In principle, Serraj’s proposal hits all the points favoured by his Western interlocutors (inclusivity, decentralisation, elections and a UN umbrella), and for this reason it received endorsement from the UN,
EU and some member states. However, he – like Haftar – has a distorted assessment of the power balance on the ground, overestimating his own strength and underestimating his adversary’s. This translates into an unrealistic belief that either side can implement its own roadmap without first reaching a settlement with the other.

**Recommendations for the EU and Its Member States**

The EU and member states should urge parties on both sides of the conflict to move away from their rhetoric of imminent triumph and toward more pragmatic positions that would open space for a possible de-escalation, an internationally-monitored ceasefire and resuming political and security sector talks, in the first instance to create new security arrangements in the capital. Through joint or concerted high-level diplomatic missions representing all EU member states or by tasking the IR/VP Mogherini to represent a common EU position, they should emphasise to decision-makers in Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, and Cairo that a prolonged LNA offensive is unlikely to produce a swift or “clean” victory that would stabilise Libya, and dissuade them from playing out their regional rivalries on the outskirts of Tripoli.

Instead, given the stalemate and the fact that prospects of a quick LNA victory have faded, they should argue that those countries’ best interests lie in convincing Haftar to agree to a ceasefire and support UN-led talks for a political and military settlement. They should underscore that continued airstrikes in the capital are alienating public support for the LNA’s cause while also empowering the very armed groups that Haftar’s offensive was meant to drive out of Tripoli. Likewise, they should press the GNA’s backers to refrain from supporting a counteroffensive by Tripoli-based forces that would pursue LNA forces beyond Tripoli’s environs eastward or to LNA-controlled oil installations. They should seek Ankara’s and Doha’s cooperation in persuading the GNA to sit with the LNA at the negotiating table.

A ceasefire would allow all sides, and their foreign backers, to work together on new security arrangements in the capital, the shortcomings of which were one of the original triggers of the conflict. In particular, the two sides need to agree on the role of armed groups, namely which ones continue to operate or demobilise, and decide who will secure what areas.

The EU and members states should also press the Trump administration – which at times has appeared inconsistent and divided between the White House on the one hand, and the State Department and Pentagon on the other – for clearer and more even-handed U.S. policy toward Libya. This should include U.S. support for a UN Security Council resolution calling for a cessation of hostilities. To this end, the EU should seek to persuade the White House that a protracted conflict in and around Tripoli will not unify Libya under one ruler, but will rather fragment and destabilise it further. Such ongoing fighting may well undermine U.S. anti-terrorism objectives: prolonged conflict almost certainly will strengthen armed groups, including those linked to radical Islamist organisations such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, whose affiliates have started operating with impunity in southern Libya since the outbreak of hostilities in April.

European diplomats also should press Washington to reject demands made by pro-LNA emissaries aimed at lifting or circumventing UN-imposed restrictions over Libya’s crude oil exports. For this purpose, they should convey the message to the U.S. administration, in particular the White House, that authorising independent oil sales to eastern authorities could, in the short run, give the upper hand to Haftar forces but poses the graver, long-term risk of consolidating the split between western and eastern authorities.

Finally, the EU and member states ought to intensify efforts to help reunify the rival Central Banks and offer technical advice on how to avert a looming banking crisis; likewise, as Crisis Group previously advocated, they should support UN efforts to forge an agreement on the management of Libya’s finances. They should step in to promote a financial and economic dialogue between rival branches of the Central Bank, especially at a time when the U.S. (which traditionally has led initiatives regarding Libya’s financial sector) has become far less active diplomatically. Failing to manage this dispute will only prolong the war and compound Libya’s post-2011 humanitarian emergency.”

The International Crisis Group (ICG), *CrisisWatch*, September 2, 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=5ca548b56-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_09_02_06_00&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-5ca548b56-359871089#overview
President's Take

The work of Crisis Group's field analysts covers the spectrum: from early warning to resolution; from preventing deadly conflicts to mitigating their impact to avoiding their resumption. Events this past month offer examples of work needed in all of the above.

For some time now, we have been warning of the risks of ignoring Yemen's southern question. So it should not have come as a surprise when, on 10 August, United Arab Emirates-backed southern separatists took up arms against Saudi Arabia-supported government forces in Aden and moved to consolidate control across the south. As of this writing, the struggle is in flux, but the risk of violence escalating into a full-fledged civil war within a civil war – and further distracting from the urgent task of ending that war – is all too real, as we wrote in a recent briefing.

A glimmer of hope – or even two – in Afghanistan, comes with the prospect of ending the United States' longest-ever war, and in Sudan, with the chance to turn the page on one of the continent's bloodiest regimes. As to the former, one can and should debate how the U.S. got to this point, why it took so many years and so many futile military escalations to get serious about negotiating and pulling out, and – critically – what the U.S. will leave in its wake, but progress in talks with the Taliban is welcome. As in so many peace processes, the approach to the finish line is accompanied by intensified violence. Civilians, as usual, pay the price: some 1,500 were killed in July, the highest monthly number since 2017. Even assuming the U.S. and the Taliban reach a deal, the conflict between the government and the Taliban may well persist. How the U.S. withdraws and what it and others in the region and elsewhere do to support intra-Afghan talks will help determine whether that war can be successfully resolved as well. Crisis Group will be offering its recommendations every step of the way.

Sudan's ruling military council and opposition coalition signed a landmark constitutional declaration but the road ahead will be rife with obstacles, in the form of resistance by old regime elements who still control (and profit from) the economy and security sector as well as of unresolved local insurgencies. The same international pressure that supported the protesters in toppling President Omar al-Bashir will be required to ensure the transition stays on track.

Meanwhile, a new cloud emerges over Venezuela's peace process. Tentative progress in Norway-brokered talks between the government and opposition suffered a setback when the U.S. announced on 5 August a new round of tough sanctions. The government responded by suspending its involvement in the talks; this almost certainly was a brief suspension, but the timing of the U.S. decision was curious, to put it mildly, coming as it did just as the government reportedly was showing some modest flexibility. Disconnected from the realities and rhythm of the negotiations, the sanctions are likely to harm ordinary Venezuelans yet further, rally chavistas around President Nicolás Maduro, and empower the more hardline in their ranks, leading even some opposition members with whom we spoke to wonder what might have motivated the U.S. administration.

Events in Colombia showcased the fragile nature of a peace deal and the need to consolidate it continuously. Three former senior commanders of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – including their former chief negotiator – announced their return to armed struggle in a 29 August video, making them the highest-ranking ex-guerrillas to renege on the 2016 peace accord. That they reportedly are based in Venezuela makes the situation even more explosive, as it could lead to clashes between the two countries.

Outlook for This Month

September 2019

Conflict Risk Alerts

CameroonMalawiKashmirLebanonYemen

Resolution Opportunities

Afghanistan
Trends for Last Month

August 2019

Deteriorated Situations

Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Kashmir, Indonesia, Myanmar, South China Sea, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Colombia, Mexico, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya

Improved Situations

Mali, Sudan, Mozambique, El Salvador

In August, deadly clashes in Yemen between southern separatists and forces aligned with the internationally-recognised government dimmed prospects for ending the war. Suspected Israeli drone strikes on Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Lebanon ramped up regional tensions. Fighting intensified in Libya’s south, north-west Syria, and Myanmar’s northern Shan State, and in Colombia senior FARC leaders returned to armed struggle. Security in El Salvador improved, but murder rates climbed in Mexico. In Asia, tensions rose in the South China Sea, clashes erupted in Indonesia over the treatment of Papuans, and India’s change to Kashmir’s status could fuel violence. Presidential polls in Somalia’s Jubaland state deepened divisions, intercommunal attacks rose in eastern Chad, and violence in Cameroon’s Anglophone west could increase in the coming month. Repression intensified in Burundi, authorities cracked down on protesters in Zimbabwe, and friction between opposition protesters and Malawi’s security forces could rise in September. In Europe, tensions rose between Georgia and breakaway region South Ossetia, while in Kyrgyzstan political rivalry led to a shoot-out. On a positive note, Sudan’s protagonists agreed on structures to rule until elections, Mozambique’s warring parties officially ended hostilities, dialogue initiatives reduced violence in Mali’s centre, and talks to end the U.S.-Taliban conflict in Afghanistan could lead to a framework agreement in the coming weeks.

PRESIDENT’S TAKE II, ROBERT MALLEY, PRESIDENT & CEO

The Dangers of Ignoring Yemen’s Southern Question

In Yemen, southern separatists aligned with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) seized the city of Aden from the Saudi-backed internationally-recognised government of President Hadi on 10 August. The fighting left at least 40 dead. Violence could escalate in coming weeks as the two factions seek to gain the upper hand. To prevent this rivalry becoming a civil war within a civil war, Saudi Arabia, alongside the UAE and the UN special envoy, should mediate an end to the fighting, including by placing the southern question on the agenda of UN-led talks.

Suspected Israeli drone strikes on Iran-backed militias in Iraq and Lebanon sparked outrage in both countries and further strained Baghdad’s policy of neutrality amid U.S.-Iran tensions. Fighting intensified in north-western Syria as pro-government forces advanced into rebel-held Idlib, targeting the Turkish military. In Libya, the war dragged on in and around Tripoli between armed groups aligned with the UN-backed government and those supporting Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA). Hostilities escalated in the south, where clashes between militias aligned with the main rivals left over 100 dead.

In Colombia, three senior former FARC rebel commanders, including the group’s former chief negotiator, announced their return to armed struggle, becoming the highest ranking guerrillas to have reneged on the 2016 peace deal. El Salvador recorded its lowest monthly murder rate this century, but Mexico’s homicide rate continued to soar; 2019 is on course to become its deadliest year on record.

Fighting escalated in Myanmar’s northern Shan State, as an alliance of ethnic armed groups launched coordinated attacks on strategic targets, including on a military academy, killing about fifteen. Tensions grew in the South China Sea as both Vietnam and the Philippines protested Chinese incursions into
disputed waters, while a U.S. warship sailed near Chinese-claimed islands, angering Beijing. India revoked Kashmir’s special constitutional status, deployed tens of thousands of troops, arrested Kashmiri politicians and put the region under lockdown. Its moves raised the risk that violence erupts, both within the region and between India and neighbouring Pakistan in coming months. In Indonesia’s Papua region, large demonstrations against mistreatment of Papuans resulted in violent clashes with security forces.

Presidential polls in Somalia’s Jubaland federal state deepened political divisions, as opposition candidates barred from running and the federal government in Mogadishu rejected the incumbent’s victory. Communal violence in eastern Chad left about 100 dead and prompted the government to impose a state of emergency. A military court in Cameroon handed down life sentences to ten Angolophone separatist leaders, sparking a rise in clashes in the Angolophone regions. Violence could escalate further in September if separatists seek to impose by force a promised lockdown.

As Zimbabwe’s economic crisis deepened, the security forces cracked down on protests, while the frequency of attacks on opposition members and activists rose. In Malawi, protesters continued to push their claim that President Mutharika won re-election through fraud; violence between protesters and security forces could rise in September if Constitutional Court dismisses the opposition’s case to overturn the result. As Burundi’s 2020 presidential elections approach, the government and ruling party’s youth wing stepped up repression of the main opposition party, arresting and assaulting its members, killing one.

Tensions rose markedly between Georgia and its breakaway region of South Ossetia as Russian and de facto South Ossetian border guards resumed efforts to build a fence along the line between Georgia and South Ossetia. In response, Georgia began building police stations in contested areas. Meanwhile, in Kyrgyzstan, supporters of former President Atambayev took up arms to resist special forces’ attempts to arrest him, killing one.

Conflict resolution efforts took fragile steps forward in several corners of the globe. In Sudan, the ruling military council and opposition coalition signed a landmark constitutional declaration and power-sharing accord, beginning a three-year transitional period until elections. Mozambique’s former armed opposition group Renamo signed a peace deal with the government, formally ending decades of hostilities. Communal and militant violence fell in Mali’s centre, thanks in part to a growing number of local dialogue initiatives. Finally, the U.S. and Afghanistan’s Taliban made progress in talks and could announce a deal in September. But the conflict continued to exact an excruciatingly high toll on civilians.
President Compaoré on trial for 2015 attempted coup, 8 Aug made final plea for acquittal; prosecutors sought life sentence. In Centre-East region, some 100 local residents 8 Aug staged attack on Turkish-owned Youga gold mine after security guard killed local man illegally panning for gold previous day, prompting security forces to intervene.

Mali

AUGUST 2019

Violence in centre fell as local peace initiatives proliferated, but jihadist groups and militias continued to attack civilians and military in centre and north. PM Cissé continued initiatives to end violence in centre; 3 Aug oversaw signing of peace agreement between Fulani and Dogon militias in Macina circle, Séguéla region. Several other villages organised dialogues and reached peace agreements with help of govt and civil society. Notably, thanks to mediation of civil society group Faso Dambe Ton, jihadist group Katiba Macina early Aug agreed to lift siege on Toguere Coubé in Tenenkou circle, Mopti region. Fulani, Dogon and Dafing militias in Ouenkoro in Bankass region, Mopti region, 16 Aug signed peace agreement following mediation by Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue. In Mopti region where at least five soldiers were reportedly killed when their vehicle detonated mine on Diougani-Dinangourou road in Koro circle late Aug, leaving two soldiers and one civilian dead; jihadist Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) claimed ambush on Hombori-Boni road 21 Aug that left five soldiers dead. Also in Mopti region, unidentified gunman 23 Aug reportedly attacked Tagari Dogon in Koro circle, killing two civilians. In Séguéla region where unidentified gunman 6 Aug killed one gendarme in ambush. In north, International Committee of the Red Cross 6 Aug said it would temporarily suspend its operations in Tombouctou area due to growing insecurity. Commission organising national political dialogue continued consultations with civil society, political parties and religious leaders, but UN panel of experts 7 Aug warned dialogue could delay further implementation of 2015 Algiers accord. Sympathisers of prominent Muslim leader Mahmoud Dicko 1 Aug announced creation of new movement to influence religious and political life. UN Security Council 29 Aug renewed until 31 Aug 2020 sanctions regime against individuals and entities derailing peace process.

Niger

AUGUST 2019

Violence against civilians continued in south east and west despite decrease in attacks against security forces. In Diffa region where abductions of women, traders and traditional chiefs continued. Four soldiers killed when their vehicle detonated mine near Bosso 10 Aug. Boko Haram 23 Aug reportedly killed twelve civilians in Lamana, Gueskero district, Diffa region. In Tillabery region where tensions remained high despite decrease in jihadist attacks. Media 18 Aug alleged Malian ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) had facilitated 1 July attack against military camp in Inates close to Malian border claimed by Islamic State in the Greater Sahara; CMA denied accusations.

Burundi

AUGUST 2019

As 2020 elections loomed, govt and ruling party’s youth wing intensified repression of opposition, arresting and assaulting members of opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL), leaving one dead. Fighting between CNL members and supporters of ruling party National Council for the Defence of Democracy–Forces for the Defence of Democracy (CNDD-FDD) in Buhinyuza, Muyinga province night of 2 Aug left five CNL members injured. CNDD-FDD youth wing Imbonerakure 9 Aug “arrested” and handed over to police thirteen CNL members preparing to open party office in Butaganzwa, Ruyigi province. Police 13 Aug arrested four CNL members in Bwambarangwe, Kirundo province. Imbonerakure 13 Aug attacked CNL members in Gasorwe, Muyinga province leaving four injured; 18 Aug attacked opening of CNL office in Muha, Bujumbura Mairie province leaving ten people injured; night of 18-19 Aug ambushed CNL members in Rugari, Muyinga province killing one. Clashes broke out 25 Aug between Imbonerakure and CNL members in Mbimbi, Bujumbura province leaving five Imbonerakure injured; one died of injuries next day. Coalition of opposition parties and individual politicians in exile CNARED Giriteka 4 Aug announced it would participate in 2020 elections and called on govt to engage in dialogue with internal and external opposition. Govt 16 Aug said politicians in exile could return, but those under arrest warrants would be brought to justice. President Nkurunziza 20 Aug reiterated his intention not to run in 2020 elections. Govt 25 Aug signed agreement with Tanzania to start repatriating in Oct some 200,000 Burundian refugees...
from Tanzania, who fled there following violence in 2015. UN refugee agency 28 Aug described conditions in Burundi as unfavourable for return.

Cameroon
AUGUST 2019

Court’s sentencing of ten Anglophone separatist leaders to life in prison sparked rise in clashes in Anglophone areas, and separatists could intensify violence in Sept to enforce planned economic lockdown; Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in Far North. In Northwest region, separatists 4 Aug ambushed security forces at Alabukum reportedly killing six. Security forces 7 Aug reportedly killed six civilians in Njinikom. In regional capital Bamenda, fighting 12-18 Aug left at least fifteen dead including ten civilians and five soldiers. After Yaoundé military tribunal 20 Aug handed down life sentences to ten Anglophone separatist leaders, fighting erupted in Bamenda between separatists and security forces, leaving at least two dead. Separatists same day called for three-week “lockdown” in Anglophone regions starting 26 Aug, prompting thousands to flee Anglophone regions; from 26 Aug businesses remained closed and inhabitants stayed at home. Clashes between security forces and separatists 24-25 Aug reportedly left at least 40 dead in Ndop, Bafu, Kumbo, Bamenda in Northwest, and Mamfe and Kumba in Southwest. In Northwest region, security forces 9 Aug clashed with separatists killing unspecified number. Separatists 16 Aug abducted two Catholic priests in Kumbo, releasing them two days later; 21 Aug abducted sixteen civilians, releasing them next day. Security forces searching homes killed seven civilians in Mautu and Banga Bakundu 11-15 Aug. In Francophone Littoral region, separatists 4 Aug killed one soldier and one civilian in Pendé-Mboko. Cardinal Tumi 3 Aug advocated for federalism as only solution to Anglophone crisis. Meetings between PM Dion Ngute and organisers of Anglophone General Conference led by Cardinal Tumi 16 and 29 Aug bore no progress toward conference. In Far North, BH attacks on villages and clashes with security forces 1-20 Aug left ten civilians, six soldiers and five militants dead. BH 20 Aug abducted a dozen bus passengers and later reportedly killed four near Dabanga; 22 Aug abducted three children in Krawa-Maffa. BH militants 27 Aug killed two near Amchoukouli; 30 Aug abducted a dozen near Kolafa. Suspected Nigerian pirates 15 Aug kidnapped seventeen seamen off coast of Douala. Court 8 Aug sentenced 41 activists of opposition Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon to six months in prison for involvement in protests following Oct presidential elections.

Central African Republic
AUGUST 2019

Amid slow implementation of Feb peace agreement, low-level armed group violence and banditry continued especially in centre. In north west, suspected members of Return, Restitution and Rehabilitation (3R) armed group 5 Aug shot and killed youth in Sarki, Ouham Pende province. In east, suspected fighters from armed group Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance 17 Aug killed three in Bria, Haute-Kotto prefecture. In west, anti-balaka militants 19 Aug reportedly killed two Fulani civilians in Boda, Lobaye prefecture. Parties to Feb peace agreement 23-24 Aug met in capital Bangui to stake stock of implementation: UN envoy to CAR Mankeur N’Diaye threatened sanctions against those who breached agreement. Leader of rebel group Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (MPC) Mahamat al-Khatim 27 Aug resigned from his position as special adviser in charge of special mixed security units in centre-north zone. Russia 14 and 18 Aug handed over weapons and ammunition to army. Kwa Na Kwa (KNK), party of former President Bozizé in exile in Uganda after Seleka rebel coalition ousted him from power in 2013, 12 Aug said it would leave presidential majority to stand as opposition party in 2020 elections with Bozizé as presidential candidate.

Chad
AUGUST 2019

Intercommunal violence escalated in Ouaddai and Dar Sila provinces in east leaving several dozen dead and prompting govt to impose state of emergency and close borders with Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR) and Libya, while Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in west. In Ouaddai province, clashes between nomadic Arab herders and ethnic Ouaddai farmers in Hamra and Chakoya early Aug left at least 37 dead. In Dar Sila province, clashes between ethnic Dadjo and Mourou in Arata and Sézabane 8-9 Aug left several dozen dead. Govt 19 Aug declared 21-day state of emergency (20 Aug-10 Sept) in Ouaddai and Dar Sila provinces in east and Tibesti province in north where army continued to confront illegal gold miners; next day announced deployment to three provinces of 5,000 soldiers and closed borders with Sudan, CAR and
Libya. Unidentified gunmen 24 Aug attacked Gamba, Mayo-Kebbi East province killing three villagers and abducting one. In south, violence between farmers and herders 26 Aug left eleven dead in Kounogo, Moyen-Chari province. President Déby 26-27 Aug reshuffled security sector. Following presidential decree in July unseating Ouaddai province’s traditional leader for mismanagement of intercommunal violence, Déby 6 Aug signed decree appointing new leader. Police force’s attempt to remove deposed leader’s family from his residence in Abeché 15 Aug met resistance; hundreds next day demonstrated at palace. In Lake Chad province in west, BH female suicide bomber night of 13-14 Aug detonated explosive vest killing four civilians and one soldier in Kaiga-Kindjiria. In capital N’Djamena, police 11 Aug used tear gas to disperse supporters of opposition movement-turned-party Les Transformateurs. Following meeting with Déby, opposition parties 15 Aug submitted list of representatives to be included in National Framework for Political Dialogue (CNDP), platform comprising ruling majority, opposition and civil society to discuss conduct of elections; Déby next day signed decree appointing CNDP members.

Democratic Republic of Congo
AUGUST 2019
President Tshisekedi formed coalition govt with former President Kabila’s alliance seven months since taking office, armed group violence persisted in east, and Ebola virus spread to South Kivu province. PM Ilunkamba 26 Aug announced coalition govt with Tshisekedi’s Heading for Change alliance filling 23 ministerial posts and Kabila’s Common Front for Congo coalition taking 42. Platform of protestant churches and Catholic Church 9 Aug said that almost 2 million people had signed petition urging electoral commission to organise local polls; 16 Aug delivered petition to presidency. In Beni territory, North Kivu province in east, armed group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) 4 Aug killed five civilians; 6 Aug killed two and kidnapped two dozen. Attack by unidentified gunmen 7 Aug in Mbau, about 20km north of Beni, left six civilians dead, prompting some 5,000 to protest insecurity. ADF killed two civilians and one soldier in Mbau 18 Aug sparking more protests in several cities; security forces’ efforts to suppress protests left three demonstrators dead and at least 74 arrested. In Ituri province in north east, army 7 Aug clashed with unidentified gunmen killing at least seven in Djugu territory. Unidentified gunmen 19 Aug ambushed and killed three in Irumu territory. Clashes between army and Ngudjolo militia on 23 Aug left twenty militia men and two solders dead in Irumu territory. ADF 23 Aug abducted 106 in Irumu territory. In South Kivu, attacks by armed groups in Fizi territory 27-29 Aug left seven civilians dead. During summit of regional bloc Southern African Development Community (SADC) in Tanzanian capital Dar es Salaam, Tshisekedi 17 Aug called on other countries to help reduce insecurity in east and proposed creation of regional coalition to eradicate armed groups in east. Ebola virus spread to third province after Ituri and North Kivu, as authorities 16 Aug confirmed first two cases in South Kivu province, one of which died 14 Aug.

Republic of Congo
AUGUST 2019
NGO Global Witness 6 Aug accused President Sassou-Nguesso’s son Denis of embezzling more than $50mn from treasury.

Rwanda
AUGUST 2019
President Kagame and Ugandan President Museveni signed agreement to normalise bilateral relations. Kagame and Museveni 21 Aug signed deal in Angolan capital Luanda agreeing to respect each other’s sovereignty, refrain from destabilising actions, respect rights and freedoms of other’s citizens and resume cross-border activities. Uganda 22 Aug blocked access to Rwandan news sites citing national security concerns, prompting Rwanda next day to block Ugandan news sites; Rwanda later that day said govts had agreed to restore access. Following 31 July Ebola-related death in DR Congo near Rwandan border, Rwanda reportedly briefly closed border next day; Rwanda denied closure.

Eritrea
AUGUST 2019
Following celebrations marking 25th anniversary of Sawa Military Training Centre and launch of compulsory military service 1-4 Aug, President Isaias early Aug confirmed govt would maintain program.

Ethiopia
AUGUST 2019
Amid ongoing violence, govt expressed determination to hold general elections in May 2020 as scheduled. Parliament 30 July again postponed village and district elections and polls for Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa city councils, saying they would be held alongside 2020 parliamentary and regional elections. PM Abiy 1 Aug said govt would hold general elections in May 2020 as scheduled. Executive Committee of ruling coalition Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) 9 Aug confirmed election timeline, and said coalition’s four member parties would consider merging into one and invite five affiliated regional parties to join. Parliament 24 Aug passed new electoral bill, after 57 opposition parties previous day said EPRDF, which controls all seats in parliament, had ignored their amendments; new bill notably raised number of signatures required to register national parties from 1,500 to 10,000 and to register regional parties from 750 to 4,000. Electoral board 29 Aug said it would hold referendum on creation of Sidama federal state 13 Nov, after Sidama activists clashed with police over delay in July. Unidentified gunmen 8 Aug reportedly killed seven civilians in Gumbi Bordede district of Oromia regional state. Police 5 Aug arrested unknown number of people suspected of plotting to free from prison former president of eastern Somali regional state Abdi Mohammed Omer, arrested in Aug 2018 for inciting violence. Police 9 Aug arrested journalist Mesganaw Getachew on terrorism charges. Clashes between herders in south 14 Aug left at least two Ethiopians and one Kenyan dead.

Kenya
AUGUST 2019
Al-Shabaab continued attacks in north and east as tensions persisted between Kenya and Somalia over maritime border dispute and communal violence continued especially in north. Al-Shabaab militants 7 Aug carried out attack on Hulugho village, Garissa county in east destroying communication mast. In Mandera county in north east, Al-Shabaab attack on Fino village 15 Aug left two dead; suspected Al-Shabaab militants 20 Aug destroyed communication mast in Cheira Ali village and clashed with police reservists, one reservist missing. Police 30 Aug shot and killed suspected Al-Shabaab militant in Ngombeni, Kwale county. Parliament 6 Aug tabled motion to push govt to explore options to resolve maritime border dispute with Somalia and protect Kenya’s territorial integrity: proposed options included resolving issue bilaterally with Somalia, turning to dispute resolution mechanisms under aegis of African Union (AU) or regional blocs Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and East African Community (EAC) or, as last resort, deploying security forces to border. Somalia 21 Aug rejected AU's offer to mediate between it and Kenya and expressed confidence in International Court of Justice hearing set for 9-13 Sept. Clashes between herders and farmers 12 Aug left two dead in Mariakani, Kilifi county in east. Clashes between herders in southern Ethiopia 14 Aug left at least two Ethiopians and one Kenyan dead. In north, suspected ethnic Borana 25 Aug attacked ethnic Gabra in Forole and Sabareh, Marsabit county near Ethiopian border leaving at least twelve dead. AU 21 Aug endorsed Kenya for non-permanent seat on UN Security Council for 2021-2022.

Somalia
AUGUST 2019
Jubaland state’s presidential elections heightened tensions within Jubaland and between its administration and federal govt, tensions persisted between federal govt and Kenya, and Al-Shabaab maintained insurgency. In run-up to presidential elections in federal member state Jubaland in south, candidates barred from running 8 Aug formed parallel electoral commission accusing official electoral commission (JIBEC) of favouring incumbent President Madobe. JIBEC 12 Aug appointed assembly tasked with electing president; parallel electoral commission next day appointed its own assembly. Jubaland forces supported by Kenyan soldiers in African Union (AU) mission (AMISOM) 19 Aug blocked Ethiopian military aeroplane from landing in state capital Kismayo. Under pressure from UN envoy James Swan and other internationals, JIBEC briefly reopened candidate registration and delayed vote till 22 Aug. Under tight security, assembly 22 Aug re-elected Madobe. Parallel assembly same day elected Abdirashid Mohamed Hidig. Federal govt rejected both results. Madobe 25 Aug discussed how to move forward with two opposition candidates. Federal govt 29 Aug said flights to and from Kismayo would first need to land in Mogadishu, prompting hundreds to demonstrate against it in Kismayo. Police in Mogadishu 31 Aug arrested Jubaland security minister. Federal govt 21 Aug rejected AU’S offer to mediate between it and Kenya over disputed maritime border, expressing confidence in International Court of Justice hearing set for 9-13 Sept. Al-Shabaab continued to clash with security forces in south, especially in Lower Shabelle region. In Mogadishu, security forces 16...

Somaliland
AUGUST 2019

Electoral commission 8 Aug postponed parliamentary and municipal elections due 12 Dec, without setting new date. After all three political parties late July agreed to increase number of electoral commission members to resolve political impasse and advance preparations for polls, parliament 17 Aug rejected proposal. Opposition party Waddani next day withdrew from agreement. President Bihi 26 Aug said electoral commission would remain seven-member body until elections, after which members would be increased to nine. During visit to Mina, Saudi Arabia, Bihi 12 Aug informally met senior officials from Somalia federal govt including FM. Puntland President Deni 17 Aug said he would be open to talks with Somaliland on contested Sanaag and Sool regions; 25 Aug offered to host Somalia-Somaliland talks in state capital Garowe. In Sanaag region, clan violence 12 Aug left at least five civilians dead in El Afwein town; Puntland militia 20 Aug attacked convoy of Somaliland officials in Hadatimo town, unconfirmed number of casualties. In Sool region, armed group supporting creation of Khatumo state 5 Aug attacked police station in regional capital Lasanod; security forces 18 Aug killed at least one person during search for illegal weapons, sparking protests 20-21 Aug, repression of which reportedly left at least three dead. Elders mediating between govt and Colonel Arre, who defected from Somaliland to Puntland in 2018, 11 Aug said Arre had agreed to cease hostilities and start talks with govt; 25 Aug announced suspension of talks between govt and Arre following remark by chief of army that Arre deserved death penalty.

South Sudan
AUGUST 2019

Implementation of Sept 2018 peace agreement continued to stall ahead of Nov deadline to form unity govt. President Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar failed to agree on conditions for face-to-face negotiations on implementation of peace agreement. Regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) 21 Aug convened parties to peace deal – including Machar but not Kiir – in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa for talks aimed at accelerating implementation, but did not reach breakthrough on points of contention. Main rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition 31 July-5 Aug clashed with Gie-Wau clan in Maiwut town, Upper Nile state in north resulting in unknown number of civilian casualties and some 10,000 displaced. Fighters suspected to belong to National Salvation Front rebel group 1 Aug clashed with security forces in Kicak village, Imatong state in south leaving at least two civilians dead. Security forces 20-28 Aug clashed with rebel group South Sudan United Front in Wanh-Achien and Raja, Lol state in north west reportedly leaving several soldiers and eleven rebels dead. Kiir in Juba 14 Aug consulted head of Sudanese armed group Justice and Equality Movement on South Sudan’s potential role in mediating peace between Sudanese parties. Kiir 17 Aug attended signing of Sudanese transitional govt agreement in Khartoum and announced intention to continue efforts to broker peace between Sudanese govt and armed groups. Kiir 19 Aug reshuffled govt, including FM. Former Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) Sec Gen Pagan Amum 30 Aug unveiled new opposition group Real Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (R-SPLM). Holdout opposition groups South Sudan National Democratic Alliance (SSNDA), R-SPLM and South Sudan United Front/Army (SSUF/A) formed alliance in The Hague, Netherlands.

Sudan
AUGUST 2019

Ruling military council and opposition coalition signed landmark constitutional declaration to govern power structures for three-year transitional period until elections. Following 17 July political agreement, Transitional Military Council (TMC) and opposition coalition Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) 4 Aug reached constitutional agreement and held formal signing ceremony 17 Aug, prompting thousands to
celebrate in capital Khartoum. Agreement outlines military and civilians’ share of positions in sovereign
council, which will oversee formation of council of ministers and legislative council; FFC to appoint 67% of
legislative council, and all positions in council of ministers bar interior and defence ministers, to be
appointed by TMC. Rebel alliance Sudan Revolutionary Front same day rejected constitutional declaration.
FFC-nominated economist Abdalla Hamdok 21 Aug sworn in as PM of transitional govt, and TMC head
General Abdel-Fattah Burhan as chairman of Sovereign Council. TMC 8 Aug annulled death sentence issued
in 2014 against leader of rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North Malik Agar. During
countrywide protests 1 Aug against alleged killing of protesters by paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF)
in North Kordofan’s capital el-Obeid 29 July, unidentified armed actors killed at least four protesters in
Omdurman near Khartoum. TMC 2 Aug said it had arrested seven RSF members for 29 July killings. Court
19 Aug opened corruption trial of ousted President Bashir, 31 Aug indicted him on corruption charges and
for illegal possession of foreign funds, and denied request for bail. Hearing adjourned to 7 Sept. U.S. 7 Aug
said it was not ready to remove Sudan from list of state sponsors of terrorism; 15 Aug imposed visa ban
on former head of National Intelligence and Security Services Salah Gosh, barring him from entering U.S.
Intercommunal clashes in Port Sudan, capital of Red Sea state 21-26 Aug reportedly left 37 dead. Sovereign
council 25 Aug dismissed provincial governor and head of security services, deployed troops and
declared state of emergency in Port Sudan. Clashes between farmers and herders in North Darfur state left
three civilians dead 11 Aug. Amid economic crisis, Sudan received financial and food aid from regional
partners: notably, Saudi Arabia 30 July transferred $250mn as part of aid package announced in April.

• **STATEMENT**: Nurturing Sudan’s Fledgling Power-sharing Accord

**Tanzania**

AUGUST 2019

Authorities continued to use judicial processes to silence critical voices. Following arrest of prominent
investigative journalist Erick Kabendera late July on pretext of investigating his Tanzanian citizenship,
court 5 Aug charged him with money laundering, tax evasion and organised crime; court 30 Aug adjourned
his trial until 12 Sept. Police 8 Aug arrested journalist for allegedly cyberbullying his wife, released him on
bail two days later; 24 Aug arrested journalist reporting on police abuse of prisoners, which authorities
deemed false, and released him on bail two days later; 24 Aug arrested journalist reporting on meeting of
opposition party Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT) and three ACT members, two days later
released all four on bail. U.S. and UK 9 Aug jointly called on govt to respect press freedom. Govt 25 Aug
signed agreement with Burundi to start repatriating in Oct some 200,000 Burundian refugees from
Tanzania; UN refugee agency 28 Aug described conditions in Burundi as unfavourable for return.

**Uganda**

AUGUST 2019

President Museveni and Rwandan President Kagame signed agreement to normalise relations, as govt
continued to crack down on opposition. Museveni and Kagame 21 Aug signed agreement in Angolan capital
Luanda committing to improve relations. Uganda 22 Aug blocked access to Rwandan news sites citing
national security concerns, Rwanda next day blocked Ugandan news sites; Rwanda later that day said both
governments had agreed to restore access. Court 2 Aug sentenced prominent academic to eighteen
months’ prison for criticising Museveni, she has already served nine months. Musician-turned-opposition
leader Bobi Wine 6 Aug appeared in court on treason charge for alleged involvement in stoning of
Museveni’s motorcade during election rally in 2018; court charged Bobi Wine with intention to “annoy,
alarm or ridicule” Museveni.

**Angola**

AUGUST 2019

Supreme Court 15 Aug handed fourteen-year prison sentence to former transport minister Augusto da
Silva Tomas for corruption. Govt 21 Aug hosted, and jointly mediated with DR Congo, talks between
Rwandan President Kagame and Ugandan President Museveni in capital Luanda following months of
Rwanda-Uganda tensions; two leaders same day agreed to de-escalate tensions and re-open common
border.
Malawi
AUGUST 2019
Govt continued to deploy security forces and use judicial process in efforts to contain protests against President Mutharika’s May re-election and alleged electoral fraud; tensions and violence could rise in Sept if Constitutional Court rules against opposition’s application for results to be overturned. High Court 6 Aug dismissed Attorney General’s petition to ban opposition demonstration that NGO Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) had called for that day; several thousand protested countrywide, demanding resignation of electoral commission chairperson Jane Ansah, whom protesters accuse of mismanaging election. In places protesters clashed with police. Constitutional Court 8 Aug began hearing opposition’s case to have election results overturned; 23 Aug adjourned until 3 Sept. Unidentified attackers 15 Aug threw petrol bombs at home of HRDC chairman Timothy Mtambo, who was unharmed. Same day HRDC accused three officials of ruling Democratic Progressive Party of orchestrating attack, officials denied responsibility. Mutharika 21 Aug ordered army and police to prevent protests that HRDC planned to organise at airports and borders 26-30 Aug. In response to petition from Malawi Revenue Authority, High Court 23 Aug banned protesters from blocking airports and border crossings. HRDC said it would abide by ruling, but late Aug warned it would organise protests 5 Sept. Soldiers 28 Aug deployed on streets of capital Lilongwe as Supreme Court of Appeal approved 14-day nationwide ban on protests, preventing protesters from gathering for planned three-day protest 28-30 Aug.

Mozambique
AUGUST 2019
Govt signed peace agreement with former armed opposition group Renamo formally ending hostilities, while in far north suspected Islamist militants continued to kill civilians. After Renamo fighters began to disarm late July, President Nyusi and Renamo leader Ossufo Momade 1 Aug signed agreement to mark official end to hostilities that raged between 1977 and 1992 and rekindled between 2013 and 2016; agreement follows previous deals signed in 1992 and 2015. Leaders 6 Aug signed agreement pledging to keep peace during Oct general elections. Renamo 16 Aug said police and supporters of ruling party Frelimo had since 8 Aug assaulted dozens of Renamo members in Tete, Zambezia, Inhambane and Gaza provinces. Mariano Nhongo, head of Renamo dissident faction Renamo Military Junta, declared himself Renamo leader 19 Aug, said that govt was “on collision course” with his faction if it remained in contact with Renamo leader Momade. Nhongo 28 Aug said elections would not take place and anyone calling for them would be killed. In Cabo Delgado in north, suspected Islamist militants 1 Aug burnt village near Macomia, causing no casualties; Islamic State (ISIS) reportedly claimed attack. Militants 23 Aug killed two near Machava, Nangade district and same day attacked Nangade town, killing three. Militants 27 Aug beheaded two civilians near Queimane village, Mocimboa da Praia district; same day beheaded four fishermen along Pangane-Macotuco road and one near Simbolongo village in Macomia district. Unidentified assailants 26 Aug killed one in Ulo village, Mocimboa da Praia. Police 24 Aug arrested man in Mocimboa da Praia district for links with insurgents. Unidentified gunmen 26 Aug killed Louis Baziga head of Rwandan diaspora in Mozambique near capital Maputo. Attorney General 9 Aug charged twenty people in connection with govt’s attempt to hide $2bn debt, including son of former President Guebuza, in power when govt made debt deals.

South Africa
AUGUST 2019
In capital Pretoria, taxi drivers 27 Aug clashed with alleged drug dealers resulting in deadly shooting of one taxi driver. Next day taxi drivers led protests in central business district calling on govt to tackle problem of drug dealers; protests turned into riots with participants looting and setting alight several foreign-owned shops, police fired rubber bullets to disperse rioters and arrested eighteen. Group of Nigerians, angered by looting of shops some of which were Nigerian-owned, 29 Aug protested at Nigerian high commission.

Zimbabwe
AUGUST 2019
Amid deepening economic crisis, govt cracked down on protests against corruption and inflation while attacks and abductions of opposition members and activists increased. Govt 15 Aug banned demonstration that main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) had called for next day
in capital Harare to protest against corruption, unemployment, shortages of power and fuel and inflation. High Court 16 Aug rejected MDC’s appeal against ban. Amid confusion over whether MDC had cancelled demonstration, police reportedly assaulted and fired water cannon at MDC supporters in streets and arrested at least 80, drawing widespread international condemnation. Govt 18 Aug banned MDC protest planned for next day in Bulawayo, and 19 Aug deployed hundreds of police and soldiers to enforce ban. Police 22 Aug arrested MDC National Organising Secretary Amos Chibaya for failing to stop 16 Aug protest; court 26 Aug released him on bail. Attacks on activists and opposition members increased with nineteen abductions recorded in Aug. Notably, unidentified attackers 13 Aug assaulted and held overnight rights activist Tatenda Mombeyarara in Chitungwiza and separately MDC member Blessing Kanotunga in Mufakose, and 21 Aug assaulted and held overnight political satirist Samantha Kureya in Harare. Govt 25 Aug denied involvement. Police 23 Aug arrested eight teachers’ union officials protesting in Harare for higher pay, their lawyer, and journalist filming arrest; court released them on bail next day. Court 21 Aug charged former VP Mphoko with abuse of office, released him on bail same day. Amid economic deterioration, govt 23 Aug offered to raise public sector wages by 76%, confederation of unions, Civil Service APEX Council, 28 Aug accepted rise after initially rejecting it. Tanzanian President Magufuli, current chairman of regional bloc Southern African Development Community, 18 Aug called on U.S. and EU to lift sanctions on Zimbabwe. U.S. 1 Aug placed retired Major General Anselem Sanyatwe, now ambassador to Tanzania, on sanctions list for his role as commander of security unit that shot civilians in Harare in Aug 2018.

Côte d’Ivoire

OPPOSITION LEADERS SIGNALLED SUPPORT FOR FORMER PRESIDENT BÉDIÉ, STRENGTHENING HIS CHALLENGE TO PRESIDENT OUATTARA’S PARTY IN 2020 ELECTIONS. FOLLOWING LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT’S APPROVAL LATE JULY, SENATE 2 AUG ADOPTED BILL TO REFORM COMPOSITION OF ELECTORAL COMMISSION. THREE OPPOSITION PARTIES – BÉDIÉ’S DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CÔTE D’IVOIRE-AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC RALLY (PDCI-RDA), VOX POPULI AND GUILLAUME SORO’S RALLY FOR CÔTE D’IVOIRE (RACI) – SAME DAY FILED PETITION AT CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL TO REPEAL BILL, CLAIMING IT DOES NOT GUARANTEE COMMISSION’S INDEPENDENCE. CONSTITUTIONAL COUNCIL 5 AUG REJECTED PETITION. NEXT DAY BILL ENACTED INTO LAW. CIVIL SOCIETY AND OPPOSITION PARTIES, INCLUDING PDCI-RDA AND POPULAR IVORIAN FRONT (FFI), PARTY FOUNDED BY FORMER PRESIDENT GBAGBO, SAID THEY WOULD BOYCOTT NEW ELECTORAL COMMISSION. FOLLOWING LATE JULY MEETING BETWEEN FORMER PRESIDENTS BÉDIÉ AND GBAGBO IN BRUSSELS, BÉDIÉ 1 AUG SAID THAT IN COMING WEEKS HE INTENDED TO FORM OPPOSITION PLATFORM TO CHALLENGE OUATTARA’S PARTY IN 2020 ELECTIONS. YOUTH MOVEMENT PAN-AFRICAN CONGRESS FOR JUSTICE AND PEOPLE’S EQUALITY (COJEP) 18 AUG ELECTED AS PRESIDENT FORMER YOUTH LEADER CHARLES BLÉ GOUĐÉ, FORMER GBAGBO ALLY WHOM INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT ACQUITTED OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY DURING CIVIL WAR. AFTER PDCI-RDA DELEGATION WENT TO THE HAGUE AND MET GOUDÉ, LATTER 21 AUG SAID COJEP WOULD JOIN OPPOSITION PLATFORM. HUMAN RIGHTS NGO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL 6 AUG SAID GOVT CRACKDOWN ON DENTMENT HAD LED TO ARREST OF FOURTEEN ACTIVISTS IN 2019 AND CALLED ON AUTHORITIES TO END ATTACKS AGAINST CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS AND OPPOSITION MEMBERS.

Gambia

JUSTICE MINISTER ABUBACARR TAMBADOU 5 AUG ANNOUNCED RELEASE OF THREE FORMER ARMY OFFICERS EMPLOYED AS HITMEN BY FORMER PRESIDENT JAMMHEH AFTER THEY CONFESSIONED TO TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION LATE JULY, PROMPTING OBJECTIONS FROM VICTIMS AND FAMILIES; TAMBADOU ARGUED THAT RELEASE WAS DUE TO LACK OF LEGAL PROCEEDINGS TO JUSTIFY FURTHER IMPRISONMENT.

Guinea

POLITICAL CAMPS SUPPORTING AND OPPOSING CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE SO THAT PRESIDENT CONDÉ CAN RUN FOR THIRD TERM CONTINUED TO MOBILISE, AND AUTHORITIES CRACKED DOWN ON OPPOSITION AND CIVIL SOCIETY. CONDÉ’S PARTY OF UNITY AND PROGRESS AND ITS ALLIES 2 AUG FORMED COALITION FOR THE DEFENCE OF A NEW CONSTITUTION TO BUILD SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. OPPOSITION ALLIANCE BLOC AGAINST ALPHA CONDÉ 21 AUG JOINED OPPOSITION MOVEMENT NATIONAL FRONT FOR THE DEFENCE OF THE CONSTITUTION AS PART OF PLATFORM DUBBED FIGHT AGAINST A THIRD MANDATE. AUTHORITIES 2 AUG ARRESTED LEADER OF OPPOSITION LIBERAL BLOC, FAYA MILLIMONO, ON DEFAMATION CHARGES, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD RETRACTED HIS ACCUSATION THAT JUSTICE MINISTER FOFANA WAS A FORMER REBEL, PROMPTING HIS LAWYERS TO CALL DETENTION “EXCESSIVE”; AUTHORITIES 10 AUG RELEASED MILLIMONO BUT SAID CHARGES
would proceed to court. In capital Conakry, court 19-21 Aug put CEO of LynxFM radio, Souleymane Diallo, and host of its phone-in program, Boubacar Alghassimou Diallo, under judicial monitoring after radio station broadcast accusations of embezzlement against govt official; dozens of journalists 26 Aug protested against “state’s harassment of private media” in front of offices of High Authority for Communication.

Guinea-Bissau
AUGUST 2019
After electoral commission 10 July announced that presidential elections would take place 24 Nov, several candidates came forward. Opposition party Movement for a Democratic Alternative G-15 (MADEM G-15) 9 Aug elected former PM Siissoco Embaló as its candidate. After conducting primaries 23 Aug, African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) same day announced leader Domingos Simões Pereira as its official candidate, who pledged to leave PAIGC if elected. Incumbent President Vaz did not take part in MADEM G-15’s primaries and 29 Aug officially announced his independent candidacy for second term. Govt 16 Aug announced process to update electoral rolls and include around 24,000 disenfranchised voters, which MADEM G-15 called “omen for electoral fraud”. Opposition Party for Social Renewal (PRS) same day announced court action for injunction of review process due to “lack of legal framework”.

Liberia
AUGUST 2019
Opposition election win continued to fuel violence. After victory of opposition candidate Darius Dillon in 31 July by-election in Montserrado county triggered clashes that day between supporters of ruling Congress for Democratic Change and opposition coalition, clashes flared again 17 Aug and ruling party supporters assaulted opposition candidate Telia Urey. Justice ministry and police same day launched investigation. UN and regional bloc Economic Community of West African States 19 Aug deplored violence. U.S. and EU member states France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden and UK 20 Aug condemned electoral violence and attacks on opposition candidate.

Nigeria
AUGUST 2019
Boko Haram (BH) kept up attacks in north east, banditry persisted in north west, standoff continued between govt and Shia Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), and Biafra separatists threatened more attacks on ethnic Igbo leaders. In north-eastern Borno state, clashes continued between security forces and BH as insurgents attacked civilian and military targets closer to state capital, Maiduguri. Air force 9 Aug said it destroyed major BH base at Izza. Insurgents, mostly from BH faction Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), 10 Aug attacked army base in Gubio, killed four soldiers and at least six civilians, lost eleven fighters; ambushed soldiers in Mogula 17 Aug killing four and in Dikwa area 20 Aug killing five; 22 Aug razed govt buildings in Gubio and Magumeri areas; 30 Aug killed at least three soldiers on Monguno-Maiduguri highway. Army said troops killed “countless” insurgents. In north west, Zamfara state govt continued peace talks between bandits and communities, but violence continued. In adjoining Katsina state, bandits 18 Aug attacked four villages in Jibia, Dammusa and Safana areas, killed seventeen civilians; 26-27 Aug sacked Wurma community abducting about 50. In Kaduna state, gunmen 29 Aug attacked Kiri, killing eight. In central Benue state, feud between ethnic Ikuar and Shitile left nine dead 17 Aug. Court 5 Aug approved request by IMN leader Sheikh Zakzaky and wife to travel to India for medical care, but arrangement collapsed after Zakzaky in India 15 Aug protested against Nigerian and Indian govts restricting his movement and denying him access to trusted doctors. Authorities detained Zakzaky and wife on their return 16 Aug. Invoking govt’s 30 July ban on group, federal police 30 Aug ordered special team to dismantle all IMN structures and arrest group’s leaders. Members of separatist group Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nuremberg, Germany 17 Aug assaulted Senator Ike Ekweremadu at Igbo community event. IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu 18 Aug offered reward to anyone who provides information that could enable attacks on “treacherous” Igbo leaders.

Sierra Leone
AUGUST 2019
Tensions continued following electoral violence. Court 8 Aug handed down prison sentences to 23 members of opposition party All People’s Congress (APC) for vandalism during 30 July clashes between APC supporters and those of ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), clashes triggered after electoral
commission called off parliamentary by-election in Hamilton, about 20km from capital Freetown, citing irregularities. Authorities 15 Aug arrested APC politician Kashor Cole; 20 Aug arrested former mayor of capital Freetown Herbert Williams, for suspected involvement in Hamilton clashes. Electoral commission 25 Aug cancelled results of 24 Aug rerun in Hamilton after unidentified assailants ransacked polling station on election day. Amid reports of opposition victory, APC 26 Aug called cancellation “highest degree of provocation and injustice” and accused SLPP of orchestrating attack, pointing to complicity of police, who reportedly stood by during ransack and illegally arrested head of opposition’s polling staff.

Asia

China/Japan

AUGUST 2019

Chinese Premier Li said after 20-22 Aug trilateral meeting in Beijing with Japan and South Korea that cooperation is “important safeguard and catalyst for region” and countries must “defend regional peace and stability”. Washington Post 21 Aug reported Japan building “wall” of defensive installations, including missile bases, on Ryuku archipelago.

Korean Peninsula

AUGUST 2019

Amid North Korea testing projectiles throughout month, U.S. President Trump received letter from North Korean leader Kim Jong-un stating willingness to resume talks, and tensions could now ease following end of U.S.-South Korea military drills. Trump 10 Aug said Kim in letter expressed willingness to meet once exercises ended, raising possibility of U.S.-North Korea talks around UN General Assembly in Sept, though North Korean attendance at assembly currently uncertain. Trump 25 Aug in meeting with Japanese PM Abe signalled his objection to joint military drills between U.S. and South Korea, describing them as “complete waste of money”. North Korea 2, 6, 10, 16 and 24 Aug launched salvos of short range missiles; however South Korea and Trump played down launches. Missiles reportedly fired in response to 5-23 Aug U.S.-South Korea joint military drills and South Korea’s 2020-2024 defence plan, unveiled 14 Aug, which adds over 7% in year-on-year defence spending; plan will see construction of large-deck landing ship capable of hosting up to twenty F-35B fighter aircraft. North Korea failed to respond to South Korea to claim body of man who drowned in Imjin River and floated into South Korean territory 31 July, highlighting breakdown of bilateral ties.

Taiwan Strait

AUGUST 2019

Tensions between Taiwan and China continued as U.S. pushed through arms deal with Taiwan, and President Tsai raised concerns of Chinese activities. U.S. administration 21 Aug formally notified U.S. Congress it was moving ahead with $8bn sale of 66 F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan. In response, Chinese foreign ministry same day threatened imposing sanctions on U.S. companies involved in deal, claiming they “constitute severe interference” and “undermine China’s sovereignty and security interests”. Tsai 10 Aug warned of “Chinese infiltration in Taiwan” including fake news, after a Reuters report claimed Chinese authorities paid Taiwanese media groups for positive coverage. Tsai’s cabinet 15 Aug proposed to parliament over 8% increase in annual military spending, largest yearly increase since 2008. U.S. navy 23 Aug sailed amphibious ship through Taiwan Strait in fourth freedom of navigation operation in 2019. Chinese authorities 27-29 Aug prohibited ships from entering water near Taiwan off coast of China’s Zhejiang Province for 48 hours to hold military exercises; Taiwan defence ministry confirmed U.S. military plane 29 Aug flew over “median line” of strait.

Afghanistan

AUGUST 2019

U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha (Qatar) continued to progress, entering possible final round ahead of potential framework agreement in coming month, while insurgent attacks struck Kabul. In Doha, U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad 21 Aug met with Taliban representatives in potentially last round of talks ahead of framework agreement; followed 3-12 Aug round, which reportedly concluded with both sides agreeing near-final text; Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid called discussions “long and useful” without providing details. U.S. President Trump 29 Aug announced U.S. would reduce troops to 8,600 as first step. Insurgent attacks continued, particularly in Kabul, despite lull around Eid holiday 11-14 Aug: Taliban 2 Aug targeted police checkpoint in Daykundi province, killing at least ten policemen; in west Kabul, Taliban car bomb 7
Aug exploded in majority Shia neighbourhood, killing fourteen. Islamic State-Khorasan Province 16 Aug carried out deadliest bombing in Kabul this year, killing at least 80 at Shia Hazara wedding; President Ghani called bombing “barbaric”, Taliban condemned attack. In Jalalabad city, during celebrations of independence anniversary, ten unclaimed explosions 19 Aug injured dozens; U.S. military 21 Aug reported two soldiers killed in combat in Faryab province, increasing U.S. combat-related deaths in 2019 to fourteen – highest since 2014. In Chahardara area, Herat province, Taliban 27 Aug killed fourteen pro-govt militiamen; in western Baghdis province, militants same day attacked army checkpoint, killing eight soldiers. Govt 30 Aug announced at least 28 Taliban killed in clashes with Afghan forces in north-east Takhar province. Taliban 31 Aug staged offensive on provincial capital Kunduz, reportedly killing twenty soldiers and five civilians before security forces repelled militants. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 3 Aug said 1,500 civilian casualties in July, highest monthly number since 2017, with over half caused by bombings. Taliban 6 Aug denounced election planned on 28 Sept as “sham” and pledged to disturb process. NGO Amnesty International 28 Aug reported human rights activists under intensifying attack from both authorities and armed groups since 2014.

• OP-ED: The U.S. Shouldn’t Stumble Out of Afghanistan

Bangladesh
AUGUST 2019
Security forces continued anti-militancy operations while attempt at repatriating Rohingya refugees to Myanmar stalled. Amid regional tensions over Indian govt’s 5 Aug decision to change constitutional status of Kashmir (see Kashmir), Bangladeshi security officials implied events could encourage militancy in Bangladesh; head of paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 9 Aug warned security forces would take “strict legal actions” against those creating unrest, RAB 7 Aug arrested suspected member of banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in Dhaka and next day, police arrested five suspected members of Wolf Pack, faction of militant Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, in Dhaka alleging they were preparing attack on police officers. UN Committee Against Torture 9 Aug issued its concluding observations on country’s record, expressing concern over allegations of enforced disappearances, custodial deaths and widespread use of torture by security forces; recommended govt to set up independent enquiry into allegations of RAB abuses. As part of repatriation efforts, govt 15 Aug said it was ready to return some 3,450 refugees (approved by Myanmar from list of over 22,000 sent by govt late-July); however no refugees turned up on 22 Aug, day repatriation due to begin, amid Rohingya concerns over security, rights and access to services if they return to Myanmar.

India (non-Kashmir)
AUGUST 2019
Clashes between security forces and Maoists continued: in Chhattisgarh state (east), special forces 3 Aug killed seven suspected Maoist rebels in raid on jungle camp in Rajnandgaon district. In Lakhisarai district, Bihar state (north east), militants 20 Aug killed two civilians, including former Maoist leader, suspected of being “police informers”. In Telangana state (centre), police 21 Aug killed one insurgent in gunfight in Bhadrachalam district.

Kashmir
AUGUST 2019
Indian govt revoked Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) special constitutional status, arrested J&K politicians and put Muslim-majority region under lockdown, raising tensions with Pakistan and risking new violence along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) and within J&K. Fulfilling 2019 electoral promise to ultra-nationalist Hindu constituency, Indian PM Modi 5 Aug revoked Kashmir’s autonomous status under constitutional article 370, including article 35-A which gave permanent residents sole rights to own property within J&K and employment with local government. Lower house of Parliament 6 Aug passed Kashmir Reorganisation Bill dividing J&K into two territories (J&K and Ladakh) and downgrading status from state to Union Territories, J&K having legislature with limited powers, Ladakh having no legislature. Indian govt 2-5 Aug deployed tens of thousands of additional troops in J&K, imposed communication blackout and detained around 300 Kashmiri politicians, including former Kashmiri Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti. Despite crackdown, 10,000 people 9 Aug protested and
clashed with police in Srinagar. In Baramulla district, militant 21 Aug fired on police, killing one officer before being killed. Communication blackout remained throughout J&K end month. BBC 29 Aug published report alleging beatings and torture of civilians by security forces. On day of 5 Aug announcement, Pakistani govt called decision “unlawful and destabilising”, with PM Khan next day raising concerns over possible ethnic cleansing in J&K and India using militant attacks as pretext for “conventional war”; 7 Aug downgraded diplomatic relations with India and suspended bilateral trade. UN Sec-Gen Guterres 8 Aug called on “all parties to refrain” from steps affecting J&K’s status and to exercise “maximum restraint”; UN Security Council 16 Aug held closed door consultative meeting on J&K, first in over 50 years, prompting India’s criticism of “international interference”. In cross-LoC clashes, India 3 Aug claimed to have killed five to seven Pakistani commandos during failed Pakistani incursion; Islamabad 15 Aug said four soldiers died by Indian firing and claimed to have killed five Indian soldiers same day and six 20 Aug.

Nepal
AUGUST 2019
Concerns over ruling-Nepal Communist Party (NCP)’s restrictions on political space continued amid new bill curtailing autonomy of govt’s media regulatory body. PM Oli-led govt 27 Aug tabled legislation on media body, despite previously committing to revising controversial proposal widely criticised after its registration in parliament in May; concerns remain that journalists could be heavily fined or imprisoned for violating regulations under new law. Activists also criticised govt for allegedly targeting individuals for their political beliefs following arrest of three journalists over last two months for their ties to hardline Communist Party of Nepal. Human rights groups expressed concerns about govt attempting to maintain close scrutiny on critics after three activists received intimidating calls from police 4 Aug. Opposition parties 27 Aug criticised govt for attempting to establish direct PM oversight into budgets of constitutionally-mandated institutions. Oli also faced internal pressures within NCP due to factional disputes involving two senior leaders and former PMs Jhalanath Khanal and Madhav Kumar, over their positions within party; dispute reportedly linked to Oli’s position within NCP vis-à-vis his fellow co-chair and former Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. NCP 26 Aug prohibited leaders from criticising party, drawing further criticism of handling of internal disputes.

Pakistan
AUGUST 2019
Political tensions between govt and opposition continued amid arrests of opposition leaders on corruption charges, while militant attacks remained at a high-level. Opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) 1 Aug attempted no confidence vote to oust Senate speaker and govt ally Sadiq Sanjrani but fourteen defections in opposition-dominated Senate led to defeat of motion. Amid PPP and PML-N mutual suspicions that other party caused defeat, Hasil Bizenjo – both parties’ joint candidate for Senate leader – accused Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief Lt. Gen. Hamid of engineering defections; local Gujranwala court 2 Aug summoned Bizenjo for accusing ISI of interfering in defections. Authorities stepped up corruption probes on opposition leaders: National Accountability Bureau 7 Aug detained former PML-N finance minister Miftah Ismail and next day arrested former PM Sharif Nawaz’s daughter Mariam Nawaz on corruption charges. Militant attacks continued, mainly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province and Balochistan’s capital Quetta: in KPK’s North Waziristan tribal district, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants 2 Aug killed four soldiers; in Bajaur tribal district, unnamed bomber 5 Aug killed two soldiers; and in Upper Dir district, TTP 18 Aug killed five civilians in bomb attack. In Quetta, unclaimed explosion 2 Aug targeted Shia Hazaras in market, killing one; unknown group 16 Aug detonated bomb in mosque frequented by Afghan Taliban supreme leader Hafizullah Akhundzada, killing four including his brother; next day, unknown gunman killed another Afghan prayer leader. In Daraban Kalan area in South Waziristan, TTP gunmen 24 Aug killed two in gas station. PM Khan 19 Aug gave three-year extension to Army Chief Bajwa, set to retire 29 Nov, alluding to tensions with India and potential U.S. agreement with Afghan Taliban as justifications; opposition Awami National Party called decision “payback” that risked politicisation of institution.

Sri Lanka
AUGUST 2019
Political manoeuvring continued ahead of Dec presidential elections, amid controversial appointment of army commander accused of war crimes. Former President Mahinda Rajapaksa formally made head of main
opposition party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) 11 Aug and nominated his brother and former
defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa as SLPP candidate for Dec presidential election. Governing United
National Party (UNP) remained divided over choice of candidate between PM Wickremesinghe and UNP
deputy leader Sajith Premadasa. Security and political figures continued to testify in public parliamentary
hearings into April terror attacks including Wickremesinghe 1 Aug; in testimony, police officials confirmed
dangerous lack of coordination and information sharing between police and intelligence agencies. Police
continued anti-militant operations, making arrests 3, 15 and 19 Aug of suspected members of banned
groups National Towheed Jamaat and Jamathei Millathu Ibraheem, accused of Easter suicide bombings.
President Sirisena 18 Aug appointed Lt. Gen. Shavendra Silva – whom a 2015 UN report implicated in
human rights violations – as army commander, generating strong international criticism; 19 Aug UN High
Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet said she was “deeply troubled” by appointment which
“comprises Sri Lanka’s commitment to promote justice and accountability”, U.S. Embassy in Colombo said
appointment undermines govt’s “international reputation”; EU and other European states 20 Aug issued
statement sharing Bachelet’s concerns; Foreign Minister 20 Aug rejected criticisms as “unwarranted and
unacceptable” attempts to interfere. Amid concerns over possible politicisation of police investigations,
Attorney General 15 Aug ordered police to conclude investigations into series of high-profile political
crimes committed under 2005-2015 Rajapaksa govt, including killings of journalists.

Indonesia
AUGUST 2019
Tensions worsened in Papua amid large-scale demonstrations against the discriminatory treatment of
Papuan students that turned violent with clashes between protesters and security forces. Local residents
15 Aug attacked Papuan students in Malang who were protesting without police permission in support of
West Papua independence. Next day in Surabaya, ahead of Indonesia’s 17 Aug Independence Day, an angry
mob threatened and harassed Papuan students outside their dormitory, after locals claimed they
destroyed national flag; police reportedly did not intervene but instead fired tear gas and arrested 43
students 17 Aug over flag issue, released them next day. In response to incidents, protesters 19 Aug
began demonstrations in Manokwari, Sorong and Timika (Papua), some turned violent with local parliament
building in Manokwari burnt down. Authorities deployed thousands of security personnel to region since 19
Aug; police 21 Aug said they arrested 45 people during protests in Timika, releasing eleven soon after.
Information ministry 21 Aug temporarily cut internet access in Papua. Demonstrations 23 Aug turned
violent when gunfire broke out between authorities and protesters in Wamena, one protester killed by
police. Clashes continued 28 Aug, police reported one soldier and two civilians killed in Deiyai regency,
while pro-independence activists claimed six protesters shot dead by police. Next day, protesters in
Jayapura reportedly set fire to several govt buildings and damaged businesses. President “Jokowi” Widodo
29 Aug called for calm, while Coordinating Minister for Security affairs General Wiranto said the govt would
not entertain demands for referendum on independence. Suspected Islamist militant 17 Aug attacked
police officer with sickle in Surabaya, East Java; police shot suspect and took him into custody. Counter-
terror unit Densus 88 arrested six suspects with alleged ties to Islamic State-linked Jamaah Ansharut
Daulah during 22-24 Aug raids in East Java. Widodo 26 Aug announced plans to move country’s capital
from Jakarta to new city on Kalimantan province on Borneo.

Myanmar
AUGUST 2019
Fighting significantly escalated in northern Shan State as militant groups combined to attack strategic
targets. Joint force of Arakan Army (AA), Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Myanmar National
Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) 15 Aug launched raids on several targets in Shan State and fired
rockets at Myanmar’s elite defence academy in Mandalay region, killing nine soldiers, three police and three
civilians, and destroying bridge on main route from Mandalay to Chinese border at Muse; groups 17 Aug
launched series of coordinated attacks around northern Shan State capital Lashio, including firing on
vehicle of local philanthropic association travelling to help civilians trapped by fighting, killing one member
of group; clashes also around the strategic town of Kutkai. Military 31 Aug extended unilateral ceasefire in
Kachin and Shan, originally announced in Dec 2018, until 21 Sept. AA attacks on security forces in Rakhine
state continued, including early Aug ambush on military at Bangladesh border, killing deputy battalion
commander; AA 20 Aug attack on convoy killed police captain and wounded four officers. Tensions
continued over issue of repatriation of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh; though Bangladesh 15 Aug said it was ready to return some 3,450 refugees from 22 Aug – approved by Myanmar from list of over 22,000 sent by Bangladeshi govt late-July – no Rohingya refugees willing to repatriate, amid concerns over security, rights and access to services if they return to Myanmar. UN Fact-Finding Mission 5 Aug released report detailing Myanmar military’s business interests and calling for targeted sanctions and arms embargoes, concluding that revenue earned from domestic and foreign business deals substantially enhances military’s ability to carry out “gross violations of human rights with impunity”; Mission also condemned military’s use of “sexual and gender-based violence to terrorise and punish ethnic minorities” in report released 22 Aug.

- **BRIEFING**: Peace and Electoral Democracy in Myanmar

Philippines
AUGUST 2019
Security forces continued to clash with Abu Sayyaf militants and communist rebels. Suspected Abu Sayyaf militants 12 Aug killed two soldiers and one child during ambush in Mindanao province. Abu Sayyaf militants 19 Aug wounded two police officers during ambush in Sulu. In continued anti-militant operations, police 15 Aug arrested suspected Abu Sayyaf member in Pasay City. President Duterte 8 Aug said he had ordered recruitment and training of up to 10,000 elite special forces to combat threat of terrorism, which he claimed “is getting bigger”. Suspected communist New People’s Army (NPA) members 15 Aug killed two pro-govt militiamen in Abra province. Military 18 Aug arrested three NPA rebels and seized manufacturing site of explosive devices in Negros Occidental. Duterte 27 Aug in speech urged military to end communist insurgency, “serving notice” there will be “a little trouble” in coming months. Philippines 9 and 19 Aug filed diplomatic protests with China over maritime disputes (see South China Sea).

South China Sea
AUGUST 2019
Chinese incursions into disputed territorial waters and U.S. warship sailing close to Chinese claimed islands led to increased tensions in South China Sea (SCS). Chinese oil exploration survey ship 7 Aug departed from disputed Spratly Islands, in area claimed by Vietnam and where it had been since early July, but 13 Aug returned to disputed waters. Amid ongoing tensions, Vietnam foreign ministry 16 Aug said it contacted China to protest “repeated violations”, demanding China withdraw its vessels. U.S. State Department 22 Aug condemned China’s “interference against Vietnam’s longstanding oil and gas activities”. Next day, after meeting between Australia PM Morrison and Vietnam PM Phúc in Hanoi, countries jointly expressed concern about developments in SCS and “disruptive activities in relation to long-standing oil and gas projects”. EU 28 Aug condemned “unilateral actions” that resulted in “mounting tensions and a deterioration of the maritime security environment”, urging all parties to “exercise self-restraint” and refrain from “militarising the region”. Philippines President Duterte 28 Aug visited China, meeting with counterpart Xi and discussing issues related to SCS. Earlier in month, Philippines twice filed diplomatic protest over Chinese incursions into disputed waters; foreign ministry 9 Aug lodged protest with China after spotting two Chinese survey ships in Philippines exclusive economic zone; FM Locsin 19 Aug ordered filing of diplomatic protest over Chinese “trespassing”. Next day, Duterte ordered all foreign vessels sailing in Filipino territory to seek permission from authorities, adding non-compliance will be responded to in an “unfriendly manner”. U.S. Air Force 16 Aug said it will continue freedom of navigation operations in SCS citing “commitment to region”. U.S. guided missile destroyer sailed within 12 nautical miles of Chinese artificial islands in Spratly Island chain 28 Aug; Chinese People’s Liberation Army called on U.S. to cease “provocative actions”.

Thailand
AUGUST 2019
Month saw several small bomb attacks near and in Bangkok, while insurgent attacks continued in deep south. Coinciding with ASEAN foreign minister’s meeting in Bangkok 29 July-3 Aug, six small bombs and six incendiary devices detonated 2 Aug in Bangkok and Nonthaburi, injuring four; two IEDs failed to detonate; seven suspects arrested by 9 Aug, police warrants for seven others still at large issued by 20 Aug. One IED exploded 4 Aug in Nonthaburi, no injuries reported. Political controversy continued following PM Prayuth 16
July omitting sentence from constitutionally required oath that directs cabinet to uphold the constitution. PM Prayuth 8 Aug pledged to take “full responsibility” and said matter of legitimacy of cabinet and constitutionality of govt should be decided by Constitutional Court (CC); Ombudsman’s office 27 Aug referred matter to CC. Criminal court 14 Aug exonerated 24 defendants from United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship group, commonly called Red Shirts, including leaders Jatuporn Prompan and Nattawut Saikua, over 2010 protests, declaring it political rather than terrorist activity. During 17 Aug interview with Reuters, alleged Barisan Revolusi Nasional Patani Melayu leader said militant group and govt representatives met for preliminary talks 16 Aug; General Udomchai Thammasarat, head of govt’s peace-dialogue delegation, declined to confirm report. Suspected insurgent detainee Abdullah Esormusor, who lapsed into coma following interrogation after his arrest 20 July, died 25 Aug. Violence continued in deep south; three bombs exploded in Pattani province 4 Aug, no casualties reported. Unknown gunmen 8 Aug killed former militant leader Abduktore Kaso in Thepha district. Bomb blasts injured seven people across four Yala districts 21 Aug. Suspected insurgents 25 Aug robbed a gold shop in Na Thawi district Songkhla of $2.5 million in valuables.

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina

AUGUST 2019

Three main nationalist parties representing ethnic political blocs (Bosnian Croat, Bosniak and Bosnian Serb) failed to break political deadlock that has prevented govt formation since Oct 2018 elections. Party leaders 5 Aug agreed to form new cabinet within 30 days. But talks between three leaders in tripartite presidency representing each bloc broke down 20 Aug reportedly over whether or not to activate NATO Membership Action Plan that would prepare for possible membership of alliance; party of Milorad Dodik, Bosnian Serb member of presidency, opposed activation while Croat and Bosniak blocs were in favour. Dodik 27 Aug cancelled extraordinary session of tripartite presidency to discuss appointment of new chairman of Council of Ministers, new deadline for talks set for 5 Sept. Dodik 13 Aug said that unless govt was formed soon, majority Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS) would withdraw from several reforms, including formation of joint armed forces, creation of state prosecutor court and joint tax policy. U.S. Deputy Assistant Sec State Matthew Palmer mid-Aug expressed concern over Dodik’s comments and urged him to stop “hardline rhetoric”.

Kosovo

AUGUST 2019

Following resignation of PM Haradinaj in July, parliament dissolved itself, while Kosovo-Serbia relations remained tense. Parliamentary Speaker Kadri Veseli 2 Aug reportedly rejected President Thaçi’s request to nominate new PM; instead parliament’s leadership 5 Aug opted to vote on dissolution. In 22 Aug session, parliament voted to dissolve itself and hold new legislative elections, scheduled for 6 Oct. In 13 Aug statement, U.S., UK, France, Germany and Italy (known as Quint member states) called on Kosovo and Serbia to renew EU-mediated dialogue “with urgency”, said status quo was “not sustainable”, and urged Kosovo to lift customs tariff on Serbian imports. After meeting with U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo, Serbian President Vučić 20 Aug said he expected to resume dialogue with Kosovo in Dec. Thaçi late Aug said dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia was “indispensable”.

Azerbaijan

AUGUST 2019

Supreme Court 7 Aug upheld charges of tax evasion against journalist Khadija Ismayilova, previously imprisoned 2014-2016 on charges of embezzlement and tax evasion; outside Azerbaijan, case was widely perceived as politically motivated and prompted international condemnation.

Georgia

AUGUST 2019

Tensions rose between Georgia and its breakaway region of South Ossetia as Georgia responded to Russia and de facto South Ossetia’s construction of border fence by building two police stations near Georgian villages close to separation line. Govt 14 Aug said Russian and de facto South Ossetian border guards were again building fence on line between South Ossetia and Georgia-controlled territory, this time in Gugutiantkari village; Russian and de facto border guards have been trying to erect barriers along separation line since 2011. UN, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, U.S., EU, Poland,
Lithuania and several other govts condemned fence construction. Georgia 24 and 25 Aug started erecting two police stations near other villages close to separation line. De facto South Ossetia claimed one near village of Chorchana was in territory it controlled, and 28 Aug deployed armoured vehicles to patrol area; Georgia denied building was in South Ossetia. Officials from Georgia, Russia and de facto South Ossetia govt 29 Aug in Ergneti failed to discuss issue at meeting of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM), structure aimed at defusing tensions in conflict zone. De facto South Ossetia official 29 Aug demanded Georgia dismantle police building near Chorchana, and said that, if it did not, local authorities would “take all ... legal measures to ensure the security” of territory they control. Officials from Georgian interior and foreign ministries and EU Monitoring Mission observers 30 Aug were present in area. De facto officials 30 Aug erected flags on hills near police station and agreed to renew discussions in IPRM format.

In Abkhazia’s 25 Aug presidential elections, no candidate won over 50% of votes, threshold required to avoid run-off; two candidates with most votes, incumbent Raul Khajimba, who won 24.83%, and Alkhaz Kvitsiniya, head of Amtsakhara opposition party, who won 22.91%, to compete in second round scheduled for 8 Sept. In lead-up to polls, Khajimba met Russian President Putin 6 Aug.

Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) AUGUST 2019
Speech by Armenian PM Pashinyan in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) capital Stepanakert 5 Aug, including assertion that NK was part of Armenia, angered Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan called speech “aggressive” and “major blow” to negotiations. Armenia dismissed criticism as misunderstanding of speech’s “context and content”. Azerbaijan 12 Aug said it had detained Armenian soldier who same day crossed front line in NK from Armenian-controlled territory to Azerbaijani trenches.

Russia/North Caucasus AUGUST 2019
Authorities responded with force to series of weekly unpermitted protests in Moscow that started mid-July after govt banned most independent candidates from running in 8 Sept Moscow city council election; hundreds arrested. Some 50,000 took part in sanctioned protest in Moscow 10 Aug, and some also participated in unsanctioned side-protests. Police reportedly arrested 256 protesters, with police brutality reports fewer than in prior weeks. To avoid arrests, protest leaders 17 Aug organised series of single-person pickets, which require no permit, and called on supporters not to demonstrate. Thousands attended unsanctioned protests in Moscow 31 Aug, police refrained from intervening, President Putin 21 Aug said protests were part of “pre-election tensions”. France and Germany 3 Aug condemned police crackdown on opposition rallies, citing “excessive use of force”. Chechen ex-commander Zelimkhan Khangoshvili, living in exile in Germany, was shot dead 23 Aug in Berlin; German authorities same day arrested Russian national in Berlin. German media 30 Aug reported links between suspect and Russian military intelligence. Putin’s spokesperson 28 Aug rejected any links between killing and Russian state. Federal Security Service raided offices of human rights group Justice Initiative in Moscow 14 Aug and Ingushetia 16 Aug; Human Rights NGO Amnesty International said that, according to police directive, authorities had conducted raids on grounds that group had played role in organising protests in Moscow 27 July and 3 Aug. Also in North Caucasus region, National Anti-Terrorism Committee in Ingushetia 7 Aug said that Russian security forces had killed man suspected of plotting terror attack when he opened fire to resist arrest. Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) 29 Aug said it had foiled series of planned terrorist attacks targeting law enforcement facilities in Kabardino-Balkaria, arresting one suspect in region.

Ukraine AUGUST 2019
Combatants violated ceasefire in Donbas in east, while Ukraine and Russia moved closer to landmark prisoner swap and resumption of Normandy Four talks on implementing 2014-2015 Minsk Agreements. In Donbas, despite unprecedented agreement late July to renew ceasefire indefinitely, clashes continued with flare-ups 6 and 29 Aug; nine Ukrainian servicemen and at least nineteen separatist fighters killed, no civilian deaths reported. Number of ceasefire violations recorded by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe fell to one third of number recorded in July. President Zelensky and Russian President Putin 7 Aug reportedly discussed potential release of Ukrainians imprisoned in Russia on charges connected to hostilities between two countries. Zelensky 13 Aug signed decree simplifying Ukrainian citizenship procedures for Russian victims of political repression and foreigners and stateless persons who have
fought against Russian-backed forces in east. After Putin met French President Macron 19 Aug, Putin’s press secretary 22 Aug said that two presidents had discussed prisoner exchanges and Moscow was taking steps in that regard. Ukrainian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Olena Zerkal 22 Aug suggested Russia was using prisoner exchanges as part of “bargaining” strategy to facilitate its return to G7. German Chancellor Merkel 25 Aug said preparations were underway for summit in Paris of Normandy Four (Russia, Ukraine, Germany and France); Putin’s spokesman said that whether or not meeting takes place would depend on progress in prisoner exchanges. Zelensky told U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton in 28 Aug meeting in Kyiv that Ukraine would welcome U.S. participation in Normandy format talks. Ukrainian authorities 28 Aug released Kirill Vyshinsky, former editor of Ukrainian service of Russia’s RIA News, charged with treason in 2018; release was key Russian demand. Ukrainian activist 30 Aug reported 28 prisoners, including Crimean filmmaker Oleh Sentsov and sailors arrested after Nov Black Sea standoff, were due in Kyiv imminently, but negotiations over possible transfer to Russia of Volodymyr Tsemakh, key witness to 2014 downing of flight MH-17, were delaying their return. 

Cyprus
AUGUST 2019
Cypriot President and Turkish Cypriot leader held first talks since Feb, as Turkey’s drilling for hydrocarbons off Cypriot coast continued to fuel tension between countries. Cypriot President Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci met informally 9 Aug; in joint statement, leaders said they were ready to hold tripartite meeting with UN Sec-Gen Guterres in Sept to plan resumption of talks. Cypriot govt 16 Aug said it was not willing to engage with Ankara’s “rhetoric of tension”. Turkish energy minister Fatih Dönmez, Turkish Cypriot “PM” Tatar and “Minister of Economy and Energy” Hasan Taçoy 6 Aug visited Turkey’s Yavuz drilling vessel in Bay of Famagusta off Cyprus’s eastern shore to highlight their efforts to protect “rights and interest of Turkey and [Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus]”. Dönmez same day said Yavuz and Fatih vessels were continuing to drill in Finike-1 and Karpaz-1 wells, adding that Turkey would deploy third seismic exploration vessel Oruç Reis to eastern Mediterranean by end of Aug. Oruç Reis departed from Istanbul 28 Aug en route to Mersin Taşucu Port on Turkey’s southern shore adjacent to Cyprus. U.S. State Department 20 Aug said Yavuz’s activities were “unlawful” and called on Turkey to remove it from Cypriot Economic Exclusive Zone. Anastasides 9 Aug rejected Turkish claim of rights over resources in East Med and any joint committee on natural resources.

Northern Ireland (UK)
AUGUST 2019
Security incidents continued. Police night of 17-18 Aug responded to report of suspicious object in road near Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh near border with Republic of Ireland, discovering on investigation that it was fake bomb. As police and bomb disposal officers cleared area 19 Aug, bomb in area detonated causing no injuries. Police accused dissident republicans of hoax to lure police and bomb disposal officers. No group claimed responsibility, but police 22 Aug blamed paramilitary group Continuity Irish Republican Army. Police 25 Aug arrested two in connection with bombing. Shooting at petrol station in Waringstown, County Down 19 Aug left suspected loyalist militant dead; 24 Aug police arrested two and next day charged them with murder. Unidentified assailants 21 Aug shot man in legs in Belfast in what police called paramilitary style attack.

Turkey
AUGUST 2019
Govt kept up military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) and intensified crackdown on people affiliated with Kurdish movement. In south east, govt launched operations against PKK in Şırnak, Hakkari and Van provinces 19 Aug and in Mardin, Şırnak and Batman provinces 28 Aug. Turkish media 8 Aug reported that security forces had “neutralised” two PKK militants allegedly responsible for 17 July killing of Turkish diplomat in Iraqi Kurdistan’s capital Erbil. Govt increased pressure on members of pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP): authorities 15 Aug arrested 21 HDP members in cities of Mardin, Şırnak and Izmir; 19 Aug dismissed newly-elected metropolitan mayors of majority Kurdish provinces Diyarbakır,Mardin and Van on grounds that they were affiliated with terrorist organisations and replaced them with state-appointed trustees; same day detained 418 people affiliated with Kurdish movement in 29 provinces. Authorities 22 Aug detained seventeen in Ankara and 27 in Izmir during protests over removal of Kurdish mayors. Batman province governor’s office removed four elected neighbourhood heads from
their posts "due to investigations into them and trials they face on terrorism charges". In north-western Syria, as regime forces threatened to take Turkish observation post in northern Hama province, Turkey 19 Aug sent military convoy to support rebels; Syrian regime carried out airstrikes targeting convoy, killing three Syrian civilians (see Syria). U.S. and Turkey 7 Aug said they had reached agreement on general framework for way forward in northeastern Syria, despite continued disagreement over depth of proposed safe zone along Turkey-Syria border and composition of troops that would man it. Turkey and U.S. defence officials 12 Aug started to establish joint operation centre in Şanlıurfa to coordinate safe zone preparations. In Istanbul, authorities 1 Aug said they had transferred to refugee camps 12,474 irregular migrants for deportation and 2,630 unregistered Syrians 12-31 July; interior minister 20 Aug extended to 30 Oct deadline for refugees to leave Istanbul and return to places where they registered. Authorities 8 Aug detained suspected Syrian suicide bomber in Şanlıurfa's central square; 6-15 Aug arrested 48 suspected Islamic State (ISIS)-linked individuals in Hatay, Konya, İzmir and Adana’s Yüreğir district.

Kazakhstan
AUGUST 2019

Kyrgyzstan
AUGUST 2019
Tensions between President Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev led to deadly raid on Atambayev’s home and street protests. Special forces 7 Aug broke into Atambayev’s compound in Koi Tash village outside capital Bishkek intending to detain former president, who had refused three summons for questioning. But hundreds of his supporters took up arms and successfully resisted operation, shooting one member of special forces who later died; about 100 people reportedly injured in fighting. Security forces 8 Aug tried again to arrest Atambayev, who gave himself up. Hundreds of Atambayev’s supporters same day marched in capital Bishkek to protest his arrest leading to skirmishes between protesters and security forces, 40 people detained. In addition to previous charges, authorities 13 Aug added plotting coup and 20 Aug extended Atambayev’s pre-trial detention until 26 Oct. Clashes between residents of Solton-Sary in centre and Chinese workers of Chinese mining company 5 Aug over company’s alleged environmental damage left twenty workers injured; company suspended operations at gold mine.

Turkmenistan
AUGUST 2019
President Berdymukhamedov 12 Aug made speech at Caspian Economic Forum; his first public appearance since 5 July dispelled rumours that he had died.

Latin America & Caribbean
Colombia
AUGUST 2019
Amid high levels of violence, three former senior commanders of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) announced return to armed struggle. Group, including former chief FARC negotiator in peace process Iván Márquez, announced via video released 29 Aug their return to armed combat, highest ranking figures of ex-guerrillas to have reneged on 2016 peace accord; Márquez claimed video recorded in Inírida region of eastern Colombia, close to Venezuela border, but intelligence reports suggested group may be based in Venezuela. Other demobilised leaders of guerrillas distanced themselves from schism. In Pacific region, fighting continued to spread, particularly affecting indigenous communities with Public Ombudsman 8 Aug announcing seventeen armed groups fighting for control of region; unidentified attackers 10 Aug killed indigenous leaders Kedvin Mestizo Coicue and Eugenio Tenorio in Caloto municipality, Cauca (south west). Levels of violence against social leaders and activists remained high, including early Aug killings of community leaders José Eduardo Tumbó, also in Caloto, and of Enrique Güejea and Gesain Yatacué, coordinators of the indigenous guard in municipality of Toribio; indigenous communities in northern Cauca 11 Aug declared state of emergency. UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2 Aug released report detailing govt had reduced amount of land occupied by illicit crops by 2,000 hectares in 2018 after five years of reported increases, but stating that cocaine production increased in same period. U.S. 8 Aug certified Colombia as cooperating with counter-narcotic measures and said govt “leading efforts to restart a
Colombian-led aerial eradication program”. Formal timeframe of existence of 24 reintegration camps for ex-FARC members ended 15 Aug; Colombian Agency for Reincorporation 6 Aug announced govt will continue providing security and financial support for additional year in order to support over 3,000 ex-combatants still in these zones. Amid regional concern over fallout of Venezuela crisis, govt 5 Aug passed degree granting citizenship to Venezuelan children born in Colombia after Aug 2015, giving 24,000 stateless children Colombian nationality.

- **REPORT:** Calming the Restless Pacific: Violence and Crime on Colombia’s Coast

**Venezuela**

AUGUST 2019

Political crisis continued as U.S. announced latest round of sanctions and govt suspended dialogue with opposition. U.S. 5 Aug announced new sanctions against govt, freezing all Venezuelan state assets in U.S. and threatening secondary sanctions against those doing business with President Maduro’s govt; in response, govt accused U.S. of “economic terrorism” and 7 Aug suspended involvement in Norwegian-mediated talks with opposition in Barbados, though did not break off talks completely; U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton 6 Aug accused Maduro of using negotiations to buy time, saying it was “time for action”. UN Human Rights Chief Bachelet 8 Aug expressed concern that “extremely broad” sanctions fail to contain measures to mitigate impact “on most vulnerable sectors of population”. Numerous media including Associated Press 18 Aug reported that Diosdado Cabello, head of govt-controlled National Constituent Assembly (ANC) had begun talking with U.S. through intermediary; U.S. President Trump and Maduro 20 Aug both confirmed secret Venezuela-U.S. dialogue underway. Govt continued suppression of opposition; ANC 12 Aug lifted parliamentary immunity from four MPs; ANC also appointed special commission to determine whether to bring forward legislative election due late 2020.

**Guatemala**

AUGUST 2019

Alejandro Giammattei won second round of presidential election. In run-off vote 11 Aug, Giammattei of Vamos party won 58% of vote, beating 42% for Sandra Torres of Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE), turnout 42%; Giammattei will assume office Jan 2020. Giammattei 11 Aug reiterated he will not renew International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) whose mandate ends 3 Sept, instead creating new anti-corruption commission. Attorney General 13 Aug announced creation of 60-person technical unit to assist new anti-corruption body “Special Attorney against Impunity”, with CICIG spokesman raising concerns that unit does not contain any CICIG members. Following July U.S.-Guatemala “Safe Third Country” agreement requiring migrants who pass through country to first seek asylum there instead of U.S., Constitutional Court (CC) received official copy of accord from govt 9 Aug, in order for CC to make final decision on previous provisional ruling which blocked signing of agreement without congressional approval; Giammattei 13 Aug stated country had neither resources nor security to act as safe third country and reaffirmed deal must have U.S. and Guatemalan congressional approval. Minister of Interior Enrique Degenhart 22 Aug signed security cooperation agreement with U.S. on sharing biometric information of foreigners in or passing through Guatemala.

**Honduras**

AUGUST 2019

Civil unrest continued during month amid allegations that President Hernández used narco-trafficking proceeds in 2013 presidential campaign. U.S. Federal Court document 2 Aug cited Hernández as part of group of high-level officials who used illicit money to consolidate political power, accusing Hernández of receiving $1.5mn for campaign financing for 2013 presidential election from individuals involved in drug trafficking; president’s office 3 Aug denied accusations. Allegations spurred public anger; university students 5 Aug used rocks and burning tyres to establish roadblock on Supaya Boulevard in capital Tegucigalpa, demanding Hernández’s resignation and clashing with anti-riot police. Protests grew in Tegucigalpa 6 Aug and 7 Aug spread to other cities. Police officers 6 Aug fired tear gas into bus filled with university students in San Pedro Sula, leaving several injured. In continued electoral reform efforts, Congress 15 Aug approved final bill outlining process for election of members of newly-created National Electoral Council to oversee electoral cycles and Electoral Justice Tribunal to settle election-related
disputes; 22 Aug appointed members of special commission in charge of process. Amid regional focus on migration and after late July U.S.-Guatemala “Safe Third Country” agreement requiring migrants who pass through Guatemala to first seek asylum there instead of U.S., acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan 1 Aug stated U.S. will pursue similar agreement with Honduras. Hernández 26 Aug travelled to Washington to discuss migration issues, among other matters.

**El Salvador**

**AUGUST 2019**

Lowest monthly homicide rate this century marked improved security situation, though debate continued over whether this was due to President Bukele’s anti-gang measures. Following late-July announcement of third phase of anti-gang “Territorial Control Plan” which saw measures extended to all departments and foresees $210mn of technical and technological equipment to security forces, govt insisted plan had helped reduce homicides though some security experts said assessment was premature; national police reported 131 murders in Aug, lowest rate since 2000; since Bukele’s 1 Jun swearing in, daily murder average dropped from nine to around four. Bukele 8 Aug pledged to fight corruption and promised to create International Commission against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES) before 1 Sept; civil society welcomed initiative but warned it was being undertaken in secretive way without consultation; Organization of American States Sec Gen Almagro and VP Ulloa 30 Aug announced creation of technical mission to establish CICIES. Amid regional focus on migration and following late July U.S.-Guatemala “Safe Third Country” agreement requiring migrants who pass through Guatemala to first seek asylum there instead of U.S., acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan 1 Aug stated U.S. will pursue similar agreement with El Salvador. Police 3 Aug detained two people, including secretary in parliament, in Anguitu on Guatemala border, on charges of human trafficking.

**Nicaragua**

**AUGUST 2019**

Political situation remained tense amid end of govt-opposition negotiations, while govt continued repressive measures. Following opposition body Civic Alliance’s repeated calls for resumption of talks and President Ortega’s 30 July letter notifying dialogue’s international guarantors of his decision to end negotiations, govt repression remained at high level; opposition Blue and White National Unity 14 Aug stated 134 political prisoners arrested since June still detained and alleged police unlawfully detaining on average four civilians daily. Permanent Human Rights Commission 7 Aug filed complaint to govt over unconstitutionality of Amnesty Law for crimes related to 2018 uprisings. International pressure continued with actors calling on govt to resume dialogue; U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Bachelet and Spain’s foreign ministry 2 Aug released statements regretting govt’s decision to end talks. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton 6 Aug threatened imposition of blockade while U.S. Nicaragua ambassador 14 Aug called on govt to resume talks, warning of possible Organization of American States measures. Amid economic deterioration, govt delegation 8 Aug began visit to allies including Cuba, Russia and Iran, signing bilateral trade agreement with Iran 13 Aug.

**Haiti**

**AUGUST 2019**

Political tensions remained high amid opposition attempts to impeach President Moïse. Parliament 2 Aug announced 7 Aug session to review impeachment motion against Moïse on accusations of treason over his alleged involvement in embezzlement of PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil) funds; Chamber of Deputies president Gary Bodeau called off session citing lack of respect for parliamentary rules and 12 Aug called off further session over security concerns; in 21-22 Aug vote, 53 of 61 MPs voted down impeachment measure, with 58 members abstaining. Local media 11 Aug reported PM Michel ready to present his govt plan to Chamber of Deputies in first round of ratification process, though some in opposition continued to insist on Moïse’s resignation before any ratification. Public unrest continued with demonstrators late July until early Aug protesting against Washington’s support for Moïse outside U.S. embassy in Port-au-Prince; embassy security 8 Aug reported gunfire in immediate vicinity of staff housing compound. Amid gang-related violence, national police 8 Aug announced 656 new officers.

**Mexico**

**AUGUST 2019**


Amid incidents of mass violence, record high homicide rate caused alarm, with 2019 on course to surpass 2018 as deadliest year on record. Officials announced Jan-July saw 20,135 murders (95.8 per day), higher than 19,335 for same period last year. Mass killings continued; in Veracruz (east), armed gunmen 28 Aug attacked and set fire to bar in town of Coatzacoalcos, killing 28; state governor Cuitláhuac García said massacre was retaliation after bar refused to let criminal group sell drugs. In Michoacán (centre), armed groups including Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG), Viagras and Knights Templar continued to compete over criminal markets including extortion of avocado industry; CJNG claimed responsibility for nineteen bodies found in Uruapan 8 Aug; in response, govt increased deployment of National Guard, controversial main instrument of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)’s security plan, in region. Violence against women remained a concern following allegations that four policemen 3 Aug raped teenage girl and a policeman sexually assaulted another girl days later, both in Mexico City; Mexico City’s mayor 14 Aug announced six police officers had been suspended as part of investigations; hundreds of protesters 13 and 16 Aug demonstrated against police inaction in tackling violence against women, damaging bus station and police station in latter demonstration. AMLO 19 Aug asked protesters to refrain from violence; said there would be no repression of demonstrations. Targeted killings of journalists continued including 2 Aug killing of Edgar Alberto Nava López in Zihuataneho, Guerrero (south) and Jorge Celestino Ruiz in Actopán, Veracruz (Gulf coast). Govt 4 Aug called for extradition of culprit of 3 Aug attack that left 22 dead, including eight Mexicans in El Paso, Texas; xenophobia against Latinos and Mexicans in particular motivated violent attack according to U.S. police reports.

Middle East & North Africa
Israel/Palestine
AUGUST 2019
Clashes erupted at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade between Muslim worshippers and Israeli police and fighting along Israel-Gaza fence area left at least nine Palestinian militants dead. In Jerusalem, tens of thousands of Muslims gathered to pray at Holy Esplanade on first day of Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha 11 Aug, which coincided with Jewish holiday Tisha B’Av. After rumours spread that police would allow Jews entry in violation of status quo, clashes broke out between Muslims and police leaving at least 61 Palestinians and four police officers injured. Later that day, police authorised Jews to enter, allowing some 1,700 Jews to be on site. Jordan, custodian of Jerusalem’s sacred sites, condemned Israel’s 11 Aug decision to allow Jews access on that day; Jordanian MPs 19 Aug recommended that govt expel Israel’s ambassador and reconsider Israel-Jordan peace treaty. Israeli police 15 Aug shot dead Palestinian youth who stabbed policeman near Holy Esplanade. In Gaza, Israeli forces 1-17 Aug killed at least nine Palestinian militants who approached fence. Militants fired rocket into Israel 16 Aug, Israel intercepted it and same day struck Hamas targets in Gaza. Next day militants fired three rockets into Israel, two intercepted, one landed in Sderot. Two suicide bombings 27 Aug at police checkpoints in Gaza city left three officers dead; Hamas declared state of emergency throughout Gaza. In West Bank, Israel 5-6 Aug approved construction of 2,304 houses for Israelis in Area C. Following deadly stabbing 7 Aug of Israeli soldier near Migdal Oz settlement, Israeli security forces in Beit Kahel village 10 Aug arrested two Palestinians suspected of attack; Israel blamed Hamas. Suspected Palestinian bombing 23 Aug killed Israeli near Dolev settlement. Iranian-backed Iraqi paramilitary group accused Israel of conducting airstrikes on their assets in Iraq (see Iraq). Israeli airstrikes 24 Aug hit Iranian forces near Syrian capital, Damascus, leaving five dead (see Syria). Suspected Israeli drone strikes targeted Iran-backed militants in Lebanon; Lebanese President Aoun 26 Aug called attack on Beirut “declaration of war” (see Lebanon).
Jordan
AUGUST 2019
Govt, as custodian of Jerusalem’s holy sites, condemned Israel’s 11 Aug decision to allow Jews access to Holy Esplanade on first day of Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha, which coincided with Jewish holiday Tisha B’Av. Jordanian FM 18 Aug summoned Israel’s ambassador demanding end to Israeli violations at Holy Esplanade and next day MPs recommended expelling Israeli ambassador and reconsidering Israel-Jordan peace treaty. Following govt decision to impose anti-smuggling measures, demonstrators 23-24 Aug clashed with security forces in Ramtha on border with Syria.
Lebanon
AUGUST 2019
President Aoun called suspected Israeli drone strikes on Iran-allied militias in Lebanon a declaration of war, raising risk of escalation in Sept. In capital Beirut, two Israeli drones 25 Aug attacked Hizbollah stronghold, one crashed and other exploded and damaged its media centre; attack reportedly targeted and destroyed equipment related to Hizbollah’s precision-guided missiles program. Israel 26 Aug conducted drone attack on military posts of Iran-backed armed group Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine-General Command near Qusayr in east, no reported casualties. President Aoun 26 Aug called Beirut attack “declaration of war” and PM Hariri called it “blatant violation of Lebanese sovereignty”. Hizbollah leader Nasrallah same day condemned “aggression”, pledging to down any Israeli aircraft that entered Lebanese airspace and retaliate for future Israeli killings of Hizbollah members in Syria. Political deadlock over deadly shoot-out in June involving supporters of two rival Druze parties thawed mid-Aug. Leaders of rival parties met and reconciled 9 Aug; cabinet next day convened for first time in six weeks. Following talks in Washington with U.S. Sec State Pompeo, Hariri 15 Aug expressed his commitment to U.S.-led negotiation process to resolve Israel-Lebanon land and maritime border dispute.

Syria

AUGUST 2019

Fighting intensified in north west as govt forces made advances into rebel-held Idlib province and targeted Turkish military convoy, while Turkey and U.S. made progress in negotiating creation of safe zone along Turkey-Syria border. Govt declared conditional ceasefire in north west 1 Aug, but resumed bombing 5 Aug citing refusal of jihadist militants to withdraw from de-escalation zone. As pro-govt forces advanced in northern Hama province, clashes 14 Aug left fourteen pro-govt fighters and 27 rebels dead. Opposition fighters same day shot down govt warplane. Pro-govt airstrikes 16-17 Aug killed twenty civilians in Deir al-Sharqi village in Idlib province. After heavy fighting, in which at least 59 rebels and 28 pro-govt fighters killed, rebels 20-21 Aug retreated from Khan Shaykhun and neighbouring Kafz Zita and Lataminah. Turkey, facing loss of observation post in Morek, northern Hama province, 19 Aug sent military convoy to support rebel forces; govt and Russia carried out airstrikes targeting convoy, killing three Syrian civilians. Turkey same day said attacks violated Sept 2018 Sochi Agreement and threatened to use right to self-defence. At Syria-Turkey border crossings thousands of Syrian protesters 30 Aug decried Ankara’s alleged acquiescence to govt advances and demanded refuge in Turkey, Turkish soldiers used tear gas and fired shots to disperse crowds. U.S. 31 Aug said it had conducted airstrike on al-Qaeda affiliate in Idlib Hurras al-Din, killing 40 militants. U.S. delegation in Turkish capital Ankara 7 Aug said it had agreed with Turkey to form joint operation centre in Turkey to oversee creation of safe zone and carry out joint patrols there. Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) 27 Aug said they had begun withdrawal from safe zone. Islamic State (ISIS) continued attacks in north east: car bombing in al-Qahtaniya 7 Aug killed five civilians; another in Qamishli 18 Aug killed policeman. Israel 24 Aug said it had conducted airstrikes in Aqraba, south of Damascus, preventing Iranian drone strike on Israeli.

Bahrain

AUGUST 2019

FM al-Khalifa 17 Aug attended signing of Sudanese transitional govt agreement in Sudanese capital, Khartoum. Govt 19 Aug said it would join U.S.-led maritime security initiative for Middle Eastern waterways. Iran

AUGUST 2019

Iran-U.S. tensions remained high over maritime security and Iran’s continued threat to further breach in Sept 2015 nuclear accord if European parties do not mitigate economic impact of U.S. sanctions. Iran 4 Aug said it had detained Iraqi tanker in Persian Gulf 31 July, accusing it of smuggling fuel. UK, Bahrain and Aus-tralia joined U.S.-led maritime security initiative for Middle East; Israel 6 Aug re-reportedly indicated it was supporting with intelligence. FM Zarif 12 Aug said naval build-up in Persian Gulf would increase “risk of combusston”. Gibraltar 15 Aug re-leased Iranian tanker it had detained since early July on suspicion of transporting oil to Syria; U.S. 16 Aug issued warrant for tanker’s seizure, which Gibraltar reject-ed 18 Aug. Iran 26 Aug said it had dispatched one destroyer and one aircraft carri-er to Gulf of Aden. Iran continued to threaten that it would further breach 2015 nuclear deal on 6 Sept if agreement’s European parties failed to mitigate econom-ic impact of U.S. sanctions. Former German ambassador to Iran who was due to head mechanism to facilitate trade with Iran bypassing U.S. sanctions (INSTEX) 8 Aug withdrew from post. After Iran breached deal’s cap on low enriched uranium stockpile in July, Iranian nuclear official 13 Aug said
its stockpile was “growing rapidly”. Israeli media 5 Aug reported that Iran increased its financial assistance to Hamas to $30mn per month. Delegation of Yemen’s Huthi movement in Tehran 11-17 Aug met FM Zarif, Supreme Leader Khamenei and Western ambassadors. Huthis 17 Aug announced appointment of ambassador to Iran. FM Zarif held discussions with French officials in Paris 23 Aug and returned to France 25 Aug for further consultations with E3 (France, Germany and UK) on sidelines of G-7 summit in Biarritz, France. President Rouhani 27 Aug said U.S. should lift sanctions as condition for talks. Kurdish militants 27 Aug killed member of paramilitary force in Piranshahr in north west; Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) next day said it had killed two militants responsible. U.S. 28-30 Aug imposed several further sanctions on Iran, including on Iranian tanker released from Gibraltar.

• BRIEFING: Iraq: Evading the Gathering Storm

Iraq

AUGUST 2019

Suspected Israeli drone strike on Iran-backed militia killed two, prompting Iran-allied parliamentary bloc to call it a declaration of war against Iraq, and security forces continued operations against Islamic State (ISIS). Following suspected Israeli airstrikes on assets of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iraq late July, PM Mahdi 16 Aug banned all unauthorized military flights. Explosion and large fire in missile depot of Iran-backed paramilitary Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in central Baghdad 12 Aug killed one person, prompting interior minister to order investigation. Explosion of unknown cause also damaged weapons depot of PMU militia Kataib Hezbollah in al-Balad base in Salah al-Din province 20 Aug. In al-Qaim near Syrian border, suspected Israeli drone strike 25 Aug killed at least two Kataib Hizbollah fighters; parliamentary bloc Fatah Alliance 26 Aug held U.S. responsible for suspected Israeli attack, which it called “declaration of war” against Iraq, and demanded withdrawal of U.S. troops; U.S. State Department same day denied responsibility and said it would cooperate with investigations. Security forces continued operations against ISIS. In Kirkuk province, Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) 4 Aug launched New Dawn operation, deploying troops and warplanes to Hawija, al-Rashad and al-Abassi and reportedly killing several militants. In Diyala province, military 7 Aug said it had killed four ISIS militants as part of ongoing operation Will of Victory. In Anbar province, CTS 14 Aug killed ten militants. U.S. soldier 10 Aug died in gunfight with suspected ISIS militants in Nineveh province. In Daquq, south of Kirkuk city, suspected ISIS mortar fire 12 Aug killed two policemen.

• BRIEFING: Iraq: Evading the Gathering Storm

Kuwait

AUGUST 2019

Iranian FM Zarif met Crown Prince al-Sabah and FM al-Sabah in Kuwait City 18 Aug and advocated for regional dialogue forum and non-aggression pact between Iran and Kuwait.

Qatar

AUGUST 2019


Saudi Arabia

AUGUST 2019

Govt sought to end hostilities between its allies in Yemen after United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed southern separatists took Aden from Hadi govt, both nominally part of Saudi-led coalition opposed to Yemen’s Huthis; fighting raised tensions between UAE and Saudi Arabia, which remains opposed to Yemen’s partition. In Yemen, UAE-backed southern secessionists Southern Transitional Council (STC) 7-10 Aug seized control of provisional capital Aden and expelled pro-govt forces, including armed groups closely
associated with Islamist Islah party (see Yemen). High-level delegations from Saudi Arabia and UAE, including Saudi King Salman and UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed, met in Saudi city of Mecca 12 Aug and jointly called for parties to “prioritise dialogue and reason in interest of Yemen”. Saudi Arabia same day called for emergency summit on Yemen’s southern conflict in Jeddah. Saudi Arabia and UAE FMs 26 Aug issued joint statement reaffirming coalition’s support to Hadi govt while condemning “defamation” of UAE. Huthis continued to launch attacks into Saudi territory: drones 9 Aug targeted Abha airport, inflicting no major damage; 17 Aug hit and started fire at Shaybah oil field near UAE border, prompting coalition to carry out apparently retaliatory airstrikes around Sanaa same day and around Saada 20 Aug. FM Jubeir and Minister of State for African Affairs Ahmed Qattan 17 Aug attended signing of Sudan’s transitional govt agreement in Sudanese capital Khartoum; Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman next day called Ethiopian PM Abiy and AU Chairperson Moussa Faki to congratulate them for successful mediation. Authorities 16 Aug said they had identified 3.67mn people in Saudi Arabia lacking proper documentation, mostly Ethiopians and Yemenis, and would soon deport nearly 1 million.

**Yemen**

AUGUST 2019

Southern separatists aligned with United Arab Emirates (UAE) seized city of Aden from govt forces 10 Aug and moved to consolidate control across south, raising risk that violence escalates in Sept between opposed factions in south. Fighting triggered by Huthi missile strike in Aden in south 1 Aug that killed Munir al-Mashali, commander of UAE-trained Security Belt force and prominent figure in separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC), and 29 other officers; STC alleged that members of Saudi-backed Islamist Islah faction facilitated strike. After reports emerged 7 Aug that President Hadi’s guards had fired at people attending al-Mashali’s funeral in Aden, STC launched offensive on city same day. STC 10 Aug said it had taken control of city, which govt confirmed. Fighting left at least 40 dead. Separatists sought to consolidate control elsewhere in south: in Abyan governorate, pro-STC Security Belt fighters 19 Aug seized military base in Zinjibar and 20 Aug captured al-Kawad military camp. Govt launched counterattacks, regaining bases in Shebwa governorate and control of Zinjibar. Govt forces 28 Aug moved on Aden, prompting clashes in eastern part. Saudi Arabia, which opposes Yemen’s partition, 12 Aug called for talks in Saudi city of Jeddah. STC 15 Aug said it would attend talks, but would not cede Aden unless Islah and northerners were removed from powerful positions in govt. Govt 20 Aug refused to participate in dialogue with STC unless latter retreated from Aden. UAE same day rejected govt’s accusations that it had supported separatists’ capture of Aden. Govt 29 Aug accused UAE of airstrike that killed 30 govt troops between Abyan and Aden; UAE same day claimed responsibility for airstrike but said they targeted “terrorist militias”. Huthis drones 9 Aug targeted Abha airport in Saudi Arabia; airstrike 17 Aug started fire at Shaybah oil field near UAE border, prompting coalition airstrikes around Sanaa same day and around Saada 20 Aug. Huthis claimed to have made advances in north near Saudi border, including attack on coalition soldiers in Kitaf, Saada.

- **BRIEFING:** After Aden: Navigating Yemen’s New Political Landscape

**United Arab Emirates**

AUGUST 2019

Yemen’s southern separatists, trained and equipped by United Arab Emirates (UAE), seized southern city of Aden from Saudi-backed Hadi govt forces, pitting UAE interests against those of Saudi Arabia, which opposes Yemen’s partition. In Yemen, UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) 7-10 Aug seized control of provisional capital Aden and expelled pro-govt forces allied to Riyadh, including armed groups closely associated with Islamist Islah party (see Yemen). High-level delegations from UAE and Saudi Arabia, including UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed and Saudi King Salman, met in Saudi city of Mecca 12 Aug and jointly called for parties to “prioritise dialogue and reason in interest of Yemen”. Following Saudi call for emergency summit on matter in Jeddah, UAE 17 Aug confirmed alignment with Riyadh but did not join Saudi Arabia’s calls for STC to leave Aden. Abu Dhabi 20 Aug rejected Yemeni govt’s accusations that it was supporting secessionists and held Yemeni President Hadi partially responsible for clashes. Saudi and UAE FMs 26 Aug issued joint statement reaffirming coalition’s support to Hadi govt while condemning “defamation” of UAE; Abu Dhabi 28 Aug denied Hadi govt’s allegations of torture in secret prisons.
Minister of State al-Sultan al-Jaber 17 Aug attended signing of Sudan’s Transitional Government agreement in Sudanese capital Khartoum.

Algeria
AUGUST 2019
Govt took steps to initiate dialogue with civil society and prepare for presidential elections as weekly protests demanding radical political change carried on and military continued to pursue high-profile critics in courts. In capital Algiers and other cities, thousands of protesters continued to gather for weekly demonstrations, demanding departure of interim President Ben Salah and PM Bedoui and end to de facto rule of army chief of staff Gaid Salah. Following Ben Salah’s late July appointment of panel led by former parliament speaker Karim Younes to organise dialogue between govt and civil society, Younes proposed measures to ease tensions, including freeing prisoners and allowing demonstrators free access to Algiers. Gaid Salah late July refused to allow measures. In response Younes 1 Aug tendered resignation from panel, but withdrew it same day. Younes 4 Aug announced creation of several commissions to focus on different issues and 17 Aug appointed “committee of wise men” to prepare national dialogue that should lay groundwork for presidential elections, despite some opposition groups’ preference for electing constituent assembly. Secular and Islamist opposition figures 3 Aug refused to participate in panel discussions, accusing govt of attempting to circumvent popular demands. Student protesters stormed panel’s press conference 18 Aug, demanding Ben Salah’s resignation. Military court 6 Aug issued international arrest warrant for former army chief of staff and defence minister Khaled Nezzar who had criticised Gaid Salah on grounds of “conspiracy and breach against public order”. Authorities stepped up repression: Committee to Protect Journalists 14 Aug reported that authorities had blocked five local news websites. Authorities 19 Aug detained and deported senior staff member of NGO Human Rights Watch Ahmed Benchemsi, accusing him of “serving foreign agendas aiming at infiltrating popular protests”.

Egypt
AUGUST 2019
Security forces responded to deadly car bombing in Cairo by stepping up raids on suspected Islamist militants, and Islamic State (ISIS) militants maintained insurgency in North Sinai. In Cairo, car bombing killed 22 people outside National Cancer Institute 5 Aug; govt blamed Hasm, organisation allegedly linked to Muslim Brotherhood, but Hasm denied responsibility. Security forces 8 Aug carried out raids on suspected terrorist hideouts in town of Atsa, Fayoum province, about 100km south west of Cairo, and East Shorouk, about 50km north east of Cairo, killing seventeen alleged militants. In North Sinai, ISIS militants 4 Aug kidnapped young man in Bir al-Abd and 6 Aug published video which appeared to show execution of two civilians in Rafah, whom they accused of being agents for military.

Libya
AUGUST 2019
Deadly stalemate persisted in and around capital Tripoli between Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) and forces nominally loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA), and fighting escalated in south between militias allied to GNA and LNA. Fighting in and around Tripoli led to no substantial change in territorial control amid humanitarian crisis with over 100,000 displaced, many sheltering in schools. LNA airstrike 2 Aug reportedly killed three GNA fighters in al-Saddadah south east of Tripoli. LNA 15 Aug reportedly shelled Tripoli’s Mitiga airport, killing one guard, and 15-16 Aug bombed Zuwara airport west of Tripoli which it said housed Turkish drones. LNA drone mid-Aug reportedly struck field hospital in al-Aziziya south of Tripoli, drawing UN’s condemnation. After brief lull in fighting 11-12 Aug during Muslim holiday Eid al-Adha, LNA resumed attacks 13 Aug. GNA 21 Aug reportedly retook Sebea district south of Tripoli. Seventeen LNA fighters 23 Aug reportedly surrendered to GNA south of Tripoli. In south, clashes escalated in Murzuq, by late Aug leaving at least 100 people dead and 3,000 displaced. After clashes between unidentified armed groups 4 Aug left four dead, suspected LNA airstrike same day killed at least 43 in Murzuq; locals claim that LNA denied killing civilians and said airstrike targeted “Chadian opposition fighters”. GNA-allied militia known as South Protection Force 18 Aug said it had expelled LNA forces from Murzuq. LNA next day reportedly sent reinforcements to maintain control of nearby Sharara oilfield. In Misrata, about 200km east of Tripoli, LNA 6 Aug hit cargo plane landing at air college and 17 Aug bombed GNA air base; GNA next day said it had downed LNA drone. In Benghazi in
east, car bomb 10 Aug killed five, including three UN staff, prompting UN Sec-Gen Guterres to call for internal investigation.

Mauritania
AUGUST 2019
In first peaceful transition since independence, newly-elected President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani took office 1 Aug.

Tunisia
AUGUST 2019
Following death of President Essebsi 25 July, preparations accelerated for presidential elections 15 Sept and legislative elections 6 Oct. Electoral commission 14 Aug approved 26 of 91 candidacies submitted for 15 Sept early presidential elections, including front-runners businessman Nabil Karoui, PM Chahed, Defence Minister Abdelkarim Zbidi, former President Marzouki, and Islamist party An-Nahda’s VP Abdelfattah Mourou. PM Chahed 22 Aug said he had delegated his powers to Public Service Minister Morjane to focus on his campaign and ensure fair elections. Police 23 Aug arrested Karoui on charges of money laundering and tax evasion and banned his TV channel Nessma TV from reporting on elections; Karoui’s party next day claimed PM Chahed orchestrated arrest. Electoral commission 24 Aug said Karoui’s candidacy remained valid despite arrest. Interim President Ennaceur 2 Aug prolonged nationwide state of emergency for one additional month and 30 Aug extended it until 31 Dec. Govt 3 Aug said security forces had killed two suspected jihadists in Gafsa in south."

Going back over the previous two months, International Crisis Group (ICG), CrisisWatch; June 3, 2019

President’s Take, Robert Malley, President and CEO:

All eyes this month were on risks of escalation between the U.S. and Iran. And what a month it was, with the Trump administration’s announcement that it would not renew waivers on the import of Iranian oil, its claim that Iran was plotting against U.S. targets in the region and had attacked four oil tankers off the United Arab Emirates coast, the ordered departure of non-essential U.S. personnel from Baghdad, and the decision to bolster America’s military presence in the Middle East. Iran suspended some of its own nuclear restrictions and threatened to exit the nuclear deal altogether, while Yemen’s Huthis – viewed by Washington and its Gulf allies as Iranian proxies – conducted drone strikes on an oil pipeline in Saudi Arabia. Neither Washington nor Tehran appears eager for a military confrontation and, at this writing, there are welcome signs of efforts to de-escalate, with numerous third countries passing messages between the two protagonists. But as Crisis Group warned over a year ago, a U.S. maximum pressure campaign that, to Tehran, is tantamount to outright economic warfare, was bound to provoke a reaction, and that reaction in turn was likely to prompt a response. That is a recipe for miscalculation. A war President Trump almost certainly doesn’t want could be set in motion by a policy his administration seems intent on pursuing.

My eyes, meanwhile, also were on other crises. I travelled to several countries balancing precariously between hopes of peace and the threat of war. South Sudan’s warring parties agreed to a six-month extension of the deadline to form a transitional government. That they had to postpone the timetable is an index of how little progress they have made and of the two protagonists’ – President Salva Kiir’s and former vice president Riek Machar’s – unwillingness to compromise. But that they managed to agree on anything at all and, crucially, prolong the ceasefire, is cause for relief. To make sure the country doesn’t slide back into violence, the next six months will need to be very different from the last eight. Outsiders, especially the African Union, U.S. and EU, should press Kiir and Machar to implement their agreement or face consequences. With the deal’s guarantor, former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, now behind bars, the onus will fall on them to keep the process moving forward.

Next door, in Ethiopia, more bouts of deadly inter-ethnic fighting deepened concerns about the country’s trajectory. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has taken bold steps to make peace with neighbours and open up the country’s domestic system. But he is confronting a rising tide of ethnic nationalism, exacerbated by political actors intent on gaining influence and power during this time of transition. Rulers in Oromia and Amhara regions face ethno-nationalist challenges; Tigrayan nationalism is resurgent; in the north west, attacks against ethnic Gumuz, themselves apparently in retaliation for attacks on ethnic Amhara,
reportedly left over 200 dead. Competing elites will quickly need to forge a consensus on how to reform the federal system to ensure Abiy’s historic initiatives can succeed.

Finally, in Venezuela, the curious uprising on 30 April was followed by a government crackdown on the opposition. Authorities detained the deputy president of the opposition-controlled National Assembly, while the pro-government National Constituent Assembly revoked parliamentary immunity for fourteen opposition MPs. Yet, in a sign that both parties may be open to dialogue, confidential talks took place between government and opposition representatives in Oslo mid-month and then again at the end of May. A settlement will require flexibility from the two parties, but also from their external allies – most notably the U.S. The problem is that powerful elements on both sides continue to believe that time is on their side. As the collapsing economic and humanitarian situation I witnessed in Caracas last week made clear, however, time is not on the side of the Venezuelan people.

Today marks day 176 of Michael Kovrig’s arbitrary detention. One hundred and seventy-six days during which Michael has exhibited remarkable courage and resilience, and during which we, along with so many others, have continued to fight for his release.

Global Overview MAY 2019
Outlook for This Month June 2019
Conflict Risk Alerts
SomaliaSudanBeninGuinea-BissauNicaraguaYemen
Resolution Opportunities
None
Trends for Last Month May 2019
Deteriorated Situations
NigerCentral African RepublicChadSomaliaSudanBeninLiberiaTogoSri LankaKosovoHondurasSyriaIranSaudi ArabiaYemenLibya
Improved Situations
None

May saw an alarming rise in tensions between Iran and both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, and an escalation in Yemen’s war, which could intensify further in June. Pro-government forces in Syria stepped up bombing in Idlib, and fighting worsened in and around Libya’s capital, Tripoli. Relations between Somalia’s federal government and regions deteriorated and Al-Shabaab upped attacks, boding ill for June. Sudan’s military council resisted demands to hand over power to civilians and is already stepping up repression of protesters. Militia violence rose in North-Western Central African Republic, intercommunal raids left dozens dead in eastern Chad, and in Western Niger suspected jihadists ramped up attacks. Benin’s security forces cracked down on opposition protesters, constitutional reforms that could give Togo’s president two more terms worsened tensions, and Guinea-Bissau’s political stalemate could trigger unrest in coming weeks.

Anti-Muslim violence rose in Sri Lanka, and tensions spiked within Kosovo and between Kosovo and Serbia. In Honduras, violence broke out as the government faced large protests against planned reforms. In Nicaragua, talks between the government and opposition stalled fuelling concerns they could falter in June, further deepening the country’s political crisis.

Trends and Outlook
As we have warned, a marked rise in tensions between Iran and the U.S. could lead to a military confrontation – direct or by proxy – unless both parties and outside actors take greater steps to de-escalate. The U.S. tightened its economic stranglehold on Iran, revoking waivers that allowed countries to import Iranian oil, and announced it would bolster military assets in the Middle East. Tehran responded by downgrading its compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal and threatened to step up uranium enrichment if the accord’s other parties (the UK, France, Russia, China and Germany) failed to protect Iran’s oil and banking sectors from sanctions within 60 days. Unclaimed attacks on four oil tankers off the United Arab Emirates – which Washington claimed Tehran directed – and drone attacks on a pipeline in Saudi Arabia added fuel to the fire. The latter strikes were claimed by Huthi forces in Yemen, but Saudi Arabia accused Iran of guiding the Huthis’ actions. In apparent retaliation, the Saudi-led coalition launched airstrikes in Yemen’s capital Sanaa causing civilian deaths. Fighting also escalated on several fronts across Yemen, raising fears of more violence on Yemeni soil and more Huthi attacks on Saudi and Emirati assets in coming weeks.

In Libya, hundreds were killed in and around the capital Tripoli as fighting intensified between Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s forces and those nominally loyal to the UN-backed government. To prevent a protracted regional conflict, the warring parties and their external backers should agree an immediate ceasefire, including a partial withdrawal of Haftar’s forces, and give the UN a chance to restart talks. Pro-government forces in Syria intensified a bombing campaign against jihadists in Idlib province in the north west, with hundreds reportedly killed, many of them civilians.

In Somalia, already fraught relations between the federal government in Mogadishu and the regional states soured further, raising the risk of greater political turmoil and insecurity, just as Al-Shabaab ramped up attacks in the capital and rural areas. After talks between President Farmajo and regional leaders collapsed with no agreement on critical issues from the electoral process to resource sharing, two regions suspended cooperation with the centre. Hope for a peaceful transition in Sudan after President Bashir’s ouster is fading fast. In May, the ruling military council resisted pressure to hand over authority to civilians and soldiers twice reportedly opened fire on protesters. Violence could rise in June; already clashes erupted when security forces tried to clear a sit-in protest from outside the defence ministry in Khartoum. In neighbouring Chad, inter-ethnic attacks spiked in the east, and militia violence rose in the Central African Republic.

Suspected jihadists ramped up attacks in western Niger near the border with Mali and Burkina Faso, killing several civilians and dozens of soldiers. After disputed elections in Benin, security forces clashed with opposition protesters in the economic capital Cotonou, reportedly leaving at least seven dead. Both the government and opposition hardened their positions, prompting fears that violence could worsen in June. Neighbouring Togo’s parliament voted through constitutional changes that could see President Gnassingbé, in power since 2005, stay until 2030, much to the opposition’s ire. In Guinea-Bissau, President Vaz continued to resist pressure from the ruling party to name a new Prime Minister after the March elections and allow the formation of a government. Thousands took to the streets to protest, and there are fears security forces could forcibly suppress further protests, especially around the end of Vaz’s term on 23 June.

In Sri Lanka, the fallout from the Easter Sunday terror attacks continued as intercommunal tensions and anti-Muslim violence increased, with hundreds of Muslim businesses, homes and mosques damaged or burned during attacks by Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups. In Europe, tensions rose within Kosovo and between Kosovo and Serbia after a police raid on organised crime suspects in the Serb-majority north.

In Honduras, political tensions flared as protests continued against the government’s planned health and education reforms, leading to violent clashes between protesters and the police. Talks between Nicaragua’s government and opposition stalled, with fears that the political crisis could worsen in June as the agreed deadline for the government to release political prisoners expires, and the country faces expulsion from the Organization of American States.
Burkina Faso
MAY 2019
Jihadist attacks, intercommunal violence and banditry continued especially in north and east, as growing number of attacks against Christians raised fears they would stir inter-religious tensions. Unidentified gunmen 12 May attacked church in Dablo in Centre-North region, killing six including priest; suspected jihadists 13 May attacked Catholic Christians in procession between villages of Singa and Kayon in Centre-North region, killing four civilians; 26 May attacked church in Toulfé in North region, four killed. Unidentified assailants 13 May abducted and killed imam and his son in Seno, Sahel region in north. Army vehicle ambushed 23 May near Wamou forest in east, one forest warden killed. Health worker abducted 6 May in Nafo in Centre-East, released next day. French military carried out operation in north with support of Burkinabè and Beninese forces 10 May freeing four abductees, including two French tourists kidnapped in northern Benin 1 May, reportedly by Islamist group Ansarul Islam; two French soldiers killed during operation. President Kaboré early May replaced governors of East, North, Centre-North, Sahel and Centre-South regions. Army 11 May launched Operation Ndoufou to counter spread of militant groups in Sahel, Centre-North and North regions. Former general and PM under Michel Kafando’s transitional govt Yacouba Isaac Zida early May said he would come back from exile and run for office in 2020 presidential elections.
Mali
MAY 2019
Appointment of new broad-based govt divided opposition, while violence continued in centre and north. After consultations with political and religious leaders and civil society, PM Cissé 5 May formed 38-member cabinet, including three opposition members. But major opposition parties Union for the Republic and Democracy (URD) and African Solidarity for Democracy and Independence (SADI) refused to join, citing lack of agreement over power-sharing. Railway workers 13 May ended strike after govt agreed to pay wage arrears. Teachers’ union 20 May ended five-month strike after govt agreed to satisfy eight of ten demands. New govt kick-started discussions with several parties over implementation of 2015 peace agreement, continuation of political dialogue and organisation of legislative elections. Insecurity persisted in centre, particularly Gourma area. Suspected jihadists staged ambush near Mondoro 11 May, eighteen reportedly killed, mostly civilians. Suspected jihadists ambushed and killed four soldiers in Diafarabé, Moipt region 16 May. UN mission (MINUSMA)’s 3 May report on Ogressou massacre that killed at least 160 Fulanis in March pointed to responsibility of Dozos (Dogon militiants). Violence also continued in north. Ex-rebel Coalition of AzawadMovements and former ally Movement for the Salvation of Azawad clashed several times 3-12 May in Talatyé, Ménaka region over control of districts and key trafficking routes, death toll unknown. MINUSMA vehicle hit explosive device near Tessalit, Kidal region 18 May, three Chadian peacekeepers injured. Unidentified assailants 18 May killed Nigerian peacekeeper in Timbuktu city.

- REPORT: Speaking with the “Bad Guys”: Toward Dialogue with Central Mali’s Jihadists

Niger
MAY 2019
Suspected jihadists ramped up attacks in Tillabery region in west bordering Mali and Burkina Faso, killing dozens of soldiers, and insecurity persisted in Diffa region in south east. In Tillabery region, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara claimed attacks against high security prison at Koutoukale in which national guard officer killed and against church at Dolbel both 13 May; same day a hundred militants reportedly ambushed security forces in Baley Beri area as they pursued perpetrators of attacks, killing at least 28 soldiers. Also in Tillabery, explosive device killed six civilians near Inates 3 May. UN and NGO Doctors Without Borders (MSF) early May suspended humanitarian operations in parts of Tillabery and Diffa regions after several incidents: militants reportedly linked to Boko Haram attacked MSF office in Maine Soroa, Diffa region night
of 25-26 April; in Tillabery region armed assailants 2 May stole two MSF vehicles and unidentified individuals 7 May stole two vehicles from refugee camp of Tabarey Barey. General Salou Djibo, who led 2010 coup and presided over peaceful transition, mid-May requested and was granted his retirement, sparking speculations that he may run for president in 2021.

Burundi
MAY 2019
Govt continued crackdown on opposition, targeting in particular members of opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL) led by Agathon Rwasa. Police 3 May arrested six CNL members including local leader in Kirundo, Kirundo province; 8 May arrested and reportedly assaulted three CNL youth members in Muha commune of capital Bujumbura; same day arrested politician from FRODEBU opposition party in Burhinda, Muyenga province; 11 May arrested three CNL members in Bugarama, Rumonge province; 15 May arrested four CNL members in Rumonge, Rumonge province. Imbonerakure youth wing of ruling party CNDD-FDD 11 May forced local population including CNL members to take part in CNDD-FDD meeting in Nyamurenza, Ngozi province and beat 25 relatives of CNL members who refused. Internal and overseas-based opposition groups met in Ugandan capital, Kampala 3-5 May and discussed whether to take part in 2020 elections, but reached no conclusion; opposition parties Movement for Solidarity and Democracy (MDS) and FRODEBU notably absent. For first time, Tanzanian police 13 May arrested two Burundian National Intelligence Service (SNR) agents in Burundian refugee camp at Nduta, Tanzania. Southern Africa Development Community 27 May said it had rejected Burundi’s application to join regional bloc for the second time due to country’s unresolved democratic process.

Cameroon
MAY 2019
Anglophone separatists continued to clash with security forces in Anglophone areas (Northwest and Southwest regions) and Boko Haram (BH) factions continued attacks in Far North. In Northwest region, violence reportedly left two soldiers, seventeen Anglophone separatists and three civilians dead 15-27 May. On National Day 20 May, separatists and two opposition parties boycotted processions in Anglophone areas; in Southwest region, fighting between separatists and military in Muyuka, Ndian department 20 May left one-month-old baby dead. In Far North, BH militants launched at least seven attacks on civilians and security forces mostly in Logone-et-Chari department, but also Mayo Tsanaga and Mayo Sava, killing three soldiers and seven civilians 11-27 May; notably grenade explosion attributed to BH in Far North region capital, Maroua 19 May left two dead. Fighting over land in Mokolo, Mayo Tsanaga 7 May left six dead.
Opposition leader Maurice Kamto, imprisoned since Jan, 6 May called for peaceful demonstrations across country 1 and 8 June; authorities 1 June arrested several hundred protesters including vice president of Kamto’s party Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC). UN Security Council 13 May held first meeting on humanitarian crisis in Cameroon; participants also addressed Anglophone crisis. U.S. Assistant Sec State for African Affairs 16 May expressed discontent with President Biya’s management of crisis and said economic sanctions were possible. In Paris (France), thousands of Cameroonian 18 May protested to demand govt free Kamto and denounce killings in Anglophone regions and France’s President Emmanuel Macron’s support to Biya.

- REPORT: Crise anglophone au Cameroun : comment arriver aux pourparlers

Central African Republic
MAY 2019
Attacks on civilians spiked in north west leaving scores killed, as parties made some progress in implementing Feb peace agreement. In north west, fighters of Return, Restitution and Rehabilitation (3R) armed group 10-12 May killed two civilians in Ouham-Pendé prefecture. In most deadly attacks since Feb peace agreement, 3R 21 May attacked four villages in Ouham-Pendé prefecture leaving 54 dead. Interior minister 31 May said 3R pledged to disarm within two weeks. Unidentified assailants 21 May killed two civilians in Batangafo, Ouham prefecture. In centre, members of rebel group Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (MPC) 5 May reportedly killed two civilians in Yagaranji, Nana-Grébizi prefecture. In south east, members of rebel group Union for Peace in Central African Republic (UPC) 22 May abducted seven people in Obo, Haut-Mbomou prefecture. In south west, beheaded body of French-Spanish nun found
in Nola, Sangha-Mbaere prefecture 20 May. Govt made some progress in redeploy of army to provinces begun some four months ago. UN mission (MINUSCA) 5 May helped deploy around 40 troops to Kaga-Bandoro in north, but MPC leader objected, forcing army units to leave town hours later; 106 troops deployed to Kaga-Bandoro 18 May with MINUSCA support. President Touadera 15 May launched executive implementation committee tasked with implementing Feb peace agreement. Consultative committee on disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) 17 May said ten of fourteen armed groups had submitted lists of combatants to be re-integrated into civilian life; reintegration to start in June with rebels in west.

Chad

MAY 2019

Interc communal violence intensified in east leaving at least 34 people dead. Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in west and govt took steps to avert protests over high cost of living. In east, Arab nomadic herders and ethnic Ouaddai sedentary farmers clashed: Arab herders 16 May attacked Ouaddai farmers in Katafa, leaving nine Ouaddai and three Arabs dead; herders raided and burned villages of Amkaroka, Amsabarna and Amsirin in Dar Sila province 19-20 May, leaving 22 people dead from both sides. In Lake Chad province in west, BH militants 16 May attacked Celia village, killing thirteen people. BH militants 25 May attacked army base in Ngouboua, leaving 23 BH combatants and at least one soldier dead; convoy travelling to scene of attack same day detonated mine, killing four soldiers and one journalist. One month after protests over high cost of living led to ouster of Sudanese President al-Bashir, Chadian govt 10 May removed import taxes on staple foods including rice, flour, cooking oil and dates to reduce prices and calm growing anger over high cost of living. Chair of National Framework for Political Dialogue (CNPD) Mahamat Zene Bada 13 May informed diplomats that legislative elections, initially scheduled for May 2019, would take place later this year without specifying exact date.

- REPORT: Tchad : sortir de la confrontation à Miski

Democratic Republic of Congo

MAY 2019

President Tshisekedi took further steps to open political space and improve regional and international relations, but insecurity persisted, especially in east. Moïse Katumbi, coordinator of opposition platform Lamuka and former Katanga governor, 20 May returned from three-year exile after court overturned conviction and prosecutors dropped investigation against him initiated by govt of former President Kabila. Ne Muanda Nsemi, leader of politico-religious movement Bundu Dia Mayala whom Kabila govt imprisoned but who escaped and disappeared in 2017, reappeared in Kinshasa 6 May, arrested 9 May but released next day at Tshisekedi’s request. Body of Tshisekedi’s father Etienne, opposition leader who died in Belgium in Feb 2017, repatriated 30 May, move previously blocked by Kabila. After months of negotiations between Tshisekedi and Kabila camps, Tshisekedi 20 May appointed Sylvestre Ilunga Ilunkamba, member of Kabila’s party, as PM. Martin Fayulu, Lamuka’s losing presidential candidate, continued to contest results and 15 May threatened to mobilise protests if Tshisekedi did not resign within weeks. Kabila’s Common Front for Congo (FCC) coalition took four of five posts in North Kivu province’s parliamentary bureau 14 May and won with significant margins in delayed senatorial elections in North Kivu and Mai-Ndombe provinces 18 May; FCC now has 86 of 109 senate seats. Tshisekedi continued to strengthen relations with regional and international partners: notably he received Rwandan army chief 10 May; Belgian political and security delegation 12 May; Ethiopian President Sahle-Work 18 May; and French FM 20 May, who promised €300mn for education, health and security sectors. In North Kivu, clashes between army and militia Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) caused displacement in Rutshuru territory; 2 May left eight dead; in Masisi territory, Nduma Defence of Congo-Renovated (NDC-R) militia continued to take ground from rival groups Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS) and Force for the Defence of Human Rights/Nyatura; in Beni territory, attack attributed to Allied Democratic Forces militia 17 May left at least five civilians and one soldier dead. In Ituri province, assailants attacked market on Lake Albert killing nineteen.

- Q&A: Moïse Katumbi’s Return Portends Shifting Alliances in Congolese Politics
Republic of Congo
MAY 2019
President Sassou-Nguesso met Russian President Putin in Moscow 23 May and signed agreement to strengthen military cooperation including Russian training of Congolese troops and inspection of previously delivered Russian-made military equipment.

Rwanda
MAY 2019
Relations between Rwanda and Uganda continued to fray. Rwandan soldiers 24 May crossed into Uganda in pursuit of suspected smuggler, and shot dead one Rwandan and one Ugandan. Ugandan authorities 28 May arrested two Rwandans for allegedly entering country to gather intelligence.

Eritrea
MAY 2019
Govt early May increased security forces in capital Asmara without giving explanation and temporarily shut down Facebook and messaging apps. U.S. removed Eritrea from updated list of countries not cooperating with its counter-terrorism efforts 29 May.

Ethiopia
MAY 2019
Intercommunal fighting continued, in north west and north east, and federal authorities sought to bring former officials to justice. In north west, after violence against ethnic Amhara in Metekel zone, Benishangul-Gumuz region 26-28 April left eighteen dead, allegedly retaliatory attacks against ethnic Gumuz in Agi Agew zone of neighbouring Amhara region 3 May reportedly caused over 200 deaths. Ministry of Peace said it would investigate violence. In north east, unidentified assailants reportedly killed eleven ethnic Somalis in Siti zone, Somali region 3 May; amid allegations that state police from neighbouring Afar region were responsible, Somali regional state withdrew from 2014 agreement with Afar region that allows latter to administer three disputed border areas. In south, fatal violence reported in Oromia region between security forces and rebel group Oromo Liberation Front, and ethnic Wolayta 17 May rallied in Sodo pressing claim for their own regional state. Executive Committee of ruling coalition Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) 16 May recognised danger of rising ethnic nationalism. Federal Attorney-General 7 May charged in absentia former head of National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) Getachew Assefa and 25 other NISS officials on 46 counts of human rights violations including torture, forced confessions, rape, and arbitrary detention; Tigray regional govt reportedly continued to shield from arrest Getachew, adviser to Tigray region president and senior official in Tigray People's Liberation Front, one of four parties in ruling EPRDF coalition. Authorities in Somalia late May arrested and deported to Ethiopia Hassan Ismail Ibrahim, former commander of Jijiga Central Prison in Ethiopia's Somali region where he is accused of overseeing serious human rights violations. New party, Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party, created in Addis Ababa 9-10 May uniting seven opposition groups; veteran opposition figure Berhanu Nega elected leader.

Kenya
MAY 2019
Al-Shabaab kept up attacks in north east and east, ethnic violence continued in north, and relations between Kenya and Somalia remained sour. In north east, Al-Shabaab fighters 4 May raided Hareri Hosle village in Mandera county, near border with Somalia, one police reservist injured in firefight; Al-Shabaab ambush on patrol in Gumarey area, Wajir county 7 May left three officers injured. In east, suspected Al-Shabaab 5 May attacked camp of special police unit in Ishakani, Lamu county, nobody hurt. Police 15 May issued security alert of possible Al-Shabaab attacks during Ramadan (early May to early June) and announced extra security measures. In north, ethnic Borana attacked ethnic Cabra killing eleven in Marsabit county near Ethiopian border 6 May. Five people killed in two subsequent attacks involving same ethnic groups in Boru Haro and Shaba Manyatta Jillo, Marsabit county 23 and 24 May. Kenya 10 May suspended direct flights between Somali capital Mogadishu and Kenyan capital Nairobi until at least 9 Aug; flights are expected to land in Wajir in northern Kenya for security checks before proceeding to Nairobi. Kenyan authorities at Nairobi airport denied entry to three Somali officials travelling on diplomatic passports 20 May saying that after change in rules Somalis needed to obtain visa at Kenyan mission in Mogadishu.

Somalia
MAY 2019

Relations between federal govt and federal member states deteriorated sharply raising risk of further instability in June, and Al-Shabaab stepped up attacks in capital Mogadishu and rural areas. President Farmajo and PM Khayre held talks with heads of federal member states in Garowe, Puntland 5-9 May, but failed to agree on way forward on critical issues including reform of electoral law and management of oil and gas. Puntland 27 May said it would stop cooperating with federal govt on matters of constitutional review, federal elections and national security and Galmudug state 30 May severed ties with federal govt. Govt 13 May cancelled ongoing national high school exams citing discovery of cheating racket, prompting thousands of students to protest in capital. In Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab 12 May detonated car bomb, killing Turkish citizen; suicide car bombing near president’s residence killed four civilians 14 May; car bombing at security checkpoint 22 May killed at least nine including former FM Hussein Elabe Fahiye. In Middle Shabelle region in south, Al-Shabaab militants 6 May ambushed security forces killing four and clashes between security forces and Al-Shabaab militants 11 May left fifteen militants dead. Al-Shabaab 14 May kidnapped two local aid workers in Gedo region, Jubaland state; 16 May clashed with Somali forces in Gedo region, leaving at least seven militants and two soldiers dead. Fighting between Al-Shabaab and security forces in Middle Shabelle region 28 May left five militants dead. Senior Al-Shabaab leader Sidow Abdi Gedi 18 May contacted govt forces in Kismayo, Jubaland requesting to surrender. U.S. claimed its airstrikes killed eleven Al-Shabaab militants and nineteen Islamic State (ISIS)-Somalia militants 5-26 May. Relations between Somalia and Kenya continued to sour following flare-up over disputed maritime border; Kenya 10 May suspended direct flights between Mogadishu and Kenyan capital Nairobi until 9 Aug and 20 May denied entry to three Somali govt officials who travelled to Kenya on diplomatic passports. UN Sec-Gen Guterres 30 May appointed U.S. diplomat James Swan as new UN envoy to Somalia. UN Security Council 31 May renewed for one year mandate of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM).

Somaliland

MAY 2019

President Bihi called for resumption of Somaliland-Somalia talks on Independence Day 18 May. Somaliland and Puntland forces clashed in disputed Sanaag region 21 May, leaving unconfirmed number of soldiers dead.

South Sudan

MAY 2019

Parties to Sept 2018 peace agreement agreed to six-month extension of pre-transitional period to Nov, allowing more time to carry out preliminary reforms before forming transitional govt. Parties convened in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa 2-3 May under auspices of regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and agreed on six-month extension, as requested by main rebel leader Riek Machar in April. President Kir 8 May publicly expressed doubt that parties would be able to form unity govt within six months, suggesting necessary security reforms would take one year. Security forces 10 May deployed in large numbers in capital Juba to prevent anti-govt protests that youth called for 16 May. Kirr 15 May warned that any attempt to seize power would be met with “violent resistance”; protests did not materialise. In south west, fighting reportedly resumed between govt forces and rebel group National Salvation Front (NAS) led by Thomas Cirillo in Yei River state 26-27 May. UN Security Council 30 May renewed for one year sanctions on govt officials and militia groups including arms embargo; govt described renewal as “anti-peace”.

- **STATEMENT:** A Critical Six Months for South Sudan

Sudan

MAY 2019

Tensions rose as military council continued to resist opposition demands for civilian leadership and security forces reportedly attacked protesters, raising risk of more intense clashes in June. After talks between Transitional Military Council (TMC) and opposition coalition Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) were suspended late April, security forces fired gunshots and tear gas to disperse protesters in Nyala, South Darfur 4 May. TMC 7 May said it wanted Sharia law to guide legislation during transition. FFC 12 May called for civilian-headed transitional structure and escalation of protests; protesters expanded checkpoints
outside army HQ in capital Khartoum, site of sit-in protest. Armed actors wearing uniforms of paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) 13 May opened fire on protesters in Khartoum, reportedly killing five; TMC and RSF denied responsibility. Talks resumed same day and by 15 May two sides agreed that transitional period before elections would last three years and agreed on duties of sovereign, executive and legislative councils, but failed to agree on composition and control of sovereign council. Security forces in RSF uniforms again shot at protesters 15 May; TMC head General Abdel-Fattah Burhan suspended talks until protesters removed barricades around sit-in. Talks resumed 19 May but made no breakthrough, and FFC called for two-day general strike. Thousands of public and private sector workers heeded call 28-29 May; in solidarity with protesters, workers at several key institutions including central bank, Port Sudan and oil ministry refused to work and flights out of Khartoum’s main airport were suspended 28 May. Tens of thousands protested in Khartoum 30 May and military called protesters’ sit-in a threat to stability, Egypt, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia continued to give TMC strong support: General Burhan visited Cairo 25 May and Abu Dhabi 26 May and his deputy General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, RSF head, met Saudi Crown Prince in Jeddah 24 May.

Tanzania
MAY 2019
Abduction of well-known opposition activist fuelled concerns for shrinking political space. Unidentified gunmen 4 May abducted Mdule Nyagali, high-profile member of main opposition party Chadema; Chadema 5 May accused security forces of kidnap, authorities dismissed allegation. Villagers 8 May found Mdule Nyagali in bush in Mbeya region in south west, he was unconscious and showing signs of torture. In capital Dodoma, authorities early May detained for one night Chadema MP Paschal Haonga after he reported Nyagali’s abduction. Group of 38 international NGOs and regional organisations 13 May denounced deterioration of human rights in early 2019, called for action at forthcoming UN Human Rights Council 24 June-12 July.

Uganda
MAY 2019
Relations between Uganda and Rwanda continued to fray. Rwandan soldiers 24 May crossed south west border into Uganda in pursuit of suspected smuggler, and shot dead one Rwandan and one Ugandan. Ugandan authorities 28 May arrested two Rwandans for allegedly entering country to gather intelligence. Govt 9 May said it planned to evict remaining residents of Apaa region, which govt seeks to turn into game reserve despite resistance by bordering Amuru and Adjumani districts. Following protests, President Museveni appointed new committee to seek solution to boundary dispute which has periodically erupted in violence. Opposition politicians Robert Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine, and Kizza Besigye 8 May pledged concerted action ahead of 2021 polls. Zimbabwean authorities 25 May temporarily detained Bobi Wine at Harare airport when he visited to attend opposition congress.

Angola
MAY 2019
Armed separatist movement Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) early May said Angolan soldiers had deployed several times in western DR Congo late April claiming to be looking for FLEC militants; FLEC denied presence of any of its militants in Congo.

Madagascar
MAY 2019
Legislative elections held peacefully 27 May; results expected mid-June.

Malawi
MAY 2019
President Mutharika was re-elected 27 May to second five-year term amid allegations of electoral fraud. Following allegations of vote-rigging in 21 May presidential elections, main opposition party Malawi Congress Party (MCP) 25 May obtained High Court injunction to delay announcement of final results; High Court 27 May lifted injunction and electoral commission same day announced results. Runner-up opposition candidate Lazarus Chakwera 31 May petitioned High Court to nullify results and called for protests; United Transformation Movement (UTM) leader and former VP Saulos Chilima same day also filed petition to have results annulled.

Mozambique
MAY 2019
Suspected Islamist militants continued attacks in Cabo Delgado province in far north, disrupting voter registration for Oct general elections and prompting locals to hunt down suspected militants. Militants 3 May attacked voter registration post in Nacate, Macomia district, killing six people, vandalising equipment and burning several houses. Militants 5 May attacked Minhanga in Meluco district, killing three people and burning some 100 houses, leading to closure of five of 38 registration posts in Meluco. Militants 17 May attacked Ngalonga in Nangade district, burning 113 houses and disrupting registration. Villagers in Macomia district 4-5 May reportedly hunted down group of suspected militants, killing four. MPs from ruling Frelimo party 16 May demanded former armed opposition movement Renamo demobilise and disarm before Oct elections. In reversal of South African court’s April ruling, South African justice minister 21 May ruled that former Mozambican Finance Minister Manuel Chang would be extradited to Mozambique instead of U.S., where he is wanted for alleged involvement in Mozambique govt’s undisclosed $2bn loan that U.S. says was fraudulent.

Zimbabwe
MAY 2019
Amid economic crisis, govt continued attempts to initiate political dialogue. Main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) 5 May said it was ready to engage in dialogue with govt if process was credible, calling for neutral external mediator. President Mnangagwa 17 May launched Political Actors Dialogue at ceremony in capital Harare, in which MDC refused to take part; at launch, South African ambassador urged govt to look for external mediator. High court 8 May declared Nelson Chamisa’s position as MDC president illegitimate, ordering party to convene congress to choose new leader within one month; MDC appealed decision and elected Chamisa as permanent leader at pre-planned party congress in Gweru 24-26 May. Security forces at Harare airport 25 May temporarily detained Ugandan opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine, and sec gen of Kenyan opposition Orange Democratic Movement, both visiting country to attend MDC congress. Govt 20-27 May arrested seven Zimbabwean activists at Harare airport after they attended workshop in Maldives on non-violent protest tactics and accused them of plotting to overthrow Mnangagwa. As economic situation continued to deteriorate, govt 21 May announced around 46% increase in fuel prices, raising concerns of future unrest.

Benin
MAY 2019
After 28 April parliamentary elections from which govt banned opposition parties, security forces clashed with opposition protesters early May, raising risk of more intense clashes in June. In economic capital Cotonou, military 1 May deployed in Cadjéhoun district to break up protesters’ barricades. Next day security forces twice stormed residence of opposition leader and former President Boni Yayi, reportedly shooting at crowd. Opposition leaders visited Boni Yayi 4 May and in joint statement called for military’s withdrawal from Cadjéhoun, return of bodies to families and stop to arrests. Opposition leader 10 May said at least seven killed in violence. 83 MPs – all from factions supporting President Talon – took office 16 May amid heightened security; opposition refused to recognise parliament. Talon 20 May defended electoral process and reform of party system, accusing opposition of “lack of wisdom”; opposition 22 May rejected govt’s offer of dialogue and called for new vote. In north near border with Burkina Faso, suspected jihadists 4 May kidnapped two French tourists and killed guide; French military 10 May said it had freed both captives in operation in Burkina Faso.

Côte d’Ivoire
MAY 2019
Parties and coalitions continued efforts to strengthen positions ahead of 2020 presidential elections and ethnic violence flared in centre. Thirteen MPs from ruling coalition Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) 8 May launched Synergie 2020 movement to support President Ouattara’s candidacy, which next day started tour in Hambol region in north, where former National Assembly Speaker and now opposition leader Guillaume Soro recently toured. RHDP continued to poach Soro’s supporters and those of opposition Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI)’s leader Henri Konan Bédié. PDCI delegation mandated by Bédié 8 May met former President Gbagbo – on conditional release from International Criminal Court (ICC) – in Brussels (Belgium) to discuss joint action for “return of a lasting peace in Côte d’Ivoire”, recognising Gbagbo’s leading role in party he founded Popular Ivorian Front (FPI) and of which he has been
trying to regain control; Gbagbo reportedly agreed in principle to join Bédié’s opposition platform. In response, FPI’s legally-recognised President Pascal Affi N’Guessan 8 May said he was party’s one and only president. Indigenous (Baoulé) and non-indigenous (Malinké) populations 16 May clashed in town of Beoumi in centre allegedly after altercation between Malinké taxi driver and Baoulé motorbike taxi driver, eleven reportedly killed and more than 100 injured.

Gambia
MAY 2019
Security forces 10 May dispersed demonstration in capital Banjul against alleged attempts by President Barrow and his allies to retract election promise he made in 2016 to step down after 36 months in office. Govt 11 May said fifteen demonstrators had been charged as protest lacked authorisation. Court martial 27 May sentenced seven former soldiers to nine years in jail and another to three years for plotting to overthrow Barrow in 2017 with help of his ousted predecessor Jammeh.

Guinea
MAY 2019
Ahead of 2020 presidential elections, presidential camp’s project to amend constitution and enable President Condé to run for third term faced growing opposition, and authorities along with Condé supporters upped violent repression of opposition. Let’s Save Guinea movement created 10 May to increase youth and women’s participation in decision-making bodies and fight against constitutional reform enabling third term. Members of National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC) – coalition launched in April by leading opposition and civil society figures to oppose constitutional reform – demonstrated in Kindia in west 4 May during President Condé’s visit, seven arrested. Court in Kindia 7 May sentenced them to three months’ in prison for “obstructing freedom to demonstrate” and “disturbing public order”; Appeal Court of Conakry acquitted them 13 May. Supporters of presidential party and opposition reportedly clashed in Kouroussa 3 May. Women and youth 9 May blocked traffic in Conakry’s Matam neighbourhood to protest power cuts, lack of drinking water and Condé’s possible third term. During general assembly 18 May, ruling party Rally for the Guinean People (RPG) confirmed project to draft new constitution and submit it to referendum.

Guinea-Bissau
MAY 2019
After ruling party won 10 March legislative elections, tensions persisted as President Vaz resisted pressure, including protests organised by ruling party, to name PM to form new govt; further protests could face violent repression in coming weeks especially around end of Vaz’s term 23 June. Ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and opposition continued to contest appointment of two vice presidents of parliament, which Vaz made a precondition for him to name new PM and cabinet. In capital Bissau, thousands of PAIGC supporters protested 14, 22 and 25 May calling on Vaz to name party leader Domingos Simoes Pereira as PM. Supreme court 15 May rejected appeal by two opposition parties allied to Vaz, Movement for a Democratic Alternative G-15 (MADEM G-15) and Party for Social Renewal (PRS), against PAIGC’s alleged attempts to block their nominees for first and second vice presidents of parliament, opening way for nomination of parliament’s bureau and govt. PAIGC leader Pereira 30 May insisted President Vaz nominate PM before end of his presidential term 23 June. P5 group that comprises African Union, Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries, ECOWAS, EU and UN 27 May called for immediate nomination of PM and formation of govt. Public and utilities sector workers 22 May started new three-day strike over unpaid wages and poor working conditions.

Liberia
MAY 2019
Coalition of opposition parties Council of Patriots called for protest 7 June to demand that President Weah “resign or find a solution to the appalling economic situation”. Weah 14 May met with Council of Patriots’ leaders, no compromise reached. UN envoy for West Africa Mohamed Ibn Chambas visited capital Monrovia 24-25 May to try to mediate.

Nigeria
MAY 2019
Serious security challenges persisted including Boko Haram (BH) insurgency in north east, bandit violence in north west, and herder-farmer tensions in north central, which altogether killed over 200. In north east,
army 10 May reported it killed at least seven BH militants in Gulwa area, Borno state; air force reported strikes killed scores of insurgents. BH continued attacks on civilians, killing at least 31 mainly in Borno state but also Adamawa 7-27 May. Insurgents, mostly from BH faction Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), also continued to target military: notably militants killed fifteen soldiers at base in Magumeri area, Borno state 3 May; Islamic State (ISIS) 11 May said ISWAP killed eleven soldiers in Gajiganna, Borno state 10 May, army denied. ISWAP 20 May attacked base in Gubio, killing at least three soldiers; ISIS 22 May said twenty soldiers killed. In north west, security forces stepped up ground and air operations against bandits, including air strikes on Kamuku forest, Kaduna state 10 May and Doumbourou forest, Zamfara state 25 May, killing scores. But bandits continued attacks in Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto states, killing over 130 people. Notably, in Zamfara state, attacks left over 50 killed in several villages 3-4 May; at least eighteen killed in three places 18-19 May; at least 23 killed in Tungan and Kabaje 28 May. In Katsina state, bandits killed at least 34 people 20-21 May. In Sokoto state, bandits 3 May raided home of former state governor in Bafarawa, killed security guard; 7 May killed district head in Balle. In north centre, herder-farmer clashes and communal violence killed over 30 people in Kogi, Plateau and Kaduna states. In Kogi state, clashes in several areas 18-19 May left fifteen herdiers dead. In Plateau state, communal clash in state capital Jos 26 May killed seven. In Kaduna state, gunmen kidnapped seventeen including pastor at Dankade 19 May.

- REPORT: Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram

Sierra Leone
MAY 2019
High Court 31 May revoked parliamentary seats of ten MPs from main opposition party All People’s Congress (APC) for breaches of electoral law during March 2018 legislative elections. Same day police clashed with APC supporters protesting outside party offices in capital Freetown, firing tear gas into offices, injuring several people and arresting dozens, including senior party executives and former ministers.

Togo
MAY 2019
Parliament passed law approving constitutional changes that could see President Gnassingbé stay in power until 2030, and military conducted joint military operation with neighbours to prevent jihadist insurgency spreading south from Sahel. MPs 8 May voted in favour of constitutional reform that limits presidential mandate to two five-year terms, but does not count three terms Gnassingbé has already served, thereby allowing him to run in two more elections in 2020 and 2025 and potentially stay in power until 2030; C14 opposition coalition 10 May denounced reform. Electoral commission late April announced local elections would be held 30 June for first time in 32 years; after boycott of Dec 2018 legislative elections C14 14 May announced it would take part in June elections. Militaries of Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin and Ghana conducted joint military operation in border areas 15-18 May and arrested some 200 suspected jihadists, of which 95 Togolese.

Asia
China/Japan
MAY 2019
Further signs of improving relations between China and Japan ahead of planned visit by Chinese President Xi to Osaka for G2 summit in June. China’s top foreign policy official, State Councillor for foreign affairs Yang Jiechi, visited Tokyo 16-18 May; meeting with PM Abe called for the two countries to “strengthen coordination and collaboration”. Japanese and Chinese officials resumed disarmament talks in Beijing 21 May, marking first bilateral security meeting in eight years. Japan, Australia, South Korea and U.S. held first “Pacific Vanguard” naval training exercise in Western Pacific late May. Visiting Japan late May, U.S. President Trump discussed military cooperation with PM Abe; Trump reported Japan agreed to purchase 105 F-35 fighter jets from U.S.
MAY 2019

 Amid stalemate in denuclearisation negotiations between U.S. and North Korea, tensions mounted as Pyongyang launched two short-range ballistic missiles 4 May (from south east) and 9 May (from north west); first missile launches in any form since Dec 2017. U.S. President Trump downplayed significance of launches, saying he remains hopeful of a deal with North Korea; U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo noted that tests did not break North Korea’s testing moratorium, which he said only covers intercontinental ballistic missiles – prompting speculation that Pyongyang may proceed with a mid-range ballistic missile launch.

 U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton 24 May said there is “no doubt” that launches violate UN Security Council resolutions. Pyongyang same day stated it will not resume negotiations with Washington unless U.S. changes its stance on sequencing of concessions in negotiations. Amid stalled talks, U.S. 9 May legally seized North Korea’s second-largest cargo vessel pursuant to civil asset forfeiture case filed in New York over accusations of involvement in money laundering transactions; North Korea demanded return of vessel, which had been physically held for a year, and convened rare press conference at UN 21 May to denounce U.S. over case. Inter-Korean tensions also on display; Pyongyang did not join South Korea in late April celebrations of first anniversary of 2018 Panmunjom inter-Korean summit, and North Korean state media 25 May accused South Korea of participating in military exercise in U.S. in Nov 2018.

Taiwan Strait
MAY 2019

 China and Taiwan both held live-fire drills across Taiwan Strait, while ongoing U.S. support to Taipei prompted criticism from China. China 5-10 May conducted exercises north of Taiwan Strait; Taiwan 22 May held major live-fire drills off its east coast, followed by annual military exercise across country 27-31 May including live fire drills and F-16 fighter jets. President Tsai after speech to national security agencies 10 May told reporters China is stepping up infiltration efforts in Taiwan and accused Beijing of “destroying the status quo across the Taiwan Strait”. Annual U.S. Defence Department report released 2 May noted China is capable of “amphibious operations short of a full-scale invasion of Taiwan”, including use of missile and precision airstrikes to “degrade Taiwan’s defenses”. U.S. opened new compound of its American Institute in Taiwan 6 May. U.S. House of Representatives 7 May unanimously approved “Taiwan Assurance Act of 2019” reaffirming U.S. commitment to Taiwan and encouraging U.S. sales of military equipment to support Taipei’s self-defence capabilities, prompting China to lodge “stern representations” with Washington. Taiwan foreign ministry 25 May confirmed its national security chief David Lee met with U.S. counterpart John Bolton during visit to Washington mid-May, marking first meeting between national security advisors in four decades. U.S. military sent two navy ships through Taiwan Strait 22 May, prompting Chinese protest.

Afghanistan
MAY 2019

 Govt-sponsored assembly on peace process failed to push the process forward and U.S.-Taliban talks continued, while Taliban launched attack on civilian targets in Kabul. President Ghani 29 April-3 May met with 3,200 delegates in national assembly (Loya Jirga) seeking common approach on peace talks with Taliban; notable opposition figures did not join and Taliban rejected process. Jirga declaration called on all sides to agree on ceasefire and prisoner exchange. U.S. Special Envoy Khalilzad met with Taliban representatives for sixth round of talks in Doha 1-9 May; Taliban called discussions on full withdrawal of foreign forces “positive”; Khalilzad noted “steady but slow progress”; Doha talks followed late April trilateral meeting between Khalilzad and Russian and Chinese counterparts, agreeing on goal of withdrawing foreign forces and “inclusive Afghan-led” peace process. In Moscow, intra-Afghan talks 28-30 May failed to reach breakthrough, despite Taliban saying “decent progress” had been made with senior Afghan politicians. Taliban 8 May launched attack on Kabul office of NGO Counterpart International, killing nine including three civilians, in group’s first major attack in capital in over a year. Taliban stepped up military operations: 4-7 May killed at least 28 security forces in attacks in Baghdis, Baghlan and Takhar provinces. Taliban 15 May captured Shamulzaiy district centre in southern Zabul province, killing at least thirteen soldiers and overrunning govt intelligence agency offices; 27-28 May killed some 56 soldiers in attacks in Farah, Khost, Sari Pul, Ghor and Samangan provinces. Near Lashkar Gah, Helmand province, media reported U.S. airstrike 17 May mistakenly killed seventeen Afghan security forces. Security operations continued to exert toll on civilians: in Bakwa district, Farah province, coalition airstrikes...
targeting Taliban drug labs reportedly killed at least 45 civilian workers and eighteen insurgents; UN 23 May reported fourteen civilians dead in coalition airstrikes in Helmand and Kunar provinces; in Nangarhar province, governor’s spokesman said security forces 24 May “mistakenly” killed six civilians during raid targeting Taliban forces. Domestic political tensions remained high: coalition of opposition candidates 22 May said it would lead protests countrywide following end of Ghani’s legal mandate.

Bangladesh
MAY 2019
Following govt order to intensify anti-militancy operations in wake of terror attacks in Sri Lanka, security forces 5 May arrested Islamic State (ISIS) militant who had returned to Bangladesh after attempting to join fighting in Syria, and 9 May arrested suspected recruiter of banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in Dhaka. Minister of Home Affairs 5 May said govt would provide security to civil society members threatened by militants following reports of potential attacks against activists and journalists. Police Inspector General 16 May denied foreign militant groups such as ISIS were active in Bangladesh but said they may have “communicated their ideology” to homegrown groups. In continued political tensions, Bangladesh Jatiya Party 6 May quit opposition alliance Jatiya Oikya Front (United National Front, led by Bangladesh National Party (BNP)); move came after BNP late April ended parliamentary boycott, held since Dec general elections, reportedly in effort to secure bail for imprisoned BNP leader Khaleda Zia. Ruling Awami League continued crackdown on media and political dissidents, arresting journalist Henry Sawpon 15 May and lawyer Imtiaz Mahmood 16 May. In Cox’s Bazar in south east, police 14 May reportedly clashed with suspected smugglers attempting to traffic Myanmar Rohingya refugees to Malaysia, killing two traffickers.

India (non-Kashmir)
MAY 2019
Maoist insurgents continued attacks around general election which ended 19 May. In Gadchiroli district in Maharashtra state, suspected Maoist landmine 1 May killed fifteen police and one civilian. In Chhattisgarh state, Dantewada police killed Maoist commander Madavi Muiya, suspected of involvement in 9 April assassination of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) politician Bhima Mandavi and four police. In north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh state, suspected National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) militants 20 May killed eleven people in ambush, including state legislator Tirong Aboh.

Kashmir
MAY 2019
Exchanges of fire between Indian and Pakistani forces continued along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) and separatists clashed with security forces in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), while international pressure increased on Pakistan to crack down on terrorist groups. UN 1267 Sanctions Committee 1 May placed Masood Azhar, leader of Jaish-e-Mohammad (Jaish which claimed Feb Pulwama attack) on global terrorist blacklist after China withdrew its objections to his inclusion; U.S. welcomed addition, and appealed for “further and sustained actions” from Pakistan against militant and terrorist groups on its territory. Pakistan 11 May banned eleven groups under Anti-Terrorism Act, due to affiliation with UN-sanctioned jihadist organisations like Jaish and Jamaat-ud-Dawa (formerly Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT)). In cross-LoC clashes, Islamabad claimed Indian cross-border fire killed one civilian 2 May and two others 6 May. In J&K, separatists launched attacks and security forces stepped up counter-terrorism efforts, as final phase of voting for general elections began 6 May. In Anantnag district, militants 6 May killed local leader of Bharatiya Janata Party. In southern Shopian district, police 10 May claimed to have killed militant belonging to Islamic State in Jammu and Kashmir; 12 May killed two LeT militants; police also reported eight people killed in two separate clashes 16 May in Shopian and Pulwama, including six Jaish militants. In capital Srinagar, thousands protested during funeral procession of Al-Qaeda-affiliated rebel commander Zakir Musa, killed by security forces in Pulwama district 23 May.

Nepal
MAY 2019
Four Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) cadres killed in Kathmandu 26 May during accidental explosions while rigging IEDs; two further individuals injured during another IED explosion in Nawalparasi district same day. Explosions preceded 27 May CPN-called nationwide strike which caused partial shutdown of schools and transportation, with several IEDs defused in a number of districts during strike; security experts pointed to
intelligence failure in govt’s response to CPN’s series of IED attacks since Feb; PM KP Oli called the party a terrorist group following explosions; human rights experts criticised Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa for terming deceased CPN cadres as “non-citizens.” Nepal Communist Party (NCP) govt widely criticised for new legislation tabled in parliament 10 May which would replace existing media regulatory body with new entity staffed by political appointees; critics claimed govt attempting to undermine media regulatory body’s autonomy, notably with proposed fines and termination of journalists’ credentials if found in violation of regulations. Several civil society experts described legislation as latest govt attempt to curtail civil liberties and weaken key state institutions.

Pakistan
MAY 2019
Militant groups carried out high-profile terror attacks and authorities focused on countering dissent. Suicide bomber from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 8 May killed at least thirteen at major Sufi shrine in Punjab provincial capital Lahore; in Balochistan’s capital Quetta, TTP claimed 13 May attack killing four police officers guarding mosque. Unknown assailants killed polio worker in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Bajaur tribal district in north west 5 May. International pressure grew on govt to crack down on terrorist groups. India 2 May called on Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to blacklist Pakistan for failing to combat terrorist financing, prompting Pakistan to accuse India of politicising FATF; Pakistan 11 May banned eleven groups under Anti-Terrorism Act, due to affiliation with UN-sanctioned jihadist organisations (see also Kashmir). Five people killed in attack claimed by Balochistan Liberation Army on luxury hotel in Gwadar 11 May; earlier, Baloch separatists 9 May killed three security personnel and two coal miners in Harnai district. In Islamabad, govt focused on countering Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM), civil rights movement from former Federally Administered Tribal Areas: FM Mahmood 4 May reiterated accusation that group is being funded by hostile regional intelligence agencies. Authorities 5 May brought charges against PTM’s co-leader and member of National Assembly Ali Wazir for instigating mutiny and anti-military activities; Peshawar High Court 9 May dismissed case. In North Waziristan, military 26 May killed at least eight Pashtun protestors, led by MPs and PTM co-leaders Wazir and Mohsin Dawar; authorities arrested Wazir; Dawar 29 May accused military of firing indiscriminately and denied attacking checkpoint, saying he was in hiding due to “extreme danger”. National Assembly 13 May unanimously approved 26th constitutional amendment, tabled by PTM co-leader Dawar, increasing number of seats for former FATA from six to twelve in National Assembly and from sixteen to 24 in KPK’s provincial assembly. Afghan-Pakistan relations saw some improvement following 25 April Pakistan’s statement pledging neutrality, although tensions increased after 2 May attack in North Waziristan by militants across Afghan border killing three soldiers. Khan 5 May spoke with Afghan President Ghani, both vowing to work together to restore peace in Afghanistan.

Sri Lanka
MAY 2019
Fallout from country’s deadliest terror attack 21 April continued as intercommunal tensions and anti-Muslim violence rose. Sinhala Buddhist extremist groups 13-14 May launched major attack on Muslim businesses, homes and mosques in Minuwangoda and other towns in Northwest Province, burning or damaging hundreds of buildings in riots killing one; govt imposed nationwide curfew and arrested some 70 people, although security forces initially failed to prevent Sinhalese attackers and in some cases reportedly assisted rioters. Earlier, Catholics and Muslims clashed in Negombo (north west) 5 May, with Muslim-owned shops and houses damaged. Govt continued securitised response to April attacks; Chief of Defence Staff presented five-point plan to tackle “violent extremism” 7 May, including: “restoring security and intelligence services”; “regulating religious space to prevent radical preachers”; managing online extremist content and holding service providers accountable; “deradicalisation” efforts; and ending religiously-based schools. Security forces 23-26 May carried out raids in Colombo and other major towns, arresting over 100 and discovering multiple caches of weapons and equipment. Former defence secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, declaring his candidacy for Nov presidential elections, used series of interviews to promise improved security and “eradication” of terrorism, accusing govt of contributing to April attacks by “dismantling” intelligence networks Gotabaya built as defence secretary. Army Commander 16 May defended decision to reinstate senior army intelligence official - one of some three dozen intelligence operatives suspended following arrest on suspicion of involvement in abductions and murders during govt
of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa – to assist with investigations into April attacks. President Sirisena 22 May pardoned Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, leader of radical Buddhist organisation Bodu Bala Sena, who rights activists previously accused of inciting anti-Muslim violence; Gnanasara had served nine months of six-year sentence for contempt of court.

- **OUR JOURNEYS: Picturing Sri Lanka’s Undead War**

Cambodia  
MAY 2019
Reports emerged of renewed crackdown by authorities against individuals linked with banned opposition party Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP), including calling 25 former party officials to appear for questioning at Battambang provincial court, accused of violating 2017 Supreme Court ruling dissolving party. Rights groups called for investigation into death in police custody of son of a CNRP activist in April.

Indonesia  
MAY 2019
Several people killed in protests against victory of incumbent President Widodo in presidential elections, which were also overshadowed by threats of terrorist attacks. After Election Commission 22 May proclaimed President Widodo winner with 55% of vote, supporters of failed candidate Prabowo Subianto, who continued to declare himself rightful winner, took to streets in protests that turned violent as police pushed them back with tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons. Eight reported killed and hundreds injured; police reported over 250 arrests; authorities launched investigation into deaths. Chief security minister 22 May announced partial block on social media to prevent “spread of fake news”. Defence Minister Ryamizard Ryacudu warned of more riots in June as Constitutional Court hears case lodged by Subianto to annul Widodo’s victory; court scheduled to issue ruling on annulment 28 June. Govt 22 May foiled terrorist plot to detonate explosives during election results announcement; police arrested several suspects in raids in Java early-to-mid May, believed to be members of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD); several reportedly returned from fighting in Syria. Police reported anti-terrorism squad had killed two suspected JAD members 4 May during raid in West Java. Violence continued in Papua province, where military reported one soldier killed in clashes with some 20 members of West Papua National Liberation Army (TPNPB) in Nduga regency 13 May.

Myanmar  
MAY 2019
Significant clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military in Rakhine state continued and spread further south. AA claimed to have clashed 33 times with military 1-12 May, including 12 May ambush of military convoy near Western Command headquarters in Ann township. Tensions in Rakhine increased following deaths of civilians in military custody, after army rounded up some 275 Rakhine men and boys aged 15-50 in Buthidaung township (north) 30 April, and 2 May shot dead six and wounded eight. Local villagers disputed military’s claim that men were attempting to riot; military announced internal investigation into incident and released some of those detained, but 83 still under interrogation or facing prosecution for links to AA; UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed concern for their safety. NGO Amnesty International 29 May released report detailing Myanmar military “war crimes” in Rakhine since Jan, also finding evidence of AA abuses against civilians. Malaysian police 13 May said they had disrupted Islamic State (ISIS) cell plotting attacks in Malaysia and other countries, with two Rohingya among those arrested, one reportedly a supporter of militant group Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) intending to target Myanmar embassy and targets in Rakhine state. Following talks between govt’s peace team and Northern Alliance of ethnic armed groups, military 30 April declared two-month extension to unilateral ceasefire in Kachin and Shan States originally announced in Dec 2018. UN Fact-Finding Mission 14 May urged international community to cut off all financial and other support to military in effort to hold army accountable for “atrocities against many of the ethnic groups living within borders of Myanmar”. Govt 7 May released on humanitarian grounds two Reuters journalists, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, jailed in 2017 for breaking Official Secrets Act in their reporting on massacre of Rohingya men, as part of presidential amnesty; civil society groups welcomed decision but warned of ongoing media restrictions. EU late April announced extension of sanctions until 30 April 2020, including arms embargo as well as visa
bans and asset freezes for fourteen members of police and military associated with human rights violations.

- BRIEFING: An Opening for Internally Displaced Person Returns in Northern Myanmar

Philippines
MAY 2019
Legislative and local elections accompanied by some incidents of violence in Mindanao and elsewhere, while clashes involving militant groups and communist rebels continued. NGO International Alert 22 May reported 144 election-related incidents involving violence in Mindanao 11-13 May, most involving rival clans, including use of grenades and IEDs as well as fights between rival supporters, although with less gun violence than past; warned of potential for revenge killings. Nationally, police reported overall significant decline in election-related violence compared with previous votes, citing shift to vote-buying by rival candidates; police reported 33 election-related killings nationwide between mid-April and 13 May; in results, President Duterte secured firm majority in Senate and held lower house. Govt and MILF implementing panels 21 May handed over Proposed Transition Plan (PTP) to Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), including codes for BTA to legislate on electoral, local govt, education, administrative, revenue and civil services procedures; BTA chief Murad Ebrahim called handover another milestone in Bangsamoro peace process. Clashes continued between military and Abu Sayyaf in Sulu where military killed one suspected militant 5 May; six militants killed and fifteen wounded on 26 May in fighting in Patikul; two children killed and six civilians wounded in clash. Military said Dutch national held captive for over seven years by Abu Sayyaf was killed by militant group 31 May while trying to escape. Military reported continued fighting between govt troops and New People's Army leading to several suspected rebels killed, including: one in Las Navas, Northern Samar (north) 5 May; five in Caraga region (north east) 19 May; at least three in Occidental Mindoro province (centre) 22 May.

South China Sea
MAY 2019
Amid ongoing U.S.-China tensions, U.S. navy conducted two freedom of navigation operations in South China Sea (SCS) and U.S. Senate proposed SCS-related sanctions targeted at China. Two U.S. missile destroyers sailed near Gaven and Johnson Reefs in contested Spratly Islands 6 May, prompting China to accuse U.S. of violating its sovereignty. Later in month, U.S. warship 20 May sailed near contested Scarborough Shoal claimed by China and Philippines, passing within twelve nautical miles of Scarborough Reef; China called move “provocative”. U.S. Senate submitted legislation 23 May to sanction Chinese individuals and entities involved in “illegal and dangerous” activities in SCS and East China Sea, prompting rebuke from Chinese foreign ministry. Following request from Washington that its Pacific allies boost their presence in SCS, U.S., India, Japan and Philippines held joint naval exercises through SCS 2-8 May. U.S. coast guard accompanied Philippine coast guard vessels in joint exercise 14 May in Luzon island in Philippines. Month after flare-up in confrontation between Philippines and China over Beijing’s deployment of vessels near disputed islands, Philippines Supreme Court 3 May ordered govt take steps to protect environment in disputed areas of SCS, after petitioners alleged govt inaction over illegal activities by China; spokesman of President Duterte 6 May said he will enforce ruling. Senior officials from China and ASEAN member states met 18 May to discuss implementation of Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the SCS, and consultation on Code of Conduct for SCS.

Thailand
MAY 2019
Govt formation underway after officials 9 May released controversial final results of 24 March general election, while violence in Deep South continued. Final results of constituency and party-list seats put anti-junta coalition at 246 seats, and pro-junta coalition 147 seats; followed Election Commission’s change in allocation of party-list seats helping eleven small pro-junta parties each gain one gain seat, cutting anti-junta coalition’s lead. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 27 May invited Democrat Party (53 seats) and Bhumjai Thai Party (51 seats) to join new govt; negotiations ongoing, but both parties expected to join. Ruling National Council for Peace and Order continued efforts to disqualify anti-junta Future Forward Party leader. Govt published names of 250-member junta-appointed Senate 14 May. Letter from UN to govt surfaced early
May expressing concern about abduction, killing and disappearance of Thais living in Laos who had expressed republican political views; reports also emerged of arrests of activists in Vietnam and Malaysia. Insurgent violence continued in southernmost provinces: in Pattani province, police killed suspected insurgent in Nong Chik district 2 May; IED attack wounded five border patrol police in Thepha district, Songkhla province 5 May; bomb at security checkpoint in Chana district, Songkhla, killed one police officer and wounded three others and a civilian on 27 May; same day, gunmen shot and killed two rangers at market in Bacho district, Narathiwat. Bomb hidden in motorcycle exploded at market in Nong Chik district, Pattani, 28 May, killing two civilians and wounding 23. MARA Patani chief negotiator Sukri Hari resigned 17 May, reportedly for health reasons.

Papua New Guinea
MAY 2019

Political tensions continued amid opposition’s successful attempts to oust PM O’Neill. Opposition 6 May launched no confidence vote after finance minister James Marape and other senior ministers resigned from govt citing lack of trust in O’Neill, including alleged lack of consultation over controversial $16bn gas deal signed in April. Three days ahead of scheduled no confidence vote, O’Neill 26 May announced resignation citing “need for change”, but did not formally resign and next day appealed to Supreme Court to block vote. PM’s supporters and opponents physically clashed in parliament 28 May. O’Neill 29 May formally resigned in front of parliament; MPs elected Marape as new PM next day.

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina
MAY 2019

Briefing UN Security Council 8 May, Office of the High Representative, international overseer of implementation of 1995 peace agreement, expressed concern over continuing deadlock over appointments to state-level and federal govt posts seven months after Oct 2018 elections, and criticised Republika Srpska (RS) authorities’ rejection of judgements of state and constitutional courts. Bosnian Serb member of presidency Milorad Dodik during ceremony in RS capital Banja Luka 12 May suggested that Serb regiment in Bosnian army should wear uniform of wartime Bosnian Serb Army at future ceremony, prompting condemnation from other members of state presidency.

Kosovo
MAY 2019

Tensions within Kosovo and with Serbia spiked after police 28 May conducted raid on organised crime suspects in ethnic Serb-dominated part of Mitrovica in north, detaining more than two dozen people including local police, and prompting Serbia to put its army on alert. Two UN officials among those arrested during raid, including Russian national who was released same day and later declared persona non grata; UN expressed “great concern”. Belgrade accused Pristina of aiming to intimidate and provoke panic; President Vučić put Serbian army on “combat alert” near border to protect Serbs, while Russia called Kosovo’s actions “provocation”. Kosovo police reported five officers and six civilians injured as police attempted to break through barricade constructed by local Serbs to obstruct operation. Hundreds of Serbs protested in north Mitrovica against raids 28 May, UN and EU called for calm. Amid tensions, Pristina 30 May banned Serbian PM for life from entering Kosovo due to “racist comments toward Albanians” previous day. Vučić 27 May told Serbian parliament that Serbia has lost control of Kosovo and suggested “a possible compromise solution in a referendum”. Snap local elections in four Serb-majority municipalities in northern Kosovo 19 May won by Srpska Lista, the only Serb party contesting polls, reportedly gaining more than 90% of vote, with voter turnout 42%; Western embassies expressed concern over “restricted electoral competition” and reports of “intimidation”. U.S. embassy 14 May expressed concern over series of recent controversial govt appointments of allegedly unqualified senior officials “including individuals convicted of war crimes”. Parliament 16 May approved resolution condemning crimes committed by Serbian forces during 1998-99 war, and calling on govt to criminalise denial of genocide in Kosovo.

North Macedonia
MAY 2019

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In second round of presidential election, pro-Western candidate Stevo Pendarovski, backed by ruling Social Democrats, won with 51.7% of the vote, beating opposition-backed Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova; turnout reported at 46.6%. European Commission in annual enlargement report 29 May again recommended launch of EU accession talks with North Macedonia.

Armenia
MAY 2019
PM Pashinyan faced growing criticism from current and former de facto Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) officials, and clashed with judiciary over court case against former president. Pashinyan 10 May warned against possible counter-revolutionary developments in NK, and 20 May accused “former corrupt [political] system” of developing conspiracies and provoking Karabakh; de facto NK leader Bako Sahakyan denied “treason” and problems with Yerevan. Court 18 May ordered release from pre-trial custody of Robert Kocharyan, country’s second president who is facing criminal charges for overturning constitutional order in 2008 in case he says is politically motivated, after current and former NK de facto leaders vouched for him; state prosecutors appealed Kocharyan’s pre-trial release at constitutional court. PM Pashinyan criticised court’s decision and called for protests in front of court offices all around country. Media reported over 1,000 protesters blocked courts 20 May in response to call by Pashinyan, who later asked demonstrators to restore access. Human rights ombudsman 19 May denounced Pashinyan’s actions as “dangerous for the security and stability of the country’s legal system”. Pashinyan 20 May announced five-step plan for reform of judicial system, including “vetting” of judges; promised open parliamentary investigation into circumstances of four-day fighting in April 2016. Head of EU Delegation to Armenia and President of Venice Commission proposed support to judicial reform.

Azerbaijan
MAY 2019
NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International criticised country’s poor human rights record ahead of Baku hosting prominent Europa League football final 29 May. Yerevan and Baku exchanged harsh statements around decision by Armenian football player Henrikh Mkhitaryan not to play in Europa League final in Baku, citing concerns over his safety despite guarantees from Azerbaijani authorities.

Georgia
MAY 2019
De facto leadership of breakaway region Abkhazia 21 May reached agreement with opposition to postpone presidential elections from 21 July to 25 Aug, after opposition mobilised two days of street protests with demand to postpone until Nov and current leadership to resign. De facto authorities deployed riot police for first time in recent history against protesters. Crisis came after opposition late April accused leadership of poisoning one of its candidates who was hospitalised along with two bodyguards and transferred to Moscow after sudden respiratory and heart problems; presidential administration denied accusations.
Armenia’s PM Pashinyan, latter’s spokesperson 6 May produced rare media comment on details of communication with Baku over recent incidents along front lines.

Russia/North Caucasus

MAY 2019

Authorities in Ingushetia continued to detain activists involved in March protests over controversial Sept 2018 border delineation deal between Ingushetia and Chechnya, including two activists deported from Belarus at Moscow’s request. Court in Kabardino-Balkaria regional capital Nalchik 22 May reportedly extended arrest of five Inguish activists. Security operations against militants continued; security forces clashed with militants in Dagestan’s Kizilyurt District 24 May, reportedly killing three suspected militants and finding automatic weapons and munitions. Human Rights Watch early May reported police in Chechnya engaged in renewed campaign of “unlawful detentions, beatings, and humiliation of men they presume to be gay or bisexual”, citing alleged detention of four men Dec 2018-Jan 2019. Following reports, U.S. Treasury Department 16 May announced new financial sanctions on Chechen law enforcement agency linked to abuse; Russian embassy said it would implement reciprocal measures. Russian national 24 May lodged official complaint with European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) over alleged abduction and torture by police in Chechnya.

Ukraine

MAY 2019

President Zelensky’s call for snap parliamentary elections and sweeping changes to administration caused stir, while fighting continued in conflict zone. During his 20 May inauguration speech, Zelensky announced he was disbanding parliament and calling snap elections, anticipated 21 July. Zelensky requested resignation of prosecutor general, defence minister and head of security services (SBU), and urged other key officials to quit; resignations included PM and FM. Appointments included Ivan Bakanov, who heads Zelensky’s comedy studio and political party, as SBU deputy head; and lawyer Andriy Bogdan as head of presidential administration; Bogdan signalled possible referendum on whether to negotiate with Moscow to end Donbas conflict. Zelensky signed decree returning Ukrainian citizenship to former Georgian President Saakashvili 28 May. Zelensky and deputy from outgoing President Poroshenko’s party both submitted to parliament separate draft laws outlining impeachment procedures 29 May. Reported casualties in conflict zone 1-31 May included eleven Ukrainian military, at least 22 armed group fighters, and three civilians; over 50 combatants and six civilians reportedly injured. Ukrainian military 22 May reported eight soldiers who unintentionally entered separatist-held territory in Donbas had been detained by Russian-backed forces. Several civilians reported wounded by shelling and explosives, including in Horlivka and Pervomaisk (controlled by armed groups); two elderly men died crossing line of separation 10 and 22 May; one man killed by explosive in Velyka Novosilka (gvt-controlled) 4 May. Zelensky visited Donbas war zone 27 May.

Tensions rose between Republic of Cyprus and Turkey over hydrocarbon explorations in East Mediterranean, with escalating rhetoric from Greek Cypriots, new Turkish naval manoeuvres, and 9 May breakdown of de facto Turkish Cypriot coalition govt. Following April announcement of imminent Turkish offshore drilling, Greek Cypriot President Anastasiades 6 May likened Ankara’s actions to “second invasion”. Greek Cypriot media same day reported Nicosia had sought international arrest warrant for crew of Turkish vessel preparing to drill in Republic of Cyprus’ Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ); 10 May reported Nicosia had granted new concession for France’s Total and Italy’s ENI to expand hydrocarbon exploration in EEZ. Turkey 13-25 May carried out “Denizkuru-2019” naval exercise in East Mediterranean; Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 20 May said Ankara would exercise its “sovereign right” to drill for hydrocarbon resources off coast of northern Cyprus. U.S. State Department 5 May said Turkey’s intention to drill was highly
provocative; EU Council President Tusk 9 May said EU “stands united” behind Republic of Cyprus; Ankara dismissed statement. Turkey’s National Security Council 30 May reaffirmed determination to protect rights and interests of Turkey, “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus” and Turkish Cypriots, warned against “provocative acts” and “irresponsible statements”, and said Turkey will continue activities in line with international law and not allow faits accomplis in East Mediterranean.

Turkey
MAY 2019
Military operations against Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) and cross-border air raids against targets in northern Iraq continued, electoral board ordered re-run of Istanbul local election in which ruling party had been defeated, and U.S.-Turkey relations remained strained over purchase of Russian missiles. Fatalities from security operations against PKK in south east increased slightly. Authorities allowed jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan to meet his lawyers for first time in eight years 2 May; Öcalan released statement calling for thousands of Kurdish movement supporters on hunger strike to end strike, which they did. Authorities 16 May lifted ban on lawyer and family visits to Öcalan. Turkish military 27 May launched “Operation Claw” carrying out land and air raids against PKK targets in northern Iraq’s Hakurk region. High Election Board 6 May cancelled 31 March mayoral polls in Istanbul and ordered re-run on 23 June due to alleged irregularities, annulling victory of opposition Republican People’s Party’s (CHP); caused small-scale protests in various districts of Istanbul. Ankara’s purchase of Russian S-400 air defence missile system continued to strain relations with Washington. President Erdoğan 18 May proposed to Russia co-production of S-500s once delivery of S-400s is complete. Authorities 17-18 May detained eleven suspected Islamic State (ISIS) members in Konya and Mersin, and arrested nine suspected ISIS members in Şanlıurfa 27 May.

Kazakhstan
MAY 2019
Police 9 May arrested dozens of protesters in capital Nur-Sultan and in Almaty staging anti-govt demonstrations ahead of 9 June snap presidential elections and demanding release of political prisoners; social-media apps and news websites reportedly not accessible same day. Govt reported it had repatriated 231 citizens linked to Islamic State (ISIS) including 156 children from Syria early May. European Council President Donald Tusk 31 May met interim President Toqayev, called Kazakhstan “important and stable partner”.

Kyrgyzstan
MAY 2019
President Jeenbekov 16 May ratified legislation under which former presidents can be prosecuted if suspected of “serious crimes”, amid ongoing tensions between Jeenbekov and former President Atambayev; law came into force 27 May. Atambayev stepped down from opposition Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan 25 May. Military Prosecutor’s Office 30 May launched probe into claims by Atambayev that his office was bugged by State Committee for National Security, which denied claim.

Tajikistan
MAY 2019
Govt late April repatriated from Iraq 84 children of women jailed on charges of belonging to Islamic State (ISIS). 29 prisoners and three guards killed in Vahdat prison riot 19 May, including two members of banned opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), and son of late former police commander-turned-ISIS war minister Gulmurod Khalimov; IRPT said death toll higher. President Rahmon discussed military cooperation with visiting Russian Defence Minister 28 May, and 29 May discussed regional and bilateral cooperation with European Council President Donald Tusk, starting his four-day tour of Central Asia.

Uzbekistan
MAY 2019
Head of Information and Mass Communication Agency 10 May reported govt had restored local access to a dozen major news and human rights websites which had been blocked for years. During three-day visit late May, German President Steinmeier met President Mirziyoyev, discussed enhancing bilateral cooperation.

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia
MAY 2019

Political tensions continued over role of transitional justice mechanism of 2016 peace deal with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), while violence between armed groups led to mass displacement. Special Jurisdiction for Peace (SJP), created under peace deal to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, 15 May ruled against imprisonment and extradition to U.S. of ex-FARC commander Jesús Santrich, arrested on drug trafficking charges in joint U.S.-Colombia operation April 2018; SJP ruled evidence did not establish that Santrich had committed trafficking crimes after 1 Dec 2016, date FARC demobilisation began. Police 17 May re-arrested Santrich immediately after his release following attorney general’s office distribution of video allegedly showing Santrich committing crimes post-demobilisation date. Santrich released 30 May on Supreme Court’s order. Attorney general, deputy attorney general and justice minister resigned in protest at SJP’s decision to not extradite Santrich. Constitutional Court 29 May ruled Congress had rejected President Duque’s objections against SJP, obliging him to sign law regarding functioning of SJP. Duque 24 May announced appointment of independent commission to review military orders and operational instructions following New York Times report 18 May alleging military leaders had set targets for army including number of deaths or surrenders of enemy combatants. Conflicts between armed groups displaced or confined over 2,000 during month. FARC dissident groups 2 May clashed in Nariño (south west), displacing over 200 and putting Dec truce between various dissident groups under strain. In Juradó, Chocó (west), fighting between Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, country’s main drug trafficking group) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group displaced over 900 people and confined 800 within their communities between late April and mid May. Other violence continued; unknown attackers 14 May attacked judicial commission in Tibú, Norte de Santander (north east), killing two members of commission and wounding five policemen. Attacks on activists increased with almost ten killed during month, mainly in Putumayo (south west), Bolívar (north), Antioquia (north west) and Arauca (east) departments.

Venezuela

MAY 2019

Political crisis continued as govt cracked down on opposition in wake of failed April uprisings, while divisions in opposition resurfaced over whether to negotiate with govt. Following opposition leader and “interim President” Juan Guaidó’s unsuccessful 30 April appeal to security forces to remove President Maduro, opposition supporters 1 May held further anti-govt demonstrations in Caracas and elsewhere; demonstrators clashed with security forces, with one woman shot dead and dozens injured. Guaidó promised further protests and series of strikes. State security (Sebin) 8 May detained deputy president of opposition controlled National Assembly. Pro-govt National Constituent Assembly (ANC) revoked parliamentary immunity of at least fourteen MPs; four MPs took refuge in embassies, one fled country and four allegedly went into hiding; govt suppression has led to arrest, flight or refuge in foreign embassies of 15 of opposition’s 112 MPs since 30 April uprising. Maduro 20 May announced plan to bring forward parliamentary (AN) elections, previously due Dec 2020; govt same day extended ANC’s two-year term until 31 Dec 2020. In efforts to open negotiations to end crisis, govt and opposition representations met in Oslo for confidential talks facilitated by Norway mid-May; talks ended 29 May, reportedly without agreement. Some in opposition criticised talks after details were leaked. Guaidó admitted authorising delegation but insisted there would be no negotiations unless Maduro stepped down. International Contact Group, headed by EU and Uruguay, extended its mandate beyond original 90-day deadline during meeting in Costa Rica 6-7 May, and visited Caracas 16-17 May, meeting with Maduro and Guaidó. Effect of U.S. sanctions and economic crisis continued to be felt with severe petrol shortages in much of country mid-May, including in Caracas.

- **BRIEFING:** A Way Out of Latin America’s Impasse over Venezuela

Guatemala

MAY 2019

Political manoeuvring and hostilities continued ahead of 16 June presidential election with cancellation of numerous candidacies, amid fears of political violence and attacks on candidates. In most prominent series of rulings widely believed to be politically motivated, constitutional court (CC) 15 May rejected Movimiento
Semilla party’s appeal to allow former attorney general and anti-corruption figure Thelma Aldana to stand
as its candidate in presidential elections, following contested legal ruling revoking her candidacy in April.
Aldana late April revealed U.S. intelligence had informed her of plot to assassinate her, raising concerns
over potential political violence around election. CC 17 May provisionally suspended court ruling that
rejected prosecutors’ request to lift immunity of presidential candidate for Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza
(UNE) party Sandra Torres, who leads pre-election polls, over allegations of illicit electoral financing in
2015; however Torres allowed to continue campaigning until CC reaches definitive resolution, raising
concerns over alleged institutional effort to block challenges against her. Interior Ministry 6 May revealed
several mayoral and federal candidates requested police protection after receiving death threats.

Honduras
MAY 2019
Political tensions flared as protesters led demonstrations and strikes throughout month against govt’s
planned reforms. Following April unrest in response to reforms to health and education systems that could
potentially lead to mass dismissals, protests continued 1 May; police and protesters clashed, leaving
dozens injured. Govt 6 May announced it would not suspend ten executive decrees as health and education
unions demanded, called instead for dialogue; protests and clashes continued including protesters setting
alight entrance to U.S. embassy in Tegucigalpa 31 May. Govt 15 May renewed Supreme Electoral Tribunal
(TSE) judges’ mandate; opposition Libre party criticised move as TSE accused of electoral fraud in 2017
and two electoral bodies, created as part of UN-led dialogue in 2018 to oversee electoral cycles and settle
election related disputes, remained non-operational; Libre members 21 May protested govt decisions on
mandate as well as decrees on health and education in Congress, prompting scuffles between members of
Congress. Police reported 305 murders 1-26 May, compared to 241 same period in 2018. Amid continued
regional focus on migration, U.S. border patrol early May revealed it had detained since O
ct 2018 133,258
Honduran nationals who had attempted to enter U.S.

El Salvador
MAY 2019
Gang-related violence remained high amid continuing anti-gang and anti-corruption operations. National
Police 20 May reported 1,236 homicides since start of year, 13% less than same period in 2018, however
homicide rate on rise since April. Gang attacks on police increased including police officer killed in San Juan
Nonualco, La Paz (centre) 17 May, 19th police officer killed in 2019. In ongoing anti-gang operations,
Attorney General 16 May issued 274 arrest warrants in attempts to attack criminal groups’ structures,
including targeting collaborators in police and judicial institutions. Legislative Assembly 27 May resumed
debate on controversial National Reconciliation bill with input from civil society; critics allege new law would

Nicaragua
MAY 2019
Govt and opposition talks stalled, fuelling concerns over deterioration in political situation in June, as
deadline for govt’s release of political prisoners expires and govt faces possible further international
isolation and sanctions. Amid govt intransigence over release of 242 political prisoners on govt and
opposition lists, opposition platform Blue and White National Unity 7 May called on Civic Alliance to
withdraw from talks. Political prisoner Eddy Montes died during prison riot 16 May; Civic Alliance called for
impartial investigation with international involvement, while Organization of American States (OAS)
Permanent Council 21 May convened to discuss Nicaragua following death. Civic Alliance 20 May withdrew
from talks until release of all prisoners and called for national strike, though govt same day released 100
political prisoners; 90-day window for release of prisoners expires 18 June, raising concerns over possible
end to dialogue. Repression continued with flawed trials of opposition protesters resuming 2 May;
Permanent Commission on Human Rights 8 May denounced re-arrest of at least twelve protesters who had
been released, while human rights association Nicaragua Nunca+ 6 May reported cases of torture of
political prisoners, including electrocution and nail extraction. OAS General Assembly due to meet 26 June
in Colombia, amid reports that Nicaragua may be expelled from organisation. UN Human Rights Council 15
May discussed Nicaragua and presented 259 recommendations, which govt rejected. Amid ongoing
deterioration in economic situation, U.S. Sec State Pompeo due to report to Congress with suggestions for
further sanctions 20 June.
Haiti
MAY 2019
Amid worsening economic situation and continued allegations of corruption, Progressive Opposition Forces (FOP) alliance 6 May announced new campaign to oust President Moïse and establish interim govt which would coordinate national dialogue and appoint new head of state; opposition also critical of new PM Lapin’s cabinet for including six members from heavily-criticised previous cabinet. Gang insecurity remained high with reports of collusion between govt figures and organised crime groups; in Artibonite department (centre), police 13 May arrested 53 members of gang led by Arnel Joseph, reported to have links to numerous state officials including a senator and former PM Céant. Police also alleged two senior officials – former mayor of Port-au-Prince and executive director of Interior Ministry – partly planned Nov 2018 mass killing in La Saline neighbourhood of capital.

Mexico
MAY 2019
Amid high levels of violence and concerns over militarisation of public security, National Guard (NG), controversial main instrument of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)'s security plan, commenced operations. Govt deployed NG in municipalities of Minatitlán and Coatzacoalcos in Veracruz state (Gulf Coast), Salina Cruz in Oaxaca (south), Tijuana in Baja California (north) and Cancún in Quintana Roo (south east), amid reports of lack of cooperation between municipal, state and federal forces. NG due to be composed of army, navy and federal police, but navy and police rejected 10 May transfers of their officers citing lack of legal basis. Public security secretary Alfonso Durazo 17 May said deployment of NG would combine with investment in local and state police. Criminal group-related violence remained high; in Veracruz, armed attack on market in Coatepec killed five 17 May. As govt continued operations to curb oil siphoning, suspected siphoners 4 May killed one navy officer and injured three in attack in Xicotepex, Puebla (centre). Journalist Telésforo Santiago Enríquez murdered in San Agustín, Oaxaca 2 May and journalist Francisco Romero murdered in Playa del Carmen, Quintana Roo 16 May; eleven media professionals murdered since AMLO's term began Dec 2018. Targeted killings of activists continued; indigenous activists José Lucio Bartolo Faustino and Modesto Varelas Sebastián murdered in Chiapa, Guerrero (south) 5 May, and environmental activist Leonel Díaz Urbano murdered in Zacapoaxtla, Puebla 10 May. AMLO 7 May announced he would ask for U.S. payments to combat drug trafficking and organised crime to be channeled toward regional development to address root causes of insecurity and migration; U.S. President Trump 30 May announced 5% tariff on all goods from Mexico rising 5% each month until country curbs illegal migration.

Middle East & North Africa
Israel/Palestine
MAY 2019
Violence between Israeli security forces and Palestinians in Gaza flared early May, killing 25 Palestinians and four Israelis. Israeli soldiers at Israel-Gaza fence began shooting at Palestinian protesters' head and chest areas 2 May, prompting retaliation. Palestinian factions fired 700 rockets and projectiles into Israel and Israelis carried out 320 airstrikes in Gaza 3-6 May. Israel claimed responsibility for 5 May killing of Hamas member whom it said had been transferring money from Iran to militant groups in Gaza. Israel 4 May closed Erez and Kerem Shalom border crossings and banned fishing off Gazan coast. Hamas and Islamic Jihad delegations in Cairo 5 May agreed to Egyptian-mediated ceasefire, which came into effect 6 May. As part of ceasefire agreement, Israel 12 May reopened border crossings and allowed fishing up to twelve nautical miles offshore, only to reduce fishing zone to up to five nautical miles offshore 16 May, citing Hamas’s use of incendiary balloons. Qatar 7 May pledged $480mn to West Bank and Gaza; $180mn for humanitarian aid and electricity in Gaza, $50mn grant to Palestinian Authority (PA) and $250mn loan to PA over twelve months. Following his April electoral victory, PM Netanyahu failed to form governing coalition in allotted time, instead he passed bill 29 May to dissolve parliament and hold new election 17 Sept. U.S. 19 May announced that as first phase of Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative it would convene "Peace to Prosperity" economic conference in Bahrain 25-26 June; Palestine Liberation Organization (PLD) 20 May said it would
not attend. Israel 27 May announced it had agreed to take part in U.S.-mediated talks with Lebanon on disputed maritime border.

- Q&A: The Deadly Political Paralysis behind the Gaza Flare-up

Lebanon
MAY 2019
Govt’s draft 2019 budget described by PM Hariri as one of “the most austere in the history of Lebanon” led to strikes and protests in capital Beirut and elsewhere. Leaks that draft budget could target public wages, services and social benefits led to wave of discontent. In Beirut, central bank employees went on strike 6 May. Veterans 10 May protested against possible cuts in pensions and benefits. Veterans 13 May blocked roads in Beirut and throughout country. Anti-austerity protesters in Beirut 20 May attempted to storm Grand Serail, PM’s headquarters, which led to clashes with police, leaving two policemen and one civilian wounded. U.S. officials 15 May met President Aoun, FM Gebran Bassil, PM Hariri and other officials to discuss Israel-Lebanon maritime border dispute.

Syria
MAY 2019
Pro-govt forces intensified bombing in Idlib province in north west. Syrian and Russian warplanes ramped up bombardment of Idlib province largely controlled by jihadist coalition He’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS); UN confirmed over 160 people killed, while Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported at least 313 civilians killed 30 April-31 May. Pro-govt forces 6-9 May seized strategic towns of Tal Othman, Kafr Nabudah and Qalaat al-Madiq. offensive seemingly aimed at recapturing strategic highways that cross Idlib. UN 17 May reported airstrikes on civilian targets throughout Idlib, damaging hospitals and schools; gov’t forces allegedly used chlorine gas 19 May. HTS retaliated: 2-19 May launched rocket attacks on Russian Hmeimim base near Latakia city; 21 May recaptured Kafr Nabudah before withdrawing again amid gov’t counter-offensive 26 May. Govt offensive on Idlib strained Russian-Turkish Dec de-escalation agreement: Turkish President Erdoğan in phone call with Russian President Putin 13 May accused Damascus of sabotaging deal; Russian and Turkish defence ministers 14 May met to discuss de-escalation measures; Russia 19 May announced unilateral ceasefire, but Russian airstrikes in Kafranbel same day killed ten. In east, amid ongoing Islamic State (ISIS) insurgency, Arab tribes continued protests – launched late April – against Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which took back territory from ISIS, citing poor service provision, forced conscriptions, arbitrary detentions, as well as SDF’s oil shipments to gov’t-controlled territories; protests petered out by end month. In south, pro-govt media 17-18 May reported gov’t forces had allegedly intercepted Israeli missiles from Golan Heights, targeting Iranian positions near capital; gov’t 27 May said Israel carried out attack in Quneitra in retaliation to anti-aircraft fire on Israeli warplane same day.

Bahrain
MAY 2019
Govt 19 May said it would host U.S.-led Palestine investment meeting in Manama 25-26 June, as first part of upcoming U.S.-developed Israeli-Palestinian peace plan; United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia 22 May, and Qatar 25 May, said they would take part.

Iran
MAY 2019
Tension between Iran and U.S. increased markedly. Citing “troubling and escalatory indications and warnings” from Iran, U.S. 5 and 10 May announced it would bolster military assets in Middle East, including naval and air forces and missile defence systems. U.S. 24 May announced additional deployment of 1,500 troops, a dozen fighter jets and drones to Middle East. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 7 May visited Iraq to meet senior officials, referring to indications of imminent attacks on U.S. assets. Tension rose further following unclaimed attacks on four oil tankers (two Saudi, one Emirati, one Norwegian) off United Arab Emirates coast 12 May and drone attacks on pipeline in Saudi Arabia 14 May claimed by Huthi forces in Yemen; Saudi officials accused Iran of guiding Huthis’ actions. U.S. 15 May ordered non-essential U.S. personnel to leave Iraq. In Iraq, rocket landed in Baghdad’s Green Zone about a mile from U.S. embassy 19 May causing no casualties. President Trump 19 May tweeted that “if Iran wants to fight, that will be the official end of
Iran”. U.S. waivers allowing countries to import Iranian oil expired 2 May. U.S. revoked nuclear-related waivers 3 May, no longer permitting countries to purchase Iran’s surplus heavy water and low enriched uranium (LEU). Tehran 8 May responded by downgrading compliance with LEU and heavy water limits in Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and also threatened to step up uranium enrichment if P4+1 (UK, France, Russia, China and Germany) failed to protect Iran’s oil and banking sectors from sanctions within 60 days; U.S. same day announced restrictions on Iran’s metal industries. EU/E3 (France, Germany and UK) 9 May said they rejected any Iranian ultimatums but underscored their commitment to JCPOA.

- INTERACTIVE: Iran Sanctions under the Trump Administration

Iraq
MAY 2019
Govt continued to stay neutral amid intense U.S.-Iran rivalry, Islamic State (ISIS) continued low-intensity insurgency and Turkey clashed with Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) in north. U.S. 6 May approved deployment of aircraft carrier and bomber task force to Persian Gulf in response to “Iranian threats”. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 7 May made surprise visit to Baghdad and reportedly warned Iraqi leaders of their responsibility to protect U.S. troops and citizens against possible attacks by Iranian-backed militia. President Salih 8 May reiterated govt’s neutral stance in U.S.-Iran standoff and PM Mahdi 15 May denied threats to U.S. assets from Iran or Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Units. U.S. 15 May decided to pull some diplomatic staff from Baghdad and Erbil; U.S. oil company ExxonMobil 18 May evacuated foreign staff, after it signed $53bn deal with Baghdad 7 May. Unidentified assailants 19 May fired rocket at Green Zone in Baghdad which landed a mile from U.S. embassy. ISIS continued low-intensity attacks: in Salah al-Din province, suspected ISIS fighters 8 May killed seven in al-Mazari village; in Nineveh province near Mosul, militants 9 May targeted village chief and his family, killing five; in Baghdad, suicide bombing same day killed eight; in Mosul province, explosion 26 May killed five in market in Rabia. In Kirkuk province, gunmen 16 May killed nine police officers in two separate attacks; coordinated explosions 31 May killed at least three in Kirkuk city centre. Anti-corruption protests 16 May broke out in Najaf and clashes with security personnel left four dead. In north, Turkey and PKK continued to clash: at Sherwan Mazin border crossing, PKK 4 May killed three soldiers; Turkey same day reported 28 militants “neutralised” in subsequent pursuit; cross-border air raids 1-16 May hit PKK targets in Hakurk, Zap, Metina and Gara areas; Iraqi Kurdistan officials 14 May reported one civilian dead in Turkish drone strike.

Qatar
MAY 2019
Qatar 25 May confirmed that it will take part in U.S.-led Palestine investment meeting to be held 25-26 June in Manama, Bahrain, as part of upcoming U.S.-developed Israeli-Palestinian peace plan.

Saudi Arabia
MAY 2019
Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran escalated with govt blaming Iran for Huthi-claimed attacks on its territory. Unidentified attackers 12 May damaged four oil tankers (two Saudi, one Emirati, one Norwegian) near Fujairah port in United Arab Emirates (UAE). UAE refrained from attributing blame and opened joint investigation with U.S., France and Norway. U.S. defence officials 24 May said Iran was responsible for attacks. Huthis in Yemen claimed responsibility for drone attack 14 May on state oil company Aramco pipeline in centre of country as response to Saudi-led coalition “aggression” in Yemen; attacks caused company to temporarily close pipeline. Saudi officials 17 May blamed Huthis and accused Iran of guiding Huthi actions. Saudi-led coalition 16 May launched airstrikes in Sanaa in apparent retaliation, with humanitarian agencies reporting at least six civilians killed. FM al-Jubeir 19 May said govt did not want war but would not allow Iran to “continue its hostile policies”. U.S.’s Bahrain-based Fifth Fleet 18 May said it had begun “enhanced security patrols” around Arabian Peninsula. State media 20 May reported security forces intercepted two “Huthi ballistic missiles” over Taif targeting Jeddah and Mecca; Huthis denied cities were targets. Huthis 21 May claimed they had launched drone attack on arms depot at Najran airport, but coalition spokesman said Huthis targeted civilian site. King Salman late May convened emergency meetings of Gulf Cooperation Council and Arab League in Mecca to address what he called Iranian “escalations” and other regional issues. Govt 22 May said it would take part in U.S.-led Palestine investment meeting to be
Yemen

May 2019

Huthis launched drone strikes on oil pipeline in Saudi Arabia and fighting escalated on several fronts in Yemen; military escalation and rising tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran raise risk of worse fighting in Yemen and more Huthi attacks on Saudi and Emirati assets in coming weeks. Huthis unilaterally redeployed from Hodeida, Ras Issa and Saleef ports 11-14 May under UN monitoring. Saudi-led coalition reportedly consented to Huthi move, but govt accused UN of Huthi bias; govt 23 May sent letter to UN Sec-Gen criticising UN envoy Martin Griffiths. Cross-border attacks intensified: Huthis claimed drone attacks in Saudi Arabia on oil pipeline 14 May, on Najran airport 21 and 23 May (latter was intercepted), and on airport in Jizan 26 May (also intercepted). Saudi Arabia accused Iran of guiding Huthi actions, and 20 May accused Huthis of targeting Jeddah and Mecca with ballistic missiles that Saudi military intercepted; Huthis denied cities were targets. Saudi Arabia 16 May launched airstrikes targeting Sanaa in apparent retaliation for drone attacks, reportedly causing civilian deaths. Fighting on other front lines intensified; clashes took place in Durayhimi district south of Hodeida city; battles between United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed forces and Huthis continued in al-Dhale, Abyan and Lahj governorates; fighting reportedly intensified near Sanaa and in Taiz, and along Saudi border. Tensions between rival factions in anti-Huthi bloc persisted; govt publicly denounced UAE influence after UAE-backed forces 8 May landed on Socotra, Yemeni island in Arabian Sea; local media reported that members of Presidential Guard clashed with UAE-backed forces in al-Dhale.

BRIEFING NOTE: Crisis Group Yemen Update #11

United Arab Emirates

May 2019

Unidentified attackers 12 May damaged four oil tankers (two Saudi, one Emirati, one Norwegian) near Fujairah port. Govt opened joint investigation with U.S., France and Norway and refrained from attributing blame; U.S. defence officials 24 May said Iran was responsible for attacks. Govt 22 May said it would take part in U.S.-led Palestine investment meeting to be held 25-26 June in Manama, Bahrain, as part of upcoming U.S.-developed Israeli-Palestinian peace plan.

Algeria

May 2019

Ahead of 4 July presidential elections, interim govt and military launched wave of arrests of Bouteflika regime allies as nationwide protests against military control and elections continued. Military 4 May arrested former president’s brother Said Bouteflika, former intelligence head Mohamed Mediene and his successor Major-General Tartag; authorities charged them with "undermining authority of army and plotting against state". Military 9 May imprisoned opposition figure Louisa Hanoune on same charges; leftist parties denounced arrest as first step toward military dictatorship. Berber activist Kamel Eddine Fekhar 28 May died as result of hunger strike, after his March arrest for "undermining state security"; following his funeral and protests, authorities 30 May announced probe into death. Interim President Ben Salah 16 May replaced prosecutors in Algiers and Sidi M'hamed and head of anti-corruption agency; security services same day revoked bank directors’ passports; prosecutor 27 May asked Supreme Court to investigate ten former ministers for corruption, including former PMs Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal. Hundreds of thousands continued to protest peacefully in main cities every Friday against interim political leaders, military control of transition and 4 July elections. Dozens of civil society organisations 18 May created Civil Forum for Change platform, publishing proposed roadmap including postponing elections for six months, consensual three-person council at head of state, and national conference on economy. Constitutional Council 26 May announced two presidential candidates, Abdelhakim Hamadi and Hamid
Touahri, both relatively unknown figures; no major party nominated a candidate. Army Chief of General Staff Gaid Salah 20 May reiterated calls for elections “as soon as possible” and refused to set up transitional bodies ahead of vote, insisting that without elections country risked a “constitutional void” and instability; 29 May called for inclusive dialogue as only means to overcome political Egypt

MAY 2019

After bombing targeted tourists near pyramids, authorities launched crackdown on suspected Islamist militants. Roadside bombing near Giza pyramids 19 May injured seventeen people. Next day security forces killed twelve suspected Islamist militants in two raids in Cairo. Authorities accused Hasm group, alleged wing of Muslim Brotherhood, of “planning chaos”, but did not say that raids were linked to Giza bombing. In Sinai, military 16 May reported 47 Islamic State (ISIS) fighters and five soldiers killed, without saying when or where; in El Arish city, police 20 May stormed ISIS hideouts, killing sixteen militants. NGO Human Rights Watch 28 May published report on military operations in Sinai since 2011, highlighting systematic war crimes and abuses by security forces; same day accused govt of coordinating smear campaign and issuing threats on staff. Marking Ramadan, President Sisi 16 May pardoned 560 prisoners, including suspected supporters of Muslim Brotherhood and journalist Abdel Halim Qandil. Top prosecutor 21 May ordered release of five opposition figures on human rights grounds, including former ambassador Masoum Marzouq held in solitary confinement since Aug 2018. Following 23 May court release order, authorities 29 May returned Al Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein to prison and announced opening of new investigation. Libya

MAY 2019

Fighting intensified in and around capital Tripoli between Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) and forces nominally loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA). Stalemate persisted with pro-GNA forces preventing LNA advance on centre, but unable to launch counteroffensive against LNA strongholds in Tarhunah and Gharyan, 60km south east and 80km south of capital respectively. Both sides stepped up airstrikes: LNA carried out several air and drone strikes against bases of armed groups in Tripoli and nearby towns and on front lines, causing significant damage to equipment. GNA air force also struck LNA-held areas. LNA shot down GNA fighter jet 70km south of Tripoli 7 May and captured pilot, who claimed to be Portuguese. Both sides intensified fighting 24-25 May, but achieved no major victory. Dozens of Turkish-made armoured vehicles arrived in Tripoli port 19 May, reportedly intended for pro-GNA forces. UN Security Council 10 May called on parties to “return to UN political mediation, and to commit to a ceasefire and de-escalation to help mediation succeed”. UN envoy Ghassan Salamé 21 May urged UN to stop other countries fuelling conflict by supplying weapons. EU Foreign Affairs Council 13 May called LNA’s offensive “a serious threat to international peace and security”, called on “all parties to implement a ceasefire” and return to political negotiations. Both sides rejected calls for ceasefire. Haftar 16 May told Italian PM Conte in Rome he was about to take Tripoli and in talks with French President Macron in Paris 22 May Haftar ruled out ceasefire. During visits to Rome, Paris, Berlin and London, UN-backed PM Serraj mid-May conditioned resumption of talks on LNA forces’ complete withdrawal from west. In south, Islamic State (ISIS) claimed attacks against LNA in Sebha 4 May, Ghatwa 9 May and Zilla 18 May that reportedly killed at least three LNA fighters. LNA 29 May handed over to Egypt authorities prominent Egyptian militant Hisham al-Ashmawi, arrested in eastern Libya in Oct 2018.

• BRIEFING: Stopping the War for Tripoli

Mauritania

MAY 2019

Constitutional Council 12 May confirmed list of six candidates for 22 June presidential election. Over 100 people 15 May held sit-in in front of Nouakchott prison to call for release of two bloggers held since March on charges of defamation against president.

Tunisia

MAY 2019

Ahead of legislative elections in Oct and presidential in Nov political alliances continued to shift and debates intensified. Several politicians joined PM Chahed’s new party Tayha Tounes, including former
ministers Lassâad Zarrouk and Afif Chelbi early May, and al-Moubadara party leader Kamel Morjane 22 May. Several public figures gained prominence as potential presidential candidates; in opinion poll released early May, law professor Kaïs Saïed won most votes with 22.4%, owner of private TV channel Nabil Karoui came second with 21.8%; former official of former President Ben Ali’s party Abir Moussi came third with 12.4%; PM Chahed came fourth with 7.4%. Sec Gen of president’s party Nida Tounes 8 May called for delay of elections to prevent political scene from fragmenting further. Ben Ali mid-May posted first political message since his ouster in 2011, thanking thousands of Tunisians who had sent him “love letters” and encouraging “my people to overcome the difficulties”. Member of UN panel of experts on Libya with dual Tunisian and German nationality Moncef Kartas, charged 10 April with “spying for foreign parties” and jailed despite UN immunity, was released 21 May; Kartas reportedly left Tunisia for Germany next day. National guard 1 May arrested al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)-affiliated militant Raed Touati at Mount Chaambi in west.

Western Sahara

MAY 2019
UN envoy for Western Sahara Horst Köhler resigned 22 May, reportedly for health reasons. Senior official in Polisario Front independence movement said Köhler resigned because of political pressure, notably from France at UN Security Council."

International Crisis Group (ICG), *CrisisWatch*, July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=1e62c71ab4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_01_06_33&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-1e62c71ab4-359871089#overview,

Robert Malley, President & CEO, THE PRESIDENT’S TAKE 1 July 2019, "How the U.S. and Iran Can Step Away from a Conflagration," commented, In his introduction to this month’s edition of CrisisWatch, Crisis Group’s conflict tracker, our President Robert Malley urges the U.S. and Iran to step back from a dangerous conflagration and calls for the immediate release of our colleague Michael Kovrig from arbitrary detention in China.

The standoff between the U.S. and Iran increasingly calls to mind the question of what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object. The force is the Trump administration’s maximum pressure campaign, which seems willing to stop at nothing – whether it is sanctioning Iran’s supreme leader or its foreign minister or forcing the country’s oil exports down to zero – to bring Tehran to its knees. The object is Iran’s determination not to yield or concede, but to resist – whether by restarting its nuclear program or targeting the U.S. and its regional allies. And the end result could be the military confrontation about which Crisis Group has warned for over a year.

There are ways out, still. Iran might be wise enough to calibrate its moves, so that they are sufficient to signal resistance but insufficient to spark a military response. A third party could orchestrate a series of steps to get the protagonists to walk back from the brink: the U.S. might agree to waive certain of its oil sanctions, Iran might resume compliance with the nuclear deal, there could be progress on the issue of Americans detained in Iran. Or Europe could provide Iran with just enough economic benefits through its recently established barter mechanism to persuade the Islamic Republic to hold its breath, sit back and await the results of the 2020 U.S. presidential elections. But those are fragile ifs on which to rest hope of avoiding a military conflagration that President Trump almost certainly does not want, but to which his policies are leading.

For us at Crisis Group, the other big news of the month is a sad milestone that ought never have been reached: last week, our friend and colleague Michael Kovrig marked his 200th day in arbitrary detention in China. He has yet to see his lawyer or a member of his family. At the G20 meeting in Japan, Canada’s Prime Minister Justin Trudeau raised his case, as well as that of Michael Spavor, another Canadian citizen held by China, with President Xi Jinping. President Trump also has said he would push for the two Michaels’ release. Other nations should continue pressing, relentlessly, until they can return home, making clear to Beijing that its ambitions to global leadership cannot go hand-in-hand with such practices. Our colleague is a pawn in a battle with which he has nothing to do, and about which he can do nothing. It is past time for him to be released and reunited with his loved ones.

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In July, Libya’s war spread beyond Tripoli, and Iran and the U.S. continued to teeter on the precipice of military confrontation. Nigeria’s woes deepened as Boko Haram stepped up attacks in the north east, tensions rose between herders and farmers, and the government cracked down on Shiite Muslim protesters in the capital Abuja. In Somalia, Al-Shabaab ramped up attacks in the capital Mogadishu and across the south, and thousands took to the streets in Malawi to protest President Mutharika’s re-election and alleged electoral fraud. In Europe, tensions rose between Kosovo and Serbia with a senior Serbian official claiming Kosovo had denied him entry. On a positive note, the peace process in Afghanistan saw signs of progress, which could lead to the finalisation of a U.S.-Taliban agreement in August.

The war in Libya expanded. Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s military alliance pursued its campaign to take the capital Tripoli from forces nominally loyal to the UN-backed government based there. For the first time since hostilities erupted in April, government forces struck outside the Tripoli area, deploying drones to destroy enemy assets in Jufra and Waddan in central Libya. Haftar’s forces retaliated by striking the air base in Misrata, some 200km east of Tripoli, from where the drones launched. To end this destructive stalemate, international actors should press both sides to reconsider their uncompromising positions and accept an internationally-monitored ceasefire, followed by talks for new political, military and financial arrangements under a UN aegis.

Tensions continued to run high between Iran and the U.S., keeping them on the brink of military confrontation. Once sparked, such a conflict could spread rapidly across regional flashpoints and engulf their respective allies. In July, Iran breached limits on uranium enrichment agreed in the 2015 nuclear deal, and said it would accelerate its violations if the deal’s remaining parties did not by 6 September find ways to protect it from U.S. sanctions. Maritime confrontations continued, especially in the Strait of Hormuz. In a new report, Averting the Middle East’s 1914 Moment, we warn that in the absence of direct talks between the two sides, a small incident could blow up into a regional conflict. We urge third parties to intensify efforts to defuse the crisis, salvage the nuclear accord and de-escalate tensions.

Nigeria faced greater insecurity on several fronts. Ten years after Boko Haram’s founding father, Muhammad Yusuf, was killed in police custody, the radical insurgent group seemed to be on the offensive, stepping up attacks across Borno state and leaving scores dead, both civilians and security forces. In a recent report, we explain how one of its two factions, Islamic State in West Africa Province, is gaining influence by cultivating support among locals. The authorities will struggle to end the insurgency without a political strategy to supplement their military campaign, one focused on improving governance and services and ensuring that security forces are held accountable. Meanwhile, in the centre and south, herder-farmer tensions rose, partly over the government’s initiative to create temporary settlements for Fulani herders. And in the capital Abuja, security forces violently dispersed protests demanding the release
of Sheikh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, leader of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria. The government officially labelled the group a “terrorist organisation” and banned it.

In Somalia, the Islamist insurgent group Al-Shabaab increased attacks on civilians as well as Somali and international forces, killing at least 109. In the capital Mogadishu, a female suicide-bomber detonated her explosives in the mayor’s office, killing six people and injuring others including the mayor, who later also died. Al-Shabaab said the attack’s target was U.S. diplomat James Swan, recently appointed UN envoy to Somalia, who had left the building not long before. The counter-insurgency remains hampered by bitter feuding between the federal government and federal states over power and resources. In Malawi, protests against President Mutharika’s 21 May re-election picked up steam, and in places opposition activists clashed with ruling party supporters. Opposition parties and civil society groups claim the election was rigged and demand the election commission chair resign.

In Europe, tensions rose between Kosovo and Serbia. A Kosovar foreign ministry advisor on 4 July announced a ban on Serbian officials entering Kosovo, which a government spokesperson denied the next day. Despite this, Serbia’s defence minister said he was prevented from entering the country on 10 July, calling Kosovo’s leaders “liars”.

As violence in Afghanistan continued to take a heavy civilian toll, the latest round of U.S.-Taliban talks bore fruit on four critical issues: countering transnational jihadists, U.S. troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue, and a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. This progress could augur the finalisation of an agreement in August. Moreover, for the first time Taliban and Afghan government officials met, albeit informally, to discuss a roadmap toward intra-Afghan dialogue. While these discussions constitute a step forward, whether and how this ice-breaker event evolves into substantive negotiations on difficult issues, including the state’s structure and power sharing, remains to be seen.

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Latest Updates

Global

U.S./Russia
JULY 2019
Russian President Putin 3 July signed bill suspending Russia’s participation in 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) between U.S. and Russia. U.S. 1 Feb said it was suspending its obligations under INF starting 2 Feb and gave Russia six months to return to “real and verifiable” compliance before its ultimate withdrawal from INF, due 2 Aug.

Africa

Burkina Faso
JULY 2019
Insecurity persisted in north and east, especially in Centre-North, East and Sahel regions, and also in south, and govt organised political dialogue with opposition. In Centre-North region, unidentified gunmen raided several villages in Dablo, Sanmatenga province in two attacks 21 and 26 July, killing at least 26; 22 July attacked Sagho and Toékodogo, Barsalogho province, killing fifteen. In Sahel region, unidentified assailants 18 July reportedly attacked Bélédéhé, Soum province, killing seventeen. In East region, unidentified gunmen 15 July reportedly killed four soldiers in Natiaboani; fighting left seven assailants dead. In Centre-South region, unidentified assailants 5 July attacked ranger station in Nahouri province, near Ghanaian border, wounding four civilian guards; 16 July killed two gendarmes between Po and Guiaro. Govt 11 July renewed state of emergency in fourteen provinces until 12 Jan 2020. President Kaboré 15-22 July held political dialogue to ease tensions with opposition and address concerns over security, constitutional reform and electoral code. After parliament 21 June adopted amendments to penal code, which civil society warned could criminalise work of journalists and advocacy groups, Constitutional Court 22 July declared amendments unconstitutional; for amendments to take effect, President Kaboré must sign them into law. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini in Ouagadougou 10 July pledged additional €138mn to GS Sahel
joint force. Govt and Niger 10 July signed agreement to improve cooperation between local authorities on management of common border.

Mali

JULY 2019

Communal and jihadist violence continued in centre despite intensification of military operations and mediation initiatives, and insecurity persisted in north. In Mopti region in centre, suspected ethnic Dogon militants 30 June attacked Fulani villages of Bidi and Saran in Bankass circle, killing 23. Explosion same day between Guri and Yoro in Koro circle killed eleven Fulanis. Security forces stepped up operations against Dogon militias in Bandiagara circle, near Mopti, destroying check points and seizing weapons. Security forces 10 July bombed camp of Dogon militia Dan Na Ambassagou in Wadouba, no casualties reported; group same day condemned attack and called for govt to cooperate with it. Security forces 11 July disarmed Dogon militants near Dombolo Kanda, seizing 28 hunting rifles. Govt and civil society launched several peace initiatives. Dan Na Ambassagou and Fulani-dominated militia in Mopti signed peace agreement 1 July. Civil society group Faso Dambe Ton late June mediated dialogue between Dogon militias and jihadist group Katiba Macina; latter listed conditions for peace, including that Dogon militias stop collaborating with security forces, refer all legal cases to religious courts, and stop attacking Fulani civilians. In north, crime and jihadist violence continued in Gao, Menaka and on main roads. Notably, unidentified assailants 5 July reportedly killed eight people in Talataye, Ansongo circle and 17 July ambushed military convoy between Fafa and Bentia, killing one soldier; French airstrike same day killed nine people suspected of carrying out attack. Suicide car bombing on base of international forces in Gao 22 July injured at least five soldiers; jihadist Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 25 July claimed responsibility. Armed group Movement for the Salvation of Azawad, formerly affiliated with ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements, 12 July said it had joined pro-govt Platform coalition. UN Security Council 10 July sanctioned five additional people for obstructing implementation of peace accord. UK 22 July said it would contribute 250 troops to MINUSMA peacekeeping mission in 2020.

Niger

JULY 2019

Jihadist groups continued violent attacks, including suicide car bombing on military targets and abduction of civilians, in west near Mali and in south east near Nigeria. In Inates, Tillabery region in west, Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) coming from Mali 1 July staged complex attack on military camp involving two suicide car bombs and dozens of militants on motorbikes, at least eighteen soldiers killed before U.S. and French airstrikes forced militants back across border to Mali. Also in Inates, suspected ISGS militants 15 July killed Tuareg leader Almoubacher ag Alamjadi. In Diffa region in south east, deadly attacks continued and kidnappings of women and girls increased. Suspected Boko Haram faction Islamic State West Africa Province 2 July reportedly abducted twelve people in Kolo Manga, including two women and four girls; 6 July kidnapped at least eight girls in Tchoungoua and one girl in Toumour next day. France 9 July said it had suspended military operations at its Madama outpost in far north and transferred personnel and equipment to restive Liptako-Gourma area that spans border areas of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso. Niger and Burkina Faso 10 July signed framework to facilitate cross-border cooperation.

Burundi

JULY 2019

Authorities continued clampdown on opposition and France revealed it had resumed bilateral support to govt in late 2018. Security forces 3-25 July arrested at least 49 supporters of leading opposition party National Congress for Freedom in multiple provinces including Rumonge, Bururi, Gitega and Kirundo. Security forces 11 July reportedly executed two opposition party members in Gihanga, Bubanza province. Youth wing of ruling party CNDD-FDD Imbonerakure also continued to assault opposition supporters. UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi 2 July said fair and transparent elections could not be held in 2020 in current conditions of shrinking democratic space. President Nkurunziza 3 July appointed former leader of Imbonerakure to head of national broadcaster. After govt withdrew BBC's license to operate in country in March, BBC 16 July said it would close its bureau and operations in Burundi after failing to reach agreement with govt. French ambassador to Burundi 12 July revealed France had resumed bilateral support to govt late 2018 in defence and education sectors having severed cooperation following Nkurunziza's 2015
decision to run for third term, and encouraged govt to maintain current “positive dynamic” by ensuring all parties can take part in elections set for May 2020.

Cameroon
JULY 2019

Opposition kept up pressure on govt, fighting between Anglophone separatists and security forces continued to take heavy civilian toll in Northwest and Southwest regions, and Boko Haram (BH) kept up attacks in Far North. Following series of anti-govt protests in Western capitals in June, authorities 12 and 17 July released some 60 activists of opposition party Movement for the Renaissance of Cameroon (MRC), but its leader Maurice Kamto remained behind bars. In capital Yaoundé, hundreds of prisoners, mainly Anglophone separatists and MRC members, rioted night of 22-23 July in protest at their detention and living conditions; injuries reported. In Northwest region, soldiers 4 July killed civilian in regional capital Bamenda; separatists ambushed military in Ndp 9 July killing two soldiers and security operation in Bamenda 10 July left two civilians dead; in Bui, fighting left at least five separatists and one soldier dead 17 July, and security forces killed at least three civilians 19 July. Separatis 14 July briefly kidnapped some 30 travellers in Belo. Unidentified men 17 July kidnapped lawyer representing detained separatist leaders in Bamenda, released him next day. Fighting in Donga-Matung 29 July left four separatists dead. In Southwest region, separatists 3 July attacked military boat in Manyu reportedly leaving several soldiers dead; clashes between security forces and separatists in Eyumojo 21 July left one gendarme dead. Organisers of Anglophone General Conference 24 July said conference would be held 30 Nov. In Far North, violence involving BH militants in Amchine, Goudoumboul, Masla and Gakara 21-30 July left at least eleven dead. During Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum in Niger’s capital Niamey 17-19 July, UN Development Programme 17 July launched Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad region to scale up stabilisation at cost of $100mn for Sept 2019-Aug 2021.

Central African Republic
JULY 2019

Violence between armed groups continued in capital Bangui and provinces, while efforts to disarm, demobilise and reintegrate rebel fighters advanced slightly in west. Clashes between traders and self-defence groups in PK5 neighbourhood of capital Bangui 10-11 July left eleven dead. In north east, fighting between armed groups Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) and Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ) in Am-Dafock, Vakaga prefecture 14 July left between nine and 23 dead. Armed group Union for Peace in Central African Republic (UPC) 26 July attacked Ngoulaka village, Ouaka prefecture and abducted 25 people. In west, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process progressed: 167 members of armed group Democratic Front of the Central African People (FDPC) 2-3 July disarmed in Beloko, Nana Mambere prefecture. UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSCA) 17 July said that since process began in Dec 2018 over 450 combatants had disarmed in Nana Mambere prefecture. MLCJ 11 July said it had removed all its roadblocks. Ali Darassa, leader of UPC, 15 July ordered his men to remove roadblocks in several villages of Ouaka and Haute Kotto prefectures. FPDC leader Nourredine Adam 26 July announced immediate and complete cessation of hostilities. FDPC leader Abdoulaye Miskine 30 July called on President Touadéra to immediately resign, if not, he threatened to remove him by force. France 7 July took lead of EU Training Mission and increased troops in mission from 80 to 140; French General Franck Chatelus appointed MINUSCA chief of staff 8 July. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini 12 July announced EU would put additional €55mn in fund for CAR and extend it until 2020.

Chad
JULY 2019

Boko Haram (BH) continued to attack security forces in west and President Déby held talks with political parties on electoral process. In Lake Chad province in west, BH militants attacked gendarme in Meliya village night of 7-8 July killing three civilians and one gendarme. During Lake Chad Basin Governors’ Forum for regional cooperation on stabilisation, peacebuilding and sustainable development held in Niger’s capital Niamey 17-19 July, UN Development Programme 17 July launched Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad region to scale up stabilisation at cost of $100mn for Sept 2019-Aug 2021. In south, clashes between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers 20 July left at least six dead in Tcharié, Tandjilé province. Déby late June reshuffled govt, notably appointing Mahamat Abali Salah as defence minister and shifting responsibility for police and nomadic guard from territorial administration ministry to defence
ministry. Déby held meetings with political parties 10 and 16 July to discuss legislative elections which he has committed to organising this year. Opposition parties failed to agree on list of members to be included in renewed National Framework for Political Dialogue, platform comprising ruling majority, opposition and civil society to discuss conduct of elections. Déby 13 July lifted restrictions on social media networks, which govt imposed in March 2018 citing security reasons.

Democratic Republic of Congo

JULY 2019

President Tshisekedi continued to negotiate govt formation with former President Kabila; Kabila faced challenge from within his Common Front for Congo (FCC) coalition; violence continued in Ituri in north east; and World Health Organization (WHO) declared Ebola outbreak a global public health emergency. Senator Bahati Lukwebo, president of Alliance for the Democratic Forces of Congo and Allies (AFDC-A), major party within Kabila’s coalition, 10 July declared himself candidate for senate presidency, challenging dominance of Kabila’s party within coalition. FCC expelled Bahati, prompting AFDC-A politicians and activists to stage protests in Bukavu in east 11 July. In senate council elections 27 July, Kabila’s candidate former Minister Alexis Tambwe Mwamba won presidency, but AFDC-A candidate Samy Badibanga won vice presidency. In Sankuru province in centre, provincial parliament 20 July elected Joseph-Stéphane Mukumadi, nominally independent candidate but reportedly close to Tshisekedi, as governor, beating Kabila ally Lambert Mende. In Ituri province in north east, violence continued in Djugu, Mahagi and Irumu territories as armed groups continued to target civilians and military. Eight headless bodies discovered 10km from provincial capital Bunia 18 July, prompting youth to protest against insecurity. 200 additional police deployed to shore up security 6 July. In east, first person in Goma, North Kivu provincial capital, to have tested positive for Ebola 14 July, died next day while being transferred to Butembo. WHO 17 July declared Ebola outbreak in Congo a global public health emergency, noting that Goma is “a city of almost two million people on the border with Rwanda, and the gateway to the rest of DRC and the world”. Tshisekedi 20 July placed Ebola response under presidency’s supervision and same day created seven-man technical secretariat to lead on it. Health Minister Oly Illunga 22 July resigned in protest.

Rwanda

JULY 2019

Tensions between Rwanda and Uganda remained tense despite steps to improve relations. Rwandan President Kagame 3 July received Ugandan FM in Rwandan capital Kigali. Following 12 July summit between presidents of Rwanda, Uganda, DR Congo and Angola in Angolan capital Luanda, heads of state appointed Angola as mediator between Uganda and Rwanda with support of DR Congo. Ugandan security forces 23 July arrested at least 40 Rwandans reportedly on suspicion of espionage in Ugandan capital Kampala.

Eritrea

JULY 2019

President Afwerki received Ethiopian PM Abiy in capital Asmara 18 July one year after they signed peace agreement and discussed deepening cooperation, no substantial outcome. Russia 22 July lifted sanctions, which it imposed on govt in 2009, to conform with Nov 2018 UN Security Council resolution that called for lifting sanctions on Eritrea following its normalisation of relations with Ethiopia and Somalia.

Ethiopia

JULY 2019

Deadly clashes erupted in south between security forces and ethnic Sidama protesting delay of referendum on creation of Sidama state, and Tigrayan and Amhara parties in ruling coalition blamed each other for late June high-level killings. Ahead of Sidama movement’s unilateral declaration of statehood planned for 18 July, electoral board 16 July said it would hold referendum on creation of Sidama federal state by 20 Nov, thereby indicating 18 July deadline set by Sidama movement was invalid. Sidama Zone administrator and some Sidama movement leaders 18 July accepted new schedule, fuelling tensions with those who rejected it. Other Sidama activists, including part of youth movement Ejetto, opposed delay and took to streets. Clashes between security forces and protesters in Hawassa in south 17 July left at least four dead and soldiers next day reportedly killed thirteen people in nearby Wotera Rassa. Reports suggested dozens of people were killed in total, including when Sidama attacked minorities, but internet blackout (lifted 29 July) restricted information. Security forces reportedly arrested some 150 protesters. National Security Council 22 July placed Sidama and all other southern districts under temporary oversight of federal security
forces. Regional govt 25 July suspended senior leaders of Hawassa city and Sidama and Hadiya zones for playing “major role” in violence. Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) 10 July called on Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), both members of ruling coalition, to admit responsibility for 22 June killings of high-level officials and called for investigation. Next day ADP condemned TPLF allegations and claimed latter was responsible for overall political crisis. ADP 15 July nominated as Amhara state leader National Security Advisor Temesgen Tiruneh, replacing Ambachew Mekonnen who was killed in June attacks. Seven opposition parties 25 July called for independent investigation into 22 June killings and subsequent arrests. Govt 27 July released 57 people arrested in connection with attacks.

**COMMENTARY:** Preventing Further Conflict and Fragmentation in Ethiopia

Kenya
JULY 2019
Al-Shabaab kept up attacks in east and relations between Kenya and Somalia remained fraught over contested status of Somaliland. In Lamu county in east: suspected Al-Shabaab militants 15 July ambushed police in Kiunga, fighting left three attackers dead and two police wounded; suspected Al-Shabaab bombing on road between Ishakani and Ras Kamboni 20 July reportedly left two dead. In Marsabit county in north, unidentified gunmen killed one person and took 250 cattle in Elle-Bor 3 July. Following late June tweet by Kenyan FM referring to Somaliland as a country, Somalia 1 July called tweet affront to its sovereignty and summoned Kenyan ambassador to Somalia. Govt 1 July agreed to establish joint border commission with South Sudan to help settle conflict between communities in disputed Ilemi Triangle.

Somalia
JULY 2019
Al-Shabaab stepped up attacks in capital Mogadishu and elsewhere in south, tensions persisted between federal govt and federal member states and between it and breakaway Somaliland. In Mogadishu, two Al-Shabaab attacks 8 July left nine dead; suicide car bombing near airport 22 July killed at least seventeen; suicide bombing in municipal govt HQ 24 July killed six and seriously wounded others including city’s mayor (Al-Shabaab said suicide bombing target was U.S. diplomat recently appointed U.N. envoy to Somalia). Al-Shabaab kept up attacks elsewhere in south, notably Al-Shabaab militants 12 July stormed hotel in Kismayo, Jubaland state capital, killing at least 26. Attacks also reported in Middle Juba, Lower Juba, Gedo and Lower Shabelle regions killing at least 50 civilians and soldiers. U.S.-backed security forces continued offensives against Al-Shabaab: notably, unclaimed airstrikes 11 July reportedly killed dozens of Al-Shabaab militants in Jilib, Middle Juba. In north, unidentified gunmen opened fire on vehicle in Galkayo, Puntland 11 July killing at least five civilians. U.S. airstrike 27 July killed one member of Islamic State (ISIS)-Somalia. Jubaland federal member state 8 July rejected federal govt’s announcement previous day that it would help identify elders who would select Jubaland’s assembly members in Aug polls; 25 July suspended co-operation with govt accusing it of interfering in electoral process. Govt 1 July called Kenya’s late June reference to Somaliland as a country an affront to Somalia’s sovereignty. Govt 4 July cut diplomatic ties with Guinea after it gave Somaliland President Bihi official welcome 2 July. President Farmajo 17 July appointed six-member committee to represent govt in any new talks with Somaliland; latter 19 July rejected committee reportedly because it included members from Somaliland whose legitimacy it does not recognise. Puntland federal member state 19 July also rejected committee since govt had not consulted federal member states before forming it.

**REPORT:** Somaliland-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks

Somaliland
JULY 2019
Fighting flared in several areas, political parties struck deal unblocking electoral process, and relations with Somalia, which claims sovereignty over Somaliland, remained fraught. In Sanaag region (disputed between Somaliland and Puntland), rival clan militias clashed in Duud Arraale and El Afweyn 7-8 July leaving at least 25 dead. Also in Sanaag, Somaliland forces clashed with those loyal to Colonel Arre, who defected from Somaliland to Puntland in 2018, near Dhoob 10 July leaving three Somaliland soldiers and one of Arre’s...
soldiers dead. After Arre’s forces 26 July took Karin village, clashes broke out there next day between them and Somaliland troops, reportedly leaving two Somaliland soldiers dead. Country’s three political parties 27 July agreed way forward to holding long-delayed parliamentary and municipal elections this year, including by increasing number of members of electoral commission from seven to nine. Govt early July filed complaint at UN following late June agreement between Somalia and international civil aviation authorities that sees Somalia take over managing airspace over Somalia and Somaliland from agencies neglecting previous agreement between Somalia and Somaliland to manage airspace jointly. After Somaliland President Bihi visited Guinea 2 July and received welcome befitting head of state, Somalia 4 July cut diplomatic ties with Guinea on grounds that invitation to Bihi violated Somalia’s sovereignty; Guinea apologised. Somalia President Farmajo 17 July formed committee to represent govt in renewed dialogue with Somaliland; Somaliland 19 July rejected it reportedly because it included members from Somaliland whose legitimacy it does not recognise.

- REPORT: *Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks*

**South Sudan**

JULY 2019

Rebel leader Riek Machar indicated his willingness to resume direct talks with President Kiir, as implementation of 2018 Sept peace deal continued to lag ahead of Nov deadline to form interim govt. Machar 8 July told govt he was willing to hold face-to-face talks with Kiir on condition that regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) lift travel restrictions imposed on him and that an IGAD head of state broker meetings with Kiir. Body tasked with command and control of all forces during pre-transitional period Joint Defence Board (JDB) 21 July ordered all govt and rebel forces to report to cantonment sites by 31 July, which reportedly they did. Army clashed with non-signatory armed group National Salvation Front (NAS) in Lobonok, Jubek 22-23 July, resulting in unconfirmed number of casualties. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) 3 July released report indicating that security forces and rebel groups had killed 104 civilians between signing of peace deal in Sept 2018 and April 2019 in Central Equatoria region in south. Unidentified gunmen 16 July killed one UN peacekeeper and six civilians in Abyei region, disputed between South Sudan and Sudan. Govt 1 July agreed to establish joint border commission with Kenya to help resolve conflict between ethnic communities in disputed border territory Ilemi Triangle. Kiir 27 July facilitated talks in Juba between, on one side, Sudanese rebel groups active in border areas Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) Hilu and SPLM-N Agar and, on other, joint delegation of Sudanese ruling Transitional Military Council and opposition coalition Forces for Freedom and Change led by TMC deputy head “Hemedti”; parties renewed ceasefire agreement.

**Sudan**

JULY 2019

Ruling military council and opposition coalition signed political agreement for three-year transitional period, but continued to negotiate over constitutional declaration that will govern power structures; military reportedly foiled coup attempt and mass protests continued. Transitional Military Council (TMC) and opposition coalition Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC) resumed talks mediated by African Union and Ethiopia 3-4 July. TMC 4 July released 235 members of rebel faction Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi. TMC and FFC 5 July reached provisional agreement on transitional arrangements. U.S. Assistant Sec State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy 8 July tied lifting of Sudan’s “state sponsor of terror” designation to implementation of power-sharing agreement. Military officers 11 July allegedly attempted coup to block agreement; in response TMC arrested sixteen military personnel. TMC and FFC 17 July signed political agreement; joint military-civilian sovereign council to rule for 39 months until elections; eleven-member council to comprise five civilians from FFC, five TMC officers, and one consensually selected civilian. TMC to chair council for first 21 months, civilian for eighteen months. Agreement called for national investigation into 3 June attack on protesters. FFC 27 July rejected findings of TMC-appointed inquiry into 3 June attacks, which implicated eight RSF officers but exonerated TMC leadership. In Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, political opposition and rebel alliance Sudan Revolutionary Front 25 July agreed to set up FFC-led body to formulate common vision on constitutional declaration and to start talks on agreement between govt and rebel groups after transition to civilian rule. In South Sudan capital Juba 27 July TMC
and FFC discussed implementation of political agreement with other Sudanese rebel groups, parties renewed ceasefire. Paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) 29 July reportedly killed at least five protesters in North Kordofan’s capital el-Obeid, prompting nationwide protests. Tens of thousands demonstrated countrywide 11 July to commemorate those killed 3 June and thousands demonstrated in Khartoum 25 July to demand experts, not political parties, make up transitional govt.

Uganda

JULY 2019

Diplomatic efforts to improve relations between Uganda and Rwanda accelerated and musician-turned-opposition leader Bobi Wine announced he would run for president in 2021. Ugandan FM 3 July met Rwandan President Kagame in Rwandan capital Kigali in bid to improve relations. At summit in Angolan capital Luanda 12 July, presidents of Uganda, Rwanda, DR Congo and Angola decided Angola would mediate between Uganda and Rwanda with support of DR Congo. Security forces 23 July arrested at least 40 Rwandans reportedly on suspicion of espionage in capital Kampala. MP Robert Kyagulanyi, known as Bobi Wine, 24 July announced he would contest 2021 presidential polls.

Angola

JULY 2019

Armed Forces of Cabinda (FAC), armed wing of movement for secession of Cabinda exclave Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC), 4 July claimed to have killed nine soldiers 1-2 July in exclave’s northern Massabi region, one FAC combatant killed. Following Feb arrest of supporters of smaller secessionist organisation Cabinda Independence Movement (MIC), police 4 July released ten detained activists.

Malawi

JULY 2019

Protests against President Mutharika’s 21 May re-election escalated and in places turned violent, and authorities continued to arrest movement’s leaders. Thousands took part in demonstrations organised by NGO Human Rights Defenders Coalition (HRDC) in capital Lilongwe 4 July to protest Mutharika’s re-election and alleged electoral fraud. After Mutharika 6 July warned that authorities would take action against protest leaders, police following day arrested at least 68 protesters for alleged “criminal acts”. Authorities 9 July arrested Gift Trapence and McDonald Sembereka, HRDC’s vice chairman and member respectively. In Blantyre, ruling Democratic Progressive Party youth cadets armed with knives 19 July attacked protesters in Chichiri Upper Stadium, police nearby failed to intervene; in city’s outskirts youths suspected to belong to opposition Malawi Congress Party blocked roads. In Lilongwe, opposition protesters 25 July damaged and torched part of govt office complex and attacked head office of Japan International Cooperation Agency. In Mzuzu, protesters 25 July burned down offices of govt and ruling Democratic Progressive Party and police unit. HRDC 29 July announced postponement of demonstrations on following day in order to prepare upcoming “One million march” 6 August against Malawi Electoral Commission chairperson Jane Ansah.

Mozambique

JULY 2019

Suspected Islamist militants continued attacks against civilians and security forces in Cabo Delgado province in far north where Islamic State (ISIS) claimed its second attack and frictions continued within former armed opposition Renamo. Police 3 July said it had arrested several Ahlu Sunnah Waa-Jama’a (ASWJ) gunmen after militants 26 June reportedly killed eleven civilians in Itole, Palma district. Militants 4 July reportedly beheaded three people in Chamala, Mudumbe district; 3 July attacked Lidjungo in Nangade district, killing one police and six civilians; ISIS 5 July claimed responsibility. After group claming to be Renamo’s military wing from Sofala province threatened to kill party leader Ossufo Momade in June, another group of alleged Renamo fighters in Funhalouro, Inhambane province in south east early July threatened to derail implementation of disarmament agreement signed with govt 2 June if Momade did not step down, Renamo’s leadership called group “deserters”. Constitutional Council 9 July declined to hear Renamo’s complaint against electoral commission for allegedly inflating number of voters registered in Gaza province in south; Renamo said it would file criminal charges and request independent audit. Parliament 29 July passed amnesty bill that exempts from prosecution govt forces and Renamo fighters for crimes committed since 2014. Renamo’s armed wing 30 July started disarmament process. President
Nyusi 31 July said govt would next day sign peace agreement with Renamo to put formal end to military hostilities. Newly appointed South African Justice Minister Ronald Lamola 13 July said he would ask courts to reverse his predecessor’s May ruling to extradite former Mozambican Finance Minister Manuel Chang to Mozambique, citing concerns that Chang still enjoyed political immunity; same day said he would consider extraditing Chang to U.S., where he is wanted for alleged involvement in Mozambique govt’s undisclosed $2bn loan that U.S. says was fraudulent. Chang 24 July resigned from parliament, losing his immunity.

Zimbabwe

**JULY 2019**

Amid continuing economic crisis, power shortages and rising inflation, attempts to initiate political dialogue remained deadlocked. Nelson Chamisa, leader of main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), 11 July warned party would organise protests against govt but did not say when. Chamisa called for seven days of prayer 26 July, “before undertaking crucial and decisive next steps” which remain undefined. Police 9 July charged MDC deputy Chairman Job Sikhala with attempting to overthrow govt after he allegedly vowed MDC would overthrow President Mnangagwa before 2023 election. Police 10 July arrested MDC Youth Assembly Sec Gen Gift Ostallos Siziba for allegedly inciting subversion of govt. Confederation of unions Civil Service Apex Council 18 July said it would not call for strike as threatened after govt same day agreed to provide “cushioning allowances”. Court 26 July ruled that Tourism Minister Prisca Mupfumira be detained for 21 days while anti-corruption commission investigates corruption allegations. Unidentified gunmen 31 July made failed attempt to abduct MDC officials in capital Harare.

Benin

**JULY 2019**

Following violent anti-govt protests in May-June, Church representatives 3 July began mediation between opposition and pro-govt parties, civil society and President Talon. Opposition insisted on dissolution of parliament and new elections. Following govt’s decision to bar opposition parties from taking part in 28 April parliamentary election, Talon 15 July met representatives of eleven pro-govt and opposition parties in bid to establish roadmap for certification of opposition parties; opposition called meeting “disappointing” and called on Talon to lift “artificial blockages”. Interior minister 18 July refused to legalise parties, insisting they required 1,155 founding members and not 120 as previously stated.

Côte d'Ivoire

**JULY 2019**

Tensions persisted between President Ouattara’s coalition Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) and opposition Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire-African Democratic Rally (PDCI-RDA) led by former President Bédié. Following Nov 2016 recommendations from African Court on Human and People’s Rights, govt 3 July proposed bill to reform electoral commission, decreasing number of members from seventeen to fifteen and reducing proportion of seats allocated to ruling coalition; parliament 30 July approved reform bill with 124 votes to 78, despite opposition MPs criticising govt for publishing final text day before vote. PDCI and other opposition parties and civil society following day protested against reform, arguing that, since executive’s representatives were biased, commission’s membership remained biased in favour of ruling coalition. Opposition also denounced 5,000 francs (about $8.50) fee for identity card on grounds that it would disenfranchise poor voters; 6 July mobilised hundreds to protest in Abidjan against fee. Authorities continued to pressure Bédié’s allies: 1 July arrested PDCI Youth President Valentin Kouassi, releasing him next day; 2 July sentenced in absentia senior PDCI member and former mayor of Plateau district in Abidjan Noël Akossi Bendjo to twenty years in prison for embezzlement of public funds; Bendjo called decision “parody of justice”; 6 July arrested Bamba Moriféré after opposition meeting, charging him with “incitement to insurrection”.

Gambia

**JULY 2019**

Hundreds 4 July marched in capital Banjul in support of victims of sexual violence demanding better laws to prevent abuse. Protests came a week after report from NGO Human Rights Watch detailed how former President Jammeh used his power as well as state institutions to entrap and sexually abuse young women. Jammeh’s party, Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction, called rape allegations against Jammeh by Fatou “Toufah” Jallow in New York Times “smear campaign”. Protests erupted 24 July in Serrekunda near Banjul, sparked by death in custody of young trader, during which protesters attacked
police station and police fired tear gas at protesters. Same day another protest took place in Brikama, about 30km from Banjul against lack of development in area, some protesters reportedly injured in clashes with security forces.

**Guinea**

**JULY 2019**

Tensions persisted between supporters and opponents of President Condé ahead of 2020 presidential elections. Following late June leak of official document that argued for president’s right to propose new constitution that would allow Condé to run for third term and submit it to referendum, FM Touré 5 July confirmed authenticity of document and vowed to track those responsible for leak, while opposition called document proof that govt was promoting “undemocratic project”. NGOs Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International 11 July criticised 25 June law that gives police “too much discretion to use firearms” and shields them from prosecution. Somalia 4 July cut diplomatic ties with Guinea after latter 2 July gave official welcome to President Bihi of Somaliland, over which Somalia claims sovereignty; Guinea apologised to Somalia.

**Guinea-Bissau**

**JULY 2019**

Following 23 June reappointment of Aristides Gomes as PM, President Vaz 3 July nominated Gomes’s proposed cabinet and Ladislau Embassa as attorney general. New govt mainly comprising members of African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde’s (PAIGC) and its allies took office 4 July. PM Gomes same day nominated 21 new advisers, including PAIGC’s leader Domingos Simões Pereira as special adviser to PM and head of Office to Support Reforms; civil society organisations criticised appointments as “nepotism” and waste of public funds. After electoral commission 10 July set 24 Nov as date of presidential election, National Assembly President Cipriano Cassamá announced his candidacy, adding that if he won Pereira would be his PM; Pereira 11 July reminded Cassamá that PAIGC would opt for primaries to choose candidate. Former PAIGC leader and former PM Gomes Júnior 13 July also announced his candidacy.

**Liberia**

**JULY 2019**

In capital Monrovia, electoral commission 31 July released preliminary results of by-election in Montserrado county pointing to victory of opposition candidate Darius Dillon of Liberty Party; announcement triggered clashes same day between opposition activists and supporters of ruling party Congress for Democratic Change, fourteen injured. Hundreds same day staged anti-govt protest in Monrovia against alleged corruption and economic mismanagement under President Weah, prompting police to use tear gas and arrest five.

**Nigeria**

**JULY 2019**

Boko Haram (BH) increased attacks in north east, deadly bandit violence continued in north west, govt forces cracked down on Shiite Muslim protesters in capital Abuja, while herder-farmer tensions rose in centre and south. In north east, both BH factions continued insurgency: in Borno state, insurgents 17 July killed at least six farmers near state capital Maiduguri; 18 July ambushed humanitarian convoy near Damasak, killed driver, abducted six NGO staff; 25 July attacked displaced persons’ camp in Maiduguri, killing two; 27 July attacked villages near Maiduguri, killing at least 70. Also in Borno state, BH faction Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) 4 July ambushed troops in Damboa, killing five; 17 July attacked army vehicle in Jakana town, killing four; troops repelled insurgent attacks in Saja and Berisheik 29-30 July, killing ten. In north west, Zamfara state govt’s peace and reconciliation initiative led to bandits and vigilantes releasing over 100 captives. In Katsina state, over 300 bandits 13 July attacked Kirtawa, killing at least ten; over 200 bandits 21 July attacked Zango, killing at least ten. In Sokoto state, bandits 17 July attacked several villages in Goronyo area, killing 39. In capital Abuja, Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) protesters demanding release of their leader Sheikh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky and his wife marched to parliament 9 July; security forces dispersed march killing two. Further clashes 22-23 July left about fifteen dead, including senior policeman; govt 30 July declared IMN “terrorist organisation” and banned it. IMN suspended protests, but said it would challenge ban in court. In centre and south, herder-farmer tensions rose: federal govt 31 June said it had begun creating temporary settlements for Fulani herders in twelve of 36 states, but suspended plan 3 July following protests by state govt and ethnic leaders in south and
Middle Belt. In south west, unidentified gunmen killed daughter of pan-Yoruba group leader in Ondo state. 12 July, group alleged gunmen were Fulani herders, heightening anti-Fulani sentiment across region.

Togo
JULY 2019
Electoral commission 5 July announced provisional results of 30 June local elections: President Gnassingbé’s Union for the Republic party won more municipal councillor seats than any other party (60%); turnout was about 52% and particularly low in capital Lomé. Main opposition parties had boycotted Dec 2018 parliamentary elections, but most ran for municipal seats; Pan-African National Party was only opposition party not to run. Its leader Tikpi Atchadam continued to demand release of activists detained during anti-govt demonstrations 13 April.

Asia
China/Japan
JULY 2019
Japanese coast guard 10 and 15 July spotted four Chinese coast guard ships around contested Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. International tensions increased over Chinese and Russian planes’ incursion of airspace over islands contested by Japan and South Korea; joint air exercise 23 July saw three Russian and two Chinese military planes fly over Dokdo islands in East Sea/Sea of Japan, claimed by both South Korea and Japan; Russia denied violation of airspace but confirmed it took part in joint patrol with Chinese aircraft. Japan’s ministry of defence said it had scrambled fighters to intercept planes (see Korean Peninsula).

Korean Peninsula
JULY 2019
U.S. and North Korea denuclearisation talks remained stalled while North Korea tested projectiles. Despite end June agreement to restart negotiations following meeting between U.S. President Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in demilitarised zone between North and South Korea, stalemate in denuclearisation talks ongoing with no talks announced. North Korea 24 July conducted test of two short-range missiles and 31 July fired two more. U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton 23 July met with Korean officials in Seoul to discuss stalled talks as well as strengthening of South Korea-U.S. alliance. World Food Programme 24 July announced it had learned that North Korea intended to reject South Korea’s food aid program, announced in June and due to be delivered through UN agencies. Joint air exercise 23 July saw three Russian and two Chinese military planes fly over Dokdo islands in East Sea/Sea of Japan, claimed by both South Korea and Japan; South Korea scrambled jets and fired hundreds of warning shots after one of Russian planes violated its sovereign airspace. Russia denied violation of airspace but confirmed it took part in joint patrol with Chinese aircraft (see China/Japan). Exercise came amid deterioration in Japanese-South Korean relations, with National Security Advisor Chung Eui-yong 18 July saying govt could even reconsider sharing intelligence with Japan if bilateral situation worsens.

Taiwan Strait
JULY 2019
Tensions continued amid military drills and Chinese condemnation of U.S. sale of weapons to Taiwan. China ministry of defence 14 July held military drills involving navy and air force near Taiwan Strait. China 28 July began military drills near both ends of Taiwan Strait, due to conclude 2 Aug. In response, Taiwan 29-30 July held live-fire drills. Earlier in month, U.S. State Department 8 July announced it had approved estimated $2.2bn sale of tanks, missiles and related equipment to Taiwan; China’s foreign ministry expressed anger and urged U.S. to revoke sale. Next day, China foreign ministry spokesperson said sale “harms China’s sovereignty and security interests”, followed by 12 July claim it would sanction U.S. companies selling weapons to Taiwan. President Tsai mid-July visited U.S. including 12 July meeting with UN representatives, where she said Taiwan “facing threat and penetration of overseas forces”. China 24 July released national defence white paper accusing Taiwan of “pursuing path of separatism” and warning China “must and will be reunited”. U.S. warship 24-25 July sailed through Taiwan Strait; in response, China foreign ministry 25 July expressed “deep concern”. China’s culture and tourism ministry 31 July announced it will temporarily restrict individual travel permits from China to Taiwan starting 1 Aug.

Afghanistan
JULY 2019
Amid continued violence causing a high civilian toll, peace process saw signs of progress in latest rounds of talks and could lead to finalisation of U.S.-Taliban agreement in coming month. During seventh round of U.S.-Taliban talks in Doha (28 June-9 July) U.S. Special Envoy Khalilzad 6 July said round was “most productive session” to date, with progress made on all four fronts: counter-terrorism assurances, troop withdrawal, intra-Afghan dialogue and permanent and comprehensive ceasefire; talks resumed late July. Taliban and Afghan representatives, including govt officials, met in Doha 7-8 July to discuss roadmap for initiation of formal intra-Afghan talks; in joint-declaration both parties called for reduction of civilian casualties and respect of women’s rights. Violence continued: in Kabul, Taliban truck bomb 1 July reportedly killed 40 people; security forces said they killed five militants in subsequent gunfire. In Ab Kamari, Baghdis province, Taliban killed at least eighteen commandos and captured eleven during security forces operation to capture senior Taliban leader 17 July. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) stepped up attacks: 6 July killed two in attack on Shiite mosque in southern Ghazni province; child-scare bomber 12 July killed five at wedding party in Pacheragam district, Nangarhar province in attack widely attributed to IS-KP. In Kabul, three separate explosions 25 July killed fifteen; Taliban claimed one and IS-KP claimed others; unidentified suicide bomber and gunman 28 July attacked VP candidate Amrullah Saleh’s office, killing twenty and injuring Saleh. High level of civilian deaths continued; in Jaghatu district of Wardak province, airstrike killed seventeen civilians 14 July, prompting protests from local residents accusing govt of overlooking incidents and saying casualties rose sharply since spring. NGO Human Rights Watch 12 July said Afghan special forces raided medical clinic in Wardak province and executed four civilians 8-9 July, calling on govt to investigate attack. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan 30 July released report documenting 3,812 civilian casualties, including 1,366 deaths, 1 Jan-30 June 2019, and stating that “civilian deaths attributed to pro-govt forces exceeded those caused by anti-govt elements” for second quarter in succession.

- **Q&A:** Afghanistan Diplomacy Gathers Steam Even as Attacks Increase

**Bangladesh**

**JULY 2019**

Security forces continued anti-militancy operations while political tensions arose over death sentences for members of opposition. In continued operations, police 1 July arrested member of banned Hizb ut-Tahrir in Sylhet district; 9 July arrested suspected members of Ansar al-Islam in Barisal town and Dhaka for allegedly attempting to recruit new members online, particularly women; 11 July arrested three alleged Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) militants in Chittagong district. Inspector General of Police 1 July warned home-grown JMB militants could join Islamic State, stressing use of social media in recruitment. Pabna district court 3 July sentenced to death nine leaders and activists of opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), 25 to life imprisonment, and thirteen to ten years in jail over 1994 bomb attack on train carrying then-opposition Awami League leader and current PM Hasina; BNP’s Sec Gen 6 July called charges fabricated and said verdict was part of govt’s attempt to “eliminate BNP using the court”. BNP continued to campaign for release of imprisoned BNP leader Khaleda Zia, holding rallies in Barisal 18 July, Chittagong 20 July and Khulna 25 July. Monsoons caused heavy flooding since early July in Rohingya refugee camps, leading to at least five deaths and deterioration of living conditions. Prosecutor of International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda 4 July requested court’s judges authorise investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and persecution committed against Rohingya Muslims (in which at least one element occurred in Bangladesh – a State Party to the Rome Statute) (see Myanmar).

**India (non-Kashmir)**

**JULY 2019**

Govt announced new campaign against Maoists amid ongoing insurgents’ clashes with security forces, abductions and targeted killings of civilians. Ministry of Home Affairs officials 4 July announced increase of Central Reserve Police Force operations in “decisive push” against “weakened” Maoist insurgents. In Chhattisgarh state (east), security forces 6 July killed four militants in Dhamtaru district; in Sukma district, Maoists 12 July killed regional party Telangana Rashtra Samithi leader Shrivastava Rao, after kidnapping him 8 July; in Bastar district, security forces 27 July killed seven insurgents. In Jharkhand state (east), police 19 July arrested four Maoists allegedly involved in 14 June killing of five policemen in Tiruldih in Seraikela-
Indian and Pakistani forces continued to exchange fire along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) and separatists clashed with security forces in Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). In cross-LoC clashes, explosion 3 July killed five Pakistani soldiers in Bhimber district of Pakistani-controlled Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Pakistani military statement accusing India of “state sponsored terrorism”; India defence spokesperson 6 July said Pakistani cross-border firing killed two soldiers in Rajouri district. International Court of Justice 17 July ruled Pakistan must grant consular access to Indian naval officer sentenced to death in April 2017 on spying charges, while calling for “effective review” of case. UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights 8 July released update report into May 2018-April 2019 situation in Indian- and Pakistan-administered Kashmir, expressing concern that past rights concerns raised in June 2018 report had yet to be addressed, and reiterating need that govt address past and ongoing human rights violations; India criticised report, Pakistan said it confirmed accusations of Indian rights abuses in Kashmir. In J&K, Indian home minister 10 July reported 93 militants killed since Feb 2019 Pulwama terrorist attack as clashes between security forces and militants continued. In Shopian district, police 5 July killed militant allegedly affiliated with Hizbul Mujahideen and 17 July killed militant allegedly affiliated with Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Tayyaba; police 27 July killed Jaish-e-Mohammed commander Munna Bhai and associate. In Pulwama district, unidentified gunman 30 July injured People’s Democratic Party (PDP) local leader Lateef Ahmed.

Nepal

July 2019

Govt campaign against hardline Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) continued; CPN and police 10 July clashed in eastern Bhojpur district, killing one cadre and one police official. Amid concerns over govt’s use of force against CPN individuals, govt rejected opposition parties’ repeated calls for formation of parliamentary panel to investigate 20 June killing of CPN cadre Kumar Paudel in Sarlahi district; National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) 19 July launched investigation into 20 June incident following preliminary probe suggesting police killed Paudel under suspicious circumstances. Opposition continued to criticise govt for failing to make progress on talks with CPN; CPN has set three preconditions for talks – official invitation from govt, lifting ban on its activities, release of arrested cadres. Tensions between federal and provincial govs continued with Supreme Court 1 July ruling federal Public Service Commission can fill over 9,000 vacant civil service positions at provincial level; provincial officials claimed recruitment initiative undermines their jurisdiction and violates principles of inclusion by ignoring quotas for marginalised groups. NGOs Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurists, Human Rights Watch, and TRIAL International 29 July expressed concerns about govt’s commitment to transitional justice and raised questions about selection of new leadership for Nepal’s two main transitional justice mechanisms.

Pakistan

July 2019

Authorities arrested leader of militant group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) amid continued militant attacks while govt continued push for criminal prosecution of opposition’s leadership. Following international pressure and possibility of Financial Action Task Force blacklisting govt, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) 17 July arrested Hafiz Saeed, leader of LeT (renamed Jamaat-ud-Dawa) on terrorism financing charges; U.S. President Trump 17 July commended arrest of “mastermind” of 2008 Mumbai attacks. During four-country consultation on Afghan peace process in Beijing 10-11 July, U.S., China and Russia recognised Pakistan’s role in facilitating negotiations and political settlement in Afghanistan. In meeting with PM Khan 22 July, Trump also praised Islamabad’s role in facilitating U.S.-Taliban talks while downplaying political disagreements between the two govs. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf govt pursued confrontation with opposition: Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) 1 July arrested Punjab President of Muslim League-Nawaz party (PML-N) Rana Sanaullah; military-led ANF claimed to have found heroin in Sanaullah’s car, prompting opposition and media outlets to accuse agency of planting drugs. Former PM Sharif’s daughter 6 July released video allegedly showing judge confessing having been blackmailed to convict Sharif in Dec 2018 on corruption charge; Supreme Court 16 July allowed the opening of a probe into
controversy; govt regulator 8 July blocked three TV channel’s live broadcast of daughter’s news conference in incident Reporters Without Borders called “brazen censorship”. National Accountability Bureau 18 July ordered arrest of former PML-N PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi while next day former PML-N Finance Minister Mitftah Ismail obtained pre-arrest bail, both on alleged charges of corruption. Militant-related violence continued; in Punjab’s Gujrat district, CTD 1 July raided militant hideout, killing three. In Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) 21 July conducted twin attacks: four gunmen killed two policemen followed by suicide bomber attack on hospital, killing at least seven. Military 27 July reported attack by suspected TTP militants killed six soldiers on patrol along Afghanistan-Pakistan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and same day said unidentified militants killed four soldiers in Balochistan.

Sri Lanka
JULY 2019
Fallout from April terror attacks continued with arrests of high-level security officials amid ongoing anti-Muslim campaigns. Police 2 July arrested former defence secretary and suspended chief of police, on charges of murder and criminal negligence over failure to prevent attacks. Catholic Archbishop of Colombo 21 July claimed attacks were foreign conspiracy to destabilise country and happened due to President Sirisena and PM Wickremesinghe’s power struggle and neglect of national security, calling on both to resign and new govt to form. Head of Criminal Investigation Department 24 July said April’s attackers inspired by but not directly linked to Islamic State (ISIS). Galagoda Aththe Gnanasara, leader of hardline Buddhist organisation Bodu Bala Sena released from prison by presidential pardon in May, held rally in Kandy 7 July decrying Muslim threat and calling for Sinhalese to unite and elect all-Sinhala govt. Police 25 July released on bail after two months detention a Muslim doctor accused by Buddhist militants of mass sterilisation of Sinhalese women, following police investigations revealing allegations false and politically motivated. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation 3 July said it remained concerned about rise in “intimidation, anti-Muslim rhetoric and hate speech”, calling on authorities to counter hate speech and ensure Muslims’ safety. UN special rapporteur on rights to freedom of assembly and association, concluding country visit 18-26 July, said hate speech laws “not applied with even hand” and “discriminatory and violent rhetoric, particularly by members of majority community, frequently goes unpunished” and exacerbated by social media. Supreme Court 5 July delayed Sirisena’s plans to carry out execution of four convicted drug dealers in first executions since 1976, amid opposition from all political parties except for Sirisena’s Sri Lanka Freedom Party, with parliamentarian from ruling-United National Party 2 July introducing bill to abolish death penalty.

Indonesia
JULY 2019
Anti-militant operations continued, amid low-level violence in Papua. Anti-terror police Densus 88 reported they had foiled plot to carry out Independence Day bombing on 17 August, arresting suspected militant in West Sumatra province 18 July; police stated suspect believed to be member of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jemaah Ansharut Daulah. Police 23 July said deadly cathedral bombing which killed over 22 in Jan was carried out by Indonesian couple who attempted to travel to Syria to join ISIS. Counter-terrorism agency chief 8 July said govt set up task force to decide whether it will take back families of Indonesian ISIS fighters stranded in Syria. Military 30 July announced new military unit to fight terrorism, reportedly consisting of 500 personnel. In Papua province, suspected separatist rebels 20 July killed soldier guarding construction of bridge in Nduga district. NGO Solidarity Team for Nduga 18 July claimed around 5,200 people displaced by fighting between soldiers and separatists since Dec 2018, alleging some 139 had died from malnutrition and disease; military spokesman disputed figures.

Myanmar
JULY 2019
Clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and Myanmar military in Rakhine state continued amid protests over deaths of AA suspects in military custody. AA used new tactic of attacking navy vessels in Rakhine state three times since late-June, including 19 July rocket attack on two ships on river in Myebon Township which killed army captain and two navy personnel. Local media 5 July reported govt had charged in absentia four AA leaders under Counter Terrorism Law for organising and participating in militant group, alongside charging numerous villagers for harbouring AA members. At govt’s request, Singapore police 10
July arrested and deported seven politically-prominent Rakhine individuals, including brother of AA leader, on charges of using country as platform to organise support for anti-govt violence by raising funds and seeking diaspora support for AA; Myanmar police arrested all seven on arrival in Myanmar or shortly after. Amid demonstrations in Rakhine over deaths of AA suspects in military custody, military 12 July announced formation of investigative team to probe incidents; since early 2019 some fifteen civilians held on suspicion of AA ties reportedly died in military custody or shortly after release. Lull in fighting in Kachin and Shan states continued following military’s late-June extension of unilateral ceasefire until 31 Aug.

Amid monsoons causing heavy flooding since early July in Rakhingya camps in Bangladesh and leading to at least five deaths and deterioration of living conditions, Rakhingya Muslims continued attempts to cross Bay of Bengal to Malaysia; over 60 people from Bangladesh camps and displacement camps around Sittwe in Rakhine state found on coast of southern Maungdaw township 7 July after boat difficulties. Prosecutor of International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda 4 July requested court’s judges authorise an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity, namely deportation, other inhumane acts and persecution committed against Rakhingya Muslims (in which at least one element occurred in Bangladesh – a State Party to the Rome Statute) during the period since 9 October 2016.

Philippines

JULY 2019

Clashes involving militants and communist rebels continued. In Negros Oriental province (centre), communist New People’s Army (NPA) 18 July killed four police officers; in subsequent days unidentified assailants killed at least ten people, including a total of seven in separate incidents on 25 July. Police arrested four suspected NPA members during operations 26 and 29 July. Govt 29 July announced deployment of over 300 Special Action Force troops to province. Military reported clashes with Abu Sayyaf on southern island Basilan including suspected Abu Sayyaf militants 15 July killing one and wounding four members of security forces during attack on military auxiliary forces, next day military reportedly killed mid-level commander during raid and arrested two other militants. Civilian killed and two others injured during 25 July military air and ground assault in North Cotabato targeted at splinter group of Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) militants, at least one militant reported killed. Military 30 July reported it killed at least nine suspected members of BIFF in late-July clashes in Mindanao province, local media reported one soldier dead. Military 23 July reported at least seven foreign militants running training camp for suicide bombers in southern provinces of Sulu, Maguindanao, and Basilan; foreign suspects supposedly “embedded” with Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Abu Sayyaf and BIFF militant groups. Authorities 12 and 17 July arrested two suspected members of Abu Sayyaf in separate raids in Manila and Quezon City respectively. Authorities 23 July arrested two alleged ISIS sympathisers in General Santos City, recovering explosives and bomb-making materials. Numerous militants surrendered to authorities between 15 and 22 July, including over 200 former NPA rebels along borders of North Cotabato, Bukidnon, and Davao del Sur provinces. Govt 31 July filed protest with China over maritime disputes (see South China Sea).

South China Sea

JULY 2019

Tensions continued over Chinese anti-ship ballistic missile tests in South China Sea (SCS) and over presence of Chinese ships in disputed waters. U.S. Defense Department 3 July condemned China’s anti-ship ballistic missile tests that began late-June, first over open water and including DF-21Ds missiles, known for capability to target ships at range of 1,500km. Chinese oil exploration ship and escorting vessels 4-15 July embarked on survey of waters around disputed Spratly islands, in area claimed by Vietnam; Vietnamese vessels closely followed flotilla. Events saw two Chinese and four Vietnamese armed coast guard vessels involved in standoff. Vietnam 19 July called on China to remove oil exploration ship from area, demanding China stop “unlawful activities” and 25 July reiterated demands. Philippines foreign ministry 31 July filed protest with China after spotting 113 Chinese fishing vessels near Pag-as-a (Thitu) Island in Spratly archipelago 24-25 July, where Philippines has been refurbishing facilities and repairing airstrip since late 2018. Amid ongoing U.S.-China tensions, U.S. State Department 20 July said China's “repeated provocative actions” aimed at other countries’ offshore energy projects “threaten regional energy security”; China’s foreign ministry 22 July called U.S. comments “slander”. During bilateral talks, Philippines and U.S. 16 July agreed to safeguard freedom of navigation and overflight over SCS. Malaysian navy 1-18 July conducted rare military exercises in SCS including tests of anti-ship missiles.
Thailand
JULY 2019
Violence continued in deep south, while new govt cabinet under PM Prayuth Chan-ocha was sworn in. Insurgents launched series of attacks on security forces in Southern Thailand: bomb 12 July targeted four defence volunteers on two motorcycles in Muang district, Yala province, wounding three. In Bacho district, Narathiwat IED explosion 15 July targeted convoy of ranger trucks in district, causing no injuries and improvised mine 17 July wounded three rangers. IED 21 July wounded four rangers in Bannang Satar district, Yala province. Army 22 July announced investigation after suspected insurgent found unconscious in army camp in Pattani province 21 July, day after his arrest; family members claimed he was tortured. Suspected insurgents 23 July killed two soldiers and two defence volunteers in bombing and shooting at military outpost in Pattani province. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 1 July publicly apologised for delays in forming cabinet and seating new govt, threatening to use the “old method that nobody wants to see”, provoking widespread criticism for allegedly implying threat of staging coup. King Maha Vajiralongkorn 16 July swore in new cabinet, with ruling National Council for Peace and Order party filling finance and interior ministries, and PM serving as defence minister. Constitutional Court (CC) 19 July accepted petition to evaluate PM’s qualifications as PM to determine if being junta leader made Prayuth a “state official”, which would disqualify him from standing as PM candidate. Same day, CC accepted petition accusing Future Forward Party leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, his party and its executives of trying to end constitutional monarchy.

Papua New Guinea
JULY 2019
Inter-tribal violence in mountainous Hela Province early July left dozens dead. Following incidents of violence in June, tribesmen 6 July ambushed and killed six women and children near Peta village which prompted revenge attack by rival tribe 8 July, killing nine women and seven children in Karida village; in days following attacks, govt announced deployment of joint military-police taskforce to Hela province while PM Marape sent police minister to region to assess situation.

Europe & Central Asia
Bosnia And Herzegovina
JULY 2019
Netherlands Supreme Court 19 July ruled that, due to failure by Dutch UN peacekeepers to adequately protect 350 Bosnian Muslims killed in 1995 Srebrenica massacre, state was liable for 10% of damages suffered by surviving relatives; decision reduced different court’s previous assessment of 30% responsibility, disappointing victims’ organisation which sued for compensation. Bosnian who joined Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014 charged for terrorism 15 July.

Kosovo
JULY 2019
Kosovo-Serbia tensions rose as Kosovo reportedly banned Serbian officials from entering country, and PM Haradinaj resigned after war crimes tribunal summoned him as suspect, triggering uncertainty over govt’s legal competency to continue governing. Shopkeepers in Kosovo’s northern Serb-led municipalities reportedly went on strike 1-3 July in protest against Kosovo’s 100% customs tariff on imports from Serbia imposed in Nov 2018. PM Haradinaj 2 July accused Serbian President Vučić of trying to “destabilise” northern Kosovo. Kosovo foreign ministry spokesperson 4 July said govt had banned Serbian officials from entering Kosovo because Serbia published “constant propaganda and false news” about Kosovo. Next day, govt denied ban. Serbia’s defence minister 10 July said Kosovo had prevented him from entering country and called Kosovo’s leaders “liars”. Haradinaj 19 July announced he would resign as PM citing summons to appear as suspect in war crimes court in The Hague and called for early polls. After resigning 22 July, he appeared in court in The Hague 24 July but refused to answer prosecutor’s questions; Haradinaj was previously acquitted of wartime crimes in 2012 and 2018. Haradinaj’s resignation created uncertainty over legality of govt’s continued rule; Haradinaj 29 July reportedly requested Constitutional Court to rule on matter.

North Macedonia
JULY 2019
President Pendarovski 15 July said he expected North Macedonia to become NATO member by end of 2019. FM s of Cyprus and North Macedonia at conference in Greece 17 July said two countries would establish diplomatic relations at next EU Foreign Affairs Council summit in Aug 2019. U.S. Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian affairs visited North Macedonia and Greece 21-27 July and reportedly discussed issue of former’s desire to become member of NATO and EU.

Armenia J ULY 2019
Constitutional Court 18 July said it had requested advice from European Court of Human Rights and Venice Commission of Council of Europe regarding case of former President Robert Kocharyan, who was arrested for third time in June for ordering violent crackdown against opposition protesters after 2008 election. Kocharyan’s team reportedly welcomed decision; hearing set for 29 Aug. European Council President Donald Tusk visited Azerbaijan and Armenia 9-10 July; 10 July met PM Pashinyan, highlighted Armenia’s effective implementation of EU-Armenia partnership agreement that supports Armenian modernisation, and reconfirmed that “EU will continue providing technical and financial assistance for its implementation”.

Azerbaijan J ULY 2019
European Council President Donald Tusk visited Azerbaijan and Armenia 9-10 July; 9 July met President Aliyev, reconfirmed EU’s “readiness to further deepen [its] cooperation with Azerbaijan”, said Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can only be resolved by political settlement in accordance with international law and expressed EU’s readiness to further support concrete peacebuilding activities to prepare population for peace.

Georgia J ULY 2019
Following large-scale street protests and rise in Georgia-Russia tensions in June, protests eased and Russian President Putin blocked sanctions against Georgia. Presenter on opposition TV channel 8 July broadcast obscenity-filled message directed at Putin, sparking outrage and leading senior govt officials to condemn message and some politicians to publicly express their regret to Russian leader. To calm situation Putin 9 July said that “out of respect for the Georgian people” he would not support new economic sanctions against Georgia which members of Russian State Duma 8 July proposed, including suspending import of wine and mineral water from Georgia. Statement prompted parliamentarians to halt drafting any new sanction bill. Street protests that erupted in capital Tbilisi in June lost momentum. Interior Minister Giorgi Gakharia, whom protesters held responsible for heavy-handed police crackdown on rally in June, 12 July promised to investigate crackdown and punish those responsible but said he would not resign. Leader of Georgian dream party supported interior minister’s decision and 17 July said resignation would have been betrayal of state. Prosecutor’s office 15 and 17 July arrested two policemen involved in crackdown on protesters, and interior ministry suspended ten police officers and head of interior ministry’s Special Task Department. Authorities 15 July arrested four protesters for instigating violence in June. In South Ossetia, de facto special security service 8 July arrested former staff member and his spouse and two current employees for passing secret information to Georgia. Abkhaz opposition leader Aslan Bzhania, still in hospital after alleged poisoning in April, 19 July withdrew his candidacy for Abkhazia’s presidential elections scheduled for Aug and urged voters to support opposition candidate Alkhas Kvitsinia.

Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) J ULY 2019
Security along front lines improved slightly after late June meeting between Armenian and Azerbaijani FM s, but both sides continued to report security incidents mainly along state borders, which increased in frequency in second half of July. Azerbaijan 18 July said Armenian sniper fire injured one of its border guards on shared border; Armenia did not confirm. Armenian defence ministry said Azerbaijan injured one of its soldiers 27 July and killed another 28 July, Azerbaijan did not confirm either incident. Armenian FM 5 July visited de facto Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), met local leadership and signed annual plan to consult with de facto foreign ministry. U.S. House of Representatives 10 July adopted two amendments related to NK conflict as part of its National Defense Authorization Act; first blocks U.S. spending on transfer of defence articles or services to Azerbaijan that could strengthen its air capabilities, and second calls on both sides to strengthen NK ceasefire at Line of Contact by refraining from deploying “snipers, heavy arms, and new
weaponry", deploying "gun-fire locator systems", and increasing OSCE observers along line. OSCE Parliamentary Assembly members 8 July adopted Luxembourg declaration; document endorses multilateral approach to addressing challenges, including arms control and conflict resolution, and encourages dialogue between Armenia and Azerbaijan within mediation process led by OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs and calls on both sides to take "specific and tangible measures to reach a peaceful solution to the conflict".

Russia/North Caucasus

JULY 2019

Govt’s banning of most independent candidates from Sept local elections sparked mass protests in capital Moscow, which police violently suppressed, arresting over 1,300 protesters. After authorities banned over 30 independent candidates from running in 8 Sept elections for Moscow’s city legislature, protests began mid-July. Authorities night of 24-25 July arrested opposition party leaders, including main opposition leader Aleksei Navalny, detained for 30 days, for planning to lead non-authorised protests. Shortly after his arrest, Navalny was hospitalised for one day 28 July for severe swelling; doctor said he had been exposed to "toxic agent". Police suppressed mass protests in Moscow 27 July, assaulting protesters and arresting over 1,300. In North Caucasus region, Islamic State (ISIS) claimed deadly grenade attack at police station in Chechnya and authorities continued to arrest journalists and activists. In Chechnya, unidentified assailant 1 July attacked police post in Achkhoi-Martan district with knife and grenade, killing one police officer and injuring several others, before police shot him dead; ISIS claimed responsibility. In Ingushetia, authorities in Nazran 12 July arrested and detained for possessing drugs Rashin Maysigov, reporter for investigative news site Fortanga. According to his lawyer, Maysigov was tortured during interrogation. Russia 14-21 July reportedly blocked access to Fortanga. At Russia’s request, authorities in Sweden 8 July reportedly detained self-exiled Chechen human rights activist but later released him after refusing to extradite him to Russia. Russia 8 July appointed to post of deputy defence minister Ynus-Bek Yevkurov, former leader of Ingushetia who resigned in June amid tension over Sept 2018 border delineation deal between Ingushetia and Chechnya.

Moldova

JULY 2019

Following creation of coalition govt in June, European Commission 15 July said it would unlock €14.5mn in financial aid citing "progress on issues which are linked to the disbursement of money", and proceeded to disburse funds 23 July. During 24 July visit to Brussels, new PM Maia Sandu signed three financial assistance agreements worth total of €40.25mn with EU enlargement commissioner Johannes Hahn, who lauded new anti-corruption efforts; EU had cut aid to govt in Nov amid concerns of democratic backsliding. Authorities 26 July issued national arrest warrant for oligarch Ilan Shor, who allegedly organised theft of €0.9bn from banking sector in 2014.

Ukraine

JULY 2019

Following escalation in fighting between govt forces and Russian-backed separatists in Donbas in east, parties renewed ceasefire 21 July, and President Zelensky’s party won snap parliamentary elections. In Donbas, fighting intensified in first half of July with both sides using heavy weapons along contact line; at least eight separatist fighters, twelve members of Ukrainian army and national guard, and five civilians killed. Talks made progress on several fronts. At 17 July Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) meeting in Minsk, capital of Belarus, parties agreed on how to rebuild pedestrian bridge at Stanytsia Luhanska checkpoint, critical for humanitarian access, and not to use it for military purposes. At 18 July TCG meeting, sides agreed to implement renewed ceasefire from 21 July in Donbas, for first time specifying "ban on any sort of fire", and made progress toward "all-for-all" prisoner exchange. After military 19 July allegedly suggested it would reject TCG ban on defensive fire, Ukraine’s envoy to talks clarified ceasefire would not prohibit return fire in case of attack. Parliamentary elections held peacefully 21 July but turnout low at 49.8%; Zelensky’s Sliha Narodu party won with 42% of vote, pro-Russian Opozytsiyna Platforma-Za Zhyttya came second with 13%. Ukraine-Russia relations remained strained. Zelensky and Russian President Putin in phone call 11 July (their first direct interaction) reportedly discussed 24 Ukrainian sailors whom
Russian security forces captured in Nov 2018. After Russian state investigators finalised charges against sailors of violating country’s borders, Moscow court 17 July approved investigators’ request to prolong their pre-trial detention for two additional months until late Oct. Putin 17 July signed order to expand eligibility for expedited Russian citizenship; in addition to those registered in areas controlled by Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, all residents and former residents of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts will be able to apply; Ukraine condemned move. During U.S. and Ukrainian-led multinational maritime exercise in north west Black Sea. Ukraine navy said Russian destroyer 10 July created “dangerous situation” by sailing into area restricted for live-fire drills, which Russia denied. Ukrainian authorities 24 July in Odessa region detained Russian tanker allegedly used to block Kerch Strait prior to Russian seizure of Ukrainian boats and their crews 25 Nov; Russian crew released that day.

- REPORT: Rebels without a Cause: Russia’s Proxies in Eastern Ukraine

Cyprus
JULY 2019
Tensions persisted between Republic of Cyprus and EU on one side and Turkey and Turkish Cypriot leadership on other over efforts to extract hydrocarbons off Cypriot coast. Turkey early July deployed a second drilling ship, called Yavuz, to East Mediterranean. Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu 10 July warned that EU’s siding with Republic of Cyprus would hamper resolution of Cyprus issue. Turkish Cypriot leadership 11 July proposed joint committee with Greek Cypriots on natural gas; Cypriot govt dismissed proposal. Citing Turkey’s violation of Cyprus’s sovereignty, EU’s Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) 15 July cut pre-accession assistance to Turkey for 2020 by €145.8mn, suspended talks for aviation agreement with Ankara and reviewed sovereign-backed lending to Turkey. Turkish energy minister 16 July said Turkey would deploy a second seismic exploration vessel to East Mediterranean, bringing total number of Turkish ships in area to four.

Northern Ireland (UK)
JULY 2019
Amid growing concerns over possible escalation of dissident violence following UK’s planned departure from EU, police responding to reports of explosion in Craigavon, County Armagh night of 26-27 July found booby-trapped explosive device made to look like fired mortar near bus stop; police accused dissident republicans of laying device in attempt to kill police officers.

Turkey
JULY 2019
Fighting continued between security forces and Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), tensions rose between Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees, and govt’s purchase of Russian missile defence system continued to fuel tensions with U.S. Military continued to carry out air and land operations against PKK in Turkey’s south east and northern Iraq; senior PKK figures were among members killed. In Iraqi Kurdistan’s regional capital Erbil, unidentified assailants 17 July killed two people, including Turkish diplomat; Turkish state blamed attack on PKK while PKK leadership denied direct involvement. Authorities maintained crackdown on members of pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). Following 29 June violent protests against Syrian refugees in Istanbul, authorities 2 July detained sixteen people for inciting hatred on social media. Istanbul governor’s office 22 July set 20 Aug as deadline for Syrian refugees to return to Turkish province in which they registered or face forced return. Syrian opposition activists 22 July reported that Turkish authorities had in July deported 1,000 Syrian refugees to Syria’s Idlib province; Turkish govt 31 July denied reports. Islamic State (ISIS) 10 July released propaganda video in Turkish threatening Turkey and U.S.; authorities 9-18 July arrested 34 suspected ISIS members in Istanbul and Adana, including alleged emir of ISIS’s Turkey branch. After Russia 12 July began delivery of its S-400 surface-to-air missile defence system to Turkey, U.S. President Trump 16 July banned Turkey from buying American F-35 fighter jets. U.S. administration and Congress deliberated over set of sanctions to impose on Turkey under Countering America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). In response to Turkey’s continued efforts to locate and extract hydrocarbons off Cyprus in East Mediterranean, EU’s Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) 15 July imposed sanctions on Turkey including cut in pre-accession assistance for 2020 by €145.8mn citing Ankara’s violation of Republic of Cyprus’s sovereignty (see Cyprus).
Kazakhstan
JULY 2019
Authorities continued to repress nationwide anti-govt protests spurred by June’s presidential election, which foreign observers rated far short of democratic standards. Sporadic protests and detentions continued throughout month; notably, authorities 6 July reportedly detained at least 70 anti-govt protesters in capital Nur-Sultan and almost 100 in Almaty.

Kyrgyzstan
JULY 2019
Violence erupted on contested Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border and tensions persisted between President Jeenbekov and his predecessor former President Atambayev. Ahead of meeting of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan presidents to resolve border dispute planned for 26 July in Isfara in Tajikistan, residents of Tajikistan’s exclave Vorukh erected Tajik flag near Kyrgyz village of Ak-Sai; move sparked fighting between Kyrgyz and Tajik locals that left one Tajik citizen dead 22 July. Further clashes reportedly erupted 24 July in Batken region of Kyrgyzstan, which surrounds Vorukh. Two presidents met in Vorukh 26 July and spoke to local residents, Jeenbekov urged “more dynamism and progress in negotiations”. Former President Atambayev 19 July rejected for third time interior ministry’s summons for questioning in unspecified criminal investigation. Atambayev 24 July travelled by private jet to Moscow where he met Russian President Putin. He returned next day and said Putin intended to talk to Jeenbekov about “political prosecution of opponents”.

Tajikistan
JULY 2019
After rumours emerged of President Berdymukhamedov’s death late July, govt denied his death and 24 July reported that he had spoken with his Uzbek counterpart on occasion of latter’s birthday. Soon after, state television showed new clips of Berdymukhamedov, although date of their filming was not provided.

Latin America & Caribbean
Colombia
JULY 2019
Political tensions continued amid disappearance of ex-Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) commander, while violence between armed groups remained high. After former FARC commander and current Congressman Jesús Santrich went missing 30 June from FARC demobilisation zone on Colombia/Venezuela border, Supreme Court issued arrest warrant for Santrich 9 July, day he was due to attend court on charges of drug smuggling; President Duque 1 July claimed Santrich “wants to evade justice” while FARC 9 July released statement reiterating commitment to peace process. UN Security Council 11-14 July visited Colombia, calling on govt to protect FARC ex-combatants and community activists, move forward on transitional justice and promote rural reform; Duque 12 July asked for extension of UN Mission in Colombia. National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla-related violence continued; ELN 4 July bombed Attorney General’s Office in Ocaña (north east), on 55th anniversary of group’s foundation, and 18 July attacked army base in Samaniego, Nariño (south west) with improvised mortar, causing loss of power. ELN 4 July called on govt to restart negotiations; govt refused and said Venezuelan govt directly protects ELN and FARC dissidents. Dissident-related violence remained high; dissidents 10 July attacked police truck in Caquetá (south), injuring three soldiers. Dissident group Steven González Front 12 July clashed with army in Cumbitara, Nariño, reportedly killing several soldiers. Humanitarian groups early July said ongoing violence between FARC dissidents and ELN confined over 1,000 people in Chocó (west). Attacks on activists continued; unidentified attackers 3 July killed social leader Tatiana Paola Posso Espitia in El Copey, Cesar (north).
Venezuela
JULY 2019
Govt and opposition dialogue resumed while UN human rights chief released report into human rights violations. Govt and opposition delegations 15 July resumed talks in Barbados; Norwegian govt, mediating negotiations, said intention was for talks to be “continuous and expeditious” with delegations due to meet each week for several days to find solution to crisis. President Maduro 19 July said ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela should prepare for “epic battle” to recover opposition-controlled National Assembly (AN) in as yet unannounced parliamentary elections; opposition leader and “interim President” Juan Guaidó 16 July said “real solution” to crisis was close but three days later said “tough days” lay ahead and there were “no magic solutions”. Amid continued opposition division between those seeking dialogue and hardliners pushing for international military intervention, AN 23 July approved law restoring country’s membership of regional defence Rio Treaty, which some in opposition see as step to requesting foreign military assistance; however, Guaidó insisted treaty was not primarily about military intervention. International support for Norwegian-sponsored talks remained strong with International Contact Group, headed by EU and Uruguay, and UN Sec Gen Guterres reiterating support for talks; U.S. Special Representative for Venezuela Elliot Abrams 12 July expressed hope negotiations would remain confidential so as to be constructive. Contact Group’s Special Representative Enrique Iglesias 9 July held talks in Caracas with both Maduro and Guaidó. UN Human Rights Chief Bachelet 5 July presented report accusing govt of committing “numerous human rights violations” including torture and extrajudicial killings; govt filed over 70 objections to report and said report failed to take into account evidence govt presented. Report called for dissolution of police special forces (FAES) but Maduro 19 July expressed support for FAES. Repression of opposition continued; govt 12 July arrested two of Guaidó’s bodyguards, accusing them of trafficking military weapons. U.S. 21 July said Venezuelan air force “aggressively shadowed” U.S. reconnaissance aircraft in international airspace 19 July, govt claimed plane entered its airspace. Mass power-cut hit most of country 22 July; govt blamed U.S. “electromagnetic attack.”

Guatemala
JULY 2019
Fallout from June presidential and legislative elections continued amid uncertainty over future of International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) 1 July confirmed two most successful candidates from presidential vote – Sandra Torres of Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) and Alejandro Giammattei of political party Vamos – would contest run-off 11 Aug; Congress 11 July confirmed out of 160 seats in congress UNE won 52 and Vamos 17. Amid criticism from public prosecutors that TSE rushed results confirmation and ignored irregularities, TSE 17 July announced official end to voting recount, ruling out allegations of electoral fraud. Ahead of 3 Sept end of CICIG’s mandate, Human Rights Prosecutor Jordán Rodas 15 July asked Constitutional Court (CC) to permanently uphold Jan ruling which blocked govt from terminating CICIG’s mandate with immediate effect; report from NGO Amnesty International 9 July warned govt’s attack on CICIG could wipe out progress in strengthening judicial system. Govt and U.S. 26 July signed “Safe Third Country” protocol which requires Central American migrants who pass through Guatemala to first seek asylum there, rather than in U.S. Earlier in month, President Morales 23 July filed appeal against CC 14 July ruling that prevented govt from entering into such an agreement without Congressional approval.

Honduras
JULY 2019
Civil unrest continued while rights groups expressed concerns about new penal code. Students and security forces 15 July clashed at Honduran Technical Institute in capital Tegucigalpa; police deployed to several schools in city where protests disrupted teaching. Congress 11 July announced continuation of consultations over new penal code, due to come into effect in Nov after revisions to previous versions due to criticism over several articles supposedly limiting free speech and offering leniency for corruption and
drug trafficking; 30 civil society organisations 17 July called for code to be abandoned and said they would develop alternative. In continued electoral reform efforts, Organization of American States advisers 11 July delivered final recommendations on reform process including on functioning of newly-created National Electoral Council to oversee electoral cycles and Electoral Justice Tribunal to settle election-related disputes; Congressional caucuses 15 July committed to finalising laws on new bodies by mid-Aug.

- **Q&A**: Crackdown Raises Stakes as Honduran Protesters March On

**El Salvador**

**JULY 2019**

President Bukele continued to detail measures as part of anti-gang “Territorial Control Plan”. Bukele 2 July announced second phase in plan, called “Opportunities” and aimed at preventing gang recruitment, providing vocational training to 100,000 youth. As part of anti-gang plan, Bukele 8 July ordered police and military deployment on transport routes to deter gangs from assaulting passengers and 17 July instructed defence ministry to recruit up to 3,000 new soldiers to implement measures. Amid concerns over extraordinary measures adopted in jails, govt 2 July accepted Inter-American Commission on Human Rights’ request to visit country. Regional focus on migration continued; Bukele 21 July met with U.S. Sec State Pompeo in El Salvador, signing agreement to combat drug trafficking, gangs and illegal migration.

**Nicaragua**

**JULY 2019**

Govt continued to alternate between adopting conciliatory measures and repressing opposition. Following June amnesty law for crimes related to 2018 uprisings, govt 4 July dismissed cases against 307 political prisoners, though lawyers warned judges could reopen them in future; govt continued to insist all political prisoners were freed despite opposition Civic Alliance’s late-June distribution of list of 91 govt opponents allegedly still jailed. Alliance 5, 11 and 17 July reiterated availability to resume third round of talks with govt, however govt did not reply to offers. Govt crackdown on opposition, including church members, continued. Permanent Commission on Human Rights 15 July said it was receiving multiple reports each day of unlawful detentions; same day, police encircled commission’s headquarters. Police 17 July broke into house of civilian in León during police operation, shooting him dead and wounding two others; police alleged officers fired in self-defence but other accounts disputed this, with NGO Amnesty International and Organization of American States Sec Gen Almagro condemning killing and urging accountability. Bishop Álvarez said civilians 18 July helped thwart group of armed men who attempted to stop and harass convoy he was travelling in, in Terrabona, Matagalpa department. Students 25 July marched in Managua and elsewhere to commemorate National Student Day; police, who had not authorised marches, repressed demonstrations, leaving at least two injured and fourteen temporarily detained. International pressure on govt remained high, though govt allies reiterated support; UN deputy human rights chief 10 July urged govt to engage in dialogue, while U.S. VP Pence 18 July condemned President Ortega for alleged crackdown on dissent and harassment of church. Russian President Putin 19 July reassured Ortega of Russian support in letter on 40th anniversary of Sandinista revolution.

**Haiti**

**JULY 2019**

Govt faced civil unrest and demands for President Moïse to resign. Unrest continued amid anger over corruption allegations linking Moïse to embezzlement of PetroCaribe (alliance giving Caribbean states access to cheap Venezuelan oil) funds; police and demonstrators clashed in capital Port-au-Prince following 6 July funeral of radio journalist killed in June, protesters setting up roadblocks and setting fire to vehicles and police firing tear gas. As opposition senators blocked ratification of PM Lapin and his cabinet, some in opposition proposed election of new PM, while others reaffirmed they will block any ratification process until Moïse resigns; Moïse 22 July named Fritz-William Michel as new PM, third in 2019. Gang-related violence continued; shootout between rival gangs in Port-au-Prince 6-7 July killed two, while 10 July clashes between different factions in capital’s La Saline neighbourhood killed at least four people. Police 22 July captured high-profile gang leader Amel Joseph as he sought medical attention in Les Cayes.

**Mexico**

**JULY 2019**
Amid high levels of violence, govt continued deployment of National Guard (NG), controversial main instrument of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO)’s security plan. Rights groups remained concerned NG will further militarise public security with initial 70,000 officers coming from army and navy; members of Federal Police due to join NG protested against alleged labour rights abuses in transitioning to force, with group of officers 3-4 July blocking major road in capital Mexico City. Planned training for NG in human rights, agreed in April with UN human rights office, yet to take place despite deployment of forces; Guerrero and State of Mexico (south) authorities 16 July arrested three soldiers on charges of kidnapping, saying soldiers belonged to NG; AMLO said they had “not yet” been incorporated into force. Record levels of violence continued with authorities reporting 17,065 homicides Jan-June 2019, up from 16,585 same period in 2018. Armed group violence remained high with groups clashing with newly deployed NG units. On day of NG deployment to Tabasco (south), criminal group 1 July set vehicles on fire to block roads; Jalisco Cartel New Generation clashed with NG in shootout on border of Guanajuato and Michoacán states (centre) 8 July, injuring one member of NG. Amid focus on regional migration, U.S. President Trump announced negotiations on “Safe Third Country” agreement – which would require Central American migrants to seek asylum in Mexico, rather than continuing north to U.S. – would begin 22 July; FM Ebrard said govt will not enter negotiations “without express authorisation of Congress”. Finance Minister Carlos Urzúa 9 July resigned, saying conflicts of interest existed within AMLO administration and accusing senior govt members of nepotism.

Middle East & North Africa
Israel/Palestine
JULY 2019
Low-level violence continued between Israeli forces and Palestinians along Israel-Gaza fence. Palestinians in Gaza continued to protest each Friday near fence that separates Gaza strip from Israel. Israeli gunfire left hundreds of protesters injured and incendiary balloons from Gaza started fires in nearby Israeli communities. Israeli security forces 11 July shot and killed Hamas member who tried to stop Palestinian youths approaching Gaza-Israel fence, Israel claimed incident was case of mistaken identity. Hamas same day responded by firing two rockets into southern Israel, which caused no injuries. Egyptian delegation same day met Hamas leadership in Gaza to discuss measures to prevent escalation of violence and consolidate ceasefire; Egyptians also discussed ways to repair relations between Hamas and Fatah. In West Bank, Palestinian Authority (PA) 1 July said it would pay its employees 60% of their June salaries; PM Shtayyeh next day announced PA had received first instalment of Qatari loan pledged in May. UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) 29 July announced $50mn contribution from United Arab Emirates. Israeli security forces 22 July demolished dozens of Palestinian homes in neighbourhood under PA control in south east Jerusalem prompting PA President Abbas 25 July to declare that PA had suspended all agreements with Israel and assigned committee to recommend course of action. Israeli security forces 30 July defused bomb near Joseph’s Tomb, religious site in Nablus in West Bank and clashed with Palestinians there, at least four Palestinians injured, fifteen arrested. Israel 31 July approved construction of some 7,000 houses for Israelis and 700 houses for Palestinians in West Bank. In Iraq, Israel 19 July struck Iraqi army base where Iranian security forces suspected to be present, reportedly killing one Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander, and another army base 28 July. In southern Syria, Israel 24 July reportedly carried out airstrikes close to Golan Heights targeting Syrian govt positions which left six Iranians and three Syrians dead.

Jordan
JULY 2019
Govt 16 July restored diplomatic ties with Qatar, two years after breaking them off over Gulf crisis.

Lebanon
JULY 2019
Disagreement in cabinet over which judicial body should handle case of deadly shooting in June paralysed govt, and hundreds protested against austerity budget. Shooting at convoy of refugee affairs minister near capital Beirut late June that killed two of his assistants paralysed govt because cabinet was divided on which judicial body should prosecute case; several mediation attempts failed. Civil servants 17 July went on strike nationwide and hundreds gathered in Beirut to protest austerity measures. Army veterans 18 July clashed with security forces outside parliament where legislators were discussing 2019 budget.
Veterans next day again clashed with security forces and parliament ratified budget. Protesters vowed to challenge budget in court. As U.S.-Iran tensions continued to rise, U.S. imposed additional sanctions on Hizbollah: 9 July added two Hizbollah MPs and one security official to sanctions list; 19 July imposed sanctions on Hizbollah security official.

Syria

JULY 2019

Pro-govt forces continued offensive against rebel-held areas of Idlib province in north west causing significant civilian suffering but failed to take new ground, and in west Israeli air raids hit Iranian targets. In north west, jihadist coalition He‘itat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) 11 July took al-Hamamiyyat town in northern Hama province, but pro-govt forces same day repelled rebels’ advance, and 28 July recaptured Jubain and Tal Malah. Hizbollah fighters from Lebanon 11 July reportedly joined pro-govt offensive in north west for first time, despite group’s leader Hassan Nasrallah same day announcing that it was reducing its presence in Syria. Pro-govt and Russian offensive reportedly caused at least 662 civilian deaths and damaged 37 medical facilities since late April, including hospitals known to Russia through UN’s de-confliction mechanisms. Russian and gov airstrikes 16-26 July killed at least 100 civilians in Maarat al-Numan, Khan Shaykhun and Ariha, in idlib province; NGO Save the Children 24 July reported 33 children killed 24 June-24 July. In Turkish-controlled Afrin, Aleppo province, suspected fighters of Kurdish People’s Protection Units 11 July killed five combatants and eight civilians in car bomb attack, including three children. Media outlet Foreign Policy 9 July reported that UK and France had agreed to increase their military presence in north east by 10% and 15% respectively to compensate for ongoing U.S. drawdown. In Deir al-Zour province in east, U.S. and French special representatives to Syria 10 July met Arab council to discuss governance and devolving authority from Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces to local Arab leaders. U.S. special envoy James Jeffreys 23 July met Turkish officials to discuss creation of safe zone on Syria-Turkey border. Islamic State (ISIS) 11-12 July claimed bombings in al-Hasakah and Qamishli cities, with no deaths reported. In west, Israeli warplanes 30 June-1 July attacked govt and Iranian targets in Damascus and Homs, killing sixteen, including three children and ten Iranian and Hizbollah fighters.

• REPORT: Squaring the Circles in Syria’s North East

Bahrain

JULY 2019

Authorities 27 July executed three people for alleged crimes of terrorism. Rights groups said that two of convicted were Shiite activists who confessed under duress and had faced mass trial.

Iran

JULY 2019

Relations between Iran and its allies on one side and U.S. and its allies on other remained tense as maritime confrontations intensified and Iran breached limits of 2015 nuclear deal, raising risk of military clash in Aug. British navy 4 July detained tanker off Gibraltar suspected of trying to smuggle Iranian oil to Syria. In Strait of Hormuz, Iranian boats 10 July allegedly tried to impede British tanker before British warship warned them off, Iran denied responsibility; U.S. President Trump 19 July said U.S. had downed Iranian drone, Iran denied; Iran 18 July claimed to have seized Panamanian tanker; Iranian security forces 19 July seized British-flagged tanker and temporarily detained another British-owned tanker. U.S. 19 July said it was developing multinational maritime security framework for Middle Eastern waterways. UK 23 July unveiled plan for separate European-led maritime security coalition to defend shipping in Middle East. Iran 24 July test-launched medium-range missile. United Arab Emirates officials attended 6th Iran-UAE meeting on maritime affairs in Tehran 30 July, first such meeting since 2013. Iran’s stockpile of low enriched uranium exceeded nuclear deal’s limit 1 July. Iran 7 July said it had raised uranium enrichment beyond limit and set 6 Sept as new deadline for deal’s parties to protect it from U.S. sanctions, threatening further violations. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini 15 July said infringements would not push P4+1 (UK, France, Russia, China and Germany) to activate dispute resolution mechanism for non-compliance, which could lead to re-imposition of sanctions. U.S. 18 July sanctioned individuals and firms it said were involved in acquiring materials for Iran’s nuclear program; 31 July sanctioned PM Zarif and announced extension of sanction waivers allowing countries to continue civil nuclear projects with Iran for 90 days. Suspected Kurdish
militants 9 July killed three soldiers in Piranshahr in north west near Iraq. In south east near Pakistan border, clashes between Iranian border guards and unidentified gunmen 21 July left two guards dead.

- **BRIEFING NOTE**: Iran Briefing Note #6

Iraq

**JULY 2019**

Amid continued U.S.-Iran tensions, PM Mahdi issued decree placing Iran-backed militias under his command and ordering their integration into formal security framework, and security forces intensified operations against Islamic State (ISIS). Mahdi 1 July issued decree legalising Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Unit (PMU) militias, granting him authority to appoint PMU head, forcing them to sever ties with political groups and integrating them into conventional security forces; Shiite cleric and political leader Moqtada al-Sadr and Hikma opposition bloc 2 July commended move. U.S. Treasury 18 July sanctioned four Iraqis, including two PMU commanders, for corruption and human rights abuses. Drone 19 July dropped grenade on base in Salah al-Din province, where Iranian Revolutionary Guard commanders were present; attack unclaimed, Pentagon denied responsibility. Security forces upped operations against ISIS. Security forces 8 July killed three ISIS militants, following launch of operation in Mosul, Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces; U.S. military 15 July confirmed it had carried out airstrikes in support of Iraqi forces. In capital Baghdad, double suicide bombings claimed by ISIS same day killed at least five civilians. In Sinjar mountains, PMUs 24 July clashed with ISIS militants, killing five. Suspected ISIS attacks 31 July killed seven members of security forces in Dujail, Salah al-Din province, and Kalar, Suleimaniya province. Govt 9 July said it had signed agreement with Iraqi Kurdistan regional govt for security cooperation in Nineveh, Salah al-Din, Diwla and Kirkuk provinces. In Iraqi Kurdistan’s capital Erbil, unidentified gunmen 17 July killed two, including Turkish diplomat; Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) denied involvement. Turkey continued air and land attacks against PKK targets in north, killing fourteen 20 June-20 July. Israeli warplanes attacked Iraqi army bases in Amerli, Salah al-Din province and in Ashraf, north east of Baghdad 19 and 28 July, both suspected of housing Iranian advisors and missiles, one Iranian Revolutionary Guard commander reported killed.

Kuwait

**JULY 2019**

Govt 12 July said it had arrested Muslim Brotherhood “terrorist cell” from Egypt and 14 July deported to Cairo several suspects with convictions in Egypt; govt promised to “crack down ruthlessly against saboteurs”.

Qatar

**JULY 2019**

Emir al-Thani 9 July met U.S. President Trump in Washington and offered to help ease U.S.-Iran tensions. Govt 7-9 July hosted in Doha talks between Taliban and U.S., and between Taliban and Afghan govt (see Afghanistan).

Saudi Arabia

**JULY 2019**

Govt maintained hard line against Yemen’s Huthi rebels, whom it considers Iranian proxies, and encouraged Sudanese military and opposition to engage in talks aimed at political transition. Yemen’s Huthi movement continued attacks into southern Saudi Arabia, but govt reported no casualties or major damage. Saudi-led coalition fighting Huthis in Yemen 8 July accused Huthis of “strong” ties to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula. Same day, govt said Huthi-operated “booby-trapped boat” sought to damage commercial ship in Red Sea, but no other sources confirmed reporting. Following visit to capital Riyadh by U.S. Envoy to Sudan Donald Booth late June, govt and United Arab Emirates (UAE) early July encouraged leaders of Sudan’s Transitional Military Council and protest movement to engage in talks mediated by African Union and Ethiopia; Saudi and Emirati leaders expressed optimism about 17 July agreement between parties (see Sudan). U.S. Congress 17 July passed three resolutions aimed at blocking U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE without congressional approval. U.S. President Trump 25 July vetoed all three resolutions saying they would “weaken America’s global competitiveness”; senators voting to override presidential veto 30 July numbered less than necessary two-thirds majority.
Yemen

JULY 2019

Huthi forces kept up cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia and fighting continued on Red Sea coast and between anti-Huthi groups in south, as United Arab Emirates (UAE) continued to withdraw forces from Red Sea coast. UAE 22 July publicly acknowledged its military drawdown from all its operations in Yemen, but appeared to retain lead for liaison with and advice to Yemeni forces on Red Sea coast. UAE FM Gargash 22 July reiterated commitment to political process, described drawdown as “confidence-building measure”, and said UAE and coalition “not leaving Yemen”. Main Yemeni forces – Giants Brigade, Guards of the Republic and Tihama Resistance – 2 July announced formation of command cell for “Joint Resistance Forces”. Huthis continued cross-border attacks into Saudi territory and reportedly stepped up attacks on towns south of Hodeida. Huthis and Saudi-led coalition held each other responsible for attack on market in Saada province in north 29 July that killed at least ten civilians, including children. UAE-backed forces continued to clash repeatedly with Hadi govt-affiliated units, particularly in al-Dhale and Taiz governorates. Hadi govt’s Economic Committee 25 June announced restoration of govt monopoly over fuel imports and distribution, angering Yemeni businessmen working in govt-controlled territory; Huthis early July claimed move was attempt to cut off fuel supplies in areas they control.

• REPORT: Saving the Stockholm Agreement and Averting a Regional Conflagration in Yemen

United Arab Emirates

JULY 2019

Govt made public its military drawdown in Yemen and encouraged talks aimed at political transition in Sudan. Govt 22 July publicly acknowledged its military drawdown in Yemen, which it started in April. FM Gargash 22 July reiterated govt’s commitment to political process, described drawdown as “confidence-building measure”, and said UAE and Saudi-led coalition “not leaving Yemen”. By end July, military had reportedly withdrawn 50-75% of its troops, but aimed to retain lead in liaison with and advice to Yemeni forces on Red Sea coast. Following late June visit to capital Abu Dhabi by U.S. Envoy to Sudan Donald Booth, govt and Saudi Arabia early July encouraged leaders of Sudan’s Transitional Military Council and protest movement to engage in talks mediated by African Union and Ethiopia; Emirati and Saudi leaders expressed optimism about 17 July agreement between parties (see Sudan). Rocket carrying UAE surveillance satellite 10 July launched in French Guiana via European Space Agency (ESA) but crashed minutes after take-off, prompting ESA to announce investigation. U.S. Congress 17 July passed resolutions aimed at blocking U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia and UAE without congressional approval. UAE and Iranian officials held 6th joint meeting on maritime affairs 30 July in Iranian capital Tehran, first such meeting since 2013.

Algeria

JULY 2019

Weekly nationwide protests demanding regime change continued, and rival political camps emerged with competing visions for the way ahead. Hundreds of thousands continued to gather every Friday in major cities, demanding resignation of interim President Ben Salah, army chief of staff Gaïd Salah and PM Bedoui. Ben Salah’s 90-day term ended 9 July, but he remained in post due to indefinite postponement of presidential elections. In concession to protesters, Ben Salah 3 July called for inclusive political dialogue and creation of new independent electoral commission. Mainly nationalist and Islamist opposition parties and activists in umbrella group Forces for Change took part in what they called National Dialogue Forum in Ain Benian, in capital Algiers 6 July; participants drafted common plan including creation of independent committees to manage national dialogue and organise elections. 70 associations close to ruling parties, National Liberation Front (FLN) and allied National Rally for Democracy (RND), 17 July met in what they called Civilian Forum for Change and advocated govt’s departure and moving quickly to presidential polls. In leftists and more radical group, Force for Democratic Alternative, refused to attend Ain Benian meeting and called Civilian Forum for Change “a scam”. It convened 21 July in Algiers and underscored its preconditions for opening dialogue including govt’s immediate resignation, new constituent assembly and rejection of elections in short term. Ben Salah 25 July said authorities would release arrested protesters and announced appointment of six mediators to conduct dialogue between authorities and various opposition
groups, aiming to establish roadmap to elections; Gaïd Salah 30 July rejected appeasement measures. Ben Salah 31 July fired Justice Minister Brahmi and appointed Algiers prosecutor Zeghmati, without stating reason. Authorities continued corruption probes into officials close to former President Bouteflika: 7 July arrested FLN’s former secretary general and senator Ould Abbès for misuse of public funds.

Egypt
JULY 2019
President Sisi consolidated executive’s power over judicial branch, Islamic State (ISIS) continued attacks in Sinai, and authorities kept up repression of civil society. Following April constitutional referendum that consolidated govt’s power, Sisi 11 July nominated new head of Constitutional Court, asserting greater control over judiciary. In North Sinai province, militants 17 July beheaded four civilians in town of Bir al-Abd and ISIS claimed responsibility saying victims were informers; murders prompted security forces to undertake series of raids. Suicide bomber 18 July killed civilian and soldier in town of Sheikh Zuweid. Sisi 22 July renewed national state of emergency for three more months. Govt maintained repression of civil society and opposition: authorities 11 July arrested supporter of former President Mubarak for social media posts criticising current executive. Kuwait authorities 14 July deported eight Egyptians due to links with Muslim Brotherhood. Parliament 15 July approved new NGO law to relax restrictive provisions in 2017 legislation, rights groups dismissed changes as “merely cosmetic”.

Libya
JULY 2019
Hostilities spread to new areas: fighting between Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA) and forces nominally loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) continued in and around capital Tripoli, GNA carried out airstrikes in Jufra and Waddan in centre, and LNA in Misrata east of Tripoli. Parties continued to receive military support from allies (GNA from Turkey, LNA from United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt), while diplomacy to stop war remained paralysed. Fighting in and around Tripoli led to no substantial change in territorial control. Suspected LNA airstrikes on Tajura migrant detention centre near Tripoli 2 July killed at least 50 migrants, prompting international outrage; LNA denied responsibility, claimed it targeted weapons depot. GNA 20-21 July carried out airstrikes on LNA-held Tripoli airport and Wadi Rabea, reportedly killing thirteen LNA. LNA 22 July launched large-scale assault on several fronts to capture Tripoli, which GNA forces repelled, capturing eleven LNA. Suspected LNA airstrikes 27 July targeted Zawiya hospital killing five medics. For first time since April outbreak, GNA drones 25 July attacked LNA in Jufra and Waddan in centre, destroying LNA assets. LNA 26 July struck Misrata airport some 200km east of Tripoli, from where GNA drones took off, no damage reported. Instability increased in east. In Benghazi, unclaimed car bombs 11 July killed two soldiers and two civilians; LNA blamed GNA supporters. Five bodies recovered in Benghazi 18 July. Cairo 14-16 July hosted some 70 members of Tobruk-based parliament House of Representatives (HoR) in bid to revive body’s legitimacy; Tripoli-based parliamentarians boycotted meeting, but participants reaffirmed HoR authority to appoint unity govt. U.S., UK, France, UAE, Egypt and Italy 16 July called for halt to conflict. UN envoy 29 July called for truce on Eid al-Adha holiday around 10 Aug accompanied by confidence-building measures, followed by summit of “concerned countries” to cement arms embargo, and then by national conference.

• COMMENTARY: Avoiding a Protracted Conflict in Libya

Mauritania
JULY 2019
Constitutional Council 1 July rejected opposition petition against 22 June presidential election results and confirmed ruling majority’s candidate Mohamed Ould Ghazouani as president. Police next day released unknown number of activists and opposition members it had arrested late June during protests against election outcome. Govt 3 July restored internet access after imposing blackout late June. Police 3 July arrested journalist Ahmedou Ould al-Wadea for unknown reasons, released him 15 July.

Morocco
JULY 2019
On occasion of twenty year anniversary of his rule, King Mohammed VI 29 July urged cabinet reshuffle, said he would pardon 4,764 prisoners, including eight activists of Hirak protest movement that formed in
recorded human history and global food crises. Following “severe health crisis” in June, Essebsi was discharged from hospital 1 July in “normal health”, but readmitted 24 July and died next day, aged 92, of repetitive faintness. Same day Parliament Speaker Mohamed Ennaceur sworn in as interim president, to hold post for no longer than 90 days; first round of presidential election planned for 15 Sept. Legislative elections to be held 6 Oct. Essebsi 20 July had refused to ratify electoral law amendments that parliament passed in June that would have imposed tougher eligibility criteria for presidential candidates and which would have barred presidential front-runner businessman Nabil Karoui. Prosecutor 9 July charged Karoui with money laundering, and imposed on him asset freeze and travel ban. Govt 4 July said death toll from 27 June attacks in capital Tunis claimed by Islamic State (ISIS) had risen to two. Police in Tunis 2 July surrounded Islamist militant and alleged mastermind of June attacks, who detonated his suicide vest, killing himself but no others. Citing security concerns, PM Chahed 5 July banned women from wearing full face veil in public institutions. ISIS 17 July released video allegedly filmed in Tunisia calling for militants to carry out attacks.

Western Sahara
JULY 2019

Moroccan security forces 19 July intervened to disperse residents in Laayoune celebrating Algeria’s victory in football tournament, killing one civilian; Polisario Front independence movement called January announcement of nuclear winter in the case of an all-out nuclear war between India and Pakistan, for example, could cause climate change unprecedented in recorded human history and global food crises,” said Robock.

The study used the smoke from the wildfires as a model, but the scale of smoke in the atmosphere from an all out nuclear war would be orders of magnitude greater.
The smoke cloud contained only about 0.3 million tons of soot, while a nuclear war between India and Pakistan could produce 15 million tons and a U.S. vs. Russia war could generate 150 million tons. Still, the scientists validated their previous theories and the climate model they’re using for ongoing research on nuclear war impacts by studying the wildfire, according to Robock.

On Monday, Common Dreams reported on two potential crises going on right now that could result in nuclear conflagration: the dismantling of the 32-year-old Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty between Russia and the U.S. and rising tensions between India and Pakistan—and, reportedly, China, another nuclear-armed state—over the territory of Kashmir.

Referring to the destruction of the INF treaty, Kate Hudson, general secretary of the U.K.-based Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, said that it did not bode well for peace.

"It’s a game of nuclear tit for tat," said Hudson, "in which there can be no winners as the threat of nuclear war rises.

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[In the case of a nuclear war, sufficiently large and intense conventional war, or sufficiently large sending up a great deal of smoke, and or a great enough event sending up sufficient dust high in the atmosphere (as in a super volcanic eruption), the result would be climate change in the opposite direction of global warming: rapid cooling. Thus a nuclear war with 200 hydrogen bomb explosions would quickly bring on a nuclear winter of several years with temperatures falling below freezing around much of the Earth, destroying almost all agriculture for a number of years. A smaller nuclear exchange would have less far reaching impacts on climate, but the Canadian fires indicate the impact would still be terrible world wide. With larger conventional weapons now available, even a fairly large scale conventional war could create a climate disaster. It may well be that the large scale bombing and other actions in Europe in World War II contributed significantly for the winters at the end of the war being unusually cold.]

Steven Erlanger. "Are We Headed for Another Expensive Nuclear Arms Race? Could Be," The New York Times, August 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/world/europe/arms-race-russia-china.html, reported, "After the recent death of the treaty covering intermediate-range missiles, a new arms race may be on the way, drawing in more players, more money and more weapons at a time of increased global instability and anxiety about nuclear proliferation."

The refugee situation, with a great many attempting to reach Europe from the Middle East and Africa, and conflict between welcomers and rescuers with governments and people resisting the refugees, in July 2019 remained a troubling and dangerous issue. For example, "More Than 80 Migrants Drowned Off Tunisia Coast," The New York Times, July 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/world/africa/libya-migrants-europe-deaths.html, reported, "Dozens of African migrants are feared to have drowned after their boat capsized off the coast of Tunisia after setting of for Europe from Libya, a government source and the Tunisian Red Crescent said on Thursday."

Nick Cumming-Bruce, "Number of People Fleeing Conflict Is Highest Since World War II, U.N. Says," The New York Times, June 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/world/refugees-record-un.html, reported, "The number of people fleeing violence is the highest recorded since World War II, according to figures released Wednesday by the United Nations refugee agency, as old conflicts dragged on and new ones erupted.

The global population of people displaced by conflict reached 70.8 million last year, up from a little over 43 million a decade ago, the report said. Around 80 percent of the world’s refugees have been living in exile for five years, and around one-fifth of them for 20 years, it noted, underscoring the intractable nature of the situation."

"About 150 migrants seeking to reach Europe drowned in a shipwreck off the coast of Libya on Thursday, according to the United Nations, which called it the largest single loss of life in the Mediterranean so far this year."

Nick Cumming-Bruce, "ISIS, Eyeing Europe, Could Launch Attacks This Year, U.N. Warns," The New York Times, August 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/world/middleeast/islamic-state-attacks-europe.html, reported, "Less than five months after the military defeat of the Islamic State in Syria, a United Nations report is warning that the group’s leaders could launch international terrorist attacks before the end of the year, including those intended to ‘exacerbate existing dissent and unrest’ in European nations.

In a bleak assessment of the global spread of jihadist movements, a report by United Nations analysts on the Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee said that Islamic State leaders, despite their military defeat in Syria and Iraq, are ‘adapting, consolidating and creating conditions for an eventual resurgence’ in those countries."


"Guns like Briana reside at the epicenter of the crisis. Worldwide, 32 percent of homicides are committed with firearms, according to the Igarapé Institute, a research group. In Jamaica, the figure is higher than 80 percent. And most of those guns come from the United States, amassed by exploiting loose American gun laws that facilitate the carnage."

"It is just one of the hundreds of thousands of guns that leak out of the United States and overwhelm countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. More than 100,000 people are killed every year across the region — most of them by firearms."

Anemona Hartocollis, Congo Warlord Called ‘the Terminator’ Is Convicted of War Crimes by I.C.C.," The New York Times, July 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/08/world/africa/bosco-ntaganda-the-terminator-war-crimes.html, reported, "His army conscripted children and outfitted them with ill-fitting uniforms and AK-47s. Female fighters, some underaged, were made sex slaves. He personally shot and killed an elderly Catholic priest, and was responsible for the massacre of a village, not sparing women or babies.

A Congolese warlord known as "the Terminator" carried out those and other atrocities in a reign of terror against civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, which convicted him on Monday of 13 counts of war crimes and five counts of crimes against humanity, committed in the 2002-2003 ethnic conflict between Lendu and Hema in Congo’s Ituri region."

Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan

The dangerous standoff between the U.S. and Iran calls to mind the question of what happens when an irresistible force meets an immoveable object. The force is the Trump administration’s ‘maximum pressure’ campaign, which seems willing to stop at nothing – whether it be sanctioning Iran’s senior political and military leadership or forcing the country’s oil exports down to zero – to bring Tehran to its knees. The object is Iran’s resolve not to yield but to resist – whether by restarting its nuclear program or targeting the U.S. and its regional allies. The increasingly likely result is a military confrontation, a scenario of which Crisis Group has warned ever since the Trump administration pulled out of the Iran nuclear accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in May 2018.

The contours of a future conflict are already apparent. Iran has warned that it will gradually accelerate its breaches of the nuclear agreement if unilateral U.S. sanctions continue to deny it the economic dividends promised by the deal and instead drive the Iranian economy into the ground. Should Tehran act on its threat, the accord will unravel, triggering broader international sanctions and raising the possibility of U.S. and/or Israeli military strikes against a nuclear program that is currently contained. The more immediate risk, underscored by a spate of limited military incidents since early May, is that the standoff will draw regional actors, aligned with either side, into an escalatory spiral.

The best hope for lessening tensions may well lie in third-party mediation. President Emmanuel Macron of France seemed to seize the moment in July when he sent a senior emissary to Tehran and engaged his Iranian and U.S. counterparts personally in an effort to persuade both sides to pull back from the brink. Successful mediation would be no mean feat, given the two adversaries’ accumulated hostility and what, for now, appear to be incompatible objectives: Tehran, deeming surrender to maximum pressure more dangerous than suffering from sanctions, seeks a loosening of restrictions on its oil exports and repatriation of revenues in return for making symbolic adjustments to the nuclear deal and showing
restraint in the region. For its part, Washington remains loath to loosen the noose of sanctions it believes are working absent significant concessions from Iran on its nuclear, missile and regional policies.

A possible first step toward de-escalation might be a mutual defusing of tensions. The U.S. would agree to partially reinstate its sanctions waivers regarding Iranian oil exports (which have caused Tehran the most damage) and in return Tehran would resume full compliance with the nuclear agreement and refrain from endangering shipping in the Gulf. Negotiators could also make progress toward the release of at least some of the dual nationals Iran has imprisoned on dubious charges. In other words, the parties could revert to an enhanced version of the pre-May 2019 status quo, with a commitment to resume broader negotiations in a format to be determined. Such a freeze would not bring peace and stability to the Middle East, but it could at least prevent one scenario the world now faces: an all-out war triggered by a lighted match tossed carelessly onto the region’s accumulated tinder.1

Vivian Yee, Yonette Joseph and Iliana Magra, "Iran Says It Has Seized Another Oil Tanker in Persian Gulf," The New York Times, August 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/world/middleeast/iran-oil-tanker-persian-gulf.html, reported, "Iran seized a foreign oil tanker [from Iraq] in the Persian Gulf, state television reported on Sunday, the third time Tehran has reported detaining a tanker in the last month as the United States applies its campaign of 'maximum pressure,' sanctions and diplomatic isolation against the country."

Benjamin Mueller, "U.K. Joins U.S.-Led Effort to Protect Ships in Strait of Hormuz," The New York Times, August 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/world/middleeast/britain-iran-strait-of-hormuz.html, reported, "Britain on Monday joined an American-led mission to protect ships traveling through the Strait of Hormuz from Iranian threats, signaling a greater openness to working with the United States to shore up maritime security in the region and acknowledging that its efforts to create a European-led task force have proved difficult."

David E. Sanger and Michael Crowley, "Trump Administration Imposes Sanctions on Iran's Top Diplomat: Officials described the foreign minister of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, who worked closely with the Obama administration, as being part of a "propaganda arm," The New York Times, July 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/31/world/middleeast/trump-iran-sanctions-zarif.html, reported, "The Trump administration took the unusual step on Wednesday of placing sanctions on Iran's foreign minister, essentially cutting off the clearest avenue for talks with Iran by punishing the man who negotiated the 2015 nuclear agreement."

Previously"

David D. Kirkpatrick and David E. Sanger, "Iran Announces New Breach of Nuclear Deal Limits and Threatens Further Violations," The New York Times, July 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/07/world/middleeast/iran-nuclear-limits-breach.html, reported. "Iran said on Sunday that within hours it would breach the limits on uranium enrichment set four years ago in an accord with the United States and other international powers that was designed to keep Tehran from producing a nuclear weapon.

The latest move inches Iran closer to where it was before the accord: on the path to being able to produce an atomic bomb.2

"In recent weeks, Tehran has retaliated by making deliberate but provocative violations of the accord as part of a carefully calibrated campaign to pressure the West into eliminating sanctions that have slashed the country's oil exports and crippled its economy." [Since the U.S. pulled out of the agreement, however unhappy the administration may be with the result, its members cannot call Iran's actions "violations"].

Previously,

restrict its nuclear program and signaled that it would soon breach another as it seeks more leverage in its escalating confrontation with the United States.

International inspectors confirmed that Iran had exceeded a critical limit on how much nuclear fuel it can possess under the agreement, which President Trump abandoned more than a year ago. By itself, the move does not give Iran enough material to produce a single nuclear weapon, though it inches it in that direction."

Michael D. Shear, Eric Schmitt, Michael Crowley and Maggie Haberman, "Strikes on Iran Approved by Trump, Then Abruptly Pulled Back," The New York Times, June 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/20/world/middleeast/iran-us-drone.html, reported, "President Trump approved military strikes against Iran in retaliation for downing an American surveillance drone, but pulled back from launching them on Thursday night after a day of escalating tensions."

Julian E. Barnes and Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. Carried Out Cyberattacks on Iran," The New York Times, June 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/22/us/politics/us-iran-cyber-attacks.html, reported, "United States Cyber Command on Thursday conducted online attacks against an Iranian intelligence group that American officials believe helped plan the attacks against oil tankers in recent weeks, according to people briefed on the operation." (But whether there was any Iranian involvement in the attacks remained unknown).

"Iranian tanker will be released if oil isn't going to Syria, says Hunt," BBC News, July 14, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/48977093, reported, "[British] Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt has said the Iranian tanker detained by Royal Marines near Gibraltar could be released, if the UK is guaranteed the oil is not bound for Syria.

The tanker, seized on 4 July, was suspected of breaking EU sanctions.

Iran claimed the seizure was "piracy". Iranian ships later tried to impede a British tanker, the UK claimed.

After 'constructive' talks with Tehran, Mr Hunt said he was encouraged Iran has no desire to escalate the situation.

David D. Kirkpatrick and Megan Specia, "Iran's Seizure of British Vessel Further Rolls Gulf Region," The New York Times, July 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/19/world/middleeast/iran-british-tanker-drone.html, reported, "Iran seized at least one British oil tanker in a vital Persian Gulf waterway on Friday, a sharp escalation of tensions with the West that revived fears of a military clash, even as voices on both sides appeared to be seeking room for negotiations.

The impoundment of the tanker by Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps naval patrols came a day after the United States said it had downed an Iranian drone menacing an American warship in the region.

But Iran's standoff with Britain, in particular, carries its own complications. Britain occupies a pivotal place in a bloc of European states that have tried to broker some resolution to a broader conflict between Tehran and Washington over the fate of a 2015 deal with the world powers designed to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon."


The roughly 500 troops are part of a broader tranche of forces sent to the region over the past two months after tensions between Washington and Tehran escalated."

Peter Baker and Aurelien Breeden, "Iranian Official Makes Surprise Appearance on Sidelines of G7 Summit," The New York Times, August 25, 2019, "He was not on the original invitation list, but when a plane landed in Biarritz on Sunday bringing Iran's foreign minister to the city hosting President Trump and other world leaders, it got everyone's attention."
The surprise guest, Mohammad Javad Zarif, flew to the resort town in southern France on a lastminute invitation from President Emmanuel Macron of France, the host of the annual Group of 7 summit meeting, who has been trying to reconcile the United States and Iran.

Minister Zarif reiterated that Iran would like to talk with the U.S. about settling the nuclear issue. He spoke with officials from several European nations.

**Earlier:**

After being extremely bellicose about Iran, Edward Wong, "Trump Administration Says It Will Negotiate With Iran With ‘No Preconditions,'" The New York Times, June 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/world/middleeast/us-iran-mike-pompeo.html, reported, "In a second major softening of American policy toward Iran in recent days, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said Sunday that the Trump administration was ready to negotiate with the country’s clerical leaders with ‘no preconditions.'"

Edward Wong and David E. Sanger, "Trump’s Twists on Confronting Iran Confound Allies in Europe," The New York Times, June 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/07/world/middleeast/trump-iran-europe.html, reported, "President Trump and his aides have sent a dizzying, seemingly conflicting set of messages to Iran in recent weeks, ordering more troops to the Middle East and a carrier to the Arabian Sea as military threats even while declaring that Washington is seeking new negotiations, not war.

European allies, still trying to save a 2015 deal to restrain Iran’s nuclear program that Mr. Trump abandoned a year ago, are trying to make sense of the administration’s strategy.

And the government in Tehran, humiliated by Mr. Trump’s hard-line policies, has all but frozen diplomacy with Washington.

However,


'SThis assessment is based on intelligence, the weapons used, the level of expertise needed to execute the operation, recent similar Iranian attacks on shipping, and the fact that no proxy group operating in the area has the resources and proficiency to act with such a high-degree of sophistication,' said Pompeo, who did not provide any details on the intelligence he cited.

After asserting Iran was also behind a litany of attacks prior to Thursday’s tanker incident—one again without presenting any evidence—Pompeo said that, 'Taken as a whole, these unprovoked attacks present a clear threat to international peace and security.'

Pompeo—who has a long history of making false claims about Iran—did not take any questions from reporters following his remarks, which were aired live on America’s major television networks.

'Mike Pompeo has zero credibility when it comes to Iran,' Jon Rainwater, executive director of Peace Action, told Common Dreams. 'He’s long been actively campaigning for a confrontation with Iran. He
has a track record of pushing bogus theories with no evidence such as the idea that Iran collaborates closely with al-Qaeda.’

‘Once again Pompeo is not waiting for the evidence to come in,’ Rainwater said, ‘he is picking facts to suit his campaign for confrontation with Iran.’

Medea Benjamin, co-founder of anti-war group CodePink, characterized Pompeo’s speech as a ‘deja vu’ of former Secretary of State Colin Powell’s infamous weapons of mass destruction speech before the U.N. in 2003, which made the case for the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq.

‘Secretary Pompeo gives zero proof but insists that Iran is responsible for ship attacks in Gulf of Oman this morning,’ Benjamin tweeted. ‘Lies, lies, and more lies to make a case for war. Let’s not be fooled into another disastrous war!’

In a column following Pompeo’s speech, Esquire’s Charles Pierce wrote that he is ‘not buying this in the least.’ ‘I remember the Iraq lies,’ Pierce wrote. ‘I know this administration is truthless from top to bottom and all the way out both sides. I don’t trust the Saudi government as far as I can throw a bone saw. And this president feels very much like he’s being run to ground at the moment and needs a distraction.’

‘And his Secretary of State is a third-rate congresscritter from Kansas who once advised American soldiers to disobey lawful orders, and who’s fighting way above his weight class,’ added Pierce. ‘Also, too, John Bolton is eight kinds of maniac.’

On Twitter, Trita Parsi—founder of the National Iranian American Council—echoed Pierce, writing: ‘A serial liar is president. A warmonger and a serial fabricator who helped get us into the disastrous Iraq war and who has sabotaged numerous attempts at diplomacy is the [national security] advisor.’

‘But go ahead, media, treat Pompeo’s accusations as ‘evidence’...’ Parsi added.

As Common Dreams reported earlier, critics warned that the timing and target of the tanker attacks on Thursday suggests they could have been a deliberate effort to ‘maneuver the U.S. into a war with Iran.

Iranian officials denied any responsibility for the attacks.

In a tweet following the explosions in the Gulf of Oman on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said, ‘Suspicious doesn’t begin to describe what likely transpired this morning.’

Rainwater of Peace Action said what is needed to calm the dangerous tensions of the current moment is an ‘impartial investigation’ into the tanker incident.

But Pompeo’s statement only served to escalate tensions further and move the U.S. and Iran closer to a military conflict, Rainwater said.

‘At a time when the world desperately needs cooler heads to deescalate tensions in the Gulf, the U.S. Secretary of State is instead fanning the flames,’ Rainwater said. ‘Our elected officials need to push for diplomacy now to take us away from the brink of war.’

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Florida Democrat, "Something fishy in the Gulf waters (Missile claims don't add up)," Daily Kos (Community contribution: This content is not subject to review by Daily Kos staff prior to publication.), Monday June 17, 2019, https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/6/17/1865298/-Something-fishy-in-the-Gulf-waters-Missile-claims-don-t-add-up, analyzed reports of various U.S. "official statements" made about the attacks on tankers in the gulf’s off Iran and found contradictions, and, in the case of one report, an impossibility. The details are at the above link.

In a different account of another difference in views of what happened, Mary Papenfuss, "Oil Tanker Owner Contradicts White House On Explosive In Mideast Ship Attack," HuffPost, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/oil-tanker-gulf-of-oman-iran-explosion-trump-administration_n_5d0415c3e4b0d17ef09f629?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly9kdWNR2HVja2dvLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAA0JpvdYoHoqTZru80F7IihLh75CwqG9kQj8W0r_sB9mvziz8YDLVtxrhI-J2Z-aj6OUCp5YWdzQjlopbpjqDOOouf1ehsylBcOCaGcxeGEluxGIXSTW2oT6YaXQZtZWD8P437JAPbJE_9mjej11Mvw_PSaJuST-Qh0QWfnhGClv, reported, "The U.S. says it was a limpet mine attached to the ship in the Gulf of Oman. The Japanese vessel’s owner says something flew toward the ship."
The company that owns one of the two oil tankers attacked Thursday near the Strait of Hormuz contradicted Trump administration (see: https://www.huffpost.com/news/topic/trump-administration) and U.S. military reports linking the incident to an Iranian sea mine.

U.S. Central Command said that the Norwegian-owned MT Front Altair and the Japanese Kokura Courageous were attacked Thursday by a limpet mine, which is attached to ships below the water line. The military released a video that officials claimed showed an Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps patrol boat removing an unexploded mine from the 560-foot Courageous.

But an official of the company that owns the Courageous said Friday that the vessel appeared to be struck in the Gulf of Oman by something that "flew towards the ship (at: https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/japanese-tanker-owner-contradict-us-officials-over-explosives-used-n1017556,' NBC reported."

Whether this is just confusion that sometimes occurs after events, or involves lying or fudging facts is not clear. It does point to the need for a careful independent investigation to find out what actually happened, and who did - and did not - do what. This is especially the case since fudging and outright lies have gotten the U.S. into military conflicts as far back as the Mexican War, when U.S. troops were ordered to attack Mexican forces occupying land claimed by both the U.S. and Mexico, but the official U.S. statement was that Mexican troops had attacked U.S. forces on U.S. soil. Certain U.S. newspapers turned the boiler explosion of the U.S. Maine in Havana Harbor into a bomb attack by the Spanish that led to the Spanish American War. The official explanation of the Gulf of Tonkin that the Johnson Administration used to escalate the Vietnam War grossly misstated the claim that North Vietnamese torpedo boats had fired on one of two U.S. destroyers patrolling in the Gulf of Tonkin. The facts were that in an area in which North Vietnamese torpedo boats had earlier been sighted, one of the U.S. destroyers on patrol, which shortly before had problems with its radar, had a radar citing that appeared like a torpedo being fired at it. The second destroyer, nearby, did not detect anything. We know now that President G.W. Bush’s claims that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction was simply not true, that there was no solid evidence to support the claim, and that the administration preempted a U.N. investigation to investigate the claim. This suggests that great care needs to be taken concerning the current, and any future claims, especially as key administrative officials have strong anti-Iran views, as does Saudi Arabia with whom the administration has significant connections.

Oil tankers have been avoiding sanctions in shipping oil from Iran by going off the reporting grid while in Iranian waters (Michael Forsythe and Ronen Bergman, "To Evade Sanctions on Iran, Ships Vanish in Plain Sight," The New York Times, July 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/02/world/middleeast/china-oil-iran-sanctions.html).


Iran's announcement on Monday that it expects within 10 days to blow past the limits on how much nuclear fuel it can stockpile opens a new and perilous phase of its confrontation with the West.

After a year of restraint, during which Iran complied with the terms of an agreement that Mr. Trump very publicly abandoned, there is a greater sense than at any time in recent years that what began as an effort to drive Iran to the negotiating table may instead push the two countries into a conflict leaders on both sides insist they do not want."

military confrontation, either direct or by proxy. It is urgent that cooler heads prevail – in European capitals as in Tehran and Washington – to head off the threat of a disastrous war.

For the past year, relations between the U.S. and Iran have brought to mind a slow-motion train wreck. Of late, the pace has dangerously accelerated, and tensions could soon lead to a catastrophic collision. A crash is not inevitable, but it could well occur – deliberately or as a product of miscalculation – unless both parties and outside actors take urgent steps to slow way down or switch to another track.

On 12 May, four oil tankers off the coast of Fujaira, a port in the United Arab Emirates on the Gulf of Oman, were hit by apparent sabotage. Two days later, drones attacked two oil pumping stations along the East-West pipeline in Saudi Arabia between the capital Riyadh and the port city of Yanbu. These two separate events may or may not be linked, may or may not involve Iran, and may or may not provoke a response. But, coming against a backdrop of significant escalation between Washington and Tehran, they represent ominous warning signs.

In the past few weeks, the Trump administration has doubled down on its efforts to strangle Iran’s economy. Not content with having unilaterally withdrawn from the 2015 nuclear deal, it is now pushing to reduce Iran’s oil exports to zero. It has designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organisation. It has also started to flex its military muscle by deploying warships, bomber jets and missile defence batteries to the Middle East to counter unspecified “Iranian threats”.

Tehran has not remained passive. It has labelled U.S. forces in the region as terrorists; downgraded its compliance with the nuclear deal, warning of further steps unless the deal’s remaining parties deliver tangible economic benefits; threatened to shut the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for the global oil and gas trade; and pledged to retaliate against any attack upon its assets or interests. Without offering proof, U.S. officials claim that Iran has also given licence to its regional proxies to target U.S. interests, suggesting that such an attack could occur in Iraq or one of the Gulf monarchies allied to Washington. In a worrying move, on 15 May it ordered the departure of non-essential U.S. personnel from Iraq.

All this ratcheting-up of tension was entirely predictable, and most of it is entirely provoked by the U.S. With Iran having increasingly less to lose as a result of U.S. sanctions, which are eating away at its already weak economy, it was virtually bound to become less risk-averse in the nuclear realm and more aggressive in the region. For months now, the more hardline elements of the Islamic Republic have been urging the leadership to impose a cost on the U.S. in order to deter it from stepping up sanctions and to show that, if the U.S. could hurt Iran, so too could Tehran wound Washington.

Click here to browse the Iran-U.S. Trigger List, our interactive map and early warning tool tracking flashpoints between the two countries.

Perhaps these actions are a prelude to negotiations: the U.S. is exerting “maximum pressure”, it says, to bring a more compliant Iran back to the table; in like manner, should Tehran conclude that it has no choice but to reach a new deal with Washington in order to relieve unsustainable economic strain, it will want to enter such talks with a stronger hand. Resuming its nuclear activities, making its presence felt in the region, and disrupting Saudi or Emirati oil exports could all be ways of enhancing its bargaining power. But if these manoeuvres are a diplomatic game, it is a dangerous one: either side could misinterpret the other’s intentions. Any Iranian move could easily lead to U.S. and/or Israeli strikes which, in turn, could lead to an Iranian counter-response. Or vice versa. Escalation comes easily; de-escalation is a much taller order, especially in the absence of direct channels of communication that can pre-empt misunderstandings or miscalculations.

In short, whether or not Tehran was directly or indirectly behind the recent attacks (the Huthis in Yemen claimed responsibility for the attacks in Saudi Arabia; the earlier offshore incident has gone unclaimed; Iran has denied any connection to the incidents and called for an investigation), and whether or not Washington is manufacturing accusations to justify a spike in military activity, all the ingredients for an escalation are present. Even assuming that neither side seeks war, growing friction at all the flashpoints between the two sides (see our Trigger List early-warning platform) mean that intentions may not suffice to prevent it. The consequences could be calamitous for states and peoples in the immediate region, but also for the international economy, given its high dependence on the free flow of oil from the Gulf.

It is not too late to avert this outcome. Key to de-escalation will be the ability of the remaining parties to the nuclear deal to give Iran an economic reprieve. In particular, Europe could shed its reluctance to indirectly import Iranian oil in partnership with Russia and China. If Russia swaps oil with Iran and China
continues to import Iranian crude, the transactions would generate credit that the parties could inject into Europe's special purpose financial vehicle (Instex), allowing Iran to engage in trade with these countries without access to the U.S.-dominated global financial system. These countries could also provide Iran with development aid to repair and renew its infrastructure. With Europe demonstrating willingness to go the extra mile, Iran should reciprocate by returning into full compliance with the nuclear deal. It also should exhibit restraint on the regional front and refrain from steps – direct or taken through partners – that could provoke its foes.

As for President Donald Trump, he faces a choice. Everything about his 2016 presidential campaign pointed in the direction of avoiding another costly and unnecessary military entanglement in the Middle East. So, too, does much about the vows he has made to his constituency since entering office. But everything about his administration’s policy toward Iran points in a strikingly different direction: toward war, by design or mistake. He says he wants the U.S. and Iran to talk. Yet he should know that the Islamic Republic will not start a dialogue if it feels it has a gun to its head; it will respond to perceived aggression in like manner, and that response could in turn engender an uncontrollable downward spiral. A back-channel dialogue eventually may be possible, but for that the U.S. ought to tone down its rhetoric and offer the Iranian leadership an off-ramp, for example by signalling its preparedness to put aside its maximalist demands and to find a mutually acceptable compromise.

President Trump might think that time is on his side, as sanctions continue to take their toll on the Iranian economy. But the wait-and-see period may have already reached the end of its natural life. A crisis that he may not want but that some of his advisers may not mind lies just around the corner. It is past time for cooler heads to prevail and for all to move decisively to take the trains off collision course."

ICG, Ali Vaez, Director of the Iran project at the International Crisis Group, "Trump's 'Maximum Pressure' Won't Make Iran Yield: The one thing Tehran would find more intolerable than the crushing impact of sanctions is raising the white flag because of them," The Atlantic, May 12, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/05/why-trumps-sanctions-iran-arent-working/589288/?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=22b9aac58c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-22b9aac58c-359871089, commented, "A magnificent fresco adorns the main pavilion of the royal palace in the Iranian city of Isfahan, depicting the 16th-century Battle of Chaldiran, fought between the Turkish-Ottoman and Persian-Safavid empires. The fresco appears to show the Persian army victorious, having crushed its Turkish adversary. The truth is that Chaldiran marked a decisive victory for the Ottomans, who went on to annex eastern Anatolia and northern Iraq. But what the self-serving historical distortion suggests is not shame of defeat but pride in the heroic valor with which the Iranians resisted a foe that outnumbered them and, unlike them, possessed heavy artillery. Donald Trump’s administration, which has made bringing Iranians to their knees the cornerstone of its Mideast policy half a millennium later, should draw a lesson from the battle and the way the Persians digested defeat.

It has been one year since President Trump reneged on the 2015 nuclear deal that rolled back Iran's nuclear activities and placed them under the most rigorous international inspection regime ever implemented anywhere. Then came one of the most draconian sanctions regimes ever imposed by Washington on any adversary. So far, the U.S. Treasury has blacklisted nearly 1,000 Iranian entities and individuals, targeting nearly all sectors of Iran's economy.

There can be little doubt that the administration's 'maximum pressure' policy is inflicting considerable economic harm on Iran. Economic growth that followed the lifting of sanctions in 2016 has given way to an inflationary recession. The Iranian currency has lost two-thirds of its value, as oil exports have dropped by more than half and will likely fall further still. Although food and medicine are exempt from sanctions, lack of access to the global financial system is giving rise to a humanitarian crisis. Some families have not been able to eat meat for months and are suffering from shortages of specialized medicine.

To date, however, there is no sign that either Iran's regional policies are shifting or its leaders are willing to come back to the negotiating table and submit to the Trump administration's demands. Nor is there any hint that economic hardship has triggered popular unrest of a magnitude that would threaten
the regime’s survival. In the absence of any visible shift in Tehran’s political calculus, Washington is presenting the sanctions’ impact by no metric other than their quantity and severity. There appears to be a belief among U.S. policy makers, almost congealed into doctrine, that Iran will cave to nothing less than massive pressure, a point it clearly has not reached. With U.S. elections at the end of next year, the administration is therefore responding to Iran’s refusal to concede defeat by doubling down, and it’s going about it in a hurry. It has resorted to the unprecedented steps of designating a state entity, Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a ‘foreign terrorist organization,’ and of trying to push Iran’s oil exports to zero almost overnight.

This policy is unlikely to succeed for three main reasons.

First and most important: The one thing Tehran would find more intolerable than the crushing impact of sanctions is raising the white flag because of them. Convinced that Trump’s national-security team is bent on toppling the Islamic Republic, the Iranian leadership views economic sanctions as just one in a range of measures designed to destabilize it. Its counterstrategy can be summed up in two words: Resist and survive. The mere act of survival would constitute victory, however pyrrhic.

Tehran believes it has history on its side. Neither besiegement nor prolonged economic suffering is new to Iran’s rulers or its people. They have previously witnessed nearly half of the country’s oil revenue evaporate during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, again during the Asian financial crisis in 1997, and a third time as a result of the European oil embargo and U.S. sanctions in 2012. They know how to get around sanctions and keep state and society afloat.

Second, Tehran feels compelled to prove to U.S. policy makers the bankruptcy of their belief that severe pressure can force Tehran to yield. Iran may have sued for compromise when it faced potential existential threats in the past, but strategic gain outweighed the cost each time. In 1988, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini reluctantly declared that he would “drink from the poison chalice,” agreeing to a cease-fire with Iraq. But when the guns fell silent, after having suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties, Iran had managed to consolidate the young republic’s rule without losing an inch of territory. A similar logic applied in 2003, when after the U.S. invasion of Iraq and, separately, the exposure of Iran’s secret nuclear activities, Tehran pushed the pause button on the nuclear program, lest it become the next target for regime change, and proposed a grand bargain to Washington. Nothing came of what was essentially an invitation to dialogue, in part because the Bush administration’s Iraq adventure proved a strategic disaster.

And third, if past is prologue, Iran will not negotiate with Washington unless it knows it has a relatively strong hand. As Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei put it, when Iran entered into serious (but then still secret) negotiations with the United States in 2012, it had accumulated significant leverage, in the form of thousands of nuclear centrifuges, tons of low-enriched uranium, bunkered uranium-enrichment facilities, and a nearly completed heavy-water reactor.

President Barack Obama took two additional steps that persuaded Iran to talk and ultimately reach a deal: He took regime change off the table and openly declared that Iran, in principle, would be allowed to enrich uranium on its own soil. So if coercive diplomacy was a factor in bringing Iran to the table, it was not the only, and perhaps not even the principal, one. Iran had built up leverage that it could trade against the lifting of sanctions, and it was offered a realistic way forward. Today the Iranian leadership sees nothing of the sort. That is why it rolled back some of its commitments this week and issued an ultimatum to the deal’s remaining parties that either they step up to salvage the deal or it would step aside from its commitments.

These factors suggest that whatever the benefits, great risks are built into Trump’s maximum-pressure campaign. For one thing, it increases the threat of a nuclear escalation: If Iran reneges on its obligations under the nuclear deal, the United States and Israel will respond by targeting Iran’s resurgent nuclear program, and Iran might direct its allies in the region to target Western assets and personnel.

But even without such a nightmare scenario, the Trump administration’s approach is self-defeating in the long term. The sanctions will reduce Iran’s pro-Western middle class to tatters at a time when the country stands in front of a major transition to a post-1979 leadership. Regime hard-liners, meanwhile, stand to benefit financially from sanctions through their control of the black market and politically through their control of a repressive apparatus to put down dissent. The net effect is a country with its economy in ruins but its regime intact—a political victory snatched from the jaws of economic defeat.
Sanctions, the U.S. travel ban, and a lack of sensitivity to Iranians’ sense of dignity could combine to harden the perception that U.S. policy is indiscriminate and implacable. This is a formula for perpetuating enmity between the two countries for another generation.

Trump and his closest advisers may discover that history will not bend to their will. Rather than trying to achieve the unattainable goal of Iran’s surrender, they should act to prevent another costly U.S. war of choice. This would require stepping back from maximalist demands, and using sanctions as a scalpel, not a chainsaw. In practice, that would mean lifting sanctions gradually and conditionally. The question is whether Trump can find his way out of the escalating confrontation, toward win-win negotiations."

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #1," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 20 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-1?utm_source=Sign%20Up%20to%20Crisis%20Group%27s%20Email%20Updates&utm_campaign=8ddd0bf87b2d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_20_09_44&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-8ddd0bf87b2d-359871089, commented, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week's major events featured on International Crisis Group's Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Actions of Note
13 June: Two oil tankers are attacked in the Gulf of Oman.
14 June: U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo asserts that Iran was behind these attacks and a string of earlier ones.
17 June: Iran announces that it will further downgrade its Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) commitments by ramping up its enrichment of low-grade uranium unless the Europeans can alleviate the pain of U.S. sanctions.
18 June: The White House announces it will send 1,000 additional U.S. forces to the Middle East.
19 June: German Chancellor warns Iran must uphold nuclear deal or face consequences.

In Heavy Waters
On 17 June, Iran declared that its stockpile of low-enriched uranium will on 27 June exceed the 2015 nuclear deal’s limit of 300kg.

**Why it matters:** In May, Tehran threatened to curb its compliance with the JCPOA’s enriched uranium and heavy water limits as of 7 July. It argued that U.S. sanctions have made the quid pro quo that underpins the deal – nuclear restrictions and monitoring for sanctions relief – an all-quid and no-quo, and that its continued adherence ends if there is no guaranteed dividend from the remaining parties to the deal on the horizon. But it is a risky move: while the Europeans are trying to set up a financial mechanism (Instex), if Iran continues to chip away at the deal – as it already has started to do by growing its stockpile – they might shift the blame from Washington to Tehran and reimpose their own sanctions on Iran. Should the so-called breakout timeline (how long it would take Iran to produce a bomb’s worth of weapons-grade uranium) be reduced to significantly under a year, the U.S. also has threatened to take military action; Israel might also decide to act.

All Roads Lead Back to Tehran?
Referring to the attacks on two oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman, Secretary of State Pompeo contended on 16 June that “these were attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran on commercial shipping, on the freedom of navigation, with the clear intent to deny transit through the Strait … we have high confidence with respect to who conducted these attacks as well as half a dozen other attacks throughout the world over the past forty days”.

**Why it matters:** If Iran was indeed behind the attacks on a total of six tankers in the past few weeks, the rocket that landed near the U.S. embassy in Iraq on 19 May, and the Taliban suicide attack in Kabul on 31 May, as Pompeo alleged, then it seems that maximum pressure and a bolstered U.S. military presence have made Iran more, not less belligerent. None of these incidents is likely to constitute a casus belli in itself, but presented as a pattern of behaviour by an aggressive power, they could provide a rationale for the U.S. taking military action against Tehran sooner or later. Asked about whether the
administration has the legal authorisation for a strike on Iran, Pompeo said on 16 June: 'We always have the authorization to defend American interests ... These are attacks on fundamental, international norms, and now on American interests, and we always have the right to defend our country'.

Arabian Sea, 9 June 2012. The aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) transits the Arabian Sea. Class Scott Pittman/Released, U.S. Navy

The Gulf Widens

In an interview published on 14 June, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) asserted that the Kingdom 'does not want a war in the region, but we will not hesitate in dealing with any threat against our people, sovereignty and vital interests'.

Why it matters: Riyad has fully endorsed the Trump administration's Iran policy. To the Saudi leadership, recent Huthi operations on Saudi territory, including attacks against an Aramco pipeline and Abha airport, the latter of which resulted in 26 injuries as well as the 12 May and 13 June tanker incidents, have Iran’s fingerprints all over them, and this is further chilling relations between the two regional heavyweights. For now, however, Riyadh’s preference appears to be for Washington to take care of the "Iran problem" on its behalf. To Iran this may merely be a distinction without a difference. Interestingly, the United Arab Emirates refrained from directly accusing it of having perpetrated these attacks, clearly hoping for de-escalation. Meanwhile, President Trump, who still seems very reluctant to stumble into another conflict in the region, tried to downplay the attacks on tankers as "very minor".

What to Watch

21 June: Financial Action Task Force plenary concludes with possibility of counter-measures against Iran
24 June: U.S./Russia/Israel National Security advisors meeting which is likely to focus heavily on Iran
27 June: Iran due to exceed JCPOA uranium cap
28 June: JCPOA Joint Commission meeting

Click here to see the U.S.-Iran Trigger List: https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list, and here for a two-page, printable PDF of the Briefing Note: https://d2071andvip0wj.clozifront.net/iran-update-briefing-1.pdf.


Members of the People’s Peace Movement have been walking across Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan since Thursday, when they left the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah. They are heading toward territory controlled by the Taliban. Most of them were fasting during the day for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan while enduring 100-degree temperatures.

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #2," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 27 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-2, commented, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Actions of Note
20 June: Iran shoots down U.S. drone.
20 June: U.S. prepares retaliatory strike, which President Trump calls off at last minute.
20 June: U.S. reportedly carries out cyberattacks against an Iranian intelligence group.
23 June: Huthis strike Saudi airport; U.S. statement accuses Iran of perpetuating Yemen conflict.
24 June: U.S. announces new sanctions against Iran's political and military leadership.
25 June: Iran says new sanctions mean 'permanent closure of the path of diplomacy' and contends that 'the White House is suffering from mental disability'.
25 June: Trump threatens that ‘any attack by Iran on anything American will be met with great and overwhelming force’.

25 June: National Security Advisers of U.S., Russia and Israel meet but gaps remain over Iran’s role in Syria.

If at First You Don’t Succeed

The U.S. on 24 June announced sanctions against Iran’s supreme leader, his office and appointees, and top brass of Iran’s military. Trump also demanded that his Treasury Department blacklist Iran’s top diplomat, Javad Zarif.

Why it matters: President Trump on 20 June called off a military strike against Iran that was ‘cocked and loaded’ in retaliation for the downing of a U.S. drone earlier in the day. His decision, which he justified by claiming that the attack would have caused an estimated 150 fatalities, might well have avoided an immediate escalation, but Washington continues to press ahead with coercive actions against Tehran that keep the two on a collision course. The U.S. reportedly launched a cyberattack against an Iranian intelligence group the U.S. believes was behind the recent attacks on tankers in the Gulf. This was followed by Monday’s designations against Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei’s office and senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commanders and came in parallel to visits by National Security Advisor Bolton to Israel and Secretary of State Pompeo to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates – three governments that share U.S. antagonism toward Iran. As such, the aborted strikes may prove a crisis deferred, not averted, with the contradictions inherent in President Trump’s policy – trying to avoid war while simultaneously prosecuting a maximum pressure strategy that makes it more likely – and the inconsistencies between his demands (focused on Iran’s nuclear program) and those of his senior officials (which include far-reaching demands on all aspects of Iran’s policy) increasingly stark.

JCPOA Watch

On 22 June, the nuclear deal’s three European signatories issued a demarche to Iran over breaking Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) limits.

Why it matters: The British Minister of State for the Middle East’s 23 June trip to Tehran came on the heels of visits this month by the German foreign minister, an adviser to the French president, the head of the E3’s (France, Germany and the UK) financial instrument (INSTEX), and a senior EU official. Together these visits represent a concerted European diplomatic effort to save the JCPOA. But with Iran due to exceed the deal’s uranium enrichment cap imminently, the question remains much the same as it has been since President Trump pulled out of the agreement last year: how much longer will Iran stay in what it sees as a one-sided deal? With oil sales to Europe down to nil, total EU-Iran trade in the first quarter of 2019 down by almost 70 per cent year-on-year and INSTEX yet to become operative, one thing to keep an eye on is cracks emerging among the deal’s remaining signatories – the E3, Russia and China – if its condition grows critical. Still, the EU’s top diplomat, Federica Mogherini, on 25 June indicated that the trade mechanism “is now ready to be operational” and predicted that “you will probably hear more from us in the coming days”.

Walking a Tightrope

Iraqi President Barham Salih on 25 June indicated that ‘we are truly concerned with the escalation [between the U.S. and Iran] and we are concerned about the ramifications for Iraq’.

Why it matters: While much of the recent regional tension has been concentrated in and around the Gulf, Iraq may also be witnessing the reverberations of growing U.S.-Iran friction. Last month, a rocket fell near the U.S. embassy in Baghdad’s Green Zone. This month, there have been a series of unclaimed mortar and rocket attacks targeting military as well as economic facilities, such as the Burjesia oil company compound near Basra. On 23 June, CNN reported a U.S. cyberattack against Kataeb Hizbollah, an Iraqi paramilitary group with close ties to Iran. Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi’s government, whose government this week finally secured appointments to three key cabinet portfolios (defence, interior and justice) has little appetite for getting caught in a fight between Tehran and Washington, but the proximity of U.S. and Iran-linked forces makes Iraq an increasingly dangerous flashpoint.

What to Watch

27 June: Iran possibly surpassing the JCPOA limit on low-enriched uranium
28 June: JCPOA Joint Commission meeting
28-29 June: G-20 meeting in Osaka, Japan
Events of Note

28 June: Seven European governments issue a joint statement on working with the E3/EU toward trade channels with Iran.

28 June: The JCPOA’s Joint Commission convenes in Vienna.

28 June: A U.S. Senate vote tallies 50 votes against an unauthorised military strike on Iran but fail to muster the required 60 votes for passage.

1 July: Syria claims Israel was behind airstrikes in Damascus and Homs.

1 July: Iran breaches a JCPOA limit on enriched uranium stockpiles.

1 July: Iraq’s government decrees that paramilitary groups “are to operate as an indivisible part of the armed forces”.

3 July: President Rouhani warns that Iran will increase uranium enrichment level and restore Iran’s heavy water reactor on July 7.

Credit Where It Is Due

On 28 June, the EU announced that a special-purpose vehicle for trade with Iran was up and running.

Why it matters: In January, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action’s (JCPOA) three European signatories set up a trade mechanism (INSTEX) to ‘facilitate legitimate trade with Iran’ – specifically food and medicine already theoretically exempted under U.S. sanctions. With Iran making the case that its compliance with the deal’s nuclear restrictions was yielding little economic dividend, the innovation at the core of the mechanism was processing transactions without exposure to U.S. penalties. Over the past few days, there have been three notable developments: the E3 (France, Germany and the UK) prepared to roll out credit lines; the EU confirmed “that the first transactions are being processed”; and seven European states jointly indicated their interest in participating. The Iranian response has been lukewarm so far: one senior official compared the measures to “a very beautiful car which has run out of fuel”. The dilemma with INSTEX remains that a minor boost to trade will not be sufficient to address Iranian expectations and keep it in the JCPOA, while success raises the possibility that the U.S. will try to stifle the channel through sanctions.

Spinning Toward Non-compliance

On 1 July, Iran’s stockpile of 3.67 per cent enriched uranium passed the JCPOA’s 300kg limit.

Why it matters: Iran announced in May that it would begin curbing its compliance with the 2015 nuclear deal, and had threatened to break a cap on low-enriched uranium (LEU) ahead of the JCPOA’s 28 June Joint Commission meeting. It held off crossing the 300kg barrier, but only until 1 July. President Trump warned that Iran was “playing with fire”. The nuclear deal “is either good or bad”, said President Hassan Rouhani. He added: “If it’s good, everyone should comply with their commitments. Comparing your level of commitment to ours, how do you even allow yourselves to object?”

The remaining JCPOA signatories’ reaction to the 300kg breach was of measured concern, calling on Iran to reverse course and stick to the agreement – though stopping short of immediately engaging a dispute resolution mechanism laid out within the JCPOA for cases where a party is believed to be non-compliant. How long that remains the case will likely be determined by how far Iran pushes the nuclear brinkmanship.

Meanwhile in the U.S. Congress

A 50-40 vote in the U.S. Senate on 28 June failed to approve legislation that would have blocked funding for military action against Iran without congressional authorisation. The numbers, while impressive, fell short of the required threshold for passage. The House will now take up a similar bill.

Why it matters: Anti-war forces in Congress are trying to include a provision in annual defence authorisation legislation that would deny funding for any military action against Iran that Congress hasn’t
previously approved, unless there is a legitimate self-defence justification. Prior administrations have asserted the right to use military force without first looking to Congress, creating ambiguity about just how far the president’s war powers go. The draft legislation would resolve that ambiguity in the Iran context. It would also make clear that the 2001 authorisation to use military force against al-Qaeda and the Taliban does not apply to Iran.

Notwithstanding the Senate vote, the legislation remains on the congressional agenda, although the path to enactment is uphill. The first step will be for the House to take up its version of the Senate bill during the week of July 8. If it passes, the next step will be much tougher: House negotiators will need to persuade their Senate counterparts to include the language, or some version of it, in the merged legislation that emerges from both chambers. The bill would then go to President Trump for signature. Although the president would likely veto any legislation that he sees as tying his hands, the passage of such a provision by Congress would send an important signal of political opposition to the prospect of war.

What to Watch
7 July: Iran deadline for further curbs on its JCPOA compliance.
8 July: Secretary of State Pompeo speaks at the Christians United for Israel summit.
11 July: Beijing hosts Afghanistan conference with both U.S. and Iranian participation expected.
Click here to see the U.S.-Iran Trigger List: https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list, and here for a two-page, printable PDF of the Briefing Note: https://d2071andwp0wj.cloudfront.net/iran-update-briefing-3.pdf.

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #4,” Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 11 July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-4, commented, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Events of Note
4 July: British forces detain an Iranian supertanker off the coast of Gibraltar purportedly carrying oil to Syria
7 July: Iran announces enrichment level above JCPOA limits; warns of further steps in 60 days
8 July: Saudi-led coalition claims it thwarted a Huthi attack against a commercial vessel in the Red Sea
9 July: U.S. sanctions three Hizbollah officials, including two members of Lebanon’s parliament
9-10 July: Senior French official visits Tehran
10 July: The IAEA holds a special meeting called by the U.S. on Iran’s nuclear activity
10 July: President Donald Trump indicates that Iran “sanctions will soon be increased, substantially”

Abselling Grace
British Royal Marines on 4 July boarded and seized the Grace 1, a tanker bearing Iranian crude oil off the coast of Gibraltar.

Why it matters: In a statement, the Gibraltar government indicated that the Grace 1 was bound for the Banias refinery in Syria, putting it afoul of EU sanctions against that country. Iran disputed the destination claim and argued that the detention was ‘piracy, pure and simple’; President Hassan Rouhani on 10 July called it ‘a stupid move’ and indicated that ‘you will understand its consequences later’. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton applauded the operation as a ‘real Fourth of July present’, which comes at a time when Iran’s fleet is engaged in a cat-and-mouse game to export oil without detection, including to its allies in Damascus. The incident further complicates Tehran-London relations, amid concerns that the UK position on the JCPOA might be getting closer to Washington’s and further away from Berlin and Paris.

Spin Cycle
Iran announced, and the IAEA on 8 July confirmed, that it had raised uranium enrichment levels beyond the 2015 nuclear agreement’s boundary.

Why it matters: Tehran’s decision to follow a breach of the JCPOA’s quantitative cap of 300kg on low-enriched uranium by pushing past the qualitative limit of 3.67 per cent enrichment is
Another incremental escalation to press the JCPOA’s parties into relieving the burden of unilateral U.S. sanctions; it is also designed to warn the U.S. of more to come if its maximum pressure campaign continues. But incremental is the key: Iran’s moves are calibrated to add urgency without emergency, neither significantly reducing breakout times for a weapon nor restricting inspections at sensitive sites. In other words, Tehran aims to do enough to send a strong warning to Europe and the U.S., but not enough to justify either snapback of UN sanctions or a military response. While the U.S. may have hoped to galvanise international support for a harder stance against Tehran at a 10 July meeting at the IAEA, Washington’s own role in precipitating the crisis did little to win over the agency’s board of governors.

**A High-stakes Summer**

A senior aide to French President Emmanuel Macron visited Tehran on 9 June.

Why it matters: European diplomats might want to start checking if their summer vacation plans have a cancellation policy. With the clock now ticking on Iran’s new 60-day deadline before further breaches of the JCPOA, the next two months are likely to see a diplomatic surge aimed at defusing the current crisis. President Hassan Rouhani spoke with his French counterpart on 6 July and agreed to try to revive multilateral dialogue by 15 July. For the Europeans, the interactions go in two directions: first, to encourage Tehran to reverse course by offering to expedite ongoing work on financial channels that circumvent U.S. sanctions (INSTEX); second, to prod Washington to consider some form of sanctions relief. One possible way forward would be for Tehran to resum its compliance with the JCPOA and make progress on the release of U.S.-Iranian dual citizens detained in Iran in exchange for some U.S. sanctions relief, most importantly concerning Iranian oil exports. But this would require the Trump administration relenting somewhat on its maximum pressure campaign, which is not particularly likely.

**What to Watch**

11 July: Beijing hosts Afghanistan conference with both U.S. and Iranian participation expected
12 July: Hizbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah scheduled to give a television interview
14 July: Anniversary of JCPOA’s finalisation in 2015
15 July: Senior European diplomats convene for the EU Foreign Affairs Council
15 July: President Macron’s deadline for resumption of multilateral dialogue over JCPOA
16 July: Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif visits New York

Click here to see the U.S-Iran Trigger List: https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list, and here for a two-page, printable PDF of the Briefing Note: https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/iran-update-briefing-4.pdf.

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #5," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 18 July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-5?utm_source=Sign-Up+to+ICG+Pulse%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=f378cf5d0-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_20_09_44_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-fa378cf5d0-359871089, commented, “Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-US Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

**Events of Note**

10 July: Three Iranian ships purportedly attempt to impede a British tanker in the Strait of Hormuz; Iran denies the incident.
12 July: Iran’s Revolutionary Guard reports missile and drone operations along Iraqi Kurdistan border after a series of clashes with Iranian Kurdish separatists.
13 July: An oil tanker sailing through the Strait of Hormuz shuts off its transponder; Iran claims it assisted after a distress call.
15 July: The EU’s foreign policy chief indicates that Iran’s breaches of the JCPOA do not constitute “significant non-compliance”.
16 July: President Trump says “a lot of progress has been made [on Iran]” and denies U.S. aim is regime change.
16 July: Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei accuses the UK of “piracy” over detained Iranian tanker.

17 July: U.S. announces maritime security conference in Bahrain later this year.

A Graceful Exit?
The UK-Iran quarrel over the detention of the Iranian tanker “Grace 1” nearly took a turn for the worse when Iranian boats on 10 July allegedly tried to block a BP-owned tanker in the Strait of Hormuz before being warned off by a Royal Navy escort.

Why it matters: The incident occurred as Iran was warning the UK of “consequences” over the detention of an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar suspected of skirting EU sanctions on Syria. UK Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt has been in touch with his Iranian counterpart and indicated that the Grace 1 could be freed if Iran guarantees that the vessel is not bound for Syria. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on 16 July warned that Iran “and devout agents of the system will respond to these vicious acts” by the UK, while British and Gibraltar officials convened to discuss the situation the following day. Tensions in and around the Gulf have been on the rise following attacks against commercial shipping off the UAE coast in May and in the Gulf of Oman in June, and the U.S. is looking for partners in a maritime coalition that would patrol the Strait of Hormuz as well as the Bab al-Mandeb chokepoint in the Red Sea – a military answer to rising tensions that would be better addressed by a diplomatic de-escalation with Tehran.

Radioactive Activities
The EU’s foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini on 15 July asserted that the remaining JCPOA signatories would not “for the time being” respond to Iran’s breaches of uranium stockpile and enrichment rate limits by engaging the JCPOA’s dispute resolution mechanism.

Why it matters: The 15 July meeting of senior European diplomats, which came one day after a joint E3 statement calling on Iran to return to compliance, underscored a commitment to salvaging the JCPOA and pressing on with steps to deliver Iran economic dividends under the deal. Notably, Mogherini suggested Iran oil sales might still factor into the INSTEX trade mechanism. Meanwhile, Israeli media on 10 July reported that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had found “traces of radioactive material” at a site in Tehran, which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last year alleged was used “for storing massive amounts of equipment and materiel from Iran’s secret nuclear weapons program”. However, unlike the IAEA provides additional details, it’s unclear whether the traces are smoking gun evidence of major infractions of Iran’s safeguards commitments.

Keeping Stockholm on Track
Representatives of the Yemeni government and the Huthis convened on 14-15 July for discussions on implementing a December 2018 agreement over the port city of Hodeida.

Why it matters: The UN-brokered, U.S.-backed Stockholm Agreement called for a demilitarisation of the Red Sea city and its ports. But differing interpretations over what that entails led to halting implementation and dimmed hopes for kicking off broader peace talks. At the same time, the Huthis and Saudi Arabia have intensified their respective cross-border attacks. As Crisis Group argues in a new report, moving forward on Hodeida is a step in the right direction, but it should be pursued in parallel with a dialogue between the Huthis and Saudi Arabia aimed at freezing cross-border attacks, which risk a further regional escalation in a context of rising U.S.-Iran tensions.

What to Watch
19 July: Joint U.S. State Department/Pentagon briefing on maritime security
Early August: Iran, Russia, Turkey to hold trilateral meeting on Syria
6 September: Deadline Iran has given for further rolling back its JCPOA commitments
Click here to see the U.S.-Iran Trigger List: https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list, and here for a two-page, printable PDF of the Briefing Note: https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/iran-update-briefing-5.pdf

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #6," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 25 July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-6, commented, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Events of Note:
18 July: U.S. announces downing of Iranian drone in the Strait of Hormuz, which Tehran denies.
18 July: U.S. Treasury sanctions twelve persons and entities in Iran’s “nuclear procurement network”.
19 July: Iran detains a UK-flagged tanker in the Strait of Hormuz.
19 July: Pentagon announces deployment of about 500 U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia.
21 July: Iran welcomes Saudi, Swiss and Omani assistance “to secure safe return” of its Happiness 1 tanker, previously stranded in Jeddah.
22 July: Iran’s intelligence ministry arrests seventeen in alleged CIA spy ring; President Trump dismisses it as ‘more lies and propaganda’.
23 July: Prime Minister Netanyahu calls for “pressure, pressure and more pressure” against Iran.

**Treachorous Waters**

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on 19 July seized the UK-flagged Stena Impero in the Strait of Hormuz.

Why it matters: Tehran had telegraphed its intention to retaliate for the UK’s apprehension of an Iranian tanker off Gibraltar in early July, and failed in its first attempt on 10 July after a Royal Navy escort intervened. Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt on Monday denounced the Iranian move as ‘an act of state piracy’. But while the U.S. has been trying to muster support for a naval coalition dubbed Operation Sentinel to conduct surveillance and escort ships, the UK is leaning toward a separate European initiative that, Hunt noted, “will not be part of the U.S. maximum pressure policy on Iran because we remain committed to preserving the Iran nuclear agreement”. It remains to be seen how incoming Prime Minister Boris Johnson will tackle the immediate standoff with Tehran while navigating between allies across the channel and the Atlantic.

**U.S. Sanctions: A Crude Instrument**

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on 22 July announced U.S. sanctions against a Chinese company and its chief executive, stating that “they violated U.S. law by accepting crude oil” from Iran.

Why it matters: The use of sanctions has been a key element in the U.S. “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran. A Crisis Group breaks down a new interactive infographic, the Trump administration has designated around 1,000 Iranian or Iran-linked entities since 2017, affecting an estimated 80 per cent of the country’s economic sectors. But while the impact of these restrictions is economically devastating (Iran’s GDP is expected to contract 6 per cent this year, and crude exports have nosedived) the limits of an approach that relies on coercion alone are evident: the campaign has failed to induce favourable strategic shifts from Tehran while spurring countries that don’t agree with the policy to find ways of bypassing the U.S. (e.g. Europe’s INSTEX mechanism). Beijing on 23 July condemned the new U.S. sanctions and described it as “bullying” – perhaps an indication that it may increasingly challenge Washington’s dictates and increase its imports of Iranian crude.

**Talking About Talks**

Foreign Minister Javad Zarif on 18 July proposed that Iran’s parliament could “ratify the Additional Protocol and [President Trump] can lift the sanctions he set”.

Why it matters: Under the terms of the JCPOA, Iran is provisionally implementing the Additional Protocol to the IAEA’s Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement. This expands the agency’s reach to all parts of state’s nuclear fuel cycle and provides greater access rights. Iran is supposed to ratify it by 2023 at the same time the U.S. is supposed to lift (as opposed to waive) its nuclear-related sanctions. In other words, these steps would be moved forward by four years. There is zero likelihood of the administration accepting this proposal and removing its primary leverage tool of sanctions, but it could be read as a signal that Tehran is looking for a way to gauge the White House’s interest in pursuing a new arrangement. It could encourage mediatory efforts that seem to be stepping up in light of growing tensions between Iran and the U.S.: Senator Rand Paul reportedly met with Zarif in New York on 18 July, a senior Iranian diplomat was in Paris on the 23rd and Oman’s foreign minister is heading to Tehran on the 27th. Any de-escalatory steps are as overdue as they would be welcome, but thus far the maximum either side is willing to offer is less than the minimum the other appears willing to entertain.

**What to Watch**

27 July: Oman’s foreign minister visits Tehran.
28 July: First meeting of JCPOA’s Joint Commission in Vienna since Iran’s breached enrichment level cap.

2 August: Expiration of current U.S. sanctions waivers on civil nuclear cooperation projects in Iran.

Early August: Iran/Turkey/Russia trilateral meeting on Syria in Turkey as part of Astana process.

6 September: Iran’s next deadline for reducing its JCPOA commitments.

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International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #7," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa

2 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-7?utm_source=Sign-Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=9f7ea4fd91-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_20_09_44_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-9f7ea4fd91-359871089, commented, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Events of Note:
28 July: JCPOA’s Joint Commission meets for an emergency session in Vienna.
29 July: UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab says “no quid pro quo” with Iran over detained tankers.
30 July: Iran and UAE hold maritime security discussions.
31 July: U.S. and Europeans meet to discuss maritime security in Bahrain.
31 July: U.S. extends sanctions waivers on nuclear cooperation projects by 90 days.
31 July: U.S. sanctions Iran’s foreign minister, Javad Zarif.
1 August: Syrian state media reports Israeli airstrikes in Quneitra province.
1 August: Bernd Erbel, former German ambassador to Iran, assumes presidency of INSTEX.

Staying the Guns of August
President Trump on 29 July tweeted that ‘the Iranians never won a war, but never lost a negotiation’.

Why it matters: Today’s confrontation between the U.S. and Iran is reminiscent of tensions on the eve of World War I. The standoff is akin to what happens when an irresistible force – the Trump administration’s “maximum pressure” campaign – meets the immovable object of Iran’s resolve to resist rather than yield. The 31 July decision to blacklist Iran’s top diplomat and label him “an illegitimate spokesman” underscores a fundamental tension in U.S. policy: expressing an interest in talks while undermining prospects for their initiation, let alone success. As tensions escalate, the impact of a potential collision would extend far beyond its two main protagonists. In a new Crisis Group report based on dozens of interviews with U.S. and Iranian officials as well as a broad range of regional policymakers from Yemen to Iraq to Israel, we examine the escalatory risks of a confrontation in key flashpoints and propose a tactical détente whereby Tehran and Washington each take a step back from the brink and let third-party mediators plot a de-escalatory path.

Nuclear Waivers Live to Fight Another Day
The U.S. on 31 July announced that it was extending waivers on international nuclear cooperation projects in Iran.

Why it matters: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) provides for international cooperation on Iranian civil nuclear projects. After withdrawing from the JCPOA, the U.S. allowed these initiatives to continue by issuing specific waivers. These include converting the heavy-water reactor at Arak into a proliferation-resistant one, turning the Fordow facility into a research and medical centre, as well as Russian cooperation on running the Bushehr power plant. In May, however, the U.S. began to tighten the screws by ending waivers on storing of heavy water and sending enriched uranium abroad. Some in Washington, including a group of lawmakers, had been advocating that the waivers be terminated altogether, further undermining the nuclear deal and putting its remaining parties in a position of violating
their JCPOA commitments or else risking U.S. penalties. Iran had suggested that revoking the waivers would give it reason to further roll back its obligations under the deal, while putting the blame on the U.S.’s doorstep. The waivers’ extension for another 90 days provides a reprieve, but the clock has already started ticking, which may reduce the incentive for the other parties to the deal to engage in long-term nuclear cooperation with Iran.

Narrowing the Gulf

A UAE delegation was in Tehran on 30 July for discussions on maritime issues.

Why it matters: Along with Saudi Arabia and Israel, the UAE is usually seen as one of the main regional supporters of the Trump administration’s Iran strategy. But growing risks of a U.S.-Iran clash are keenly felt in the Gulf, particularly among smaller states on the front lines of a potential confrontation: an escalation could endanger their infrastructure, economy, tourism and energy exports. While Tuesday’s meeting was ostensibly technical and following up on existing bilateral consultations, the timing and acknowledgement of a ‘satisfactory’ session could signal Abu Dhabi’s interest in a cooling down of tensions. It’s also worth recalling that the UAE was careful not to publicly blame Iran for attacks on tankers in the port of Fujairah in May, and in June drew down its forces from fighting the Huthis in Yemen (though it remains heavily committed in the south of the country). “We are very alarmed at the sporadic nature of the escalation [between the U.S. and Iran],”, a senior UAE official told Crisis Group. “We’re at the brink of something". The logic may be that keeping channels of communications open translates that alarm into a de-escalatory message intended for both Washington and Tehran.

What to Watch

24-26 August: G7 meeting in Biarritz, France.
6 September: Iran’s next deadline for reducing its JCPOA commitments.
17-30 September: UN General Assembly; general debate begins on 24th.

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International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #8," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa

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Events of Note

4 August: The IRGC announces 31 July detention of an Iraqi tanker near Farsi Island allegedly smuggling fuel.
5 August: Saudi Arabia downs Huthi drones allegedly aimed at civilian airports.
5 August: UK signs on to U.S. maritime security initiative.
5 August: U.S. announces Warsaw Process working groups to be held in October-November 2019.
6 August: President Rouhani asserts that “if the U.S. really wants to negotiate, it must lift all sanctions before any action is taken”.
7 August: Two IRGC members killed in skirmish with “terrorist separatists” in north-western Iran.
8 August: Incoming head of INSTEX withdraws from the post.
8 August: President Trump tweets that the Iranians “want desperately to talk to the U.S., but are given mixed signals from all those purporting to represent us... nobody speaks for the U.S. but the U.S. itself”.

The Funding Fallacy

Israel’s UN envoy on 5 August cited reports of increased Iranian financial support to Hamas to the tune of $30 million per month; previous Israeli estimates put Iran’s annual support to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad at around $120 million per year.
Why it matters: A core supposition of the ‘maximum pressure’ strategy is that the economic impact of sanctions will drive Iran into changing its behaviour. As Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reiterated in a 6 August USA Today op-ed, an aim of U.S. policy is ‘to deprive the Iranian regime of the money it needs to support its destabilising activities’. While Iran’s overall resources have declined, historical precedent demonstrates – and if true, the alleged increase to Hamas would underscore – that Tehran conducts its policies based on threats and opportunities more than on the health or depletion of its treasury. As the USA Today’s editors put it on the same day, ‘Trump’s erratic Iran policy has allowed the clerics to scapegoat Washington, provoked Tehran’s aggressive pushback, established that America won’t keep its word, and potentially reignited a nuclear crisis that had been quelled at least into the next decade. If that’s winning, we’d hate to see what losing looks like’.

Bolstering the Arsenal
A senior Iranian military official on 5 August indicated that ‘our missile power… deters any regional and extra-regional acts of aggression, and the range of the missiles is also increasing constantly’.

Why it matters: Iran has inferior conventional military capabilities compared with its neighbours, let alone the U.S.; ballistic missiles provide what Iran claims to be its sole reliable conventional military deterrent. Occasional tests, the most recent of which reportedly took place in late July, have been a point of contention not just between Iran and the U.S. but between Iran and some European governments as well. Iran has generally rebuffed recent attempts to put its missile program on the negotiating table, and its potential acquisition or export of conventional arms could become a growing point of contention as a UN Security Council-imposed embargo should, under the terms of the JCPOA, be lifted in October 2020. At that point, as President Rouhani noted on 1 August, ‘we can start buying or selling any kinds of weapons that we want’.

Undiplomatic Immunity
Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif on 5 August claimed that the U.S. blacklisted him after he turned down a meeting with President Trump.

Why it matters: Earlier this year, Zarif temporarily resigned after not receiving an invitation from the IRGC to attend meetings between senior Iranian officials and Bashar al-Assad in Tehran; now his apparent refusal to accept one in Washington has seen the Islamic Republic’s political and military elite close ranks behind the country’s oft-embattled top diplomat. The Revolutionary Guards on 1 August issued a statement thanking Zarif for his services, and on 5 August Qods force commander Qassem Soleimani paid a visit to the foreign ministry with warm words for the “chief of the country’s foreign policy”. Iranian hardliners have long criticised the Rouhani administration, and Zarif in particular, over the JCPOA and engagement with Europe. The designation may briefly dampen this, but it is likely to pick up again in the run-up to Iran’s February 2020 parliamentary elections.

What to Watch
24-26 August: G7 meeting in Biarritz, France.
30 August: Next quarterly IAEA report on the JCPOA’s implementation.
6 September: Iran’s next announced deadline for reducing its JCPOA commitments if it is not satisfied with Europe’s steps.
17-30 September: UN General Assembly; general debate begins on 24th.
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International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #9," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 16 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latest-updates/briefing-note, commented, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Events of Note
9 August: French Foreign Minister Le Drian issues statement defending French efforts to de-escalate tensions with Iran in the face of President Trump’s criticism of President Macron’s diplomacy.
10 August: Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei blasts U.S. peace plan for Israel/Palestine; Secretary of State Pompeo hits back, charging “faux concern for the Palestinian people”.

11 August: Iran reportedly detains a UK-Iran dual national.

12 August: Secretary Pompeo tweets countdown clock to October 2020 end of UN arms embargo on Iran, calling for more pressure on Iran.

12 August: Explosions hit weapons storage facility used by Iraqi militias.

13 August: Iranian nuclear official says Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile has surpassed the JCPOA’s 300kg limit by ‘60 to 70kg’ and “is growing rapidly”.

13 August: Supreme Leader Khamenei meets Huthi spokesperson in Tehran.

14 August: Bahrain releases Iranian tanker held since 4 July on suspicion of carrying oil to Syria; Iran describes U.S. legal challenge as a “piracy attempt”.

Maritime Insecurities

Iran’s Foreign Ministry on 9 August asserted that Israeli participation in U.S.-led maritime security operations would constitute ‘a blatant threat to Iran’s national security’.

Why it matters: The Strait of Hormuz and surrounding waterways have become the central theatre for rising U.S.-Iran tensions following a string of incidents against commercial shipping. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz on 6 August reportedly confirmed that Israel was providing intelligence in support of the U.S.-led effort to build up a maritime coalition; the UK has also joined the U.S. mission and on 12 August dispatched HMS Kent to the Gulf as the destroyer HMS Duncan rotates out. But assembling what is now being termed the “International Maritime Security Construct” is proving a challenge: Germany and France are reluctant to participate under a U.S. umbrella, while Japan is reportedly considering the dispatch of naval assets off the Yemen coast but not in the Gulf. German Chancellor Angela Merkel on 14 August indicated that putting wind into the sails of a parallel European initiative is likely to come up at the end of the month, when senior European diplomats and defence officials convene in Helsinki.

Yemen’s Civil Wars

A Huthi delegation was in Tehran for meetings with senior Iranian officials including Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Why it matters: There is little doubt that Iran has provided the Huthis with arms, funds and training and that their ties have grown during the conflict between the Huthis and the Saudi-led coalition. Yemen is not a strategic priority for Iran but the war has provided Tehran with a low-cost, high-yield opportunity to bog down its regional rivals. Still, the Huthis reject the notion that they are mere proxies, and direct diplomatic engagement between them and Saudi Arabia to de-escalate cross-border attacks would offer a more constructive path – something the U.S. can facilitate by developing its own channels to Sanaa. Meanwhile, the outbreak of clashes in Aden on 7 August underscored the diverging interests of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, and, as Crisis Group notes in a conflict alert, could spread to other parts of the south and hurt efforts to broker a deal to end the war with the Huthis.

Bombs Over Baghdad?

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi on 13 August visited al-Asad military base in southern Baghdad and called for an investigation into a deadly explosion there the previous day.

Why it Matters: The explosion of a munitions warehouse reportedly used by Iraqi paramilitary units adds to existing challenges of the Abdul Mahdi government to insulate the country from U.S.-Iran tensions. While it is still unclear if inappropriate storage is the cause of the explosion, the incident gave rise to speculations of an Israeli airstrike. Last month, Asharq al-Awsat, a pan-Arab daily newspaper, claimed that Israel had twice struck Iran-linked targets in Iraq. That Israel has concerns over Iranian precision-guided missile transfers is not new. It has conducted hundreds of (often unacknowledged) operations in Syria to prevent the transfer of such weaponry to Hizbollah. But striking Iranian-linked assets in Iraq would constitute a significant expansion of the arena in which the Israeli-Iranian battle is being waged.

What to Watch

19 August: Foreign Minister Javad Zarif travels to Finland, followed by visits to Sweden and Norway.

24-25 August: G7 meeting in Biarritz, France.

28-29 August: Informal meetings of EU defence and foreign ministers in Helsinki, Finland.

30 August: Next quarterly IAEA report on the JCPOA’s implementation.
6 September: Iran’s next announced deadline for reducing its JCPOA commitments if it is not satisfied with Europe’s steps to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions.

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International Crisis Group (ICG), “Iran Briefing Note #10,” Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 2 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-10?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=21cf8b014b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_20_09_44_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-21cf8b014b-359871089, commented, “Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Events of Note
16 August: U.S. issues warrant for Grace 1 tanker.
17 August: Iran hosts talks with Huthis and E4 (France, UK, Germany and Italy) ambassadors.
18 August: The Grace 1 sets sail from Gibraltar.
19 August: Iran indicates it has warned U.S. via intermediaries against detaining Grace 1.
19 August: Bahrain signs on to U.S.-led International Maritime Security Construct.
19 August: Prime Minister Netanyahu warns that ‘Iran has no immunity, anywhere… we will act – and currently are acting – against them, wherever it is necessary’.
20 August: Explosions at Iraqi paramilitary base north of Baghdad, the third such incident in the past month.
20 August: U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo tells UN Security Council that Iran ‘has gone all in on a campaign of extortion diplomacy’
20 August: Huthis claim downing of U.S. drone over Yemen; U.S. National Security Council spokesperson says ‘this attack is only possible because of Iran’s lethal aid to the Huthis’.
21 August: Australia announces “modest, meaningful and time limited” contribution to U.S.-led International Maritime Security Construct.
21 August: An Iraqi enquiry into the 12 August explosion of a munitions warehouse assesses it was caused by a drone strike; paramilitary units issue statement asserting that ‘the U.S. is ultimately responsible’
21 August: President Rouhani warns that ‘if Iran’s oil export is reduced to zero, international waterways will not have the same security they used to’.
22 August: Iran unveils missile defence system, Bavar-373, that President Rouhani claims ‘is more powerful than the [Russian] S-300’.

Exit Grace 1, Enter Adrian Darya 1
An Iranian tanker detained in Gibraltar on 4 July set sail on 18 August.

Why it matters: In a 15 August statement, the Gibraltar government announced that Iran had provided ‘written assurance’ that the Grace 1’s $140m crude oil cargo was not headed for Syria in contravention of EU sanctions, and that the ship was free to go. Case closed? Not quite. The U.S. on 15 August warned that it could deny visas to sailors linked to the Grace 1 and other vessels it connected to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the following day issued a warrant for the ship’s seizure; it has since warned against possible offers of harbour to the now-renamed Adrian Darya 1. Meanwhile, the CEO of Stena Bulk, whose UK-flagged vessel Stena Impero was seized by Iran on 19 July under alleged “maritime violations” currently under consideration by an Iranian court, met with Foreign Minister Zarif in Sweden on 20 August to press for its release.

Quid (and Euro) Pro Quos
Foreign Minister Zarif on 21 August indicated that ‘even if the U.S. does not come back to the JCPOA and Europe simply implements its part of the bargain, then we will immediately – not within even days, within hours – reverse to the original state [of JCPOA compliance]’.
Why it matters: Iran in July breached the 2015 nuclear deal's limits on enriched uranium stockpile size and enrichment rates, while warning of a "third step" in September if Europe cannot deliver the economic dividends Tehran expects for its compliance. Recently released EU-Iran trade data gives a sense of the impact of the re-imposition of U.S. sanctions: over the first half of 2019, Iran's European exports amounted to €418m, down more than 93 per cent year-on-year, while imports more than halved. Getting the French/German/British special purpose vehicle (INSTEX) through its fitful start, including via the injection of export credits, may not completely mitigate these reversals, but - in light of Foreign Minister Zarif's statement - even a partial redress could help the JCPOA from unravelling further.

Pre-Biarritz Blitz
French President Emmanuel Macron on 21 August indicated that 'before the G-7 I will have meetings with the Iranians and propose ideas', adding that "we have made proposals either for a softening of sanctions or a compensation mechanism to enable the Iranian people to live better".

Why it matters: In the burst of 'active diplomacy' that Iran's top diplomat has been undertaking (Finland, Sweden and Norway this week, France on Friday and trips to Japan and China later this month), the meeting with President Macron just before he hosts President Trump in Biarritz for the G-7 stands out as a key opportunity for de-escalating tensions between Iran and the U.S. As Crisis Group recently argued, one path worth exploring is for Washington to partially reinstate sanctions waivers on Iranian crude sales and Tehran to resume full JCPOA compliance and refrain from provocations in the Gulf - a tactical détente that Macron may be in a prime position to mediate. Progress toward the release of dual nationals held by Iran on dubious charges would also be welcome.

What to Watch
23 August: Foreign Minister Zarif expected in Paris for meetings with President Macron and Foreign Minister Le Drian.
24-26 August: G-7 meeting in Biarritz, France.
28-29 August: Informal meetings of EU defence and foreign ministers in Helsinki, Finland.
30 August: Next quarterly report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the JCPOA's implementation.
6 September: Iran's next announced deadline for reducing its JCPOA commitments if it is not satisfied with Europe's steps to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions.
17-30 September: UN General Assembly, which Iran has announced Rouhani would attend; JCPOA Joint Commission meeting on the sidelines.

Click here to see the U.S.-Iran Trigger List: https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list, and here for a two-page, printable PDF of the Briefing Note: https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/iran-update-briefing-8.pdf.

International Crisis Group (ICG), "Iran Briefing Note #11," Briefing Note / Middle East & North Africa 16 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/iran-briefing-note-11?utm_source=Sign-Up-to-Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=0152bd8b7b-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_20_09_44_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-0152bd8b7b-359871089, "Iran Briefing Notes highlight and provide context for the previous week’s major events featured on International Crisis Group’s Iran-U.S. Trigger List. This infographic resource tracks developments on key flashpoints between Iran, the U.S. and their respective allies in the Middle East.

Events of Note
24 August: UK Royal Navy announces HMS Defender, a destroyer, heading to the Gulf to participate in U.S.-led International Maritime Security Construct.
24 August: Iran sanctions U.S. think tank and its CEO; State Department responds that "Iran issued a threat... we intend to hold Iran responsible for directly or indirectly compromising the safety of any American".
24 August: Israel confirms airstrikes south east of Damascus; Prime Minister Netanyahu asserts that "Iran has no immunity anywhere".
25 August: Lebanese army, Hizbollah point finger at Israel after a drone falls and a second explodes in south Beirut. Hizbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah says Israel should “wait for our response”.

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25 August: Two members of Iraqi pro-Iranian paramilitary group reportedly killed in drone strike close to Syria border.

25 August: Two days after talks with senior French officials in Paris, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif returns to France for talks with President Macron and other senior E3 officials with G-7 underway.

26 August: President Rouhani declares that the “hand of power and hand of diplomacy should work together”, adding that “if the odds of success are not 90 per cent but are 20 or 10 per cent we must move ahead with it”.

26 August: President Macron expresses hope for U.S.-Iran summit “in coming weeks”; President Trump indicates that “if the circumstances were correct or right, I would certainly agree” to meet President Rouhani.

26 August: Senior Iraqi leaders assert that string of attacks against paramilitary groups “are blatant, hostile acts”; parliamentary group linked to paramilitaries claims Israel responsible.

26 August: Lebanese media report Israeli attack against Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine base in Beqaa.

27 August: President Rouhani calls for U.S. to “take the first step, which is lifting the unjust sanctions". President Rouhani appears to have carried out a string of additional and wide-ranging attacks against Iran-backed paramilitary forces in Iraq as well as against Hizbollah and an allied Palestinian group in Lebanon, which Israel has not claimed but is widely suspected to have executed. In a 25 August speech, Hizbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah warned that “if we do not respond to the Zionist attack on Dahiyeh [the group’s south Beirut stronghold], Israel will repeat the same model used to attack the Hashd al-Shaabi [Iraqi paramilitary] sites in Iraq”. Thus while past Israeli operations in Syria in most cases did not trigger a response from Hizbollah or Iran, their expanded scope risks involving a broader array of actors who may prove difficult to restrain.

What to Watch
30 August: Next quarterly report of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the JCPOA's implementation

31 August: Foreign Minister Zarif expected to brief parliament on diplomatic efforts.

6 September: Iran's next announced deadline for reducing its JCPOA commitments if it is not satisfied with Europe's steps to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions.

17-30 September: UN General Assembly, which Iran has announced Rouhani would attend; JCPOA Joint Commission meeting on the sidelines.

Click here to see the U.S.-Iran Trigger List: https://www.crisisgroup.org/trigger-list/iran-us-trigger-list, and here for a two-page, printable PDF of the Briefing Note: https://d2071andwp0wj.cloudfront.net/iran-update-briefing-8.pdf.*


What's new? In June, several rockets landed near U.S. installations in Iraq, and in July-August, explosions shook weapons storage facilities and a convoy of Iraqi paramilitary groups tied to Iran. These incidents helped push U.S.-Iranian tensions to the edge of confrontation, underscoring the danger of the situation in Iraq and the Gulf.

Why does it matter? While the U.S. and Iran have so far avoided clashing directly, they are pushing the Iraqi government to take sides. Iraqi leaders are working hard to maintain the country's neutrality. But growing external pressures and internal polarisation threaten the government's survival.

What should be done? The U.S. and Iran should refrain from drawing Iraq into their rivalry, as doing so would undermine the tenuous stability Iraq has achieved in the immediate post-ISIS era. With the aid of international actors, Iraq should persevere in its diplomatic and domestic political efforts to remain neutral.

I. Overview

The rockets that fell close to U.S. assets in Iraq in mid-June and the explosions that struck the assets of Iraqi paramilitary groups with ties to Iran in July and August are ominous signals. They are clear warnings of how badly escalation between the U.S. and Iran could destabilise Iraq and the region as a whole. Even short of hostilities, Washington's “maximum pressure” campaign against Tehran could wind up placing as much stress – and inflicting as much harm – on its nominal ally Iraq as it does on its enemy Iran. For Iraq, the timing hardly could be worse. It is still recovering from the havoc wreaked by the Islamic State (ISIS) and the costly battle to defeat the jihadists; its institutions and security forces remain brittle; and its government, elected a little over a year ago, hangs on to a slim, precarious parliamentary majority.

Washington and Tehran should keep Baghdad out of their confrontation: the costs to both of renewed instability in Iraq would exceed any benefits to either. Attempts to compel the Iraqi government to choose sides would likely fail and lead to chaos instead.

The Iraqi leadership is working hard to insulate the country from regional turmoil. It is stepping up diplomatic engagement with Iran, the U.S. and its immediate neighbours, as well as shoring up domestic consensus behind the objective of remaining neutral. These efforts are important but may be insufficient to protect Iraq from the spiralling U.S.-Iranian rivalry. If relations between the U.S. and Iran continue to deteriorate, let alone if the two countries come to blows, the struggle is likely to deepen political polarisation between Iraqis supporting and opposing Iran. Even under current conditions, internal tensions may precipitate a descent into political disarray.

Both the U.S. and Iran are likely to lose from a feud in Iraq. Contrary to the Trump administration's expectations, its “maximum pressure” campaign is not countering Iran’s extensive influence in Iraq, which Tehran exercises in myriad ways. As part of its pressure, Washington would like Iraq to cut back its purchases of natural gas and electricity from Iran and forge closer links to U.S.-allied Arab states. But these U.S.-directed efforts are likely to lead Iraq to intensify its own pressure on Baghdad, seeking to
impede the Iraqi government’s efforts to strengthen its institutions, diversify its energy supply and broaden its foreign relations. Should tensions between Washington and Tehran continue to grow, U.S. personnel in Iraq could become more vulnerable to attack by pro-Iranian militias. A resulting security vacuum could enable an ISIS comeback.

Tehran, too, should have an interest in shielding Iraq from its standoff with Washington. Stability in its neighbour carries both economic and security benefits: it allows Iran to blunt the impact of U.S. sanctions by preserving ties to the Iraqi economy, and it lessens risks of an ISIS resurgence that inevitably would threaten Iran.

Others, too, can help immunise Iraq from harm, beginning with the Iraqi government itself. Steps it could take include making clear to the Trump administration which U.S. expectations it is in a position to satisfy and which it is not; bolstering efforts to bring the Iran-linked paramilitary groups under central government control; and intensifying outreach to regional states – notably Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Jordan – to counterbalance Iran’s role without exacerbating risks of armed confrontation on Iraqi soil. For its part, Europe, which has an important stake in consolidating the achievements of the anti-ISIS campaign and avoiding more turbulence in the area, should work with Baghdad in seeking to de-escalate U.S.-Iranian tensions and preventing them from dragging Iraq, and the wider region, into a dangerous spiral.

Mujib Mashal, "Afghan Talks With Taliban Reflect a Changed Nation," *The New York Times*, July 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/07/world/asia/afghanistan-peace-talks-taliban.html, reported, "When the Taliban met Sunday for the first time with Afghan officials, the delegates they faced formed a moving tableau of a new Afghanistan that has taken shape since the movement was toppled 18 years ago.

Bloodshed and progress in those years have gone hand in hand, and many of the representatives at the table — from each side — came with stories of personal loss and grievance. The dialogue in Qatar, which continues on Monday, is the first in which Afghan government officials have participated and aims to break the ice for direct negotiations on Afghanistan’s political future after an expected United States military withdrawal."

Mujib Mashal, "Stressing War’s Toll, Taliban and Afghan Representatives Agree to Peace Road Map," *The New York Times*, July 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/08/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-peace-talks.html, "Taliban and Afghan representatives, including some government officials, agreed on Tuesday to a basic road map for negotiating the country’s political future, a major step that could help propel peace efforts to end the long war, now in its 18th year.

In a joint declaration after two days of unprecedented and often emotional discussions in the Qatari capital, Doha, the two sides emphasized a need to work for reducing ‘civilian casualties to zero’ and assuring women their fundamental rights in ‘political, social, economic, educational, cultural affairs.’ The declaration is not binding, and at best is a starting point for when the two sides meet later for negotiations that could lead to fixed terms."

Mujib Mashal, "Afghan and U.S. Forces Blamed for Killing More Civilians This Year Than Taliban Have," *The New York Times*, July 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/30/world/asia/afghanistan-civilian-casualties.html, reported, "Afghan security forces and their American-led international allies have killed more civilians so far this year than the Taliban have, the United Nations said in a report on Tuesday, once again raising alarm that ordinary Afghans are bearing the brunt of an increasingly deadly 18-year war.

In the first six months of the year, the conflict killed nearly 1,400 civilians and wounded about 2,400 more. Afghan forces and their allies caused 52 percent of the civilian deaths compared with 39 percent attributable to militants — mostly the Taliban, but also the Islamic State. The figures do not total 100 percent because responsibility for some deaths could not be definitively established.

The higher civilian death toll caused by Afghan and American forces comes from their greater reliance on airstrikes, which are particularly deadly for civilians. The United Nations said airstrikes resulted in 363 civilian deaths and 156 civilian injuries."

International Crisis Group (ICG), Borhan Osman, Senior Analyst, Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Diplomacy gathers Steam Even as Attacks Increase,” Q&A / Asia 9 July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/afghanistan-diplomacy-gathers-steam-even-attacks-increase?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=03f0d00a5d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_05_10_11_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-03f0d00a5d-359871089, commented, "This week the Afghan government and Taliban met publicly for the first time – albeit informally – for a peace dialogue. Crisis Group’s Senior Afghanistan Analyst Borhan Osman explains what the talks mean and what may lie ahead.

What happened in Afghan peace talks in Doha?

Negotiations to end the Afghan war took a step forward on 7 and 8 July as more than 60 delegates, including Taliban and Afghan government officials as well as pro-government civil society representatives, gathered in the Qatari capital, Doha, for a peace dialogue. All participants joined the discussion in their personal capacities, which allowed the Taliban to continue refusing direct talks with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as the Afghan government is formally known. The format also circumvented longstanding concerns in Kabul about giving recognition to the Taliban’s preferred name for themselves: the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Setting aside the dispute over names and the underlying contestation of legitimacy, the two sides entered their first major – albeit informal – meeting.

Participants told Crisis Group that the atmosphere was respectful and constructive. A joint statement issued late on the second day struck a positive tone and outlined some shared principles but did not delve into specific points toward a follow-up meeting. Unlike previous events, which excluded Afghan government officials, and in which Taliban delegates generally restricted themselves to prepared statements, the Doha gathering turned into a conversation among Afghans about their shared future. Whether and how this ice-breaker event evolves into substantive negotiations on difficult issues, including the state’s structure and power-sharing in politics and security, remains to be seen.

Will the Taliban formally negotiate with the Afghan government?

The governments of Germany and Qatar facilitated the two-day dialogue in hopes that it would lead to direct negotiations. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah both responded to the Doha event with optimism that the Taliban would formally engage with their government. The Taliban, however, will be reluctant to sit down with Kabul’s representatives since they view that step as implying recognition of the government’s legitimacy. Taliban negotiators told Crisis Group that reaching even the current stage of informal talks represented a significant compromise on their part. Still, further shifts in the Taliban position remain possible, as the insurgents seem hopeful about progress on a related set of talks with the United States on withdrawal of troops.

How are talks proceeding between the U.S. and the Taliban?

U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad met again with the Taliban on 9 July, amid growing anticipation that the parties could soon announce a preliminary deal. Khalilzad then departed for travel to China and Washington. Participants say the talks have been tough but appear to be building toward an agreement that would include Washington’s declaration of a timeline for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan in return for Taliban guarantees not to harbour foreign militants. The emerging deal would link these two issues with two other conditions: a Taliban commitment to negotiate with the Afghan government and other political factions, and mutual commitment to military de-escalation or perhaps even a full ceasefire. The strength of the linkages between the first two items and the two more difficult parts – intra-Afghan talks and a ceasefire – would be the litmus test of any agreement. An agreement that is clear on the U.S.-Taliban deal but ambiguous about the Afghan peacemaking to follow might hasten the U.S. withdrawal without a high probability of stability in its wake.
How quickly could the U.S. and Taliban strike such a deal?
During his June visit to Kabul, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the U.S. wants a peace deal by September, before the Afghan presidential election planned for late that month. Some U.S. officials appear hopeful that, once a peace process starts moving ahead, Afghans from all political factions would prioritise Taliban negotiations over the planned election. Otherwise, the campaigning and voting risk distracting the parties from peace efforts, particularly as electoral disputes could drag on for months. Senior Afghan officials in Kabul told Crisis Group that the September goal for a peace agreement seems unrealistic. The government has been focusing on the election schedule, while expressing less urgency about peace talks. Breakthroughs in peace talks that push the election off centre stage in Afghan politics thus seem unlikely this summer. But diplomacy is proceeding at breakneck speed – putting great pressure on the Afghan conflict parties – and the outcome is hard to predict.

Why is there a surge in violence?
Escalating violence on both sides has punctuated the peace negotiations. On 1 July, for example, a Taliban attack in downtown Kabul killed at least 35 people, drawing the UN Security Council’s condemnation. Following the incident, the Taliban published two online commentaries describing the attack as a response to the Afghan government’s growing campaign of airstrikes and night raids. Two days before the Kabul attack, an airstrike killed religious students as young as ten years old in Wardak province.

Many people living through the surge of attacks find it puzzling that progress in peace talks is coinciding with intensified violence on the battlefield. The combatant parties, however, seem to see logic where civilians see a contradiction. U.S. and Afghan officials told Crisis Group that increased military pressure on the Taliban would improve the U.S. and Afghan negotiating positions at the peace talks. As for the Taliban, members of both the military and political wings claim that they are not coordinating their actions in response to events in Doha. Still, at a minimum, the rising Taliban attacks do seem to be an effort to demonstrate that mounting military pressure will not set the movement back on its heels.

Escalating violence risks hardening positions at the negotiating table. Following the Taliban’s Kabul attack, for example, social media users in the capital called upon government officials to pull out of the peace dialogue event in Doha. Similarly, Crisis Group has observed a small, more radical segment of the Taliban trying to use the increased airstrikes, particularly the bombing of mosques and religious schools, to discredit the entire political process. The more violence intensifies, the more such naysaying will resonate.

What will be the main sticking points as talks proceed?
In the talks between the U.S. and Taliban, the most difficult issue is the troop drawdown timetable – both how stretched out the drawdown will be, and whether it will commence and proceed unconditionally or be tied to progress in the peace process or other requirements. Both sides have been tight-lipped on progress in negotiating over this issue, but reportedly the Taliban have insisted on a nine-month timeline, whereas the U.S. has offered one two and half years long.

Among Afghan negotiating parties, reaching consensus on changes to the form of government is likely to be difficult. The Taliban insist on establishing an Islamic government, without as yet clarifying how, in their view, that would differ from the current Islamic republic. The parties will also sharply contest the timing for a comprehensive ceasefire. The Taliban prefer to continue fighting during negotiations in order to maintain their leverage, while the pro-government side seeks an early suspension of hostilities. For Afghan political groups and ordinary people who are sceptical of the Taliban’s sincerity in negotiations, progress would require the insurgents at least to commit firmly to an eventual ceasefire. Many Afghans consider a ceasefire the most visible proof that the Taliban are ready to make the transition to mainstream politics.

International Crisis Group (ICG), Borhan Osman, Senior Analyst, Afghanistan, "Intensifying Violence Dulls Afghans’ Hopes for Peace," Commentary / Asia 5 July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/rural-afghans-lost-feeing-imminent-peace, commented, “A return visit to Taliban strongholds in rural Afghanistan reveals that hopes for peace last year’s brief ceasefire sparked have dimmed amid growing violence – despite progress in peace talks. I travelled the war-torn districts of rural Afghanistan in June, searching for a lost feeling. I had visited the same rural areas a year earlier during the brief ceasefire that stretched through three magical days of June 2018. It was the first nation-wide ceasefire in the two decades since the U.S. invasion.
Taliban fighters hugged their enemies, joining members of the Afghan security forces in celebrations of the Eid al-Fitr holiday. People of all ages flooded public squares and waved flags of the two warring sides. Youth danced in the bazaars to the sound of drums. The war seemed to be ending.

All of that joy vanished this year. I went back to the same places in the Taliban strongholds of Wardak, Ghazni, and Paktika provinces during the Eid al-Fitr holiday and observed a stark contrast. People struggled to recall their feelings of a year ago. The ceasefire was a distant memory. Nobody seemed to care about the peace talks that have occurred between the Taliban and the U.S. over the last year. Their more immediate concern was the dramatic worsening of violence, and their personal stories of trauma caused by a stepped-up campaign of airstrikes and night raids by U.S. and Afghan government forces.

American military officials have told Crisis Group they are escalating the pressure on Taliban strongholds in hopes of encouraging the insurgents to soften their approach to peace talks. The strategy includes heavy reliance on air power. The nine months that followed the 2018 ceasefire brought a record-breaking 5,914 airstrikes to Afghanistan, more than a 50 per cent increase from the same period a year earlier. The bulk of these airstrikes hit rural areas from where there is generally little public reporting about daily life and the impact of the conflict on it. How those living in areas affected by the stepped-up air campaign perceive the increased military activity and its impact on their attitudes is little discussed compared to the experiences of violence in urban areas.

The rain of bombs shattered the relative peace that had existed for years in some Taliban-held territories. The insurgents have ruled parts of the countryside as their exclusive fiefdom, creating a sense of security and stability for the local populations. This year, government forces are chasing Taliban fighters deep into these villages in hunting operations often supported by U.S. aircraft. The operations brought the war back to the homes of the Taliban constituency, and some villagers blame the Taliban for sheltering among civilians. More often, though, I heard stories that reflect a deep resentment of the Americans and their local allies.

A tribal elder sees the situation this way:

I lost count of how many people that I have known lost their lives in airstrikes or got detained during night raids since this spring. There were Taliban among them. But not all of them were Taliban. Even not half of them were Taliban. Foreign and government forces are fighting indiscriminately. Do they want to punish us, the civilians, because the Taliban have chosen to live here? What is our crime, stuck between two sides?

A 45-year-old mother of eight children said her youngest daughter was stunned by the loud explosions and seemed to be constantly in a state of shock. She described the panic caused by airstrikes: Bombs have been raining like hell during the entire month of Ramadan. One day, I and my kids had to rush to the cows’ stable in the evening and eat our breakfast there in order to shelter from bombs. Taliban were moving around our house and planes in the skies were chasing them. We thought we would be deafened by the constant sounds of fire and explosions. We survived that day. We are very lucky to have lived till now.

These men and women have grown afraid of the sky; fearful after the frequent appearance of strike aircraft; on the ground, they worry about the Taliban’s arrival. Insurgents sometimes shelter behind civilians. In Ghazni province I heard complaints from villagers about the insurgents retreating to people’s homes when chased. Residents begged them to leave, but the fighters replied: “Your lives are not worth more than ours. Do you think that blood runs through your veins, and water through ours?”

Patterns of violence are changing. In the past, the insurgents inflicted the majority of civilian casualties. That started to change this year. The latest wave of fighting includes a greater number of civilians killed by international forces and their Afghan allies.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) reported in May that more civilians were killed by pro-government forces than by insurgents in the first quarter of 2019. This marks the first time since UNAMA started recording the casualties a decade ago that pro-government forces killed more civilians than did insurgents. Some analysts noted that the trend started more than two years ago, as the Taliban began taking greater care with their operations, though quite inconsistently, in an attempt to improve their political legitimacy. Taliban continue to cause civilian casualties; indeed, they detonated a car bomb near a government building in Kabul as recently as 1 July. But such high-profile attacks have become less
frequent as the insurgents have shifted toward targeted assassinations – often using small magnetic bombs – that kill fewer civilians.

The new wave of violence follows a longstanding pattern of the war’s intensification over the last dozen years, with both sides missing opportunities for de-escalation. The numbers of killed, injured and displaced have risen steadily since 2001. In 2014, some observers hoped that violence would subside after the foreign forces withdrew more than 100,000 troops and handed over lead responsibility for security to Afghan forces. The idea was that the Taliban would lose their raison d’être and find it hard to justify continued war as the international forces pulled back. The Taliban did not lose their momentum, however, citing the aim of removing of all foreign troops as a continued justification for the war. The insurgents stepped up their military campaign as the U.S. drew down its forces, threatening major cities and even briefly overrunning some urban zones. In 2016, fighting in Afghanistan killed more people than any other conflict worldwide, and the war will probably remain the world’s deadliest in 2019.

Increased fighting and airstrikes have driven many people to leave their homes. A schoolteacher from Wardak province told Crisis Group:

We often thought we had been through the worst of the fighting, but this year has been really the worst. We were caught in the crossfire all the time. The fighting has been madly intense. Several of my fellow villagers and relatives had to leave their homes and move to the city. We had thought the time of war and displacing people was past. But we see it all over again, the worst of it.

Amid the escalating violence, the U.S. and the Taliban began on 29 June in Doha a seventh round of bilateral talks aimed at concluding an agreement on terms for a U.S. military withdrawal and Taliban commitment to countering transnational terrorism. European diplomats are hoping to facilitate dialogue between the Taliban and other Afghan factions throughout the summer. These moves hold some promise for initiating peace negotiations among Afghans – without which a U.S.-Taliban deal will not end the war. But the violence seems unlikely to pause during any of these talks, which sours the mood of ordinary Afghans about the peace process. The violence may even ratchet up further, as all sides seek negotiating leverage on the battlefield.

I also spoke to Taliban commanders and their political emissaries in recent weeks. They seem unconcerned about whether increased military pressure from their side will spoil the mood of peace. Nor does it appear that the onslaught of airstrikes has softened the Taliban’s views on war and peace. A Taliban commander told me: ‘They can add as much bombing and military pressure as they can. We will add pressure accordingly. We are not afraid of dying. We do not run out of fighters. Their pressure would only make us harder, and a compromise more difficult.’

If the Taliban are upset about the increased bombing, are the front-line insurgents pushing their leadership to pull out of peace talks? Not yet, it seems. The Taliban’s envoys in Doha share regular updates with senior field commanders, and consult with them on political strategy. Those practices give the fighters some sense of the political game and that diplomacy might be worth trying. As a Taliban commander put it:

We have not been told to adjust our operations due to the talks. We have set our annual military plans in the winter and they go as planned. We decided to step up as the other side did. But there is nothing in the peace talks yet that makes us think about a lull in our fighting. We are going to fight as if there were no talks at all. But we increasingly suspect that the talks are just a game the Americans are using to deceive us and buy time. When we are fully confident about this, I am sure the leadership would decide to pull out [of talks].

There is still some hope among Taliban on the front lines that talks could lead to a breakthrough. However, patience for the process may be running out with the Taliban’s military cadres; it is unclear for how long they would endorse diplomacy if there is no sign of at least the beginnings of a deal. Many conversations make me think the seventh round of talks may well be a turning point for the faltering peace process.

If a breakthrough occurs at the peace table, it would happen despite — not because of — increased military pressure. For the Taliban, compromising in the face of U.S. airstrikes runs against their ethos of pride, ghayrat, which dictates they must do nothing that could be interpreted as succumbing to the pressure of the enemy. Even if the Taliban feel the pain of heightened military action and are bleeding
terrifically, ghayrat is not going to allow them to accept offers that make them appear unable to withstand the rising intensity of conflict. That would look like cowardice to the Taliban and their supporters.

Despite the bleak situation in communities experiencing the violence, a lesson from last year’s ceasefire is that the mood can shift rapidly. The guns went silent overnight, and it could happen again. A university lecturer in Ghazni province says he personally remains hopeful: ‘Last year’s ceasefire serves as a trailer for a long-awaited movie of peace’, he said. ‘This is how things could beautifully unfold when the sides opt for peace. All the rancour and ill-feeling of decades could vanish overnight, with joy and celebrations of peace, when the two sides reconcile’.


But the Taliban quickly rejected it.

The militant group’s spokesman said the Taliban was steadfast in its refusal to directly negotiate with the Afghan side until the United States announces a schedule for withdrawing the remainder of its 14,000 troops in the country. Analysts questioned the point of the government’s announcement when the Taliban’s position on the withdrawal of U.S. troops was clear all along.”


Mujib Mashal, “As Taliban Talk Peace, ISIS Is Ready to Play the Spoiler in Afghanistan,” The New York Times, August 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/20/world/asia/isis-afghanistan-peace.html, reported, “Even as the United States and the Taliban seem close to a deal on an American troop withdrawal, the Islamic State in Afghanistan is making clear that it stands to inherit the role of violent spoiler if any peace agreement is reached.”


More proactive security forces, borne of a generational shift to younger leaders, have been credited with denying the Taliban any major new gains at a crucial time of peace negotiations. The forces have ruthlessly used commandos and airstrikes to bleed the insurgents, waging what has been a more flexible and adaptive counterinsurgency compared to the older ways, when the forces remained less mobile and largely defensive.

However, the Taliban continued to make gains as their attacks increase as Taliban-U.S. peace talks restarted. For example, in Kandahar province, after the government relocated its district capitol of Maruf, the original one having been captured, on June 30, 2019, Multiple Car Bomb attacks by the Taliban in the New district center killed 34-50 people (Taimoor Shah and Fahim Abed, “Dozens Killed as Taliban Bombs in 4 Humvees Rip Through Afghan District,” The New York Times, June 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/asia/afghanistan-taliban-bombs.html).

ago, Pentagon officials said that American forces in the remote reaches of Afghanistan could defeat the
Islamic State’s offshoot here by the end of 2017.
This month, American Special Forces in eastern Afghanistan were still fighting, with no end in
sight."

Ben Farmer, "Pakistan’s Tribal Areas Are Still Waiting for Justice as Army Tightens Grip," The New
tribal belt in recent days, the security forces have asserted themselves as the true masters of justice in
the region."
"But this is the year things were supposed to be different in the tribal belt, which has waited for
something other than summary justice for decades and was promised it would finally happen.
Pakistan voted last year to merge those borderlands, once known as the Federally Administered
Tribal Areas, into the country’s political and legal mainstream. At a stroke, the move assigned the region’s
five million residents — the vast majority of them from the ethnic Pashtun minority — the same
constitutional rights as other Pakistanis, including access to the national civilian justice system.
Before, it had been run under a harsh frontier code set up long ago by British colonial masters,
who put each tribal region under the near-complete power of a single governor. Residents were denied
basic rights like access to lawyers or normal trials, and collective punishment for the crimes of an individual
was common."
Salman Masood, "Pakistan Brings Terrorism Financing Charges Against Hafiz Saeed," The New
prosecuting the founder of the Islamist terrorist group that carried out the deadly 2008 Mumbai attacks
on charges of terrorism financing, along with several of his close aides."
Asian (including Middle East) Developments

Syria Says it Agrees to Cease-Fire in Rebel Stronghold," The New York Times, August 1, 2019,
https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/world/middleeast/syria-says-it-agrees-to-cease-fire-in-rebelstronghold.html, reported, "Syria’s government said it has agreed to a conditional cease-fire starting late
Thursday in northwestern Syria, according to state media. Government troops and allied Russia warplanes
have been carrying out a three-month offensive against the rebel’s last stronghold, which has displaced
hundreds of thousands and has targeted health facilities and other infrastructure.
The decision came hours after U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres authorized an investigation
into attacks on health facilities and schools in the rebel-held enclave, following a petition from 10
members of the U.N. Security Council.
The offensive in Idlib and surrounding areas has unfolded since April 30, displacing more than
400,000 people and killing hundreds. Images of attacks on health facilities and residential homes were
reminiscent of the peak of the violence in the eight-year conflict. International rights groups, western
countries and the U.N. had appealed for a cease-fire. Around 3 million people are living inside the rebel-held
area."
However, Vivian Yee and Hwaida Saad, "Syrian Forces Move Into Strategic Town, Tightening Grip
on
Rebels,"
The
New
York
Times,
August
20,
2019,
reported that following Russian air attacks, "Syrian government troops are pushing into a strategic town in
the country’s last rebel-held region, local witnesses and monitors said Tuesday, another milestone in a
military campaign that has trapped about three million civilians in the area."
For a view of what Syria is like outside of Iblib after the civil war, see, Vivian Yee, Photographs
by Meridith Kohut, "What ‘Victory’ Looks Like: A Journey Through Shattered Syria: On an eight-day visit,

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Carlotta Gall, “U.S. and Turkey Avoid Conflict by Agreeing on Buffer Zone in Syria,” August 7, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/07/world/middleeast/us-turkey-peace-corridor-syria.html, reported, “The United States and Turkey agreed on Wednesday to create a safe zone in northeastern Syria that would allow Turkey to protect its borders from Syrian-Kurdish forces that it regards as a terrorist threat and provide Syrian refugees in Turkey a safe space to return home.”


What’s new? After President Donald Trump announced a full U.S. withdrawal from Syria, his administration decided to leave a residual force there. All parties - the U.S., Turkey, the Syrian regime, Russia and the PKK-affiliated People’s Protection Units (YPG) that control the north east – are adjusting their stance to the resulting uncertainty.

Why does it matter? The withdrawal reprieve provides an opportunity to prevent a violent free-for-all in the north east. Had U.S. troops left precipitously, Damascus might have tried to recover the territory and Ankara to exploit the vacuum to destroy the YPG. A resurgent Islamic State could have filled the void.

What should be done? Washington should use its remaining influence to address Turkish concerns about the PKK’s role in the north east while protecting the YPG; and Moscow should help the YPG and Damascus reach agreement on the north east’s gradual reintegration into the Syrian state on the basis of de-centralised governance.

Executive Summary

The U.S. flip-flop on Syria – from President Donald Trump’s announcement of an immediate withdrawal to the subsequent decision to maintain a limited troop presence in the north east for an unspecified period – offers an opportunity to set the area on a path to greater stability. A precipitous withdrawal carried a major risk: that the Syrian regime, Turkey or both would have sought to advance their interests by attacking the People’s Protection Forces (YPG), which is linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which Turkey, the U.S. and the EU consider a terrorist organisation. With its reversal, the U.S. retains leverage to mediate an arrangement in the north east that could survive an eventual U.S. troop departure. It will need to use its influence wisely. In particular, it should now press the YPG to reduce its monopoly on governance and loosen its PKK ties in exchange for U.S. protection from a possible Turkish military incursion. And it should stop discouraging the YPG from negotiating a Russian-backed deal with Damascus that could enable the north east’s gradual reintegration into the Syrian state on the basis of de-centralised governance.

President Trump’s 19 December 2018 surprise announcement that the U.S. would withdraw its troops from Syria stunned allies and adversaries alike. The YPG, which dominates the U.S.-allied Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) controlling the north east, suddenly faced the prospect of being left without its powerful protector. Turkey, the YPG’s adversary, saw an opportunity to intervene militarily in northern Syria and deal the PKK affiliate a blow. Trump’s announcement likewise reinforced Damascus’ belief that it might soon recover territory lost to the YPG. And the Islamic State (ISIS), on the verge of battlefield defeat, may have sensed a chance to stage a comeback.

As U.S. officials scrambled to devise a formula that would save the north east from chaos, Trump’s foreign policy team and the military first stretched and then partially walked back the initial withdrawal plan. This approach can buy precious time but, on its own, it cannot resolve Washington’s basic dilemma:
the president is determined to withdraw from Syria, yet so far is unable to reconcile the incompatible demands of two allies – the YPG and Turkey – and remains deeply opposed to the Syrian state’s return to the area so long as the current regime is in place.

To date, the administration has focused on finding middle ground between Turkey and the YPG. The gap is still wide. Whereas Ankara demands full control over a strip of territory inside Syria to limit YPG hegemony over the north east and keep the group from its border, the YPG requests an internationally enforced zone in roughly the same area, from which Turkish forces would be excluded and from only parts of which the YPG might agree to withdraw some of its fighters.

Absent a compromise, the contradiction that has been at the heart of U.S. policy for the past five years will remain – Washington can protect the YPG or strengthen its ties with Turkey, but it cannot do both. If it prioritises the former, Ankara likely will seek to destabilise YPG-controlled territory or conduct a war of attrition along its border with Syria. If it prioritises the latter, it risks losing a key partner in the fight against ISIS. Should the YPG feel threatened, it likely would redeploy its forces from the Euphrates valley in Deir al-Zour province to protect predominantly Kurdish towns in the north. This would leave the southerly areas, which the U.S.-backed SDF retook from ISIS in early 2019, unprotected from an ISIS resurgence.

The U.S. is not alone in facing a dilemma. Russia, too, must balance twin objectives that are in tension: helping Damascus reassert its sovereignty throughout the country, on the one hand, and maintaining strong relations with Ankara, on the other. To date, its attempts to broker an understanding between Turkey and Syria and mediate between the YPG and Damascus have come up empty; the presence of a residual U.S. force in the north east further reduces Moscow’s leverage.

Meanwhile, amid this uncertainty, worrying trends are emerging on the ground. Shortly after losing its last pockets of territory to the SDF at the end of February, ISIS shifted its strategy to an increasingly robust insurgency, which by now threatens to undermine the security situation in a significant part of north-eastern Syria. As long as the YPG feels unsure about its future, it will be less likely to conduct an effective counter-insurgency; each time it has felt Turkish pressure or less than full U.S. commitment on its behalf, it has paused its anti-ISIS operations and reinforced its fighting strength near the Turkish border. The YPG also faces an almost insurmountable challenge in the form of thousands of detained Syrians as well as foreign ISIS fighters and their families.

Washington’s extension of a troop presence in the north east is not a sustainable solution. It rests on shaky legal ground, lies at the mercy of another Trump change of heart and – sooner or later – will come to an end. What matters is what happens in the meantime. Even as it deters a Turkish attack, Washington should use the prospect of its eventual withdrawal to press the YPG to address Ankara’s concerns regarding the group’s growing influence in Syria’s north east. The YPG should take steps including diminishing its hegemony over the area and distancing itself from the PKK’s command and control. Alternatively, the U.S. should use its leverage over the YPG to encourage de-escalation between Turkey and the PKK.

The U.S. also should avoid standing in the way of a putative understanding between the Syrian regime and the YPG. Today, such a deal appears unlikely. The regime has expressed hostility to genuine decentralisation and its record of breaking agreements reached with other opposition groups hardly inspires confidence. But should that change, the north east’s gradual reintegration into the Syrian state on the basis of decentralised governance would seem the most viable, longer-term outcome. In the meantime, the Trump administration should neither obstruct dialogue between the two nor use the YPG as a tool to pressure the regime, which would only heighten the likelihood of an eventual showdown with Damascus. Amid the YPG-Turkish conundrum, one ought not to lose sight of ISIS. It may have suffered a territorial defeat, but it is a re-emerging threat in predominantly Arab areas under SDF/YPG control. The next phase in the fight against ISIS will require the YPG to devolve authority to local partners who then take the lead on governance and security in their home districts. A measure of stability has been achieved in Syria’s north east. But the area is home to a dizzying array of local, regional and international actors whose competition needs management; lest the stability prove short-lived. The consequences of chaos would be deadly.’

Lara Seligman, "Britain, France Agree to Send Additional Troops to Syria: The two U.S. allies have agreed to a marginal increase to help backfill the U.S. withdrawal," FP, July 9, 2019, "In a major victory for
U.S. President Donald Trump’s national security team, the United Kingdom and France have agreed to send additional forces to Syria to pick up the slack as U.S. troops withdraw. sources familiar with the discussions told Foreign Policy.

Britain and France, the only other U.S. partners that still have ground forces in Syria, will commit to a marginal 10 to 15 percent troop increase, a U.S. administration official confirmed. Other countries may send small numbers of troops as well, but in exchange the United States would have to pay, the official said."

The most influential Arab leader, including in Washington, DC, appears to be the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates, Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, who controls wealth of more than $1.3 trillion. He has been extremely bellicose against Iran, and in the war in Yemen. He has been strongly criticized by rights groups for his domestic policies, his backing of the current Saudi Crown Prince, and for playing a major role in creating a humanitarian crisis in Yemen. His international actions have often been destabilizing of nations in the region (David D. Kirkpatrick, "The Most Powerful Arab Ruler Isn’t M.B.S. It’s M.B.Z.: Prince Mohammed bin Zayed grew the U.A.E.’s power by following America’s lead. He now has an increasingly bellicose agenda of his own. And President Trump seems to be following him," The New York Times, June 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/02/world/middleeast/crown-prince-mohammed-bin-zayed.html).

Catie Edmondson, "Senate Votes to Block Trump’s Arms Sales to Gulf Nations in Bipartisan Rebuke," The New York Times, June 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/20/us/politics/saudi-arms-sales.html, reported, "The Senate voted to block the sale of billions of dollars of munitions to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday, in a sharp and bipartisan rebuke of the Trump administration’s attempt to circumvent Congress to allow the exports by declaring an emergency over Iran." The House appeared likely do the same, but Trump threatened to veto the bill, which he did.


Russia and Turkey, two of the dominant foreign powers in the area, had negotiated the cease-fire between the groups. It took effect on Wednesday, and was aimed at ending more than six weeks of fighting, bombing and shelling as the Syrian government moved to reclaim parts of the northwest."


In a separate attack in the city, a suicide bomber drove a truck full of explosives into a police station, killing at least 11 people, officials said. There was no immediate claim of responsibility for that blast. At least 50 people were wounded in the two attacks in Aden, the provisional capital of the Saudi-backed forces in the country’s civil war.

The missile strike on the military parade was the bloodiest assault on the Saudi-backed forces and their territory since their other main external sponsor, the United Arab Emirates, announced a steep drawdown of troops last month.


What’s new? A UN-brokered agreement to demilitarise the Yemeni port city of Hodeida is stuck. The Yemeni government insists on a complete handover of Hodeida by the Houthi rebels, which the latter reject. Meanwhile, Houthi attacks on Saudi territory and Saudi airstrikes in Yemen have intensified over the past three months.

Who does it matter? The paralysis in Hodeida is preventing the UN from convening talks to end the war and undermining its credibility as mediator. Continued Houthi attacks on Saudi territory could trigger a broader regional confrontation at a time of deepening tensions between Iran and the U.S. and its regional partners.

What should be done? The UN, with P5 support, should clarify the minimum threshold needed for implementing the Hodeida agreement to allow for a pivot to broader peace talks. And the U.S., with the UN in support, should push Saudi Arabia toward direct talks with the Houthis over military de-escalation, particularly regarding cross-border strikes.

Executive Summary

Yemen witnessed a rare moment of international coherence and focus in December 2018 when a UN-brokered, U.S.-backed accord prevented a battle for the Red Sea port city of Hodeida and staved off a likely famine. Seven months on, UN-led attempts to demilitarise Hodeida and two nearby ports are at risk of running aground, in turn preventing long hoped-for political negotiations to end the war. Beyond Hodeida, fighting is intensifying on other front lines. Cross-border attacks by the Houthi rebels, or Ansar Allah (also known as Ansar Al sharia) into Saudi Arabia and Saudi airstrikes inside Yemen are enmeshing Yemen ever more deeply in regional tensions between the U.S. and Iran. If a collapse of the demilitarisation process is to be prevented and Yemen is to be firewall from regional rivalries, international stakeholders in the crisis should urgently revive diplomatic efforts to achieve a realistic implementation plan for Hodeida so that broader peace talks can begin, and urge Saudi Arabia and the Huthis to negotiate an end to reciprocal cross-border attacks.

A weakened UN diplomatic effort in Yemen is in dire need of an international shot in the arm to remove obstacles to implementing the Stockholm Agreement, of which the subsidiary agreement to demilitarise Hodeida city and ports forms the core. In May, faced with the parties’ inability to work out a mutually acceptable process, the UN endorsed unilateral Huthi redeployments from Hodeida, Ras Issa and Salif ports. Yemen’s internationally recognised government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi reacted angrily, calling the Hudi redeployments a sham and accusing UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths of bias, even briefly cutting off contact with him. The Hadi government has yet to back down from its maximalist...
interpretation of the accord: that all Huthi personnel are to be replaced by government forces, a claim the Huthis reject and the UN says does not reflect what was agreed in Sweden.

**Amid this worrisome picture is some good news.** In June 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) withdrew the bulk of its forces that led the assault on Hodeida and continue to support anti-Huthi Yemeni fighters along the Red Sea coast, easing the threat of a return to major fighting. But this development should not lull policymakers into a false sense of security. Front-line fighting has moved to other parts of the country. Anti-Huthi forces still see Hodeida as a target and may yet resume hostilities, with devastating consequences. Yemen’s humanitarian crisis, which the UN describes as the world’s biggest, has not deteriorated significantly since December 2018, but neither has it improved. A renewed battle for Hodeida would almost certainly tip the country into widespread famine. Plus, continued efforts to revive the faltering Hodeida agreement are consuming all available diplomatic bandwidth at great cost, preventing a turn to national-level peace talks.

At the same time, Yemen is at increasing risk of becoming the trigger for a wider regional confrontation. Escalating Huthi drone attacks and missile strikes into Saudi Arabia since May have injured dozens of civilians and killed one person. Saudi airstrikes in Yemen have also intensified, routinely causing civilian casualties. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia use increasingly black-and-white language in their portrayal of the Huthis as an Iranian remote-control proxy just as the crisis in U.S.-Iran relations has further intensified. Senior U.S. officials now say that they consider all Huthi attacks as Iran-directed, while some Huthi officials say they see a “great war” across the region as all but inevitable. It is not hard to imagine a particularly lethal Huthi attack prompting military action by the U.S. and its allies against Iran, or drawing the U.S. deeper in to the Yemen war.

Reviving the Hodeida agreement and preventing an escalatory spiral of cross-border attacks from plunging Yemen further into a regional quagmire are urgent priorities. They will require successfully pushing on two mediation tracks: one between the Huthis and the Yemeni government over Hodeida and the other between the Huthis and Riyadh over escalating fighting between them.

As for the first track: optimally led by the UN and supported by the PS, talks should aim to clarify the minimum steps necessary to stabilise the situation in Hodeida and allow for the onset of broader Yemeni peace talks. Closing the remaining gaps on Hodeida will entail addressing the thorny issue of the composition of local security forces that are to provide security following Huthi redeployment from the city and ports; if a full resolution proves unachievable, then the UN should aim at a minimum for a satisfactory compromise that allows discussions over the city to take place in parallel to more comprehensive peace talks. This in turn will require pressure by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council on both sides and their respective regional backers.

As for the second track: Saudi Arabia and the Huthis should engage in discussions aimed at halting cross-border attacks. The U.S. is best-placed to encourage Saudi Arabia to reestablish meaningful communication with the Huthis in pursuit of such an agreement.

The more time passes without either a workable Hodeida arrangement or a freeze in cross-border attacks, the greater the threat of the Stockholm Agreement’s unravelling and of a wider regional war. The more remote, too, any prospect of a national political settlement and end to the Yemeni conflict. The international community mobilised once before to prevent an attack on Hodeida. With the stakes now even higher – for both Yemen and the region as a whole – such mobilisation is needed again, as urgently as ever.”

ICG, “Preventing a Civil War within a Civil War in Yemen,” Alert / Middle East & North Africa 9 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/yemen/preventing-civil-war-within-civil-war-yemen?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=6d7ee17175-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_09_07_5&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-6d7ee17175-359871089, commented, “Fighting within the anti-Huthi front threatens to make an already multi-faceted conflict even more complex and intractable. Clashes in Aden reveal tensions within the Saudi-led coalition and highlight the pressing need to address Yemen’s “southern question” now rather than wait until a post-conflict political transition.”
Clashes in the port city of Aden between secessionists and loyalists of the internationally recognised president, Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, threaten to tip southern Yemen into a civil war within a civil war. Such a conflict would deepen what is already the world’s worst humanitarian crisis and make a national political settlement harder to achieve. In the past, half-measures helped de-escalate simmering tensions in the south; today’s circumstances require robust diplomatic intervention from the UN, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates to avoid the worst and help forge a durable solution.

The fighting broke out on 7 August during the funeral of Munir “Abu al-Yamama” al-Yafei. Al-Yafei was a leading commander of the Security Belts, a UAE-backed paramilitary group that has battled the Hadi government’s forces before, despite technically falling under its interior ministry’s command. He was killed by a missile that hit a parade ground in western Aden on 1 August. The Huthis claimed responsibility for the strike. But members of the Southern Transitional Council (STC), secessionists who see themselves as a southern government-in-waiting and claim control of the Security Belts, blamed it on Islah, Yemen’s main Sunni Islamist political party, which is sometimes described – not entirely accurately – as “Yemen’s Muslim Brotherhood". STC media outlets speculate that Islah and the Huthis are conspiring to destabilise the south together, despite the fact that they are on opposite sides of the wider war.

STC officials further claim that while they respect Hadi’s legitimacy, Islah members, whom they describe as terrorists, have infiltrated Hadi-aligned military forces, including the Presidential Guard, as well as other government institutions. The Presidential Guard is stationed at the presidential palace, near the location of al-Yafei’s funeral. After reports of gunshots directed at the mourners, STC-aligned fighters and Guardsmen exchanged fire at the palace entrance and near the airport. The STC claims that eleven of its members were killed. By the early evening of 7 August, Aden residents reported that the fighting had subsided, giving rise to hopes of a ceasefire. But Hani bin Breik, the STC vice president who is widely seen as the Security Belts’ founder, called that night for the overthrow of what he described as the “terrorist” and “corrupt” government. Fighting erupted again on 8 August. It was ongoing at the time of publication after a failed Yemeni-Yemeni initiative to negotiate a truce.

The parties have issued a welter of statements that may seem contradictory. Bin Breik reaffirmed the STC’s affiliation with the Saudi-led coalition, the force that intervened in Yemen’s civil war in 2015 to restore the president. Ahmed al-Maysari, the Hadi loyalist interior minister, claimed on 7 August that his forces had fended off a coup attempt and that the Saudi-led coalition continued to support the Hadi government. For their part, Mohammed al-Jaber, the Saudi ambassador to Yemen, and Anwar Gargash, the UAE minister of state for foreign affairs, each called for calm without expressing support for either side.

Aden’s convoluted situation reflects the internal politics of Yemen’s anti-Huthi coalition, united against a common enemy but fragmented and lacking a shared identity. The Hadi government wishes to regain control of all Yemen. The STC, giving voice to southern grievances against perceived northern domination dating to the end of Yemen’s brief 1994 civil war, wants an independent south. Framing Islah and the Huthis as two sides of one “northern” coin, the STC alleges Islah infiltration of the Hadi loyalists when in fact these forces are largely southerners only loosely allied with Islah. The group’s rhetoric is also likely designed to garner support from the UAE, which reviles the Muslim Brotherhood.

South Yemen’s tangled politics, in turn, reveal the differing interests of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, the heavyweights in the Saudi-led coalition. Though the two sides in Aden both claim the coalition’s full support, forces loyal to Hadi are Saudi-backed while the STC and Security Belts are backed by the UAE. The UAE entered Yemen as part of Saudi Arabia’s campaign to oust the Huthis and restore Hadi to power. Abu Dhabi recognises that Riyadh depends on Islah-affiliated figures such as Vice President Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar to sustain the anti-Huthi war effort. But UAE officials also view the Saudis’ relationship with Ali Mohsen and other Islamists warily, and consider the STC to be a vital non-Islamist counterweight. In turn, Saudi officials concede that the UAE and its southern allies have produced most of the war’s notable military successes, including the push toward the Red Sea port city of Hodeida in 2018. Yet some in Riyadh are nonetheless displeased by Abu Dhabi’s support for the STC, which they worry undermines Hadi and diverts attention from the fight against the Huthis.

The imperative of defeating the Huthis explains why the sides struck a balance in Aden, which Hadi named Yemen’s temporary capital after fleeing Huthi-controlled Sanaa in 2015. On the one hand, the UAE and its allies have allowed the government to retain a physical presence in Aden; on the other hand, STC-
aligned forces have become the dominant power on the ground. But, with so many divergent interests inside the coalition, it is an unstable equilibrium.

At the moment, the balance of power on the ground appears to lie with the STC but outright victory is by no means assured for the secessionists. Both the STC and the Hadi government claim to have the upper hand militarily. While the STC has a larger number of affiliated forces in Aden and across the south, it is not clear that all its supporters will answer bin Breik’s call to overthrow the government. In the past, many STC commanders remained neutral during other STC units’ clashes with Hadi loyalists and even threatened to take the government’s side. Many other secessionist groups are wary of the STC, which they worry hopes to build a one-party state modelled on the People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen that governed the south before the 1990 unification. The STC denies having this ambition. Other southerners view the STC and especially its leadership as biased toward al-Dhale, a part of the south whose military forces were pitted against those from Abyan, President Hadi’s home governorate, in the brutal southern civil war of 1986. There are echoes of the past in today’s political alignments and fighting.

Full-fledged support from Abu Dhabi or Riyadh for either side could be a game changer. Hadi government officials claim that Saudi Arabia warned the STC that its jets would strike anyone attempting to enter the presidential palace. This claim cannot be confirmed, but Saudi armoured vehicles reportedly have been deployed at the palace entrance. The STC leadership will likely seek to avoid any action that might place it in direct conflict with Riyadh, consistent with the UAE’s views.

The fighting in Aden is not the first standoff between Saudi-backed and UAE-backed forces in Yemen, but if it continues, it could be the most destructive. If tensions in Aden cannot be eased, the risk is high that they will spread to other parts of the south. A battle in Aden or the wider south could also draw in southern forces engaged in the fight against the Huthis on the Red Sea coast and Islah-aligned forces from northern governorates. More broadly, such a turn of events could hurt UN-led efforts to broker a deal to end the war with the Huthis who, facing less military pressure, could be in a stronger position to question both the Hadi government’s credibility as its sole negotiating partner and its ability to deliver on any putative political agreement. Intensified clashes in the south also would have serious humanitarian implications. To begin, they likely would shut off access to Aden’s airport, many Yemenis’ only reliable gateway to the outside world. Flights have already halted temporarily. Moreover, clashes would stem the flow of goods coming into the country from Aden’s port, pushing up prices of fuel, food and other staples nationwide. Millions of Yemenis already cannot afford to meet their basic daily needs.

To head off further clashes, damage to UN-led negotiations and an even more pressing humanitarian emergency, Crisis Group recommends the following steps:

- Coordinated diplomatic intervention, led by the UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, to prevent further fighting in Aden and escalation in other governorates. Abu Dhabi and Riyadh should use their influence and leverage over their respective local allies to press for an immediate ceasefire.

- Formation of a coordinating security council consisting of civilian and military leaders from the Hadi government, STC and Saudi-led coalition to discuss solutions to the dispute. The coalition would convene this council and invite international observers, such as UN personnel. This council would focus on de-escalating tensions and finding workable security arrangements to begin the demilitarisation of Aden and other southern cities. It would formulate a time-bound plan for de-escalation and cooperation on internal security and local governance over the coming year.

- Dialogue among the Hadi government, the STC and other southern groups, initiated by the UN with the support of Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The future status of Yemen’s south needs to be addressed and cannot wait for a post-war political transition. The dialogue would aim to determine broader southern inclusion in current UN talks to end the war and it should start intra-southern discussions on the future of the south that can inform a national political settlement.

- For too long, Yemen’s southern question has been an afterthought for diplomats. Even after the street battles of January 2016, little was done to resolve local tensions. The principal international stakeholders in Yemen have strong relationships with the rival sides in Aden, and now they have an opportunity to deal both with the immediate threat of conflict and its underlying causes. It is an opportunity they are unlikely to have again if they fail to seize it.”
calls for committed Yemen’s Slide into Fam
Hodeida city has been largely encircled by UAE
lace on 10 May. The fighting that broke out on Wednesday has been between two groups that are nominally allies: the separatists, who aspire to make southern Yemen independent, and the forces loyal to Yemen’s exiled president, Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi. Throughout the war, the two groups have been part of a Sunni coalition fighting the Houthi rebels, who practice an offshoot of Shiite Islam and have taken over the president, Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi country’s northwest.

Yemen’s Slide into Famine.

Hodeida, a UN-declared humanitarian hub, the northern highway, still open. (See Crisis Group Report No 193: How to Halt Yemen’s Slide into Famine.) Under the Stockholm Agreement, the Houthis and the Yemeni government committed to pulling back their frontline forces from Hodeida city and its three ports. The agreement also calls for prisoner swaps and the formation of a joint committee to deal with the fight for the embattled

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city of Taiz. (See Making Yemen’s Hodeida Deal Stick.) The deal did not clearly define how the rival military groups would be redeployed or the composition of local security forces designated to secure areas that frontline fighters vacate. These details were meant to be worked out by the RCC.

The UN has struggled to broker a consensus on how to implement the deal. For RCC members, who have not met face-to-face since January, the question of local security forces has been the thorniest. The government is pushing for the return of pre-war security forces that report to them, and the Huthis argue for keeping in place security personnel already in the city, who are under their control.

At the most recent Security Council meeting in April, Michael Anker Lollesgaard, a Danish general who heads UNMFA and chairs the RCC, announced that the two sides had agreed to the details of a first phase of redeployments. These would include a Huthi withdrawal from the three ports and both forces pulling back from the so-called “Kilo 8 triangle” on the city’s eastern edge. The UN had hoped that this could happen without the need for an agreement on the local security forces issue. But it has since become clear that the two parties will not complete implementation of phase one until there is agreement on the details of phase two redeployments from the city, as well as an agreement on the local security forces.

Security Council Pressure

The unilateral redeployment was in no small part a product of pressure on the UN to show some progress on implementing the Stockholm Agreement, given that consensus on local security forces and finalising the details of phase two redeployments will still take time. Five months had already passed since the meeting in Sweden and Security Council members had come under mounting pressure from the Yemeni government and its backers in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to censure the Huthis for blocking implementation of the Stockholm Agreement. Such a move, however, would have been more likely to enrage the Huthis than pressure them into compliance, particularly since they have not been the only obstructionists. With a Security Council meeting scheduled for 15 May, Griffiths opted for what was possible: a UN-monitored Huthi withdrawal from the ports, which Crisis Group has consistently recommended. (See Update #9.)

While both the Saudi-led coalition and the Yemeni government gave the green light for the move, the latter is now objecting to what it views as a fait accompli to permanently install Huthi supporters in critical positions at the ports with the UN’s blessing. Coast Guard units from Huthi-controlled areas have taken over security, leading the government to claim that the Huthis have simply “rebadged” their fighters – with UN complicity. The government objects in particular to what it says amounts to the UN dropping the requirement of a tripartite verification process that both sides established during RCC-led negotiations earlier this year. It argues that the Huthi move was unilateral and, as such, a breach of the Stockholm Agreement and subsequent Security Council resolutions, although none of these documents specifies the details of monitoring or prohibits consensual unilateral redeployments.

Distrust between the Huthis on the one hand and the government and the Saudi-led coalition on the other has deepened since the Stockholm Agreement owing to an intensification of fighting on other frontlines. Huthi attacks on Saudi oil infrastructure deep inside the Kingdom on 14 May, and Saudi airstrikes in Huthi-held areas (see below). The government’s reaction to the redeployments – the first time Huthi forces have pulled back from territory they hold through a negotiated settlement since the war began in March 2015 – risks heightening longstanding Huthi fears that the entire redeployment process has been rigged from the start to provide public justification for a military assault on the city.

The weaknesses of the Stockholm Agreement – its vague language and lack of detail left it too open to interpretation – and ongoing gamesmanship between the parties have placed Griffiths in a near-impossible position. Absent progress on the ground, there was a real likelihood that the Security Council would single out the Huthis for obstruction, potentially scuppering the whole process. But when, under huge time pressure, the envoy convinced the Huthis to redeploy their forces – largely on the basis of an operational plan agreed within the RCC – and received sign-off from the government and coalition, he came under attack for his efforts nevertheless. Yet the process has not collapsed, and if the Security Council endorses it, as it should, it could set the stage for further redeployments.

Bottom Line: Griffiths had few options to preserve the Stockholm Agreement, and took the most logical step forward. While it should not be mistaken for a major breakthrough, his achievement is significant and should be warmly welcomed. The government’s reaction may chiefly reflect a tactical move – an attempt to maintain pressure on the Houthis and the UN to ensure its interests are not forgotten –
rather than a genuinely negative position. UNMHA should work to reassure the government and the Saudi-led coalition that the redeployments were sincere and that the arrangements at the ports after these unilateral redeployments do not set a precedent for the rest of the process in Hodeida and beyond. The government will anyway be given the chance to assess the redeployments either now or as part of the overall process.

UN Security Council members should back Griffiths’ approach, and maintain pressure on the Huthis, the government and the coalition to find a solution to the local security forces issue for Hodeida. They should also push for ports revenues to be used to pay for state salaries (as per the agreement), and for progress on the prisoner swaps agreed in Sweden. Both measures can keep this important process alive and inspire hope for talks on a wider political process. It has become clear that implementing Stockholm will be a marathon rather than a sprint. But the collapse of the agreement would only lead to more bloodshed, a more acute humanitarian catastrophe and further postponement of a long-awaited peace process.

Political and Military Developments

On 14 May the Huthis announced that they had launched multiple attacks on an oil export pipeline that links the east and west coasts of Saudi Arabia. Seven Huthi-controlled drones carrying explosives reportedly detonated at oil pumping stations in central Saudi Arabia. Huthi representatives said that the attacks came in response to coalition “aggression”, in particular a recent intensification of fighting against the Huthis claim has led to fuel shortages in territory they hold. Earlier in May, the Huthi-controlled Supreme Economic Committee in Sanaa had accused the coalition of using the economy as a tool of war, in particular by blocking fuel imports into Hodeida. On 16 May, the coalition launched airstrikes in Sanaa in apparent retaliation for the drone attacks. Multiple civilian deaths were reported.

Elsewhere in Yemen, battles between UAE-backed southern forces and the Huthis continued in al-Dhale, Abyan and Lajj governorates (see Update #10) while fighting along the northern border with Saudi Arabia also reportedly intensified, particularly in the Abs district of Haja governorate (see Update #7). Durayhimi district, to the south of Hodeida city, also is seeing regular and often fierce clashes; the area is technically subject to the governorate-wide ceasefire agreed in Sweden. As with the other fronts, the rival parties blame one another for the fighting.

Sanaa-based members of Yemen’s historical ruling party, the General People’s Congress (GPC), announced that they had held elections for the GPC’s ruling body. Among those named as members were Ahmed Ali Abdullah Saleh, the son of the GPC founder and former president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Awadh Aref al-Zuka, the son of Aref al-Zuka, the former GPC assistant secretary-general and a longtime Saleh ally. The party has been riven by divisions since Yemen’s 2011 uprising, a trend made worse by the Huthi killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh in December 2017. Multiple factions now claim to represent the GPC’s popular base – the party has won the most votes in every major poll in Yemen’s history – but the most prominent (if not the most influential) are those clustered around the Sanaa leadership, Ahmed Ali Saleh (based in Abu Dhabi) and Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi, the current president. The addition of Saleh and al-Zuka to the ruling council has been interpreted by some as a broadside against the Hadi faction by the Sanaa and Abu Dhabi factions amid attempts to build internal consensus.

Tensions between the Hadi government on one side and the UAE and the forces it backs on the other have become more visible in recent weeks. Local media reports in May claimed that a large contingent of UAE-backed forces had landed on Socotra, a Yemeni island in the Arabian Sea and a flashpoint for UAE-Yemeni government tensions in the past. In response to these reports, Interior Minister Ahmed al-Maysari said the government had asked the coalition to help liberate Yemeni territory, “not administer it”. Minister of Transport Saleh al-Jabwani accused the coalition (specifically the UAE, which is dominant in Aden) in early May of preventing the transport ministry from increasing the number of flights by state-run Yemenia to Aden during Ramadan. Local media also reported that members of the Hadi-loyalist Presidential Guard had clashed with UAE-backed forces in al-Dhale, after travelling to the frontlines in order to fight the Huthis.

On 5 May the UN’s World Food Programme surveyed conditions at the Red Sea Mills wheat storage and milling facility on the outskirts of Hodeida for the first time since February. Staff assessed the
conditions of the facilities and the wheat, and concluded that around 70 per cent of supplies at the mill were salvageable.

Bottom Line: While Hodeida carries the lion’s share of headlines, political, economic and military competition continues unabated in the rest of the country, and has accelerated since December. The UN special envoy’s office is already at maximum capacity, but intervention to de-escalate along key frontlines and improve the flow of goods into all parts of the country is needed to improve the overall picture. As Crisis Group has noted before, Griffiths is in direct contact with the Huthis, the government of Yemen and the Saudi-led coalition, and should push for a de-escalation as part of confidence-building measures that go beyond Hodeida and support future peace talks. A de-escalation agreement could include a freeze on or reduction of cross-border attacks, airstrikes and offensives aimed at seizing new territory.

Regional and International Developments

Rising tensions between Tehran and Washington – which increasingly sees Yemen as another front in its regional ‘maximum pressure’ campaign against Iran – are visibly affecting discussions about Yemen. Some Saudi-aligned commentators have argued the Huthis’ 14 May attack on oil pumping stations in Saudi Arabia was coordinated to coincide with attacks on four oil tankers in the Gulf of Oman two days earlier. Anonymous U.S. officials have speculated this second attack was perpetrated by Iran.

While Saudi and Emirati officials have been broadly positive about the Hodeida redeployments announced by the UN in contrast to the Yemeni government, they have warned that further cross-border attacks could undermine attempts to implement the Stockholm Agreement. Some U.S., Saudi and Emirati officials believe that they need to apply fresh military pressure on the Huthis if the latter are to implement the remainder of the deal and engage constructively in a political process, and also to push back against Iranian influence in Yemen. They suggest that such pressure – which they say is justified by the cross-border attacks – would most likely come from a new offensive in or near Hodeida.

At the time of writing the Security Council was discussing a potential statement on Yemen. While the five permanent council members – the U.S., UK, France, China and Russia – are said to be broadly positive about the redeployments, Kuwait, a non-permanent member, has criticised the way they were carried out, citing the need for tripartite verification. Some council members are also likely to want to condemn the Huthi attack on Saudi oil infrastructure (but not the airstrikes in Sanaa).

Bottom Line: Regional developments make implementation of the Stockholm Agreement and the start of a UN-led peace process in Yemen all the more urgent. As Tehran and Washington ramp up their rhetoric, there is a real danger that Yemen could come to be seen in both capitals as just another front in their regional competition for dominance. Diplomats working to bring peace to Yemen should redouble efforts to make the redeployments in Hodeida stick as an indispensable first step toward a wider ceasefire and talks to end the war.


What’s new? The anti-Huthi alliance in Yemen has reached a breaking point with southern secessionist forces taking over the interim capital, Aden, from the internationally recognised government. The government calls the move a coup and accuses the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of complicity. Saudi Arabia is trying to broker a truce.

Why does it matter? If allowed to fester, the intra-alliance discord in the south could tip the country into a civil war within a civil war. That development almost certainly would lengthen the wider conflict, deepening Yemen’s humanitarian emergency and making a political settlement harder to achieve.

What should be done? Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE and UN special envoy, should mediate an end to intra-alliance violence and address its causes by expanding the number of groups representing the anti-
Huthi bloc in UN-led talks, placing the southern question on the agenda and laying the foundation for a durable peace.

I. Overview

The past eight years of uprisings and war have redrawn Yemen’s political map almost entirely. UN-led attempts first to prevent and then to end the country’s bloody civil war have failed, often because they lag behind the rapidly changing facts on the ground. The latest political rupture came in August 2019, when the secessionist Southern Transitional Council (STC), a self-styled government-in-waiting led by Aydrous al-Zubaidi, seized the southern port city of Aden, the country’s interim capital, from the internationally recognised government of President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi. As of this writing, the situation is in flux: the government is mounting an offensive in hopes of retaking Aden; both sides are preparing for renewed battle; and their respective external allies appear to be stepping in.

This turn of events brings longstanding but partially hidden tensions within the anti-Huthi coalition into the open – and could prolong the war. Backers of the opposing sides in the south should, with the UN’s help, mediate an end to the fighting and negotiate a more inclusive power-sharing arrangement. That deal, in turn, could lay the foundation for a pan-Yemeni peace process that comprises all the primary stakeholders.

If left unaddressed, fighting in the south could spark a civil war within a civil war [and] thus prolong the overall conflict, worsen Yemen’s humanitarian crisis, and drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

There is considerable debate over how the STC’s takeover of Aden came about, in particular whether it was premeditated or spontaneous. What can be said with certainty is that the sequence of events started with the death of a senior southern security official aligned with the STC, Munir “Abu Yamama” al-Mashali (also known as al-Yafei). Mashali died in a Huthi-claimed missile strike on 1 August. Nine days later, STC-affiliated forces trained and equipped by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were in complete control of Aden’s military bases and government institutions. In the interim, they exchanged fire and recriminations with Saudi-funded units, their ostensible allies under Hadi government command. Government officials say they hold the UAE, which has cooperated closely with the separatists since 2015, responsible for the STC’s actions. Since then, the two have become to blows with the UAE launching airstrikes against government-aligned fighters, which they say were terrorist militias seeking to attack the Arab coalition, as they moved to Aden in an attempt to re-take the city.

If left unaddressed, fighting in the south could spark a civil war within a civil war. It could thus prolong the overall conflict, worsen Yemen’s humanitarian crisis, and drive a wedge between Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

But there is a better way. The Aden takeover provides a chance for international stakeholders in Yemen to revive and recalibrate a peace process that is increasingly removed from facts on the ground. This process has long been constrained by UN Security Council Resolution 2216 (passed in 2015) that effectively – and unrealistically – called for Huthi surrender to the Hadi government. Most have interpreted the resolution to limit the UN’s mandate to negotiations between the government and the Huthis, leaving out other critical stakeholders, notably southern secessionists. Ideally, events in the south would prompt the Security Council to pass a resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire and renewed UN-led talks that include southern separatists to end the war and establish a transition period. Yet this outcome is highly improbable, given Saudi Arabia’s opposition to any new resolution and a likely U.S. veto.

A more practical approach would be for the Saudis and Emiratis, with UN help, to work with their Yemeni allies to reschedule the anti-Huthi coalition deck in a way that tamps down the immediate potential for more violence and lays the foundation for more inclusive and sustainable UN-led negotiations. They could, for example, negotiate formation of a government based on a new power-sharing arrangement, including southern separatists. This arrangement could then act as the basis for the selection of an inclusive delegation to future UN-led talks to end the war, which would also need to encompass discussion of the southern issue. Such an approach would allow a much-needed course change, while allowing the Saudis and Hadi government to avoid upending 2216.”

In Turkey, after President Erdogan’s party candidates lost badly in elections in cities around the country, most notably in his political stronghold of Istanbul, Erdogan forced a re-election. Dorian Jones “Opposition Candidate Wins Istanbul Mayoral Seat,” GlobalSecurity.org, June 23, 2019, https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/turkey/2019/turkey-190623-
Turkey's opposition won decisively in the controversial re-vote in the Istanbul mayoral election. The victory is a significant defeat for President Recep Tayyip Erdogan who lost his Istanbul power base of 25 years. Provisional results indicate Imamoglu increased his winning margin to over 700,000 votes with 54% of the total votes, up from the razor-thin majority of 13,000 in the March poll.

Isabel Kershner, “Israel Is Blamed for Deadly Missile Strikes in Syria,” The New York Times, July 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/01/world/middleeast/israel-syria-airstrikes.html, reported, “Israeli warplanes struck several military sites in Syria overnight and killed several fighters and civilians, Syrian state media reported on Monday, in what appeared to be a stepping up of Israel’s long-running, partly covert campaign to thwart Iranian military entrenchment in Syria and stop weapon transfers to Lebanon.” Israel has been concerned that Iran is sending high tech weapons to Syria and Hezbollah.

Alissa J. Rubin and Ronen Bergman, “Israeli Airstrike Hits Weapons Depot in Iraq,” The New York Times, August 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/world/middleeast/israel-iraq-iran-airstrike.html, reported, “Israel has carried out an airstrike on a weapons depot in Iraq that officials said was being used by Iran to move weapons to Syria, an attack that could destabilize Iraq and thrust it deeper into the conflict between the United States and Iran.

The attack, believed to be the first Israeli bombing in Iraq in nearly four decades, represents an expansion of the military campaign Israel has carried out against Iranian targets in Syria.”


David M. Halbfinger, “Israel Says It Struck Iranian ‘Killer Drones’ in Syria,” The New York Times, August 24, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/24/world/middleeast/israel-says-t-struck-iranian-killer-drones-in-syria.html, reported, “Israeli warplanes struck targets in Syria where Iran was preparing to attack Israel using explosive-laden ‘killer drones,’ Israel’s military said, and top commanders were on alert early Sunday to see how Iran might respond.”

Hezbollah struck back at Israel. September 1, 2019, with a missile attack at an Israeli artillery post on the Israel-Lebanon border, causing no casualties and the Israelis briefly fired back. Both sides appeared to wish to cease fire quickly to avoid a larger confrontation. (David M. Halbfinger, “Hezbollah Hits Back at Israeli Army but Without Casualties,” The New York Times, September 2, 2019, ).


‘We are in a collapsing situation,’ the premier, Muhammad Shtayyeh, said in an interview.

A new Israeli antiterrorism law that withholds some Palestinian revenue has precipitated a financial crisis that could bankrupt the authority by July or August, he said. If that happens, the authority would have to furlough its police officers, he said — a not-so-veiled threat to Israel, which depends on Palestinian security forces to police the West Bank.”

“The demolitions in Wadi al-Humos: The excuse – security, The strategy – a Jewish demographic majority,” B’tselem. July 22, 2019, stated, “This morning, Monday, July 22, 2019, the Israeli authorities began demolishing buildings in the neighborhood of Wadi al-Humos, the eastern extension of Zir Baher in East Jerusalem. The move came after the Israeli Supreme Court rejected the residents’ appeal and ruled
there was no legal barrier to the demolitions. Israel intends to demolish a total of 13 buildings, including at least 14 apartments, the vast majority of which are in various stages of construction. Until this morning, the buildings were home to two families including 17 people, of which 11 are minors. Some of them were built in Area A, with building permits issued by the Palestinian Authority, which holds planning powers in those areas. Wadi al-Humos is outside of Jerusalem’s municipal boundary and constitutes the main land reserve for the development of Zur Baher. The Zur Baher committee estimates that 6,000 people currently live in that neighborhood – a quarter of the total population of Zur Baher.

In 2003 the Zur Baher committee petitioned the Supreme Court against the route of the separation fence, which was set unilaterally by Israel to serve its interests. The route was supposed to run near Jerusalem’s municipal boundary and thereby disconnect all of the homes of the Wadi al-Humos neighborhood from Zur Baher. Following the petition the State agreed to reroute the fence a few hundred meters eastward into West Bank territory. In 2004 and 2005 a “light” version of the separation fence was erected: Instead of a concrete wall, as in most of the route of the fence in East Jerusalem, Israel built a two-lane patrol road with wide shoulders and another fence. The fence surrounds the neighborhood of Wadi al-Humos, which may not have been cut off from Zur Baher, but which was cut off from the rest of the West Bank by the fence, even though the land on which it was built was never annexed to Jerusalem’s municipal territory.

The Wadi al-Humos neighborhood is not considered part of Jerusalem, and therefore the Jerusalem Municipality does not provide the neighborhood with services, except for garbage collection. The Palestinian Authority does not have access to the neighborhood and therefore cannot provide it with any services, except for planning and providing construction permits. The neighborhood’s residents built its infrastructures themselves, including roads and water pipes from Zur Baher and Beit Sahur. On the southeastern edges of the enclave, which were defined by the Oslo Accords as areas A and B, the Palestinian Authority has planning and building jurisdiction. But most of it is defined as Area C, where the Civil Administration is responsible for the planning, and where, just like in the rest of the West Bank, it refrains from drawing up outline plans that would allow the residents to build legally. This Israeli policy, which completely limits Palestinian construction in East Jerusalem, causes a severe housing shortage for the city’s Palestinian residents, who are forced to build without permits.

In December 2011, about six years after the separation fence was erected in the area, the Israeli Military issued an order forbidding construction in a strip measuring 100-300 meters on either side of the fence. The Military argued such an order was necessary in order to create an “open barrier area” it needed for its operations, because the Wadi al-Humos area is a “weak point of illegal entry” from the West Bank into Jerusalem. According to the Military’s figures, at the time the order was issued, 134 buildings already stood on the land designated as a no-building zone. Since then dozens of additional buildings were built, and by mid-2019 there were already 231 buildings in the zone, including high-risers built only dozens of meters from the fence, and distributed between areas designated as A, B and C.

In November 2015 the Military announced it intended to demolish 15 buildings in Wadi al-Humos. About one year later, in December 2016, the Military demolished three other buildings in the neighborhood. In 2017 the owners and tenants of the 13 buildings under the threat of demolition petitioned the Supreme Court through the Society of St. Yves – Catholic Center for Human Rights. The petition argued, among other things, that most of the buildings had been built after receiving building permits from the Palestinian Authority, and that the owners and tenants were not even aware of the order prohibiting construction.

During the hearings on the petition, the Military agreed to cancel the demolition orders against two of the buildings. As for the 13 other buildings, the Military announced that for four of them the demolition would be partial. On June 11, 2019 the Supreme Court accepted the State’s position and ruled that there was no legal barrier to demolishing the buildings.

The Supreme Court ruling, written by Justice Meni Mazuz, fully accepted the State’s framing of the issue as one of purely security matter. It thereby completely ignored Israel’s policy of limiting Palestinian construction in East Jerusalem, and the planning chaos in the Wadi al-Humos enclave that allowed the massive construction in the area – of which the Israeli authorities were fully aware. Like in many past cases, the judges did not discuss in their ruling the Israeli policy almost completely preventing Palestinian construction in East Jerusalem, with the purpose of forcing a Jewish demographic majority in the city – a
policy that forces the residents to build without permits. The severe building shortage in East Jerusalem, including in Zur Baher, was at the basis of the village’s demand to reroute the separation fence eastwards. Instead, the judges ruled that the home demolitions were necessary for security considerations, because construction near the fence ‘can provide hiding for terrorists or illegal aliens’ and enable ‘arms smuggling.’

The judgment also clarifies the extent to which the ‘transfer of powers’ to the Palestinian Authority in areas A and B as part of the interim agreements has no practical meaning – except for the need to promote Israeli propaganda. When it serves its own convenience, Israel relies on that “transfer of powers” to cultivate the illusion that most of the residents of the West Bank do not really live under occupation, and that actually, the occupation is almost over. Whereas when it is not convenient for Israel, like in this case, it sets aside the appearance of “self-government,” raises “security arguments,” and realizes its full control of the entire territory and all of its residents.

The judges rejected, almost flipantly, the argument by the petitioners that they did not know of the existence of the order forbidding them to build, and that they built after they relied on permits they received from the Palestinian Authority, and ruled that the residents ‘took the law into their own hands.’ According to the court, the residents should have known about the order. The judges relied for this point on the provisions of the order requiring that its contents be brought ‘as much as possible’ to the knowledge of the residents, among other ways by hanging it, along with low-resolution, difficult-to-understand maps, in the District Coordination Office, as well as on the State representatives’ arguments before them. In doing so, the judges completely ignored the relevant facts: that the Military took no action to bring the order to the knowledge of the residents before November 2015, that the order was issued years after the construction of the fence and the construction of the buildings, and even then—nothing was done for the first years to enforce it, and no real effort was made to ensure that the residents knew about the existence of the order—not even as obvious and simple an action such as pasting it to the residents’ walls.

This Supreme Court ruling may have far-reaching implications. In various places in East Jerusalem (such as Dahiat al-Barid, Kafr Aqab, and the Shuafat Refugee Camp) and other parts of the West Bank (such as a-Ram, Qalqilyah, Tulkarm, and Qalandia al-Balad), numerous residential homes were built near the separation fence. Furthermore, as a result of the Israeli planning policy that prevents Palestinians from receiving building permits, many other buildings were built without permits, there being no other choice. The latest ruling gives Israeli legal authorization to demolish all of the these houses, while hiding behind ‘security arguments’ in order to carry out its illegal policy.

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Mark Landler and David M. Halbfinger, "White House Unveils Economic Portion of Middle East Peace Plan," The New York Times, June 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/22/us/politics/trump-middle-east-plan.html, reported, "The Trump administration said on Saturday that it hoped to raise more than $50 billion to improve the lot of the Palestinians and their Arab neighbors, releasing an economic plan titled, ‘Peace to Prosperity,’ that reverses the actual sequence of its peacemaking efforts in the Middle East.

The blueprint sets the stage for a two-day economic workshop next week to be convened by the White House in the Persian Gulf state of Bahrain. That gathering is meant to lay the groundwork for a subsequent diplomatic proposal to end decades of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

But the political component of the plan has been repeatedly delayed, most recently by the call for new elections in Israel after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed to assemble a governing coalition.
Some experts question whether President Trump will ever put a peace proposal on the table, given the Palestinians’ vow to reject his efforts and his looming re-election campaign in the United States.\(^1\)

IGG, “Bahrain Workshop Sets Back Arab-Israeli Rapprochement,” Commentary / Middle East & North Africa June 26, 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israelpalestine/bahrain-workshop-sets-back-arab-israeli-rapprochement, commented, “If President Donald Trump’s peace team thought they could advance Arab-Israeli rapprochement over the heads of Palestinians through the Bahrain Prosperity to Peace workshop, they were wrong. The one-off entry of a handful of Israeli journalists to Bahrain and photos of Israeli and Gulf businessmen could not compensate for three developments that underscore that, despite major international and regional shifts, Arab-Israeli normalisation still depends on resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

First, after committing to attend the workshop, senior leaders from participating Arab states declared their unyielding commitment to the longstanding positions the Trump administration had attempted to shift, namely those itemised in the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. Such statements were issued even by Arab governments who, before the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, seemed willing to support Trump’s efforts to coerce the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to accept considerably less than the Arab Peace Initiative stipulates.

Second, some Arab governments appear to have conditioned their attendance on Israel’s absence: for several days after the White House announced Jordan and Egypt would participate, Amman and Cairo failed to confirm. They did so only after the U.S. announced no Israeli officials would attend. In Bahrain, these two Arab countries, which have peace treaties with Israel and whose heads of state have met openly with Israel’s prime minister, will not even have their officials meet with Israeli counterparts, or send senior officials to attend. The Trump administration’s attempts to normalise Arab-Israeli relations with flagrant disregard for the Palestinian national project thus undermined the progress already made toward Arab-Israeli normalisation.

Third, even though the PLO and Hamas are much weaker than before, and even though Israel and several Gulf states share an interest in countering Iran, the Palestinians managed to prevent an Arab-Israeli ministerial summit in a Gulf state. A shared Iranian enemy was (barely) enough for the U.S. to convene an anti-Iran meeting in Warsaw that Israel and ten Arab states attended last February. But that common threat has proven insufficient for the U.S. to bring Arab and Israeli officials to a summit focused on the Palestinians, let alone for articulating parameters of a peace agreement the Palestinians would be forced to accept.

If the Bahrain workshop secures a place in future history books, it will be for exposing the limits of Arab-Israeli rapprochement, underlining that Israel’s overt acceptance in the region requires it to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians and emphasising the deep commitment of Arab states to the Arab Peace Initiative.”

David M. Halberfnger, Hamas Leader Says Israel Isn’t Upholding Cease-Fire Terms,” The New York Times, June 20, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/20/world/middleeast/hamas-israel-gaza-cease-fire.html, reported, “The head of Hamas, the militant Islamic group that rules the Gaza Strip, accused Israel on Thursday of “blackmail” and slow-walking the easing of border restrictions under a tenuous cease-fire agreement reached last month after repeated rounds of violence.

“Complicating matters: The terms of the cease-fire are not written and made public, leaving each side to fault the other, with little public accountability.”

“Online Briefing: Evictions And Rising Tensions In East Jerusalem,” J-Street, 7/19/19 via E-mail, reported, “Last month, while President Trump and his allies took a ceremonial (and symbolic) sledgehammer to a wall to inaugurate an archaeological dig below East Jerusalem, the Israeli government -- in tandem with local law enforcement and settler groups -- ramped up demolitions aboveground in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan.

The increased evacuation of Palestinian families, home demolitions and settler takeover of East Jerusalem have devastated Palestinian communities -- and undermined the prospect for a peaceful
settlement of the final status of Jerusalem as part of a two-state solution. They could spark additional escalations that further destabilize the city -- and harm both Israeli and Palestinian residents.”

Isabel Kershner, "Israel Is Expected to Approve Surge in Jewish Construction in West Bank," The New York Times, July 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/31/world/middleeast/israel-west-bank-palestinians.html, reported, "In a rare step, Israel approved plans late Tuesday to build 715 housing units for Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, though the government is soon expected to endorse 6,800 units for Jewish settlers there, too. About 3,700 settler housing units have already been approved this year, and the addition of 6,800 would push 2019 past the record for approvals in a single year. The news comes as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is campaigning for support from right-wing voters, including settlers, less than six weeks before a parliamentary election.”

"Contrary to military statement: 'Abd a-Rahman a-Shteiwi, 9, was shot in the head with live ammunition,” July 18, 2019, B'Tselem stated in an E-mailed press release, "B'Tselem investigation published today proves a soldier fired live ammunition, hitting "Abd a-Rahman a-Shteiwi, 9, in the head. A-Shteiwi was injured last week while playing in the entrance to a home in Kafir Qudum during the weekly demonstration in the village. Now hospitalized in critical condition, he is the latest victim of the reckless open-fire policy that allows soldiers to use live fire even when neither they nor anyone else is in any danger.”

"Israel Begins Tearing Down Palestinian Housing on Edge of East Jerusalem,” The New York Times, July 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/22/world/middleeast/israel-demolition-palestinian-housing.html, "Israeli equipment arrived before dawn on Monday and began clawing at the first of 10 Palestinian apartment blocks that were scheduled for demolition because the government said they were built too close to its security barrier in a Palestinian area of the West Bank abutting Israeli-annexed East Jerusalem.”

"Reversing Israel’s Deepening Annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem," Report 202 / Middle East & North Africa 12 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel-palestine/202-reversing-israels-deepening-annexation-occupied-east-jerusalem?utm_source=Sign%2BUp+to+Crisis%27s+E-mail+Updates&utm_campaign=5a5c1f2d10-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_11_03_36&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-5a5c1f2d10-359871089, commented, "Israel is pursuing new ways of cementing its grip on occupied East Jerusalem, further enmeshing the city’s Palestinians while maintaining a Jewish majority within the municipal boundaries. These schemes could spark conflict. The new Israeli government elected in September should set them aside.

What’s new? Israel is advancing new policies to entrench its de facto annexation of most of occupied East Jerusalem. Moreover, depending on what coalition government emerges from forthcoming parliamentary elections, it could shunt the city’s Palestinian areas lying east of the separation barrier into disconnected Israeli administrative units outside the municipality’s jurisdiction.

Why did it happen? Israeli decision-makers are concerned that Jerusalem will soon have a non-Jewish majority. The Netanyahu government has conceded that its neglect of East Jerusalem has failed to induce Palestinians to leave. Instead, neglect has bred crime and violence, and created numerous lawless areas, particularly east of the barrier.

What matters? Israeli plans - removing from the municipality certain Palestinian areas outside the barrier, cataloguing all occupied East Jerusalem lands in the Israel Lands Registry and inducing Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem to adopt Israeli curricula – would exacerbate the conflict in and over Jerusalem.

What should be done? Palestinians, Israelis and allies of both leaderships should press the Israeli government not to carry out these plans. If it wants to reduce poverty and crime in East Jerusalem, Israel should allow Palestinians to establish civic leadership bodies in the city and end its ban on Palestinian Authority activities there.
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Israel is advancing new policies to entrench its de facto annexation of parts of occupied East Jerusalem. In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem but never fully applied Israeli laws: land registration was partial, most Palestinian schools do not use Israel’s curriculum and East Jerusalemites have residency, not citizenship. In May 2018, with the stated aim of reducing socio-economic inequality, Israel adopted a five-year plan allocating $530 million to East Jerusalem. But the plan’s real goal is to assert Israeli sovereignty, including, most dangerously, by cataloguing all East Jerusalem’s lands in the Israel Land Registry and inducing its schools to use Israeli curricula. In parallel, to protect Jerusalem’s Jewish majority, Israeli leaders are thinking about redrawing the Israeli-demarcated municipal boundaries in order to remove Palestinian-populated areas that lie within these boundaries but to the east of the separation barrier. This “excision” scheme, along with the land registry and curricular initiatives, risks deepening conflict in Jerusalem. Whatever government Israel forms after the 17 September 2019 election should not carry out these plans.

For 50 years, the state has tried to attract more Jews to East Jerusalem and to prod Palestinians to leave. Israel’s national leaders increasingly recognise that this policy has failed to secure a lasting Jewish majority: too few Jews have moved in, and many continue to leave, while too few Palestinians have departed. If current demographic trends persist, Jerusalem could become a minority-Jewish city as early as 2045.

Unable to have all of East Jerusalem without most of its Palestinian inhabitants – and buoyed by support from the Trump administration, international neglect of the Palestinian issue and growing Israeli cooperation with Arab states – Israel is phasing in a plan that would consolidate Israel’s rule over East Jerusalem territory west of the separation barrier. (The separation barrier is a physical divide erected during the 2000-2005 intifada with the security aim of preventing West Bank assailants from entering Israel and the political aim of establishing that in any future solution, Israel would annex many Jewish settlements, including those in and around East Jerusalem, even as a large number of East Jerusalem’s Palestinian residents end up on the other side of the border.)

In East Jerusalem and its vicinity, the barrier mostly separates Jewish settlements from Palestinian communities, East Jerusalem from the West Bank and Palestinian areas from one another. In order to increase the proportion of Jews in Jerusalem and prevent the loss of a Jewish majority in the city, a number of Israeli leaders across the political spectrum advocate excising Palestinian-inhabited areas of East Jerusalem east of the barrier from the municipality, turning them into separate Israeli regional councils. The most widely supported excision proposal would leave Palestinians with status as residents of Israel in excised areas (there are also Palestinian citizens of Israel in these areas). Palestinians fear that this step would be the prelude to revocation of their residency – without which they cannot enter East Jerusalem or Israel. Other excision proposals call for rescinding the residency status of excised areas’ inhabitants.

Excising Palestinian-inhabited areas in order to forestall the loss of a Jewish demographic majority in the city could set a dangerous precedent, offering a model for how Israel could annex large parts of the West Bank while shunting Palestinian residents into separate Israeli administrative units, where they might have residency but not citizenship. Excision would also deepen poverty, chaos and militancy in the most forsaken corners of the city. An excision plan could go into effect shortly after a new coalition government takes its seats following the 17 September Knesset election, depending on its composition.

Israeli political parties, from both the coalition and the opposition, that seek to preserve stability and minimise the risk of escalation should block any excision of Palestinian areas, press their government to discards the most inflammatory components (East Jerusalem land registration and Palestinian adoption of Israeli curricula) of its five-year plan and loosen Israel’s ban on Palestinian Authority activities east of the barrier in areas that Israel has refused to govern. The international community, and in particular the EU and Arab states, should warn Israel of these schemes’ possible repercussions and signal that excision would bring Europe closer to recognising a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Outside powers also should allocate funds to help Palestinian Jerusalemites establish civic leadership bodies in East Jerusalem to operate both east and west of the separation barrier, in coordination with Israel. Indeed, Israel, too, should have an interest in having such a leadership, which can help reduce crime that spills over into West Jerusalem, provide services that could begin to correct for decades of neglect and create a mechanism for addressing conflict in East Jerusalem.”
Farah Stockman, "Birthright Trips, a Rite of Passage for Many Jews, Are Now a Target of Protests," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/11/us/israel-birthright-jews-protests.html, reported, "Over nearly two decades, a nonprofit organization called Birthright Israel has given nearly 700,000 young Jews an all-expense-paid trip to Israel, an effort to bolster a distinct Jewish identity and forge an emotional connection to Israel. The trips, which are partly funded by the Israeli government, have become a rite of passage for American Jews. Nearly 33,000 are set to travel this summer.

But over the past year, some Jewish activists have protested Birthright, saying the trips erase the experiences of Israeli Arabs and Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank. Activists have circulated petitions, staged sit-ins at Hillels on college campuses and blocked Birthright’s headquarters in New York. But no protests have generated more publicity and outrage than the walk-offs from a handful of Birthright trips," by people who have visited Palestinians.


"Hong Kong Residents Block Roads to Protest Extradition Bill," *The New York Times*, June 11, 2019, "Riot police officers used pepper spray and water cannons against huge crowds of protesters who blocked roads around Hong Kong’s legislature on Wednesday morning, as lawmakers prepared to debate a contentious bill that would allow extraditions to mainland China.

Tens of thousands of demonstrators, many of them young people in black T-shirts, dragged heavy metal barriers into the road and flooded across lanes of traffic. The scenes instantly recalled the start of the so-called Umbrella Movement protests of 2014, in which thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators blocked major Hong Kong thoroughfares for months.

Those protests, calling for more open elections in the semiautonomous Chinese territory, ultimately failed to win concessions from the Hong Kong government. The city’s leaders said this week that they would press on with the extradition bill, despite an enormous march on Sunday opposing it."

Alexandra Stevenson and Tiffany May, "Carrie Lam, Hong Kong’s Leader, Retreats, but Her Critics Want More," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/world/asia/protest-carrie-lam-hong-kong.html, reported, "When Hong Kong’s chief executive, Carrie Lam, said on Saturday that she was suspending an unpopular bill to allow extraditions to mainland China, she expressed hope that her action would restore peace and order in the city, which has been convulsed by demonstrations.

But for most of the bill’s opponents, Mrs. Lam’s promise to indefinitely postpone the legislation was insufficient, signaling that the fight was not over for the embattled leader and foreshadowing more upheaval in the semiautonomous territory, where many still fear the bill could extend China’s reach."

With perhaps 2 million of Hong Kong’s residents in the streets following Lam’s withdrawal of the bill, and unions calling for short continuing strikes, demanding the bill be completely dropped, an impartial investigation into the police use of force during the first clashes with protesters, and the rescinding of the official description of that protest as an illegal riot, with many demanding Lam’s resignation, China backing down had reverberations in Beijing (Keith Bradsher and Daniel Victor, “Hong Kong Protesters Return to the Streets, Rejecting Leader’s Apology,” *The New York Times*, June 16, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/16/world/asia/carrie-lam-hong-kong-protests.html).

on Monday after weeks of demonstrations, prompting fears of violence spiraling beyond the authorities’ control.

As of July 27, Hong Kong protests were continuing, and spreading to new areas including the city’s international airport. The battle between police and protestors was also reaching new levels. "In Hong Kong Protests, Faces Become Weapons: A quest to identify protesters and police officers has people in both groups desperate to protect their anonymity. Some fear a turn toward China-style surveillance," The New York Times, July 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/26/technology/hong-kong-protests-facial-recognition-surveillance.html, reported, "As Hong Kong convulses amid weeks of protests, demonstrators and the police have turned identity into a weapon. The authorities are tracking protest leaders online and seeking their phones. Many protesters now cover their faces, and they fear that the police are using cameras and possibly other tools to single out targets for arrest.

And when the police stopped wearing identification badges as the violence escalated, some protesters began to expose officers’ identities online. One fast-growing channel on the social messaging app Telegram seeks and publishes personal information about officers and their families. The channel, ‘DaudioBoy,’ has more than 50,000 subscribers and advocates violence in crude and cartoonish ways. Rival pro-government channels seek to unmask protesters in a similar fashion."


Tens of thousands of protesters had converged on the northern district of Yuen Long to show their opposition to an assault by more than 100 men, armed with sticks and metal bars, on demonstrators and others there last Sunday night that had left at least 45 people injured."

As the protests continued and the authorities threatened tougher action, Tiffany May, "Hong Kong’s Civil Servants Protest Against Their Own Government," The New York Times, August 2, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/02/world/asia/hong-kong-civil-servants-protest.html, reported, "Thousands of Hong Kong’s civil servants demonstrated against the government after work on Friday evening, sending a powerful message of discontent by joining the anti-government protests that began in early June."

And as the protests continued, Austin Ramzy, Mike Ives and Tiffany May, "Hong Kong Strike Sinks City Into Chaos, and Government Has Little Reply," The New York Times, August 5, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/05/world/asia/hong-kong-general-strike.html, reported, "Antigovernment protesters in Hong Kong mounted their fiercest challenge to the authorities on Monday, disrupting more than 200 airline flights, occupying malls and blocking roadways and rail lines to snarl the commute for hundreds of thousands of workers.

The protesters called for a general strike in an effort to halt daily life across the semiautonomous Chinese territory, wielding a potentially powerful new tool in their weekslong campaign against the Hong Kong government. Hong Kong’s values of efficiency, hard work and, increasingly, a dedication to public protest are colliding as protesters from across society test the limits of the city’s police force. Officers on Monday fired tear gas near shopping malls and residential areas and arrested at least 82 people, while the city’s leader warned that efforts to “topple Hong Kong” could destroy livelihoods and push the city “to the verge of a very dangerous situation.”

The Hong Kong protests reached 80 days in duration, and were continuing, on August 28, 2019, longer than the 2014 protests. At least one fourth of the city residents have taken part in the largely nonviolent, and seemingly increasingly supported actions by the citizens of Hong Kong. But police have been taking stronger, and sometimes violent actions against protestors, more recently met by stone


Chris Buckley, "China’s Prisons Swell After Deluge of Arrests Engulfs Muslins September 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/31/world/asia/xinjiang-china-uighurs-prisons.html, reported, "The Chinese government has built a vast network of re-education camps and a pervasive system of surveillance to monitor and subdue millions from Muslim minorities in the Xinjiang region.

Now China is also turning to an older, harsher method of control: filling prisons in Xinjiang. The region in northwest China has experienced a record surge in arrests, trials and prison sentences in the past two years, according to a New York Times analysis of previously unreported official data."

Michael Crowley and David E. Sanger, "In New Talks, U.S. May Settle for a Nuclear Freeze by North Korea," The New York Times, June 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/asia/trump-kim-north-korea-negotiations.html, reported. From a seemingly fanciful tweet to a historic step into North Korean territory, President Trump’s largely improvised third meeting on Sunday with Kim Jong-un, the North Korean leader, was a masterpiece of drama, the kind of made-for-TV spectacle that Mr. Trump treasures.

But for weeks before the meeting, which started as a Twitter offer by the president for Mr. Kim to drop by at the Demilitarized Zone and ‘say hello,’ a real idea has been taking shape inside the Trump administration that officials hope might create a foundation for a new round of negotiations.

The concept would amount to a nuclear freeze, one that essentially enshrines the status quo, and tacitly accepts the North as a nuclear power, something administration officials have often said they would never stand for."

Choe Sang-Hun, "South Korea to Send the North 50,000 Tons of Rice,” The New York Times, June 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/world/asia/south-korea-north-rice.html, reported. "South Korea said on Wednesday that it would provide 50,000 tons of rice to North Korea, in the hope that the humanitarian aid will help persuade the North to return to talks on improving inter-Korean ties and ending its nuclear weapons program."

Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea Fires Short-Range Missiles, Its 2nd Test in Less Than a Week." The New York Times, July 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/30/world/asia/north-korea-projectiles.html, reported. "North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast on Wednesday, the South Korean military said, the North's second weapons test in less than a week." The longer firing was over 400 miles. North Korean claims they are a new type of ballistic missile. South Korea’s military said it not yet completed analysis that might indicate the nature of the projectiles.

ICG, "The Case for Kaesong: Fostering Korean Peace through Economic Ties," Report 300 / Asia 24 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/north-east-asia/korean-peninsula/300-case-kaesong-fostering-korean-peace-through-economic-ties?utm_source=SignUp+to+Gro+is+Crisis%27s+Email+Updates&+utm_campaign=61902c0e3a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_21_02_49&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11e-61902c0e3a-359871089. "The Kaesong Industrial Complex, closed since 2016, was the most successful joint economic venture undertaken by North and South Korea. Reopening the manufacturing zone, with improvements to
efficiency and worker protections, could help broker wider cooperation and sustain peace talks on the
peninsula.

What’s new? In 2016, South Korea shuttered the Kaesong Industrial Complex, breaking a modest but productive connection between the two Koreas. Crisis Group’s analysis sheds new light on the economic performance of firms operating at the Complex, demonstrating that the benefits for the South were greater than previously understood.

Why does it matter? Beyond helping restart the stalled peace process, a deal to reopen the Complex in exchange for a proportionate step toward denuclearisation by North Korea could produce mutual economic benefits that help sustain South Korean support for talks and encourage Pyongyang’s commitment to peaceful relations.

What should be done? As part of any deal to reopen the Complex, Seoul and Pyongyang should take steps to address problems that previously kept it from reaching its potential. The more efficiently, profitably and fairly it works, the better the Complex can help foster and maintain stable, peaceful relations between the Koreas.

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The Kaesong Industrial Complex was the most successful joint economic initiative launched by North and South Korea during the South’s pro-rapprochement “sunshine policy” era (1998-2008). As this report shows, this inter-Korean manufacturing zone, which operated from December 2004 to February 2016, was more economically beneficial, in particular for the South, than was recognised at the time. Reopening Kaesong as part of a package of mutual steps – including proportionate North Korean measures to circumscribe nuclear and missile capabilities – could therefore have multiple benefits. Not only might it generate badly needed momentum for stalled peace talks, but it also could begin bringing the economies of North and South closer, serving as an ongoing reminder to key constituencies in both countries of the benefits of building a sustainable peace on the peninsula.

In order to understand why reopening Kaesong should be attractive to both Seoul and Pyongyang, however, it is important to look at the history of the Complex and the benefits it generated – as well as what those benefits meant to each country. For the North, the benefits were clear enough: foreign investment in its infrastructure, employment for its people and much-needed revenue in hard currency. But for many South Koreans, the benefits were less clear. One reason may be that the Complex operated for most of its tenure against the backdrop of declining inter-Korean relations. Time and again in the Complex’s twelve-year history, North Korean actions shook faith in the South that joint ventures like Kaesong could help reduce inter-Korean tensions. These actions included four nuclear tests (2006, 2009, 2013 and 2016), the shooting of one unarmed South Korean citizen (2008) and five-month detention without charge of another (2009), and the sinking of a South Korean naval vessel and shelling of a South Korean island (both 2010). In 2013, following its third nuclear test, Pyongyang closed the Complex’s doors for five months for reasons that remain unclear. In 2016, as tensions on the peninsula mounted in the wake of the North’s fourth nuclear test, South Korea shuttered the Complex altogether.

But another reason the picture for South Koreans is clouded may be the paucity of data analysis showing how the Complex benefited the South Korean firms that invested in operations there. In this report, Crisis Group seeks to fill that gap. The analysis presented here shows how – despite deepening political challenges and even as other engagement efforts fell by the wayside – the Complex offered meaningful economic benefits to the South as well as the North. Focusing on the period 2007-2014, this report demonstrates that South Korean firms with subsidiaries operating at Kaesong showed average annual increases in revenues (by 8 per cent), fixed assets (by 26 per cent) and profits (by 11 per cent). These growth figures are all the more striking given that during the same period other South Korean firms in the same industries were in decline.

The purpose in airing these figures is not to suggest that reopening Kaesong would benefit the two Koreas equally. Even in its strongest years of operation, the revenues that the Complex produced for South Korean firms were only a fraction of 1 per cent of South Korea’s gross domestic product. By contrast, the hard currency receipts that the Complex generated for the North – possibly over $100 million a year at the peak of operations – were much more significant. In this sense, reopening Kaesong would unquestionably be a concession to the North.
Nevertheless, a fuller appreciation of how the benefits of Kaesong flowed in both directions during its last period of operations – and the prospect that this would happen again should Kaesong reopen – has important implications for the peace process. While the South Korean government has long made it plain that they would like to clear the way for Kaesong to reopen, there is still work to do in generating political support among the South Korean public. Information about how much a reopening could benefit South Korean firms may help sustain public support for ongoing talks that could help bring about that result. Moreover, should the Complex reopen, it presents a new opportunity for deepening North-South economic cooperation that can help cement ties between the two nations and create a counterweight to future escalatory cycles.

Of course, there are lessons to be learned from the joint venture’s last incarnation should it reopen. While fully insulating operations from political tensions on the peninsula may not be possible, the two countries should make every effort to buffer it from those risks, so that it has the opportunity to reach its potential. It will also be important to loosen economically inefficient controls that constrained operations during the Complex’s first incarnation. Taking steps where feasible to expand direct communication between managers in North and South Korea, allowing South Korean firms greater control over hiring and training, and increasing protections for workers would make the Complex work more fairly, efficiently and profitably – and help it become a model and driver of peaceful cooperation between two nations struggling to leave war behind.”

Sameer Yasil and Kai Schultz, “Kashmiris Call for Investigation of Torture Accusations Against India,” The New York Times, July 6, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/06/world/asia/kashmir-india-torture.html, “According to a lengthy new report from Kashmiri activists, thousands of civilians have been summarily arrested and then abused in Kashmir, the center of a long and bitter territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Released in May by rights groups in Srinagar, the capital of the Indian-administered part of Kashmir, the report profiles 432 victims of torture in detention since 1990. It includes accounts alleging that Indian security forces had hung Kashmiris by their wrists, shocked them, forced them to stare at high-voltage lamps and dunked them in water mixed with chili powder. Most were civilians accused of having information about militants, the report said, and 49 of them died during or after being tortured.”


Sameer Yasil, Suhasini Raj and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Inside Kashmir, Cut Off From the World: 'A Living Hell' of Anger and Fear," The New York Times, August 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/world/asia/kashmir-india-pakistan.html, "On the streets of Srinagar, Kashmir’s biggest city, security officers tied black bandannas over their faces, grabbed their guns and took positions behind checkpoints. People glanced out the windows of their homes, afraid to step outside. Many were cutting back on meals and getting hungry. A sense of coiled menace hung over the locked-down city and the wider region on Saturday, a day after a huge protest erupted into clashes between Kashmiris and Indian security forces. Shops were shut. A.T.M.s had run dry. Just about all lines to the outside world — internet, mobile phones, even landlines — remained severed, rendering millions of people incomunicado.”

[It would appear that by taking such horrendous action the government of India has taken a major step toward making everyone living in Kashmir a determined enemy, pushing Kashmir toward becoming an independent state - hardly what the government intended. If it has wisdom, for its own self-interest it will quickly reverse its action and do what it can to ameliorate the situation.]
Jeffrey Gettleman, Kai Schultz, Sameer Yasir and Suhasini Raj, "India’s Move in Kashmir: More Than 2,000 Rounded Up With No Recourse," The New York Times, August 23, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/23/world/asia/kashmir-arrests-india.html, reported, "It was the start of one of the biggest mass arrests of civilian leaders in decades carried out by India, a close American partner that bills itself as one of the world’s leading democracies.

Local officials say that at least 2,000 Kashmiris — including business leaders, human rights defenders, elected representatives, teachers, and students as young as 14 — were rounded up by the federal security forces in the days right before and after the Indian government unilaterally stripped away Kashmir’s autonomy."


India has begun a citizenship check that appears to be mostly anti Muslim. Suhasini Raj and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Mass Citizenship Check in India Leaves 2 Million People in Limbo," The New York Times, September 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/31/world/asia/india-muslim-citizen-list.html, reported, "He[...a Muslim who has lived his entire life in India,] is one of nearly two million people in northeast India who were told Saturday that they could soon be declared stateless in a mass citizenship check that critics say is anti-Muslim. The news arrived in small, sunlit offices across the state of Assam, where citizenship lists were posted that drew huge crowds. Many walked away shocked and demoralized; others were joyous.

Just about all of those excluded from the list were ethnic Bengalis, whose families have migrated to Assam during various periods over the past 100 years. The majority are Muslim, said several lawyers and human rights activists."


In 2018 her farther was beaten to death after he spoke out about the rape allegation. On July28, 2018 the young woman, two of her aunts and her lawyer were traveling by car when a truck crashed into their vehicle head on, badly injuring the young woman and killing the two aunts. The family of the young woman, the man witness in the case and advocates of women’s rights charge that the politician accused of rape Kuldeep Singh Sengar, ordered the crash in attempt to eliminate the witness.

"The mere possibility that a lawmaker involved in a highly publicized rape case might have ordered the death of the victim has stunned India. It has provoked walkouts in Parliament and become what many see as a test case for the abuse of power."

Dharisha Bastians and Mujib Mashal, "All 9 of Sri Lanka’s Muslim Ministers Resign, as Bombing Backlash Intensifies," The New York Times, June 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/03/world/asia/sri-lanka-muslim-ministers-resign.html, reported, "All nine Muslim ministers in Sri Lanka’s government and two Muslim provincial governors resigned on Monday as the fragile, Buddhist-majority country grappled further with the communal backlash of the Easter Sunday bombings that killed as many as 250 people."

The resignations were in response to a hunger strike by an influential Buddhist monk, Athuraliye Rathana, who said he would fast to death unless the country’s president removed three senior Muslim officials — the two provincial governors and one of the ministers — that he accuses of having ties to the suicide bombers who targeted churches and hotels.
The eight ministers not targeted by Mr. Rathana announced their resignations in what appeared to be an act of solidarity with the three officials accused by the monk, who also serves as a member of Parliament and an adviser to the president, Maitripal Sirisena.


Ten years have passed since Sri Lanka's 26-year war came to an end on 18 May 2009. A decisive victory over the Tamil Tigers placed the Sinhalese-majority government firmly back in control of the country. The war-weary population of 21 million hoped the end would usher in reconstruction that would strengthen battered democratic institutions and deal with the longstanding concerns of the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups.

But the government has done little either to heal the war's wounds or to address the ethno-nationalist dynamics that drove the conflict. It has largely limited itself to generic statements in support of "reconciliation", disappointing many Sri Lankans, most notably the 11 per cent Tamil minority, who suffered huge casualties in the war's crushing last days. Failed political reforms, inadequate economic development, heavy militarisation of the Tamil-majority north and government resistance to providing information on disappeared persons have further deepened many Tamils' grievances. Their sense of betrayal, and the absence of spaces to work through the suffering experienced by Muslims and Sinhalese, too, threatens hopes of reconciliation – either between ethno-religious groups and the state or among the groups themselves – and risks further instability. For many Sri Lankans living in the bitterly contested north and east, the war has never quite ended. The Easter jihadist terror attacks compounded the general anxiety, tearing again at the social fabric, unleashing further violence and complicating the road to sustainable peace.

In April, Crisis Group's Sri Lanka Project Director Alan Keenan and Photographer Julie David de Lossy travelled through the former combat zones in the north and east to explore how the Tamil, Muslim and Sinhalese civilians who suffered most intensely during the war remember their experience – and what these collective memories mean for the prospects of lasting peace. On their ten-day, 1,500km-long trip, they found scattered across the country's landscape an extraordinary array of war memorials. State-sponsored monuments glorifying the government's victory contrast with the grassroots memorials, some of them hidden or secret, to the estimated 150,000 dead – everything from statues to bulldozed Tamil cemeteries to bus shelters honouring soldiers killed in action. The sheer number of memorials shows a population coping in myriad ways with the legacy of an undead war. For the photos and commentary go to: https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/sri-lanka/picturing-sri-lankas-undead-war?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=e14d70ecf5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_16_04_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-e14d70ecf5-359871089.

What’s new? The Myanmar government’s desire to close internally displaced person (IDP) camps and the Myanmar military’s unilateral ceasefire have created an opportunity to return or resettle people displaced by conflict in the country’s north. Discussions have begun with civil society groups representing the largely ethnic Kachin IDPs on how this might unfold.

Why does it matter? For seven years, more than 100,000 IDPs have been living in camps in northern Myanmar, where they are entrenched in poverty and vulnerable to abuse. Recent developments may allow a limited number of IDPs to leave camps in the short term, potentially paving the way for larger numbers to follow.

What should be done? The Myanmar military should extend its ceasefire indefinitely and the Kachin Independence Organisation should pursue negotiations toward a bilateral agreement. The civilian government should assume responsibility for IDP return and resettlement, working with civil society and donors and observing best practices to help ensure a safe, voluntary and dignified process.

I. Overview

For the past seven years, around 100,000 people uprooted by conflict, primarily between Myanmar’s military and the Kachin Independence Organisation, have lived in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kachin state and the northern part of Shan state. Several recent developments have created a potential opening for a limited number of these IDPs to return to their homes or be resettled in new locations. In June 2018, the Myanmar government announced plans to close IDP camps across the country, and in December 2018 the Myanmar military proclaimed a unilateral ceasefire through 30 April 2019 covering Kachin and northern Shan. The latter declaration included a pledge to help people displaced by war return to where they had come from. The ceasefire has since been extended for a further two months, to 30 June 2019.

The military’s ceasefire declaration has created a significant opening to accelerate IDP returns and resettlement, even though it has not yet translated into a bilateral ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Organisation. The prospect of the military’s assistance with demining and its willingness to pursue negotiations on troop withdrawals, both of which are in many cases necessary for the safe and voluntary return or resettlement of IDPs, create new potential for progress.

Moreover, in parallel, support is also building among ethnic Kachin leaders for returning the IDPs to their former homes or resettling them elsewhere. Even prior to the ceasefire announcement, ethnic Kachin leaders were preparing for IDP returns and resettlement to begin. Though they are not yet of one mind about when the time is right to start accelerating these efforts, in recent months they have displayed a clear willingness to work with civilian and military authorities on the issue. Some have publicly estimated that between 6,000 and 10,000 IDPs might be able to return to their places of origin or resettle in the near term.

Pursuing these opportunities could not only enable some IDPs to begin rebuilding their lives but also act as a confidence-building measure between the military and government, on one side, and the Kachin Independence Organisation and Kachin civil society, on the other, helping create conditions for large-scale returns in the future. But some initial post-ceasefire government and military actions, such as hurried surveys in IDP camps and military-led resettlement activities seemingly undertaken without sufficient regard for IDP safety, have sown mistrust and threatened to undermine prospects for progress.

To make the most of the current opening – and help expand it going forward – the Myanmar military should extend its ceasefire indefinitely and the Kachin Independence Organisation should continue to pursue negotiations toward making it bilateral. The civilian government should assume responsibility for IDP returns and resettlement, and the authorities should work with civil society and donors to create a program that can gain the IDPs’ trust.”

IGC, "Peace and Electoral Democracy in Myanmar," Briefing 157 / Asia 6 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-asia/myanmar/b157-peace-and-electoral-democracy-myanmar?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=3466e99048-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_05_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-3466e99048-359871089, commented, "Myanmar’s 2020 polls are a chance to consolidate electoral democracy in the country. Yet many ethnic minorities doubt that voting gives them a real say. To preempt possible violence, the government and outside partners should work to enhance the ballot’s inclusiveness and transparency."
What's new? Myanmar will go to the polls in late 2020. Political positioning has begun in earnest, affecting important governmental decision-making. In ethnic-minority areas, particularly Rakhine State, there is growing disillusionment with electoral democracy that could fuel escalating violence.

Why does it matter? The pre-election period of political contestation will likely exacerbate ethnic tensions and conflict risks, particularly in the country's periphery. At the same time, balloting will be a crucial opportunity to consolidate gains in electoral democracy – an important if insufficient step toward long-term peace and stability in Myanmar.

What should be done? To bolster ethnic minorities' faith in elections, the government should signal its intention to appoint state chief ministers from the winning party in each state, rather than imposing National League for Democracy-led governments everywhere. More transparent decision-making about the likely cancellation of voting in conflict-affected areas would also help.

I. Overview

More than a year ahead of national elections in Myanmar, the key protagonists' political positioning is already affecting policy on everything from the peace process to the economy. Political actors now see important decisions through an electoral lens. Political contestation during the campaign risks aggravating ethnic tensions and conflict, particularly in the country's periphery; Rakhine State, where the anti-government Arakan Army continues an insurgent struggle for greater regional autonomy, is a likely flashpoint. The elections could also be a crucial if imperfect next step toward consolidating electoral democracy in Myanmar. The election commission and its international partners should focus on both mitigating conflict risks and enhancing the polls' credibility.

As Aung San Suu Kyi remains hugely popular with her ethnic-majority Burman base, the election result is not really in doubt. The party she leads, the National League for Democracy (NLD), will handily win a majority of parliamentary seats.

What is in doubt is the salience of elections for those other than her core supporters. More and more, minorities feel excluded from or ill served by the electoral system. The alienation is clearest in Rakhine State, where most of the Rohingya remaining after the expulsion of more than 700,000 of them in 2017 have no prospect of gaining the vote. The ethnic Rakhine population – another minority – also feel that politics has failed them. The landslide victory of the main Rakhine party in 2015 was followed by the presidential imposition of an NLD government and a lack of subsequent national government engagement with Rakhine leaders. Angered, many ethnic Rakhine now support the Arakan Army insurgency.

As other ethnic minorities also chafe at the perception of a Burman nationalist NLD leadership, the elections could be a pivotal moment. On the one hand, they could help defuse tension by showing a peaceful method for these communities to gain a greater voice in their own governance. On the other, they could cement the impression that the NLD has a hammerlock on power at all levels and lead to dangerous scepticism of electoral democracy.

The government should take steps now to lay the groundwork for elections that instil greater confidence in the democratic process within these minority communities. One important measure would be for it to commit to appointing chief ministers (the top executives for each state) from the party that wins the most seats in state legislatures. Such appointments would go a long way toward giving minorities a say in their own governance and in official decisions affecting their lives – and would almost certainly build greater support for the electoral process.

A more transparent and inclusive electoral process in conflict-affected areas would also help mitigate the erosion of confidence in democracy. In places where the election commission will cancel voting for security reasons, it should be more transparent about the basis on which such decisions are made. The election commission and its international partners should also take advantage of the coming year to enhance the polls' credibility, especially in the priority areas identified by election observation organisations. Improvements should include accurate updating of the voter rolls to ensure the registry of some five million new voters who have turned eighteen since 2015. Promoting greater representation of women, as candidates and on the currently all-male election commission, should also be a priority. Given the risks of conflict and the broader importance of making the elections as credible as possible, international partners should invest in long-term observation of the electoral process, not only election-day monitoring.


**What's new?** A new autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao marks the culmination of 22 years of negotiations between the Philippine government and the secessionist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). This breakthrough follows a five-month battle in 2017 for Marawi City by pro-ISIS fighters who, though on the defensive, still pose a threat.

**Why does it matter?** The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region should represent the end of the Moro conflict with the Philippine state. Proponents portray it as an "antidote to extremism". But the new administration has to confront a corrupt, inefficient local bureaucracy, clan conflict and ongoing violence by pro-ISIS groups.

**What should be done?** The Bangsamoro government, with Manila's and donors' support, should respond to the grievances of those in Muslim Mindanao sceptical of the new autonomous region, help 30,000 MILF fighters return to civilian life, try to win over Islamist armed groups outside the peace process and redouble efforts to deliver social services.

**Executive Summary**

The inauguration in March 2019 of a new autonomous region in Muslim Mindanao marks the culmination of a decades-long peace process between the Philippines government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Advocates for the new region promote it as "the antidote to extremism". Indeed, Filipino lawmakers passed legislation setting up the autonomous region in part due to fear, after a five-month battle in Marawi city in 2017 between Philippines forces and local groups aligned with the Islamic State (ISIS), that delays in the peace process were fuelling militancy. Military operations have since ground ISIS-linked groups, but those groups could still disrupt the transition or gain recruits from its failure. Priorities for the new Bangsamoro transition authority include delivering quick wins in service provision, reaching out to Mindanaoans sceptical of the new autonomous region, helping MILF fighters return to civilian life and continuing efforts to win over armed groups that reject the peace process. For their part, the Philippine armed forces should avoid military tactics that displace large numbers of civilians.

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao should represent the end of the Moro struggle for self-determination and the resolution of the conflict between Moros and the Philippine state. The new autonomous region's leaders must now fulfill the political aspirations of 3.5 million Muslim Mindanaoans. But the transition faces many challenges. The region has a long history of separatist fronts fracturing when peace deals are reached and splinter groups taking up arms again against the state and their former allies. Such fragmentation, if repeated, could create new recruiting opportunities for Islamist militants, including those associated with ISIS. The MILF itself must undertake the fraught task of transforming from rebel movement into political party and government. It must decommission fighters and commanders, many of whom will likely resist giving up weapons given the number of other armed groups still active and the prevalence of arms in Mindanao.

Armed groups outside of the peace process pose the gravest security threat to the new autonomous region. Several proclaim allegiance to ISIS; most profess also to fight for Moro independence. The five-month battle for Marawi City in Lanao del Sur province in 2017 represented the high-water mark of a pro-ISIS alliance that united fighters from Mindanao's three largest ethnic groups, the Tausug, Maranao
and Maguindanao. Since the Philippine armed forces ousted the militants in October 2017, ISIS-linked groups have been under heavy military pressure in mainland Mindanao, as well as the island provinces of Basilan and Sulu, where loosely organised factions of the Abu Sayyaf Group hold out. Despite this pressure, groups that pledged fealty to ISIS have staged several damaging bombings over the past year and continue fighting the security forces.

Manila’s response has been predominantly military. Its recapture of Marawi, involving artillery and airstrikes, left much of the city centre in ruins. Locals resent the lack of reconstruction since then. After the Marawi siege, aggressive operations have continued against small bands of militants, leaving most of them weakened but in places displacing large numbers of civilians. Congress has three times extended martial law – instituted in Mindanao on the first day of the Marawi siege – most recently until the end of 2019. Officials argue that martial law is necessary because existing counter-terrorism legislation is inadequate.

Critical to countering the appeal of Islamist militancy is a successful transition to autonomy, initially via the interim Bangsamoro Transitional Administration which is run by the MILF and will govern the region until elections in 2022. In this effort, it faces an enormous challenge amid high expectations. Greater autonomy, accountable and representative leadership, and redressing “historical injustices” against the Moro should erode at least some support for militants who tap into those grievances, among others, to recruit. The new regional authorities also need to act quickly to deliver services, curb corruption and show that peace brings dividends, tasks for which they will need donors’ support. Perhaps most urgently, given that those authorities neither control local governments nor command their own regional police force – both still report to Manila – they and the Philippine government need to agree on how the new region will shoulder its responsibility for security and governance.

Specific steps that could bolster the new Bangsamoro region’s prospects for success include:

The Philippine armed forces should avoid tactics that cause displacement and generate local anger. Aerial bombardments and artillery fire may have been necessary to dislodge militants from Marawi, but are less suited to the operations in rural areas that have taken place since then.

The Bangsamoro Transitional Authority should seek to meet high popular expectations, notably by demonstrating that the new region can bring a peace dividend. Delivering services, particularly improvements in access to health, education and improved road connections, is a priority. The MILF should ally with existing clan-connected local governments, given the important service delivery role those governments play.

The MILF should seek to involve representatives of areas that voted against establishing the autonomous region in its decision-making to help gain wider buy-in (especially, but not only, in Sulu, where militancy remains a significant concern). Donors should consider supporting quick-impact projects in such areas. Nothing suggests those areas’ inhabitants will turn en masse to jihadism, but their alienation would hinder efforts to contain militant groups. At the same time, MILF leaders should continue efforts to persuade armed groups that reject the peace process to abandon their armed struggle and join it in decommissioning.

The new regional authority and donors should fully fund programs to help demobilised MILF and other fighters find new livelihoods to avoid a new potential recruitment pool for militants and other armed groups. But the new authorities and donors should be clear-eyed: rather than seeking large-scale disarmament, which is unlikely to succeed, they should consider negotiating formal or informal agreements among MILF commands and other armed groups on weapons management.

Although Islamist militancy is far from the only challenge facing the new Bangsamoro region, it remains a significant threat in Mindanao. ISIS-linked groups are on the back foot and their numbers small; still, they conduct disruptive attacks across diverse locations in Mindanao, could undercut confidence in the transition authority and potentially could be reinvigorated by MILF splinters or disillusioned former fighters. A successful Bangsamoro is unlikely to wholly eradicate militancy, but a failed one almost certainly would lead to disillusionment and anger that could reinvigorate jihadist and other violent groups and poison prospects for peace in Mindanao.”

ICG, Matthew Wheeler, Senior Analyst, South East Asia, “A Young Leader in the Philippines’ Battle-scarred ‘Islamic City’,” Commentary / Asia 28 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-east-
Politics runs in the family. Faykha Ala’s father served than a politician. Some of her friends staged rallies and other activities advocating for IDPs’ ri... and some people found th... appeal

To do so, a young council chair says, she acts as both official and activist.

I met Faykha Ala at a camp for internally displaced people (IDPs) on Marawi’s outskirts, where many of her constituents have lived for the past two years. Elevated above the shore of Lake Lanao, Marawi is a one-time American hill station, as Asia’s Western colonisers called their upland summer retreats. Today it is the capital of Lanao del Sur province and a centre for commerce, education and religion for the Maranao people, one of the three largest Muslim ethno-linguistic groups on Mindanao. In 1980, the city council designated Marawi, known for its mosques and Islamic schools, as the Philippines’ only ‘Islamic city’.

You’re Old Enough

In May 2017, militants acting in the name of the Islamic State, or ISIS, seized a zone of 24 barangays in Marawi’s centre, holding the territory until that October. This “most affected area”, as the government calls it, was the epicentre of the Philippine military’s five-month battle to oust the insurgents. The military’s airstrikes and artillery barrages, as well as pitched battles with the militants, forced some 600,000 people to flee from Marawi and environs, including all the residents of South Madaya. Residents feel that the government has done too little to hasten their return to what they call “ground zero”.

I asked her what it was like to represent South Madaya Proper, a district in Marawi, the Philippines’ historic “Islamic city”, depopulated two years ago in a battle between government forces and jihadists. To do so, a young council chair says, she acts as both official and activist.

Faykha Khayriyyah Alonto Ala is the youngest official in Marawi, a Muslim-majority city in the west of Mindanao, the second-largest island in the Philippines. Having just reached her nineteenth birthday, she is surely one of the youngest in the whole archipelago. Last September, Faykha Ala was elected chair of a barangay (village) council, the smallest political subdivision in the Philippines, an achievement of which she and her family are proud. But her village, South Madaya Proper, sits empty and off limits, littered with unexploded ordnance, many of its buildings half-destroyed.

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Muslims are a minority in the Philippines, making up about 11 per cent of the population. On Mindanao, however, that proportion rises to roughly 23 per cent, concentrated mostly in five central and western provinces, where 90 per cent of the population is Muslim. The island’s Muslims, or Moros, have long felt disenfranchised, voicing demands for autonomy or independence that were championed for decades first by the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), an armed insurgency, and later, after its leaders signed a peace deal with the government in 1976, by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). After more than twenty years of talks with the government, the MILF itself reached an agreement with the government in 2014, which envisaged a new autonomous region, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, inaugurated in March 2019 (Bangsamoro means “Moro Nation” and refers both to the Moro people and the autonomous region). The ISIS-linked coalition of militant groups that captured parts of Marawi in 2017 included splinters of the MNLF and MILF that reject the peace deal and the new autonomous region.

Many IDPs resent the government for bombing the city centre and then failing to facilitate a return to their homes. Some analysts warn that militant recruiters may exploit this bitterness. In the aftermath of the battle for Marawi, Faykha Ala acknowledges, some local people were vulnerable to the jihadists’ appeals. Recruiters told young Maranao that the government had disrespected their people. “So, it was a normal reaction for people to look for a refuge ... and some people found the wrong refuge”. But she does not see pro-ISIS militants as an imminent threat.

After fleeing the barangay, the vast majority of South Madaya’s people had other concerns, such as when the government would let them return. Faykha Ala joined the Let Me Go Home movement, which staged rallies and other activities advocating for IDPs’ rights. As the council elections approached, some villagers encouraged her to run for chair. She was hesitant, seeing herself as a government critic rather than a politician. Some of her friends told her to stick to activism, but her mother counselled her to consider how she might use a council position to achieve the same ends she was seeking in the movement, that is, to help the displaced.

Politics runs in the family. Faykha Ala’s father served as barangay chair, and her grandfather before him. It is not uncommon for women to seek and hold elected office in the region. Most often, as in Faykha Ala’s
case, novice politicians – men and women – fill posts vacated by male relatives who have reached term limits.

But some conservative villagers disapproved of her following in her father’s and grandfather’s footsteps. “We are at the stage of women’s empowerment”, she explained, “but still, the culture, the religion itself, teaches us that the man will always walk ahead of the woman”. Some told her to get married, so that she would have a man to support her. “Somehow, it is still weird for women to have a say. When I became barangay chair, it was considered a flaw to be young, single and a woman”. But Faykha Ala believes that, in her own way, she is acting in accord with traditional mores. “My father and grandfather, they walk ahead of me, and I will always get advice from them”. And when her views diverge from those of her older and all-male predecessors? “It’s my decision. My father will say, ‘You’re old enough’”.

Serving a Scattered Constituency

The barangay chair’s job is challenging. Her constituents are scattered across three provinces and have diverse concerns. “It’s challenging because when we were in the barangay, people had the same needs. If there was a damaged road, the entire barangay would complain about it. You know you have to fix the road. Now, our constituents have different problems”. The most pressing of these is access to water. But many constituents, accustomed to Marawi’s temperate lakeside climate and now displaced to areas near the humid coast, also complain about the heat. “You want water, I can help”, she says, “but the weather?”

Faykha Ala worries as well that extended displacement is killing off a way of life. The Agus River runs through South Madaya, which flows from Lake Lanao to the sea at Iligan Bay. Most of the residents were laudanums, people who launder clothes in the river, or fishermen, diving for fish. She notes that in their absence the government has built an embankment that will impede access to the water and has encouraged some to take up farming in their temporary homes: “Then you give them seeds and tell them to plant. Why would you teach that man to plant if he has spent his whole life as a fisherman?”

Life as an IDP is not easy. She feels that some of her compatriots regard the Maranao as a threat. In Cagayan de Oro, 100km north of Marawi, where her family first lived after fleeing the fighting, guards sometimes followed her in the shopping malls: “They see us in our veils, talking in our strong Maranao accents, and next thing you know there’s a security guard walking around us. And my reaction is, ‘I’m in pain. Why are you labelling me like this?’” Faykha Ala supports Rodrigo Duterte, the first Philippine president from Mindanao. But she cannot forgive him for saying that Marawi’s residents brought destruction upon themselves by “coddling terrorists”. This remark, she said, twisted perceptions of the Maranao across the Philippines. “We are the unconquered Maranao, unconquered by the Spanish. We have the Battle of Bayan [in 1902 against the U.S. Army], we fought against guns with swords and arrows. This is what people should know about us, not that we are ‘coddlers of terrorists’.

In representing her constituents, and reconciling her identities as activist and official, Faykha Ala sometimes ruffles the establishment. “I go to [government] offices and ask questions. If I am not satisfied with the answer, I have to find it, even if it means talking to the media. I am not scared. ... The welfare of my people is supreme. I do what I have to”. Her persistence and outspokenness are assets in her job, “I have always been loud”, she says. “And I like arguing. Only my mother can ‘shush’ me”.

Faykha Ala is also a full-time second-year student at Mindanao State University, studying public administration, majoring in local and regional government. The demands on her time are heavy, requiring constant shifting between studies and official duties. And the job can be emotionally taxing. “People break down in front of me. You have to deal with it. You sit there and feel sorry. You can only do so much. I’m not Superwoman who can solve all your problems. Sometimes the best thing I can do is listen”. As the link between her constituents and the government, she must draw on reserves of patience.

Colossal Tasks Ahead

Like many in Muslim Mindanao, Faykha Ala and her constituents have high hopes for the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. An interim Bangsamoro Transition Authority, lead by the MILF, is responsible for establishing a parliamentary-style sub-national government in the region before an election in 2022. In a plebiscite early this year, Faykha Ala’s constituents voted overwhelmingly to ratify the Bangsamoro Organic Law, the legal instrument establishing the new autonomous region. Amid these expectations, the Bangsamoro Transition Authority faces a colossal task, as outlined in Crisis Group’s report The Philippines: Militancy and the New Bangsamoro. It must erect an entirely new
institutional edifice in the poorest part of the Philippines in just three years. The new Bangsamoro autonomous entity replaces a previous autonomous region established in 1989 as part of the peace deal with the MNLF and must contend with the legacy of this “failed experiment”. Faykha Ala is optimistic, though, that the Bangsamoro can succeed “as long as there is clear communication between local government and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region”.

Faykha would like to see the national government lift martial law, which the president imposed on all of Mindanao on 23 May 2017, the first day of the Marawi siege. Congress has since extended it three times, most recently until the end of 2019. Faykha says martial law has helped bring a sense of security, especially in tamping downrido, or clan feuds, but that it comes with a cost. She is concerned about the impact on Marawi’s children. “I want the next generation to see that you do not need the military to have peace and order in your place. … Someone needs to tell them, "You don’t need to have a gun. If you have wisdom and values, you can be admired instead of feared”.

Marawi’s youngest official appreciates the scale of the challenge she has taken on in helping the Bangsamoro region reap the benefits of its new autonomy. She is now ‘rowing in two rivers’, she says, meaning that she combines the roles of official and activist. “Now I have two perspectives. I can see clearly the government plans and at the same time, I see what the people want”. She embraces the opportunity to bridge the gap between the two. “You don’t have to be a man or be married. You can be single, widowed, have kids. Things will be easy if you love it. … Despite the stress, I can say I am grateful for having that honour”.


Andrew E. Kramer, “Kazakhstan Welcomes Women Back From the Islamic State, Warily,” The New York Times, August 10, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/10/world/europe/kazakhstan-women-islamic-state-deradicalization.html, reported that the government of Kazakhstan, unlike most other countries, has been welcoming back women who were connected to ISIS in Syria and Iraq, placing them in a deradicalization program, despite the lack of proof that deradicalization programs work — rather than arresting them if they dare show up.”

European Developments


Any change to the stated mission of NATO’s current missile defense system — aimed at threats from outside the region, like Iran — would probably divide the alliance’s member countries and enrage Russia, which has long said it views NATO’s missile defense site in Romania and one under construction in Poland as a threat to its nuclear arsenal and a source of instability in Europe.”


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toward reconciliation and tough talk. He has proposed both a referendum on peace talks with Moscow and
tougher U.S. sanctions on the Kreml for its continued backing of pro-Russian separatists in the east.
"Poroshenko was an adversary", said one official. "At least we knew where we stood. With Zelenskyy, we
don't". Another said: "We don't know who stands behind him". In short, the Kreml is waiting for
Zelenskyy to make the first move.

The decision to wait fits into Moscow’s quietly shifting strategy in eastern Ukraine. From 2014 to
2018, the Kreml bolstered the D/LPR with military support with the apparent aim of destabilising
Ukraine. Its vision of the implementation of the Minsk agreements, signed during talks involving Russia,
Ukraine, Germany and France in 2014 and 2015, in which Kyiv would be forced to grant these statelets
autonomy on their terms, would have given Russia substantial and lasting influence in Ukrainian politics.
Since last year, however, Moscow has changed tack. While it continues to pay lip service to Minsk,
its priority has shifted from the military conflict itself to helping the statelets mitigate their financial
dependence on Russian support.

This approach aims to entrench the statelets’ nascent institutions while allowing Moscow to avoid
costlier moves like recognising their independence or annexing them. It keeps Minsk alive, but
unimplemented, such that Russia can continue to accuse Ukraine of failing to abide by its terms. It also lets
Moscow off the hook financially, as better developed client economies would have less need for Russian
subsidies. If those economies are better integrated with Russia’s own, with gains for each, so much the
better. There’s a reason why the Emergencies Ministry, which has been sending convoys of humanitarian
aid, has paused its shipments in recent months: to paraphrase one Russian official, it is time for the
statelets to stop being dependent on Russian aid and start trying to break even.

The economic embargo that Ukraine imposed on D/LPR in 2017 makes above-board trade difficult,
and may push them closer to Russia, albeit via grey zone commercial interactions. For example, according
to media reports and Ukrainian specialists interviewed by Crisis Group, anthracite coal and other minerals
travelled freely across the line of contact into Ukraine from the start of the conflict in 2014 until the
blockade. Now, those sources say, a complicated scheme sends these minerals first east to Russia, then
west to Belarus, and from there to other markets – including Ukraine itself.

Because Russia denies being a party to the conflict and says it offers nothing to the D/LPR but
humanitarian aid and moral support, it is difficult to verify how exactly Moscow is assisting the coal trade
or any other commerce. But for over a year now, Kremlin-connected observers have noted the growing influence of the deputy prime minister, Dmitry Kozak. Kozak, who is responsible for Russia’s energy sector, oversees a government commission that manages humanitarian aid to rebel-held areas in eastern Ukraine. Russian investigative reporters have linked his role to a Russian decision to prioritise business integration with the statelets, including allegedly facilitating coal trade from Ukraine’s east.

Asked about the prioritisation of economic above military ties, one Russian official said that the current D/LPR leadership is not as militaristic as its predecessors. In November 2018, the self-proclaimed statelets held elections, which were not recognised outside of Russia and which Moscow allegedly choreographed. Denis Pushilin, who became DPR leader, is widely believed to be less ideologically passionate, less popular and thus easier to control from Moscow than his assassinated predecessor Aleksandr Zakharchenko. Much the same applies to the LPR’s new leader, Leonid Pasechnik, who took over after a power struggle in 2017 and retained the leadership in last year’s election.

The Kremlin’s offer of Russian passports to D/LPR residents may also be intended to strengthen the breakaway region’s economies and ties to Russia. One Kremlin adviser said the measure had been in the works for some time. Domestic political pressures in Russia might also have played a role. Many Russians know that life in D/LPR is difficult, as Crisis Group has reported. During a widely watched call-in show featuring Putin last June, D/LPR residents phoned to complain about how hard it was to settle in Russia after fleeing the war. On the air, the president ordered the Interior Ministry to make it easier for them to obtain citizenship. Issuing passports strengthens D/LPR residents’ ties to Russia. If more residents go to work in Russia, they may well send remittances home, another boost to the local economy, even as they provide cheap labour to Russia.

While Ukrainians are surely right to distrust Russia’s intentions in the east, Moscow’s actions so far do not suggest a plan of escalation. The passport move does signal Moscow’s resolve to bolster ties with Russian speakers in Ukraine. But Zelenskyy’s election was likely not its impetus. ‘We’re not orienting our policy around Zelensky’, a Russian official said. Overestimating Moscow’s appetite for escalation could have its own negative consequences. If Kyiv interprets Moscow’s move to expedite passports as escalatory and pushes back, even if only rhetorically, it risks feeding a spiral of both words and action, rendering the escalation prophecy self-fulfilling.

Instead, the new administration in Kyiv and its European supporters could take advantage of Moscow’s waiting game, and use the time to construct a better policy for engaging the people of the east. Kyiv should also decide on what terms it wants to deal with Moscow in order to move toward real peace, including how it wants to move forward on Minsk. Zelenskyy’s administration is already taking tentative steps in this direction: at a 5 June meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group, formed in 2014 to broker Russian-Ukrainian talks over the rebel-held east, Kyiv’s representatives explored several proposals for a truce, including lifting the embargo. Moscow sounded encouraged, but said it wanted to hear more specifics.

Indeed, in Kyiv, Zelenskyy faced blowback, however. Because the Trilateral Contact Group meeting came so soon after his election, his offer raised concerns among some Ukrainians that the new president is making concessions to Russia in hopes of sealing a fast truce. Already, some politicians in Kyiv call his proposals a capitulation to Russia.

The president can prove them wrong. First of all, he should avoid rushing proposals in hopes of clinching a fast deal; Moscow in any case is unlikely to commit to concessions in return anytime soon. Secondly, no deal will be viable absent Ukrainian consensus on the conditions under which it can implement its commitments under Minsk. He needs to involve political parties and civil society in Kyiv in formulating proposals for a truce. He also needs to ensure that any proposal is a means of restoring Kyiv’s control over the breakaway regions. Whether he seeks to lift the embargo or agrees to a ceasefire, he must do so with a view to how this helps restore Ukraine’s ties with its citizens in the east and its social and territorial integrity. And, indeed, restored Ukrainian economic relations with this region would push back against Moscow’s efforts and help bring it back into the fold.

Moscow is still sizing up Ukraine’s new president. Zelenskyy should convince his own base that he is developing a plan for eastern Ukraine that will serve Ukraine’s long-term social and political cohesion.”
Andrew E. Kramer, "In Ukraine, a Rival to Putin Rises," The New York Times, August 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/world/europe/ukraine-president-putin-russia.html, reports that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has been making gains in dealing with the split in his country, with the struggle for the independence of the eastern portion supported by Russia. 

"Mr. Putin appears to have engineered a series of small crises to test the new president. But where the previous Ukrainian leader, Petro O. Poroshenko, was constrained by Ukrainian nationalist sentiment in Parliament, Mr. Zelensky has seized chances to appeal to eastern Ukraine's Russian-speaking miners and steel workers — and even to those tiring of Mr. Putin in Russia.

His government declared a cease-fire that is mostly holding, has pulled soldiers from the front line near one checkpoint to ease civilian access, and has invested in border towns on the Ukrainian side. Mr. Zelensky traveled to Mariupol, a steel town in eastern Ukraine, to announce a $2.5 million investment to reduce air pollution."

ICG, Anna Arutunyan, Senior Analyst, Russia, "Getting Aid to Separatist-held Ukraine," Commentary / Europe & Central Asia 13 May 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine/getting-aid-separatist-held-ukraine?utm_source=Sign-Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=9354984f46-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_13_02_S&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-9354984f46-359871089, commented, "The front lines in eastern Ukraine are slowly freezing in place, as is civilian deprivation in the conflict zone. An embargo, bureaucracy and distrust conspire to keep humanitarian aid out. Russia and Ukraine should find politically neutral ways to unblock the flow of assistance."

After five years of war, a humanitarian crisis drags on in the self-proclaimed Luhansk and Donetsk People’s Republics (L/DPR), the parts of eastern Ukraine nominally governed by Russian-backed separatists. More than 3.5 million people in eastern Ukraine are in need of aid, according to UN figures. The need is particularly dire in the rebel-held territories, which confront a Ukrainian economic blockade as well as isolation imposed by the rebels themselves. The aging segment of the L/DPR’s population is hardest-hit of all, struggling to get by on pensions as low as $30 per month. But humanitarian groups face several obstacles in getting these people the aid they need.

All sides are erecting hurdles. Citing obstruction by the L/DPR authorities, the UN has scaled back its humanitarian response in rebel-controlled areas, focusing on the less hard-hit but still in need people on the government-controlled side of the line. Ukraine’s trade blockade of the L/DPR limits aid access. Russian humanitarian groups say indiscriminate shelling from the Ukrainian side of the contact line makes aid distribution dangerous, and that they also face obstacles from L/DPR authorities whom they decry as corrupt. They perceive the Russian government as doing too little to coordinate assistance efforts and say they cannot trust anyone in power.

'The Russians, they have forgotten about them [people in eastern Ukraine]', said Marina (not her real name), a Muscovite who regularly travels to Donetsk to deliver goods and help families buy groceries. After trying to work through established charities operating in Russia, she decided to go solo, citing a lack of transparency and corruption. 'The government of L/DPR, when it comes to big convoys there, they just steal the goods', she added. Another aid worker in Rostov-on-Don, a Russian city not far from the separatist-controlled areas, told a similar story. Exasperated, she founded her own charity, which distributes food, money, toys and animated films to children in affected areas.

Many of the independent Russian aid workers who raise these concerns sympathise with the separatist cause. But the depth and frankness of their frustration reflects their belief that both Kyiv and Moscow have abandoned the people whom the workers are trying to serve. As the conflict stagnates, and contact across the front lines becomes ever more difficult, humanitarian aid could yet be a rare, vital avenue of cooperation among the Russian, Ukrainian and European governments. That, however, will require all sides to focus on the residents’ plight rather than tactical gains vis-à-vis their adversaries.

Many Obstacles

Over five years of conflict, humanitarian access to the east has shrunk. Even in the war, militias supporting the Ukrainian government, such as Donopro-1 and Aidar, were known to intercept humanitarian convoyshead to L/DPR territories because they did not want supplies getting through to people they regarded as the enemy. In 2017, Kyiv imposed an economic blockade on the separatist-controlled areas,
not only paralysing what remained of the war-shattered L/DPR economy, but also in effect slashing the volume of assistance distributed there. As Crisis Group has reported, the embargo made an explicit exception for humanitarian convoys crossing the contact line. Yet in practice it kept aid out, because charities legally registered in Ukraine could no longer function in the L/DPR due to a combination of Ukrainian and L/DPR regulations, and to the ways in which L/DPR authorities adapted to the embargo. Before the blockade, for instance, one of the chief aid distributors in these territories was a foundation run by steel magnate and Kyiv loyalist Rinat Akhmetov. After the embargo, self-declared DPR authorities seized Akhmetov’s assets, causing aid distribution to fall precipitously. Meanwhile, these authorities have also interdicted aid shipments from politically neutral parties: as late as this year, forces loyal to the self-proclaimed republics reportedly blocked Red Cross convoys, giving no explanation.

Today, many humanitarian organisations cannot reach people in need, according to aid workers from Russian and international groups interviewed by Crisis Group. Ukrainian authorities will often refuse accreditation to organisations trying to deliver aid to the L/DPR from the western, Ukrainian side if in the past they have crossed into the L/DPR from the eastern, Russian side. Kyiv distrusts such groups, viewing them as collaborators with L/DPR de facto authorities. For their part, self-proclaimed L/DPR authorities obstruct efforts by groups entering from Ukrainian-controlled territories on the grounds that they are not humanitarian agencies, but enemies.

Russian groups, which enter through Russia and therefore should be both free of Ukrainian red tape and trusted by the L/DPR, also face problems. Alexei Smirnov runs the crowdfunded Angel Humanitarian Group, based in Moscow. Angel volunteers travel to residential areas along the contact line on the L/DPR side as often as twice a week to deliver goods and medicine. Smirnov does not deny that some of his foundation’s personnel may have fought alongside pro-Russian rebels in the past. He says they no longer do so, however, and adds that his organisation seeks to be politically neutral. Smirnov complains that Ukraine nonetheless treats his staff like combatants. “We get shot at [by the Ukrainian forces] because they think we are enemies and because we show what it is like in those residential areas”, he said, referring to Ukrainian forces’ shelling of civilian areas.

Smirnov insists that his group does not seek support from Russian authorities. ‘We don’t accept help from Russia because that would only increase suspicion. Or they could take advantage of us’.

Meanwhile, Russian aid groups find that coordination with Russia’s Emergencies Ministry, which gathers medical and food aid supplied by federal and regional bodies and ships it to L/DPR, is difficult or non-existent. ‘There is no documentational framework for us to coordinate together with [the Ministry]’, said one independent Russian aid worker. ‘We can’t really track the aid they send there or verify that it has actually reached civilians’. Amid the lack of both coordination and common guidelines, grassroots groups distrust each other as well as Moscow, trading accusations that some workers are merely enriching themselves instead of delivering aid to needy people. This mistrust, the aid worker said, dominates the sector and keeps grassroots groups from getting along. “There is no friendship. No coordination”. The inability to get along hampers the formation of more effective networks that could work with government agencies to maximise access.

**Life Support**

As a result, the overwhelming bulk of aid to rebel-held areas comes from the Russian government, via regular convoys sent by the Emergencies Ministry, but independent aid workers say it’s unclear how many of those goods actually reach the people in need. Since the conflict began, the Ministry reports, it has dispatched more than 80 convoys, each carrying up to 500 tonnes of goods. Though these numbers seem impressive, other figures point to huge unmet needs: as of late 2018, also according to Ministry figures, 160,000 of the DPR’s 2.3 million people were able to receive aid packages at distribution points. The UN estimates that over 20 per cent of the L/DPR’s population is food-insecure. Indeed, independent Russian aid workers who travel regularly to the affected areas say that Emergencies Ministry aid is, in their words, barely keeping civilians on life support. Moreover, its convoys are part of the reason why Smirnov and his volunteers have such a hard time: Ukrainian and international groups accuse Russia of secreting undeclared weapons and ammunition amid the supplies. Ukrainian authorities assume that independent Russian aid workers are doing the same – and thus treat them like combatants.

Aside from the humanitarian implications, the economic strangulation of these isolated territories dims prospects for their peaceful reintegration into Ukraine. Reliance on Russian aid, insufficient though it
is, makes both the civilians and authorities of L/DPR more dependent on Moscow and more alienated from Kyiv. But it is also bad for Russia. The trickle of assistance from Russia and the lack of coordination with grassroots groups undermines the morale of once dedicated aid workers, leading to even fewer aid deliveries and greater dissatisfaction with Russia’s efforts both at home and in L/DPR. Russia is already seeking ways to pay less for assistance, local media reports suggest, and the Emergencies Ministry recently postponed a planned column of its aid trucks amid plans to “restructure” aid. The more difficult it is for grassroots groups and international agencies to deliver aid, the larger the burden for Moscow in feeding a hungry region outside its borders.

**Bringing Order to Chaos**

Both Russia and Ukraine should explore politically neutral options for getting more humanitarian aid into the affected regions. Facilitating aid to civilians in the unrecognized statelets could open up avenues of bilateral cooperation that, with time, could make political dialogue easier.

One way to ease access for aid groups might be to set up an independent observer body staffed by Russians, Ukrainians and nationals of a third European country perceived as relatively neutral, such as Austria, Germany or Italy. This body could establish transparent guidelines to verify the neutrality of aid groups regardless of their country of origin, while ensuring aid, not weapons, are delivered. The body could work together with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – which is monitoring the ceasefire at the contact line and overseeing negotiations that are part of the Minsk peace plan – in accrediting aid providers.

Even such a body, however, will not be enough absent a broader shift toward reconciliation. Kyiv in particular should explore ways to facilitate aid as part of a wider policy of treating civilians of the east, regardless of their political affiliations, as Ukrainian citizens in dire need of aid, rather than as combatants or instruments in political battles. There are many ways to signal this, and a new president means new opportunities to do so. Ukrainian President-elect Volodymyr Zelensky has argued in favor of re-engaging with Ukrainians in the east. One concrete way to start could be for Kyiv to make a concerted effort to ensure that pensions reach civilians in rebel-held territories, in accordance with Ukrainian laws. Kyiv should also explore ways to ease the embargo – something that may also indicate Kyiv’s newfound interest in reintegrating the rebel-held territories rather than isolating them or pushing them toward Russia.

As matters stand, as Alexei Smirnov put it, aid provision ‘is in a state of chaos. It doesn’t work.’

Marc Santora, ""Balkan Spring" Turns to Summer, and Hopes for Change Dim," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/01/world/europe/balkans-protests-montenegro-serbia-bosnia-albania.html, reported, "with summer fast approaching, and tourism season arriving, hopes for a ‘Balkan Spring’ seem likely to be disappointed in Montenegro, as they have so far elsewhere in the former Yugoslavia.

From Bosnia to Serbia, and even in Albania, citizens have taken to the streets by the hundreds of thousands for months in an epidemic of discontent.

Specific grievances vary, but all are animated by the sense that their governments are increasingly ruled by kleptocrats with authoritarian tendencies who have taken advantage of young democracies with weak checks on executive power.

Where there was once hope that the path to joining the European Union would compel leaders to take on reforms, many taking to the streets across the region feel the opposite has happened."


Former Prime Minister Pavel Filip was appointed to replace Mr. Dodon, and he promptly announced snap elections in September.

Mr. Filip said that Mr. Dodon had not fulfilled his duties by failing to dissolve Parliament and had attempted to stage a "coup."

President Ilir Meta said on Saturday that he had acted because the circumstances did not provide "the necessary conditions for true, democratic, representative and all-inclusive elections," which had been scheduled for the end of this month. Mr. Meta added that he had canceled the polls since the crisis "undermined every chance to start accession talks with the European Union."

The president said he would clarify his decision on Monday.

Thousands of Albanians who support the political opposition took to the streets for an antigovernment protest on Saturday, calling on Prime Minister Edi Rama, whom they accuse of corruption and of manipulating elections in 2017, to quit. Mr. Rama, leader of the Socialist Party of Albania, is backed by both the United States and the European Union and has so far held on to power."

Marc Santora, "Protestors Fill Prague Square Again, in New Struggle for Country's Soul," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2019, [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/world/europe/czech-republic-protests.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/world/europe/czech-republic-protests.html), reported, "In the square in the heart of Prague, where crowds gathered three decades ago in their bid to wrest freedom from Communist rule and where independence was proclaimed seven decades before that, protest songs rang out again on Tuesday night.

Tens of thousands of men, women and children, coming from across the Czech Republic, waving flags and carrying signs attacking the government, gathered for what they said was yet another struggle for the soul of their democracy.

What started six weeks ago as a relatively contained protest — over the appointment of a justice minister many believe will protect Prime Minister Andrej Babis from potential fraud charges — has grown into something broader and possibly harder to control. Organizers said Tuesday that as many as 120,000 people had attended the protest, a count that would make it one of Prague’s largest demonstrations since 1989."

In perhaps a sign that rightwing nationalists are beginning to be found to be making matters worse, not better as promised, Slovakia swore in its first woman president, Zuzana Caputova, who is pro rights and diversity, anticorruption, and supports a strong European Union (Marc Santora, "Slovakia’s First Female President, Zuzana Caputova, Takes Office in a Divided Country," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2019, [https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/world/europe/zuzana-caputova-slovakia-president.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/world/europe/zuzana-caputova-slovakia-president.html)).

**African Developments**

ICG, "A Tale of Two Councils: Strengthening AU-UN Cooperation," Report 279 / Africa 24 June 2019, [https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/279-tale-two-councils-strengthening-au-un-cooperation?utm_source=Sign-Up-to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=27b12e8df2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_24_03_34&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-27b12e8df2-339871089], "Since 2002, when the African Union was founded, its Peace and Security Council has worked closely with the UN Security Council to resolve the continent’s multiple conflicts. But sharp disagreements have hampered cooperation of late. Practical remedies can help the resolve the continent’s multiple conflicts. But sharp disagreements have hampered cooperation of late. Practical remedies can help the bodies pursue their common mission.

**What’s new?** Both African Union (AU) and UN leadership have made deepening the AU-UN partnership a priority. But while increased cooperation between the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) should be at the centre of this effort, internal challenges and inter-council tensions are driving the bodies apart.

**Why does it matter?** The PSC and the Security Council need each other. Although the AU would prefer to take the lead on African conflicts, it recognises that some crises require international support. And while the Security Council ultimately has primacy in peace and security matters, its efforts risk losing legitimacy and effectiveness if they lack regional buy-in.
What should be done? African states should help the PSC become a stronger voice for the continent on peace and security matters and the Security Council should be more attentive to this voice. Improved communication between the two councils – and better PSC coordination with the Security Council’s African members – can help.

Executive Summary

Since the start of 2019, long-time tensions between the UN Security Council and the African Union Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) over the handling of African crises have broken into the open, as evidenced by friction around how to address this year’s political turmoil in Sudan and the upsurge of violence in Libya. The catalyst of the intensified disagreements was a December 2018 dispute over the proposed use of UN-assessed contributions to fund AU-led peace operations. But there are deeper, longer-term dynamics at work, undermining both councils from within and sharpening debates about which institution should have primacy in pursuit of their common mission. The councils cannot immediately overcome some of these challenges, but both can take practical steps to lower tensions, increase cooperation and modestly improve prospects for reducing conflict on the continent.

Forces undermining the two councils from within also make each less reliable in its engagement with the other. On the one hand, splits among the Security Council’s five veto-wielding permanent members (China, France, Russia, the UK and the U.S. – also known as the P5) regarding conflict situations such as Syria and Ukraine are infecting deliberations on African conflicts at the same time as competition is rising among these countries for influence on the continent. On the other hand, AU leaders’ and senior officials’ increasing marginalisation of the PSC is denting that institution’s confidence and is undermining its credibility as a voice for continental affairs – with the Security Council.

The two councils must also struggle with time-worn questions about which body ultimately has the lead when it comes to peace and security on the continent. The AU and its member states tend to believe that there must be African solutions for African problems – a logic that would privilege the PSC’s positions on African crises when they come before the Security Council. But the Security Council’s permanent members, especially France, the UK and the U.S. (the P5), jealously guard the Council’s role under the UN Charter as the principal protector of global peace and security. The AU often interprets the lack of deference to PSC positions as arrogance, which can undermine the perceived legitimacy of Security Council decisions. To the extent that disconnects between the councils reflect a lack of African support for decisions emanating from New York, they can also be a harbinger of failure. Without regional cooperation, it is hard – if not impossible – for UN efforts to succeed.

But while many of these challenges run very deep, there are some irritants to inter-council relations that might be more readily and productively addressed. For example, annual consultations and possible joint visits to Africa, which should foster greater understanding and cooperation, too often have the opposite effect; New York delegations behave in ways that come off as high-handed and non-inclusive, reinforcing the PSC’s impression that the Security Council views it as a junior partner.

For its part, the PSC’s failure to consistently lay out clear and timely positions on issues on the Security Council’s agenda weakens its influence, as do persistent challenges in coordinating its views with those of the three rotating African participants on the Security Council (A3). The PSC generally takes the view that the A3 should represent its views in New York. In reality, however, their role vis-à-vis the AU is complicated by both AU and UN politics. The PSC’s protocols mean that the A3 states are not invited to attend the PSC’s closed consultations (unless they sit on both councils simultaneously) and therefore have no input into the decisions they are meant to advocate. Meanwhile, the A3 are targets of heavy political lobbying at the UN, especially by the P5. Historical ties also matter. Côte d’Ivoire has, for example, sometimes sided with France rather than other A3 members during its term.

Resolving the core issues that aggravate inter-council relations may be beyond immediate reach. But addressing some procedural irritants and focusing on practical improvements offers the potential for some progress. Among other things, the PSC could improve its ability to influence Security Council deliberations and decisions by discussing conflicts well in advance of key Council meetings and mandate renewals. To ensure that agendas are better aligned, the PSC chairperson and Security Council president (which rotate on a monthly basis) could meet long before their terms to begin jointly defining areas of interest. The councils could plan more frequent and better-prepared direct engagements to promote
mutual understanding. And the PSC could improve communication and coordination with the A3 – both by inviting them to participate in its deliberations and giving them clear negotiation mandates. But none of these proposals will make much difference if Security Council members do not take greater notice of the AU’s views. Simple steps, such as echoing the language of PSC decisions in Council resolutions, could demonstrate increased sensitivity to AU positions. Far from diminishing the Security Council’s status under the UN Charter, these initiatives could instead help it increase regional support for its efforts and make it more effective in serving its paramount goal of ending deadly conflict.”


The council, a semi-independent body operating in the shadow of the country’s all-powerful military, gave no reason for canceling the July 4 vote in its official statement. But the decision was not unexpected: For weeks, the protesters who have filled the streets of Algiers and other cities have been demanding nothing less.”


What’s new? A neglected banking crisis in Libya is coming to a head just as forces under Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar are trying to capture Tripoli. A protracted conflict will hinder efforts to reunify the divided banking system, fuelling prospects of a financial implosion and economic war alongside the military one.

Why did it happen? The looming crisis is a direct consequence of a four-year split between the Central Bank in Tripoli and its eastern branch, dating from the broader political divide that emerged in 2014. Haftar’s desire to seize control of the Central Bank and state assets possibly contributed to the timing of his offensive.

Why does it matter? Should the Central Bank freeze the operations of two key commercial banks because of falling reserves, the move could destabilise the east-based government and interrupt funding for Haftar-led forces. This would deepen the political divide between competing authorities in east and west and produce severe economic blowback throughout the country.

What should be done? In addition to a ceasefire, Libya’s warring sides should, at a minimum, reach agreement on standardising commercial banking operations in the east and work toward the Central Bank’s reunification. Libya’s foreign partners should offer expert advice and prioritise resolving the financial crisis in negotiations.

Executive Summary

As forces loyal to east-based military commander Khalifa Haftar battle armed groups in western Libya nominally loyal to the Tripoli-based government, a neglected and possibly explosive banking crisis could further destabilise the country. In April, the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya started enforcing restrictions on several eastern state-owned commercial banks, which together cover 30 per cent of Libya’s commercial banking needs. Such restrictions loomed prior to Haftar’s offensive, which may partly have been inspired by a spiralling banking feud rooted in Libya’s 2014 political split. If the Central Bank further tightens restrictive measures, this would compromise the east-based government’s ability to pay employees and Haftar’s forces. This in turn could prompt Haftar to cut oil exports from areas he controls and ignite an economic war. Averting such a crisis requires a settlement between the Central Bank in
Tripoli and its eastern branch in Benghazi, operating autonomously since 2014, on how to account for commercial bank transactions. Libya’s international partners should work toward that goal.

The battle for Tripoli has already caused at least 300 deaths and displaced tens of thousands in a month of fighting. Haftar’s Libyan National Army’s (LNA) offensive, which began in early April, so far has foundered on the capital’s periphery in the face of fierce resistance from armed groups aligned with the UN-backed Government of National Accord. Both sides project confidence that they will prevail with military and financial support from their respective foreign sponsors. They have also rejected mediation by external neutral parties such as the UN. All signs point to a prolonged, highly destructive, stalemate.

Against the backdrop of ongoing fighting, the authorities in Tripoli evince little appetite for responding to the imminent banking crisis. They know they have the advantage of exclusive access to state funds accruing from oil sales, and that a concession from their side would save the very banks that have helped bankroll the military forces now besieging them. The Tripoli authorities may indeed be tempted to let the banking crisis come to a head, or even take additional measures such as interrupting salary payments to east-based civil servants currently on Tripoli’s payroll, in order to halt funding streams to the east, thereby hamstring the LNA’s ability to carry on the fight.

Such a strategy could make military sense, but it would also compound Libya’s lingering economic crisis by orders of magnitude, with grave social, economic and political repercussions for the entire country. The commercial banks’ growing troubles could cause mass panic, aggravate an existing liquidity crisis and impede service delivery as key state companies and private firms, which hold accounts with these banks, may no longer be able to process payments or issue letters of credit to import the essential goods on which Libya is highly dependent.

A financial squeeze in the east could also reignite fighting over Libya’s sole source of revenue: its oil. In the short term, Haftar could ask his wealthy regional backers – mainly the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia – to bankroll his war effort, but as the battle wears on, the east-based government could decide to shut down the country’s oil fields and export terminals, most of which are under LNA control. This would deepen the de facto split between east and west, including the rift in the banking sector, and possibly become a prelude to partition. All these developments would vastly complicate efforts to reach a political settlement to the Libyan conflict overall.

To prevent such a catastrophic scenario, Libya’s competing military coalitions in the east and west should urgently agree to a ceasefire and then promptly launch negotiations between the Central Bank’s rival governments to settle the dispute over how to account for financial transactions in the east. Outside actors should press the parties to embark on this course of action and offer expert advice. The U.S. in particular should use its historical leverage over Libya’s financial and oil sectors and its newly declared sympathy for Haftar to usher the parties toward a financial settlement. This is an essential step that should support simultaneous political and military-to-military negotiations over reuniﬁing governing institutions, including reconsolidating the Central Bank and appointing new bank governor.

Ultimately, only the reunification of Libya’s rival governments and state institutions, including its ﬁnancial ones, can bring the stability that its citizens crave. Reuniﬁcation by military means on which Haftar and his backers appear to be betting is likely to backﬁre. The promise of a ﬁnancial settlement might make the difference Libyan parties need to agree to a ceasefire and put political negotiations back on track.”

ICG, “Stopping the War for Tripoli,” Briefing 69 / Middle East & North Africa 23 May 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/b069-stopping-war-tripoli?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=99a1e3a7ea3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_23_12_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-99a1e3a7ea3-359871089, commented, “Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s march on Tripoli has ground to a halt in a war of attrition with the internationally recognised government’s forces on the city’s outskirts. The parties should conclude a ceasefire including Haftar’s partial withdrawal as a prelude to renewed UN peace talks.

What’s new? Almost two months have passed since war erupted between forces loyal to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and groups aligned with the Tripoli government in Libya. Fighting has raged on the capital’s outskirts, causing at least 510 deaths, but neither side has been able to deal a decisive blow.
Sudan following an appeal said, in a dawn raid in the capital of Khartoum on Monday, killing an estimated 31 people and wounding hundreds, protest organizers said, in a day of violence that plunged the country's once-hopeful revolution into chaos and uncertainty.

The dawn raids, led by a paramilitary unit notorious for atrocities in the western region of Darfur, appeared to signal that the military was intent on breaking the pro-democracy movement that galvanized Sudan following the ouster in April of the longtime dictator and president Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

Soldiers fanned out across the city from first light, opening fire on protesters, burning their tents and thrashing civilians with sticks. The brutal crackdown came days after the collapse of power-sharing negotiations that pointed to a partial withdrawal of Haftar’s forces from the Tripoli front lines and give the UN the chance to restart peace talks.

Why does it matter? Both sides view the war as existential, and reject calls for an unconditional ceasefire: Tripoli demands that Haftar’s troops withdraw to eastern Libya; Haftar wants the capital under his control. Both have put in motion a cycle of internal and external mobilisation that points to protracted regional proxy conflict.

What should be done? The parties and their external backers should acknowledge that neither side can prevail militarily and stop pouring oil on the fire. They should conclude an immediate ceasefire entailing a partial withdrawal of Haftar’s forces from the Tripoli front lines and give the UN the chance to restart peace talks.

I. Overview

Almost two months have passed since Libyan National Army (LNA) forces commanded by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar marched on Tripoli from their base in eastern Libya in an attempt to seize the capital. They expected a swift victory, banking on the belief that key units in the Tripoli area would remain neutral or switch sides. But they miscalculated: rather than swooping into the capital, they became stranded on its outskirts, settling into a war of attrition with forces from Tripoli and Misrata nominally loyal to the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and its Presidential Council, headed by Fayez Serraj. Nevertheless, Haftar is claiming success and, seeming to believe victory is within reach, refusing calls for a cessation of hostilities. On their side, forces nominally loyal to the GNA have pegged the resumption of talks to the LNA’s complete withdrawal from western Libya. Otherwise, they say, they will push out the LNA by force. Both sides see themselves as pursuing a just cause and, convinced that their military objective is achievable with a little outside help, have shown signs of doubling down.

Meanwhile, the fighting has created a diplomatic vacuum: the UN special envoy has seen the political process he initiated evaporate, and rifts among Libya’s external stakeholders have been laid bare, leaving the UN Security Council paralysed. With no military solution on the horizon, the two sides will have no choice but to return to the negotiating table sooner or later. The UN’s reputation may have taken a hit, but the world body remains the only actor capable of managing peace talks. External actors need to acknowledge these realities, and throw their support behind an internationally monitored ceasefire that would require at least a partial withdrawal of Haftar-led forces from the Tripoli front lines. It will be no easy task, given the zero-sum logic that drives both the LNA’s offensive (and that Haftar’s regional backers share) and the Tripoli government’s demand that Haftar forces leave western Libya entirely.

But simply letting the war take its course, and possibly escalate further, should not be the only option. International stakeholders, including the U.S., need to achieve a new consensus on Libya, genuinely empower the UN special envoy, call for an immediate ceasefire and press the warring sides back to the table.

For their part, the two sides should reassess their assumptions and acknowledge that neither has the capability to prevail militarily. For Haftar and other LNA commanders, as well as the east-based government, reassessment means softening their bellicose rhetoric and publicly accepting the Tripoli government as a legitimate negotiating partner. In turn, Serraj and military forces allied to the GNA should be prepared to commit to negotiations that could well overturn the UN-installed institutional framework of which they have been the prime beneficiaries. Once a ceasefire is in place, an immediate priority should be the resumption of talks to resolve a banking crisis that, if left unaddressed, could impoverish the majority of the population, reignite the battle for the capital and bring Libya to ruin.”


The dawn raids, led by a paramilitary unit notorious for atrocities in the western region of Darfur, appeared to signal that the military was intent on breaking the pro-democracy movement that galvanized Sudan following the ouster in April of the longtime dictator and president Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

Soldiers fanned out across the city from first light, opening fire on protesters, burning their tents and thrashing civilians with sticks. The brutal crackdown came days after the collapse of power-sharing
negotiations between civilian and military leaders over who should run Sudan during a planned transitional period."

"Lt. Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the military council’s head, announced that elections would be held within nine months."

Declan Walsh, "Sudan's Protesters Reject Military Plan After Crackdown Kills Dozens," The New York Times, June 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/04/world/africa/sudan-protest-military.html, reported, "A day after security forces violently cleared the main protest camp in Khartoum, the leaders of Sudan's protest movement rejected a plan by the nation's military leaders to hold elections within nine months."

The protesters vowed instead to push ahead with an open-ended civil disobedience campaign to force the military from power:

At least 35 people were killed and over 650 were wounded in a firestorm of violence on Monday, protest organizers said, when paramilitary troops swept through central Khartoum, the capital, firing on protesters, burning tents and beating civilians."

Declan Walsh, "Sudan's Protesters Call Off Strike and Agree to Resume Talks With Military," The New York Times, June 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/11/world/africa/sudan-military-protester-talks.html, reported, "Protest leaders in Sudan have agreed to end the general strike that brought Khartoum to a standstill this week and are willing to resume power-sharing talks with the ruling military council, an Ethiopian mediator said on Tuesday."

"Sudanese protesters accept Ethiopian initiative to end political crisis," Iran Press TV via GlobalSecurity.Org, June 23, 2019, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2019/06/mil-190623-presstv06.htm?_m=3n%252e002a%252e2607%252eex0a000c49%252e2ejc, reported, "Sudanese protest leaders have agreed with a proposal set forth by Ethiopian mediators aiming to end the months-long unrest in the African country."

A coalition of political groups representing the protesters announced that they had accepted the proposed plan suggested by mediators sent by Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

One of the protest leaders, Madani Abbas Madani, confirmed that the proposal calls for a civilian-majority governing body.

'We think that our acceptance of the proposal is a major leap towards meeting the goals of the revolution, which are freedom, peace and justice,' protest leader Babiker Faisal told reporters in a brief statement. "It will put the country on the right track to create the transitional period that would usher in sustainable democracy."

'Media reports said the Ethiopian mediators’ proposal suggests creating a 15-member transitional body comprised of eight civilians and seven members of the military to run the country.

The ruling Transitional Military Council (TMC) has yet to announce its acceptance of the proposal."

In a sign that the moderated agreement to form a joint civilian-majority-military minority was not ratified by the Sudanese army, Declan Walsh, "Bouncing Back From Crackdown, Protesters Surge Through Sudan's Streets," The New York Times, June 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/30/world/africa/sudan-protest-hamdan.html, reported, "Tens of thousands of pro-democracy protesters filled the streets of Sudan's major cities on Sunday in a defiant rebuke of the generals whose violent crackdown earlier in the month had left scores of people dead.

Despite veiled threats of violence from Gen. Mohamed Hamdan, the powerful paramilitary commander who led the June 3 crackdown, protesters paraded down major streets in the capital, Khartoum, banging drums and chanting, 'Civilian rule.'"

Finally, both an agreement was reached in Sudan with each side to have 5 members of the temporary governing council and an 11th agreed upon by both sides. As the Times reported it, Declan Walsh, "Sudan Power-Sharing Deal Reached by Military and Civilian Leaders," The New York Times, July 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/world/africa/sudan-power-sharing-deal.html, reported, "Sudan's military and civilian leaders announced on Friday that they had reached an agreement to share
power until elections, promising an end to the standoff that has paralyzed the African country since the ouster of President Omar Hassan al-Bashir in April.

The two sides, which resumed talks this week after a monthlong hiatus that included a bloody crackdown by the military, have agreed to form a joint military-civilian authority to run Sudan during an interim period of just over three years, a senior protest leader said.

Power will rotate between military and civilian leaders during the transitional period, a mediator from the African Union, Mohamed Hassan Lebatt, told a news conference in Khartoum. Then, elections are to be held and the military is to return to its barracks, ushering in democratic rule."

But with Sudan's fractured military and militia forces, nothing was fully settled as of August 2. Nada Rashwan, "Four Killed at Sudan Protest, and Tensions Rise," The New York Times, Aug. 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/01/world/middleeast/sudan-protest-killed.html, reported, "At least four protesters were shot dead in Sudan on Thursday, according to members of the country's main protest movement. The killings took place during another round of large-scale demonstrations, potentially escalating a tense, months-long standoff between protesters and military leaders."

The protest was demanding justice for the previous killings of demonstrators by a militia.

Perhaps finally? " Sudan Power-Sharing Deal Finalized, African Union Envoy Says," The New York Times, August 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/world/africa/sudan-power-sharing-deal.html, reported, "The African Union envoy to Sudan and protest leaders said on Saturday that the pro-democracy movement and the governing military council had finalized a power-sharing agreement announced last month. The envoy, Mohamed el-Hassan Lebatt, said they agreed on a constitutional declaration outlining the division of responsibilities for a three-year transition to elections."


ICG, "Nurturing Sudan's Fledgling Power-sharing Accord," Statement / Africa 20 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/nurturing-sudans-fledgling-power-sharing-accord?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=2a5747ccd6-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_20_09_1&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-2a5747ccd6-359871089, commented, "Sudan's military junta and opposition have agreed to form a civilian-led administration to steer a transition toward free and fair elections. But the generals signed only under pressure. All Sudanese - and outside partners - need to remain vigilant lest they try to restore autocracy.

On 17 August, four months after the most sustained protest campaign in Sudan's modern history swept Omar al-Bashir from power, the Forces of Freedom and Change opposition coalition signed a power-sharing accord with the ruling military junta. The deal is a milestone in the country's sometimes stumbling transition away from autocracy. If honoured in full, it will pave the way for elections at the close of a three-year period of reforms overseen by a civilian-dominated cabinet and legislature. Within the week, the opposition and the generals are expected to announce the members of a new Sovereign Council tasked with steering the transition. It will consist of five opposition representatives, five members picked by the security forces and a civilian jointly nominated by both parties. The opposition will then name a prime minister and a cabinet, though the military will assign the interior and defence portfolios.

Yet formidable challenges lie ahead. The generals who have monopolised power in Sudan for three decades will not share it easily. And the new administration will inherit an economy in deep distress.

To give the transitional authority the best chance at success, external actors, notably the African Union (AU) and its partners, should act as guarantors of the agreement. They should help bridge gaps in trust between the parties to ensure that the accord's timetable stays on track. Meanwhile, both Western governments and Arab Gulf states should stand ready to offer substantial financial assistance to the new administration, contingent on the generals respecting the accord's provisions for civilian control, both in principle and in practice.
The achievements of the Sudanese people are remarkable, not just in ending Bashir’s rule but also in standing up to the junta’s series of schemes to seamlessly replace the ousted strongman with a like-minded lieutenant. Beginning in mid-December, in towns and cities across Sudan, a diverse coalition of protesters drawing in the urban middle classes, rural farmers and herders, traders, students and a cross-section of professionals, notably doctors, defied repression including the killing of dozens and arbitrary detention of hundreds to demand change. Women were often at the vanguard of the protests, presenting a pointed challenge to a regime that had long sought to still their voices. The four-day sit-in at the beginning of April that ultimately persuaded the military to turn against their patron Bashir was stirring as both a display of civil disobedience and a celebration of Sudan’s ethnic, cultural and political diversity.

The protesters underlined the wide support they command from ordinary Sudanese at the 17 August ceremony. Ahmed al-Rabia, the man picked to sign the power-sharing agreement on their behalf, is a teacher who supplements his income by driving a taxi at night. Mohamad Nagi al-Asam, a 28-year-old doctor who was detained and tortured in January after he emerged as one of the movement’s early spokesmen, delivered one of the main speeches. It was such everyman figures who helped topple one of Africa’s most entrenched regimes. It is understandable, given the David-versus-Goliath story to date, that many Sudanese rejoiced long into the night after the endorsement of a deal they hope will turn the page on their country’s troubled past.

Caution is warranted, however. The junta signed the agreement only under intense external pressure from parties that included the AU, the U.S., the UK and the EU. Many of its members are beneficiaries of the patronage-based economic system that Bashir created. They accumulated vast wealth not only from extravagant budgetary allocations to the defence sector but also from controlling sectors such as gold mining and sending thousands of Sudanese to fight as mercenaries in foreign wars. They will be loath to let civilian authorities audit or control these two sources of foreign exchange. The junta has been unafraid to use deadly force to get its way. On 3 June, troops stormed the sit-in outside the military headquarters, then ten weeks old, killing more than a hundred protesters, raping dozens and reportedly burning some alive, in a burst of brutality that shocked the world.

The junta could henceforth confine soldiers to the barracks but still find ways to derail the accord. The 17 August agreement is carefully crafted to prevent the military from overriding decisions by other organs, including the prime minister and the cabinet. The Sovereign Council – whose duties include overall responsibility for defence and foreign affairs – must confirm all the prime minister’s appointments but will enjoy no veto over these choices. Decisions the Council rejects are to be sent back to the appointing authority and, if the prime minister reaffirms them, they are to take effect immediately. The prime minister and cabinet will take effective charge of running the country, including managing the civil service, drawing up the budget and overseeing all state agencies outside the security sector. The cabinet will also report to a legislative council, two thirds of which the civilian opposition will appoint. A general will head the Sovereign Council for the first 21 months of the transition before handing over to a civilian for the remaining 18 months pending elections. Despite these safeguards, the generals could stall or block decisions, particularly as they control the country’s armouries and also have considerable funds they have already used to buy off opponents.

A further concern is that important constituencies have not endorsed the power-sharing agreement. Commanders of longstanding insurgencies in Darfur, Blue Nile State and South Kordofan rejected the accord, saying they were insufficiently accommodated in transitional structures. The junta has reached out to some of these rebel leaders, seeking to cut separate deals that would lie outside the scope of the transitional agreements and thus undermine the civilian-led authority. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have also been in touch with some of these groups, as has Cairo, which hosted some of the main armed group leaders shortly after they rejected the deal endorsed on 4 August in Addis Ababa. Given the junta’s desire to divide and rule, the civilian opposition cannot afford to be seen as excluding the rebels from the transition. They should, together with the security forces, continue to seek an accommodation with the insurgents that signals the new rulers’ intent to break with Sudan’s history of centralised power that neglects and abuses the periphery.

Maintaining the opposition coalition’s cohesion will be tough. Its members are inexperienced, and they were unable to muster a united front in negotiations with the junta until the 3 June massacre galvanised them into action. Some political parties, including the Communists, rejected the accord, saying
it did not go far enough in seeking justice for those killed during the protests. Opposition leaders, acknowledging that the hopes of millions of Sudanese rest on their shoulders, should be as inclusive as possible and avoid early own-goals, such as their decisions to include only one woman in their initial list of Sovereign Council nominees and only a handful of women in the cabinet – missteps that have already provoked protests. It will take time to revive normal political life after decades of authoritarian rule, diaspora flight and forced inactivity. In the interim, the coalition should avoid internal squabbling and keep its eyes on the prize of reform.

The opposition has taken an encouraging first step by tapping an experienced and well-respected economist, Abdalla Hamdok, as its nominee for prime minister. This choice illustrates its understanding that it needs a figure with the right credentials to tackle the country’s most significant challenges, particularly retooling a rigged economy that has imiserated millions of Sudanese. A number of quick, early steps would help support the new team as it navigates this crucial transition:

- The AU, which played a critical role in negotiating the deal, should stay at the helm going ahead. Experience in transitions elsewhere shows that power-sharing pacts often founder when there is no guarantor who can offer an avenue for talks if the parties become deadlocked. Given the mistrust between the opposition and the generals, the AU, backed by other parties – including the UN – should play this role for the duration of the transition leading up to elections. Accepting an outside guarantor would allow the junta to show its good faith to a sceptical public. A guarantor would also give the opposition coalition confidence and help redress the asymmetry of power between the two sides, given that the generals retain effective control over the security forces and much of the formal and informal economy.

- The AU should also appoint a special envoy and expand its liaison office in Khartoum, given recent events. The UN can channel technical backing to the office-holder who, given Sudan’s needs, should ideally be someone with a background in macro-economic management. The joint AU-Ethiopian mediation team that helped broker the deal deserves commendation but a more permanent arrangement will be necessary to help the transitional administration. The proposed envoy should report to the Chair of the AU and provide regular briefings to its Peace and Security Council, which ought to monitor the agreement’s implementation. The Council should not lift its 6 June decision to suspend Sudan’s AU membership until the country’s new administration is fully operational.

- The new cabinet and the generals will also need to seize the opportunity to end Sudan’s long-running insurgencies. As a first step, the transitional government and rebel groups could observe a six-month ceasefire as suggested in earlier rounds of talks, allowing all parties — perhaps with the support of others, such as the AU — to address the roots of the insurgencies, including the concentration of power and resources in Sudan’s wealthier centre.

- External partners, including the U.S., EU and international financial institutions, could assist the civilian-led transitional authority’s efforts to jump-start the economy. They should coordinate their work with Gulf countries, notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which have sent significant financial support to transitional authorities already and continue to compensate Sudan’s military for several thousand troops fighting in Yemen. Thus far, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi have spoken primarily to the generals, their key Gulf backers and Egypt, can play a leading role in coordinating aid and ensuring that special interests do not capture or compromise financial assistance. Washington should demand that all funding, perhaps through the pooled coordination mechanism outlined below, be channelled through the central bank and not into individuals’ pockets, to give the new administration the best chance of stabilising Sudan’s finances and to avoid empowering spoilers. The U.S. also has the leverage of tying Sudan’s progress toward complete civilian rule to its designation as a State Sponsor of Terrorism, which Washington could eventually lift. The U.S. should in particular demand reforms to public sector financing and consistently lean on Saudi Arabia and the UAE to end the practice of sending funds directly to their clients in the security sector. Following on its success in persuading Gulf powers and Egypt to push their military allies to the negotiating table, the U.S. might convene a meeting of potential funders to pool financial support for Sudan’s transition. These could include the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank, the Saudi Fund for Development and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development. Historical allies of Sudan, including Turkey and Qatar, could also be invited to participate in this joint mechanism as leaving out these past donors may risk further exposing...
Sudan to intra-Gulf competition. The funds raised could then be managed and disbursed jointly, perhaps under the auspices of the UN Development Programme, which has the requisite experience. The overriding message should be that with debt in excess of $55 billion, sky-high inflation and widespread shortages of essential goods, no number of ad hoc cash infusions can resolve Sudan’s economic woes. Instead, the country needs reforms championed internally and supported externally, including debt relief. Partners should offer this support only if the junta respects the wishes of the Sudanese people for a civilian-led transition. They should stagger the resumption of financial assistance to accompany various phases of the accord’s implementation, including the naming of a cabinet and the formation of a legislative council, expected by the end of November.

It was the Sudanese people who brought the country to this moment of great hope mingled with anxiety, and ultimately, the task of consolidating the gains of Sudan’s revolution will fall to them. With their repeated mass strikes and, particularly, their million-man march on 30 June, Sudan’s citizens have shown that they will not accept superficial change, let alone a return to the old ways. They are the arbiters of their country’s future – but they deserve all the support they can get from Sudan’s friends.”

ICG, Robert Malley and Stephen Pomp, “Yemen’s Fleeting Opportunity for Peace, ‘There’s Still Hope for South Sudan:’ The cease-fire currently in effect may not last, but a brittle equilibrium is better than a return to warfare,” The Atlantic, May 15, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/05/there-s-still-hope-for-south-sudans-peace-agreement/589492/., commented, “Virtually everything in South Sudan appears rigged in favor of the few. It begins with the economy, with so much oil revenue and so little to show for it. The capital, Juba, has few paved streets and scant signs of development or even basic infrastructure. There is wealth, but unseen, lost to graft, misused to build private armies and buy off potential rivals.

The war, too, belongs to the elites. They are not doing the fighting, and they are not its victims. But they provoke it, manipulating ethnic tensions to mobilize their respective constituents and seek control of land and resources. They are good at sparing their own manpower: Armed groups typically don’t do battle with other armed groups, but instead steal from, rape, and kill ordinary, defenseless civilians. Even peace itself has tended to be the preserve of those at the top. Rather than negotiate on behalf of their constituents, strongmen strike transactional deals to preserve their personal power.

At least peace—or the absence of war—can bring benefits to a broader community. That much became clear after President Salva Kiir and his former vice president but also main rival, Riek Machar, reached a cease-fire deal last September. Their recent decision to extend the deadline to form a transitional unity government rather than pronounce the collapse of their agreement was, for that reason, welcome news. But it also was a clear indication of how tenuous the truce is, and how far off a lasting peace still remains.

The cease-fire agreement between Kiir and Machar suffered from many common defects. It lacks a credible outside guarantor. It didn’t address any of the deeper roots of the conflict. It was a power-sharing affair (Kiir would retain the presidency, while Machar was promised a return to power as vice president) reached between two men who have wrought such damage to their country and who want to exercise power, not share it. It excluded other important armed groups, which, having been shut out of the deal, have had an incentive to grow their ranks while waiting for a slice of the cake. It involves a complex effort to reunify the two men’s armed groups that, because it encourages the sides to inflate the size of their forces, is more likely to be used to recruit new fighters than to demobilize existing ones.

Still, the deal ushered in the first sustained end of hostilities between the two antagonists since the 2013 outbreak of a vicious civil war that killed up to 400,000 people, a mere two years after South Sudan was born amid local and international exuberance. For a people that has experienced unthinkable brutality for decades, first during the war for independence from Sudan and then during the war within the new breakaway country, the reprieve from violence is priceless.

By now, though, the two armies were to have assembled, screened, and trained their respective armed forces. They were to have turned them into a unified national army and formed a unity government. They were to have resolved disputes over the number and boundaries of South Sudan’s states. As of now, none of this has been achieved. The period since the signing has been wasted.
The question on people’s minds in Juba is whether the cease-fire can last. Judging by how little has been accomplished in the eight months since the signing, the obvious answer would be: no. Judging by the ease with which the parties agreed to extend the deadline to carry out their commitments from May to November, however, the answer would be: maybe.

Neither side seems in a hurry to resume fighting at this point, and both saw advantages in gaining time. For Kiir, the calculus was straightforward. He is in control, both of the government and (mostly) on the ground, so the status quo suits him well. Why rush toward implementing a deal that will require dividing power that is now his alone? Why relinquish any control over armed forces he presently commands? The original request for an extension came from Machar, not Kiir, and the president dragged his feet for a while before acquiescing in what he described as a goodwill gesture. But few were fooled, and in private conversations senior officials in Kiir’s government don’t bother to conceal it: A postponement served them well this time, and it may serve them well the time after that.

Machar’s calculations were more complex but led him to the same conclusion. Returning now meant returning in a position of comparative weakness; his forces have largely demobilized, the balance of power clearly favors his foe, and he fears further defections from his remaining forces should he come back to the capital without adequate concessions from him. Machar’s gamble when he signed the deal appears to have been that he would have time to embark on a recruitment spree, attract new fighters, stack his forces with loyalists from ethnic or clan networks, and build up strength in case of renewed warfare. The opposition offered a preview of this pattern following an earlier accord in 2015, with fateful results: It mobilized fighters from areas previously unaffected by conflict, thus expanding the war’s boundaries as soon as it resumed. Yet, over the past eight months, Machar made few advances in this regard. He has been struggling to get his fighters, many of whom have deserted and now live in refugee camps or other East African capitals, to return.

To Achieve his goal, he would have had to have money to pay, feed, and otherwise take care of new recruits. External donors refused to foot the bill, for good reason: The parties intended to create a 300,000-strong joint security force, a significant expansion of what presently exists, most of whose members would have to be freshly recruited, at a cost of more than $200 million. South Sudan needs fewer men with guns, not more. Unable to rebuild his forces, Machar had little option but to seek an extension of the deadline. At a minimum, it gives him a chance for a do-over.

The question remains: How to make the halt in fighting endure? Pressure from outside powers—African nations, but also the United States and Europe—has its part to play. Faced with a credible threat of sanctions targeting their personal economic interests, Kiir and Machar might think twice before dragging their people back down the road of confrontation. But without some advance toward bringing Machar back into the government, and some combination of demobilizing and integrating the two rival armed forces, the risk of a resumption of violence will grow over time. Already, in private conversations, Machar’s aides promise war will reignite if no progress is made in implementing the deal. It could be bluster, of course—but it might not be.

Perhaps the smartest step that could be taken now would be to focus on immediate, realistic steps. Machar’s demands regarding broader reform of the military and integration of his own disparate armed forces may be in line with the agreement he signed. But they won’t happen, or won’t happen anytime soon. Nor is he being sensible in his insistence that he return only after thousands of his fighters are deployed to Juba; twice in the recent past, in 2013 and 2016, a major eruption of violence was triggered by a confrontation between Kiir’s and Machar’s bodyguards. A potential alternative solution would be for an external, third-party force to provide protection for Machar, allow him to return safely and with dignity intact, assume the vice presidency, and—by keeping the process afloat—lend more time and space for the peace deal to progress without holding it hostage to wider security reforms. We suggested such an idea in conversations with the two leaders. Neither jumped at it, but neither shut the door completely. By South Sudanese standards, that counts as hope.

On the plane ride out of Juba, a woman told her story. Half of her family members had been killed; the other half were scattered across the globe. Her mother had been exiled twice, once because of the war with the North, the second time because of South Sudan’s interethnic fighting. As a member of the Dinka, the country’s largest ethnic group, she had been kidnapped and tortured by Machar’s predominantly Nuer forces. One Nuer threatened to kill her; another ultimately saved her life. That summed it up for her.
daughter: The war essentially was engineered and stage-managed from the top. Why, she asked, was the world spending so much time and effort cajoling and trying to persuade Kiir and Machar even as they were busy agitating their constituents for the next battle, rather than focusing on the ordinary people, for whom such ethnic differences hardly matter?

She had a point. Assuming Machar can be persuaded to return, assuming he and Kiir can form a unity government, assuming the process of demobilization and reforming the armed forces can begin, and assuming the cease-fire holds—assuming all that, none of the underlying sources of conflict will have been addressed. The result would be a precarious status quo between one side that feels comfortably entrenched in its current dominant position and another that feels too weak today to take a gamble. It hardly would mean that either side has given up on the goal of eradicating its foe, that memories of brutal ethnic killings have dissipated, or that the brittle equilibrium can persist for long. But it’s far better than the likeliest alternative today—a return to warfare.

For now, South Sudan’s most meaningful ray of hope may lie in its cloudy skies. The six-month rainy season is when fighting is hardest. As we prepared to depart Juba, a powerful rainstorm signaled that it was just around the corner."

Earlier:
ICG, "Sudan: Stopping a Spiral into Civil War," Statement / Africa 7 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/sudan/sudan-stopping-spiral-civil-war?utm_source=Sign-Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=59cc6f9293-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_07_12_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab6c11ea-59cc6f9293-359871089, commented, Sudan’s political transition is in great peril following the unprovoked killing of dozens of protesters. The African Union has rightly suspended the country’s membership. Western and Gulf powers should take urgent steps to compel Sudan’s interim leaders to accept a civilian-led transitional administration.

On 3 June, Sudan’s security forces launched a bloody crackdown on unarmed protesters in Khartoum, clearing a sit-in outside the country’s military headquarters and bringing its political transition to a screeching halt. The horrific rampage left dozens dead and many more injured. State-affiliated militias now roam the streets of the capital and other major cities, with residents sheltering at home. Many Sudanese fear the prospect of fractures among the army, intelligence services and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), the paramilitaries blamed for the attacks. The risk of widespread conflict is at its highest since the military removed Omar al-Bashir on 11 April. But the alarming course of events is reversible. On 6 June, the African Union’s Peace and Security Council took an important first step in this direction, suspending Sudan’s African Union (AU) membership until authorities put a civilian administration in place. Other world leaders, including Sudan’s backers in the Arab world, must now follow suit, quickly and in concert, to force the military junta to resume talks aimed at handing power to a civilian-led transitional authority.

The ouster of Bashir was set in motion by a remarkable, non-violent campaign, which began in the provinces in mid-December and quickly spread countrywide, eventually forcing the toppling of one of Africa’s longest-ruling leaders. Since 11 April talks have been marked by periods of apparent progress, only to be followed by stalemate. On one side is the Transitional Military Council – an awkward marriage of the Sudan Armed Forces, now led by General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, a rural militia primarily from Darfur led by General Muhammad Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemediti, who many consider the true power behind the scenes. (The RSF rose to prominence as a counter-insurgency force during the civil war in Darfur.) On the other side is the opposition – the Forces of the Declaration for Freedom and Change, comprising traditional parties and active rebel movements as well as a coalition of professional trade unions known as the Sudanese Professionals Association.

There had been hopeful signs: the two sides agreed on the outlines of a deal built around a civilian-led executive overseen by a sovereign council for a three-year transitional period leading up to elections. The sovereign council’s composition and chairmanship remained in dispute, but the parties reportedly came close to a compromise under which they would have had an equal number of seats, with the chair rotating between the two sides, and with the civilian-dominated council of ministers and legislative council wielding more power in any case.
What happened next is not entirely clear. According to various reports, parts of the military council were unhappy with the tentative deal, fearing it ceded too much power. The RSF and other disgruntled elements scrapped the deal and moved to disperse the protesters. On 4 June, Burhan announced plans to form a government and hold elections in nine months. That the crackdown came immediately on the heels of the junta leaders’ first state visits from 23 May, including to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), fuelled protesters’ suspicions that external actors encouraged the Sudanese officers down the path of violence instead of compromise.

The attacks on the protesters have muddied the road ahead. The RSF now patrols the streets of Khartoum as residents hole up at home, fearing to go out and without internet access, which the state has cut off. The crackdown could in principle bring together the fractious opposition against the military council, which had been quietly trying to peel off some of the established opposition parties. Protesters say they will continue their campaign of civil disobedience rather than negotiate to share power with the military rulers responsible for the mass killings. They have demanded that the junta step down.

The junta’s most powerful constituency lies, by all appearances, outside Sudan – in Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi. The Saudis and Emiratis know Burhan and Hemedi well due to their command of Sudanese forces in the Yemen war. They trust the generals to shepherd the country through a managed transition from one military-led regime to another, avoiding the interlude that occurred in Egypt – elections with uncertain outcomes followed by brief Muslim Brotherhood rule – by sidelining those favouring more wholesale reform among civilian protesters. This gambit is risky, however: it could lead to greater unrest, or perhaps even civil war, precisely the outcomes Arab allies say they dread. The recent two-day general strike has made clear that popular protest can continue to render the country ungovernable. Sudan’s economic troubles are already severe, and both Saudi Arabia and the UAE would be on the hook for open-ended subsidies to keep the ship of state afloat.

The gambit also appears based on a faulty analogy. An Egyptian-style managed transition in Sudan lacks a critical ingredient: a cohesive military. Bashir gutted the Sudan Armed Forces, gradually outsourcing security tasks to a dysfunctional array of state-backed militias and paramilitaries, in order to forestall a coordinated challenge to his rule. In recent years he bolstered the RSF in particular to counterbalance other elements of the security apparatus. The RSF also gained influence as it contributed to the Saudi-led war in Yemen. Indeed, Bashir so divided his security forces that, in the end, he could only be ousted through a coup-by-committee. Today, many of Sudan’s officer corps would sooner trust their fate to Khartoum’s opposition elite than to Hemedi, whom they view as a thuggish provincial warlord and who lacks the legitimacy and political constituency to rule on his own. In short, this bloated and fissiparous security apparatus offers no clear foundation for a political regime.

A key to a peaceful settlement thus lies in prompting the junta’s Arab backers to rapidly shift tack. There are signs that they and their Gulf backers have softened their position in the face of widespread condemnation and revulsion at the attack on unarmed protesters. On 5 June, Saudi Arabia publicly expressed “great concern” over the loss of life in Sudan, calling for a resumption of dialogue. As if in response, Burhan quickly changed his tune, calling on 5 June for the opposition to return to talks. A day earlier, the U.S. State Department released an unusually blunt readout from a call between Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale and Saudi Deputy Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman in which the Americans pressed for a transition to a civilian-led government ‘in accordance with the will of the Sudanese people’. This call may be directly related to the softening of Riyadh’s stance – and Khartoum’s.

Still, Sudan’s peaceful transition to more inclusive governance is in great and immediate peril. International actors should take the following steps:

The AU Peace and Security Council should follow up on its suspension of Sudan’s membership by pressing authorities there to drop their unilateral decision to hold elections within nine months. The military rulers should instead go back to the deal earlier broadly agreed with protesters for a civilian-led transitional administration. The Council should set a new deadline for the conclusion of a final round of talks on the hand-over to an authority led by civilians. AU Commission Chair Moussa Faki should visit Khartoum at the earliest opportunity to convey the urgent need to meaningfully advance the dialogue process.

Parties with influence over Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, particularly the U.S., should urge them to lean on the generals in Khartoum to back down from their attempts to rule through repression. They should
Instead ask Sudan’s military rulers to resume talks with the protesters and swiftly accede to a civilian-led transitional authority that can restore stability.

To persuade an understandably reluctant civilian protest movement to resume talks, the junta will need to take a number of confidence-building measures. It should release all political prisoners, accede to an outside-led commission of inquiry into the killings and swiftly reinstate access to telecommunications. A more difficult step might be persuading the RSF, whose reputation arguably is beyond repair following its role in the violence, to retreat to the barracks. To this end, the RSF’s backers, notably Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, should rein in its leaders and urge them to back down, to avert the descent into chaos they fear.

Egypt, a key regional power broker and current chair of the AU Assembly, ought to have every interest in avoiding a Libya-style meltdown in one of its key neighbours. It should lean on Saudi Arabia and the UAE to persuade the RSF leadership to pull their men out of Khartoum and to give space to parties able to strike a deal that could prevent a dangerous slide to civil war.

The AU Peace and Security Council, the U.S. and the EU should warn members of Sudan’s security forces who stand in the way of a political deal that they will face targeted sanctions, asset freezes and travel bans. The Council, which on 6 June took the additional welcome step of cautioning those obstructing a path to a political settlement that they would face individual sanctions, could start compiling a list of targets.

The U.S. should reiterate that no talks with Khartoum toward the normalisation of ties, which could lead to the lifting of Sudan’s state sponsor of terrorism designation, the potential return of a permanent ambassador to Khartoum and Washington’s enabling of debt-relief, will resume until the military junta reaches a deal on a civilian-led transitional authority.

As early as 2012, Crisis Group had warned that the security forces might fly apart in a post-Bashir Sudan. The danger of such a split – and the conflict it portends – is real and growing. All concerned with peace and stability in Sudan should take every possible step to stop this prospect in its tracks and press for a genuine transition to a civilian-led transitional administration."


"Over the last two years, war-torn Somalia has emerged as a central battleground, with the United Arab Emirates and Qatar each providing weapons or military training to favored factions, exchanging allegations about bribing local officials, and competing for contracts to manage ports or exploit natural resources."

ICG, "Somalia-Somaliland: The Perils of Delaying New Talks," https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/280-somalia-somaliland-perils-delaying-new-talks?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=0e6d0fc66dc-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_12_11_23&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-0e6d0fc66dc-359871089, commented, "Somalia and Somaliland have been at odds since the latter's 1991 declaration of independence, which the former rejects. The dispute has cooled after heating up in 2018, but lingering tensions could threaten regional stability. To restart dialogue, the two sides should meet for technical talks.

What's new? Relations between Somalia and Somaliland, while back from the brink after a difficult 2018, remain tense. International actors are leading efforts to revive dialogue between the two sides.

Why does it matter? Absent progress toward dialogue, the parties' relationship is likely to deteriorate in ways that could endanger regional stability.

What should be done? The two sides should agree to technical talks as a step toward negotiations on more sensitive political subjects. These talks should focus on security and economic issues where tangible gains can build mutual confidence. Discussing Somaliland's political status could create counterproductive dynamics, including with Gulf states, and should happen later.

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Tensions between Somalia and Somaliland remain high. The core bone of contention is still Somaliland’s political status in light of its 1991 declaration of independence, which Somalia rejects. Relations frayed in 2018 when troops from Somaliland and Puntland, a semi-autonomous regional state in
Somalia notionally loyal to the federal government in Mogadishu, clashed over disputed territory. Somaliland’s deal with an Emirati conglomerate and Ethiopia to manage its main port – which Mogadishu saw as challenging its claim to sovereignty there – deepened antagonism. But frictions have eased in 2019, and outside pressure has created some momentum toward renewed negotiations between the two sides, which last gathered to talk in 2015. The two sides should meet for technical talks, focusing on security and economic matters of mutual concern, and avoiding for now the polarising issue of Somaliland’s political status. A neutral party such as the African Union ought to convene the talks, so that none of the many states vying for regional influence sees the mediation as threatening its interests.

Getting back to talks will likely not be easy. In addition to historical grievances and decades of separate rule, efforts to restart dialogue face political opposition on both sides. With parliamentary and presidential elections approaching in 2020 and 2021, respectively, Somalia’s President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed “Farmajo” is particularly susceptible to pressure from his nationalist support base to shy away from talks and the give-and-take they may entail. Somaliland leader Muse Bihi, a former rebel commander who fought against the government in Mogadishu in the late 1980s, is less open to compromise than his predecessor. He will also face political pressure from hardline separatists, including other former insurgents, for whom any concession to Somalia is anathema.

Moreover, Gulf states could very well use their influence with leaders and others in Somaliland and throughout Somalia (including in its federal member states) to play the spoiler if talks are not carefully designed to take their interests into account. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) in particular enjoys close relations with the Somaliland government in Hargeisa and is unlikely to welcome a negotiation in which Somaliland is pressed to yield decision-making power to Mogadishu on issues that affect its interests. The Emiratis would likely prefer to engage on weighty matters with Somalia after its next elections in the hope of dealing with a federal government more sympathetic to their concerns.

But there are issues short of Somaliland’s political status that the two parties could meaningfully tackle to the benefit of both. Some relate to security. Defeating Al-Shabaab’s Islamist insurgency will require Mogadishu and Hargeisa to share intelligence and pool resources. And calming the volatile military standoff between Somaliland and Puntland over contested territories along their border will require Hargeisa to commit to de-escalation and Mogadishu to support, as it did in 2018, UN-led mediation efforts.

Other mutual interests are economic in nature. Agreements on freedom of movement and trade are essential in order for businesses in Somalia – especially livestock farmers – to benefit from the upgrade of Somaliland’s Berbera port and development of the trade corridor between it and Ethiopia’s capital, Addis Ababa. Both Somalia and Somaliland also have incentives to cooperate on sharing the benefits of debt relief packages under discussion with international financial institutions and on negotiating access to shared territorial waters for companies interested in oil and gas exploration.

Given high levels of suspicion between Somalia and Somaliland, international mediation will be crucial to achieving progress, but roles need to be assigned carefully. While Turkey and Ethiopia have been diplomatically very active in both Mogadishu and Hargeisa, neither is ideally positioned to play the lead role. Turkey’s relationship with Saudi Arabia, which also has deep interests in both Somalia and Somaliland, is too fraught. And despite Ethiopia’s recent improvement of ties with the Farmajo administration, it has historically enjoyed too close a relationship with Somaliland to trust it fully.

The most promising approach might be for the African Union to convene the talks, ask an eminent statesperson to lead them and solicit technical assistance from a “group of friends” that might include countries like Turkey, Ethiopia, Sweden and Switzerland – which have been at the forefront of efforts to encourage talks – as well as the European Union.

The time for serious discussions about Somaliland’s political status will likely come after Somalia’s next elections. But waiting until then to have any talks at all would be dangerous: tensions between the two sides persist, regional powers are competing for advantage at a cost to local stability, and Somaliland and Puntland remain at loggerheads as forces gather in border areas. Against this backdrop, drifting along with no movement toward reconciliation raises risks of conflict. Engaging in technical talks about common security and economic challenges might help defuse those tensions and could build mutual confidence and create good will for the more difficult negotiations down the road.

ICG, “Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province,” Report 273 / Africa 16
To complement military action by filling the service and governance gaps that ISWAP has created, states want to sever the bond between ISWAP and these communities – and they should – then they cannot stop with countering ISWAP in battle. They will need to complement military action by filling the service and governance gaps that ISWAP has exploited.

Displacing ISWAP will not be easy. Although the group’s methods are often violent and coercive, it has established a largely symbiotic relationship with the Lake Chad area’s inhabitants. The group treats local Muslim civilians better than its parent organisation did, better than its rival faction, Jama’u Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS), does now, and in some ways better than the Nigerian state and army have done since the insurgency began in 2009. It digs wells, polices cattle rustling, provides a modicum of health care and sometimes disciplines its own personnel whom it judges to have unacceptably abused civilians. In the communities it controls, its taxation is generally accepted by civilians, who credit it for creating an environment where they can do business and compare its governance favourably to that of the Nigerian state.

ISWAP’s approach appears to have paid dividends in terms of recruitment and support. With an estimated 3,500–5,000 members according to Crisis Group’s sources, it overshadows JAS, which has roughly 1,500–2,000, and appears to have gained the military upper hand over the latter. It has also caused real pain to the Nigerian military, its primary target, overrunning dozens of army bases and killing hundreds of soldiers since August 2018. As its name suggests, ISWAP is affiliated with the faded Islamic State, or ISIS, caliphate in Iraq and Syria, whose remnants count ISWAP victories as their own. ISWAP appears to be working hard to gain greater favour from its namesake organisation, and it has obtained some support already, notably in the form of training, though it is not clear how significant a boost this will afford.

ISWAP’s deepening roots in the civilian population underscore that the Nigerian government (and, to a lesser extent, those of Cameroon, Chad and Niger) cannot look purely to military means to ensure its enduring defeat. Instead, they should seek to weaken ISWAP’s ties to locals by proving that they can fill service and governance gaps at least in the areas they control, even as they take care to conduct the counter-insurgency as humanely as possible and in a manner that protects civilians.

To combat impunity among the security services, they should release the report of the panel that President Muhammadu Buhari appointed in 2017 to investigate alleged military abuses and implement
those recommendations that advance accountability. They should enhance public safety in towns that are under government control in Borno and neighbouring states where ISWAP is building influence.

They should take care that in seeking to cut off ISWAP’s access to local markets they do not alienate locals by also strangling their ability to trade. And even though negotiations to end hostilities may not be a realistic prospect at this time, they should keep lines of communication open with ISWAP, focusing on practical issues such as how to get more humanitarian assistance to local communities.

These strategies certainly do not guarantee victory for state authorities over ISWAP – but they could help counteract important sources of the organisation’s strength, provide a useful complement to ongoing efforts to degrade it militarily, and at the same time channel important support to communities in the region, which sorely need it.


What’s new? The Nigerian military’s battle with Boko Haram has led tens of thousands of women formerly associated with the group to return to government-held towns across the north east. While prejudice against them has waned, many women remain ostracised and exposed to abuse.

Why does it matter? The successful reintegration of former Boko Haram women can send a powerful signal to their fighter husbands, some of whom are eyeing the possibility of their own surrender. Conversely, their mistreatment could not only dissuade men from demobilising but also prompt women to return to the insurgents’ ranks.

What should be done? The Nigerian government should better protect women returnees from sexual and other abuse; give them and communities greater say in their resettlement; avoid aid that targets only Boko Haram-linked women and provokes social discord; and increase funding for the north east’s development, particularly for the education critical to its recovery.

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The return of women formerly affiliated with the Boko Haram insurgency to areas under the government’s control is a challenge for Nigeria’s authorities. Since 2015, tens of thousands have fled the group or been captured or rescued by the army. After varying degrees of screening and reintegration support, they live among civilians scarred by the conflict. Many initially faced intense stigma, regardless of their actual commitment to jihadism. That stigma has somewhat subsided as more returnees have arrived, but most former Boko Haram women still suffer ostracism and higher risks of sexual abuse and privation than other displaced women. Their hardship is a humanitarian concern but also could fuel the conflict: either because they could return to Boko Haram, thus boosting morale and supporting military operations; or because their plight could deter male insurgents inclined to demobilise from doing so. The authorities and aid groups should better protect returnees from abuses, give women and communities more of a say in their resettlement and ensure that aid to women does not provoke a backlash.

Conventional narratives about women and Boko Haram can mislead. Many women were abducted, like the girls from Chibok whose kidnapping by the militants provoked outrage in Nigeria and abroad. But others joined voluntarily. Some endured terrible abuse while with the group, while others found a sense of belonging. Apart from female suicide bombers, of whom there are fewer today, most women in Boko Haram committed no act of violence themselves, even if many were complicit in spying, recruitment or coercing other women. Many lived with the militants in fear, but nonetheless enjoyed a reliable food supply, religious education and basic services, including – particularly for those of privileged status – health care. These experiences shaped their expectations of what the state should provide on their return.
Many women associated with Boko Haram suffer considerable hardship on leaving. Their paths out of the insurgency have varied, ranging from escape or rescue to capture or surrender. But whatever their means of departure – and, indeed, no matter whether they were slaves or married to fighters – their life in proximity to the jihadists means that many fellow citizens perceive them as tainted by association. The overt hostility such women encountered in 2015 is waning. But they remain ostracised, their position precarious: unattractive on the marriage market, rejected by relatives, shunned at social gatherings and – without male partners – vulnerable to assault.

The Nigerian authorities’ response has evolved since 2015, when the only alternative to military detention was a small, costly reintegration program. The state now sends women back to civilian life faster, sometimes even forgoing screening (assessment by the authorities as to the danger they pose). Women may thus miss the chance of receiving counselling or other types of support, but they also spend less time in the hands of security forces or allied vigilantes and militias, which appears to have lessened the scale of abuse that returnees endured in earlier years. Lobbied by human rights groups, the authorities also have taken steps to reduce abuses, while the profusion of humanitarian actors in Borno state has meant greater oversight over the security forces. Nonetheless, sexual exploitation persists: rape still occurs, and many women find themselves forced into “survival sex”, the exchange of sex for protection or resources.

The plight of female returnees is not only a humanitarian concern; if not rectified, it could hinder efforts to end the conflict. Flawed reintegration could force more women to return to the insurgents. Women are a boon to both Boko Haram factions (the group split in 2016) as they can play important support roles for men. Conversely, women who leave Boko Haram could help de-escalate fighting. Their return home could be a litmus test for male fighters, whose defection and reintegration into society is crucial to ending the insurgency. Indeed, in some instances male fighters appear to have explicitly charged wives or sisters to leave and explore prospects for their own demobilisation. If returnee women report fair treatment, they may convince disillusioned insurgents to leave Boko Haram’s ranks.

The federal government, together with authorities in the north-eastern states, in particular Borno, the hardest-hit, should take the following steps:

1. End abuses. The military’s screening of women emerging from Boko Haram should be professionalised, with clear, standardised assessment criteria and a civilian state body, such as the National Human Rights Commission, providing oversight and minimising the likelihood of mistreatment. Borno state’s State Emergency Management Agency should work with the police, army and Civilian Joint Task Force to shield women from abuse, including by their own staff. They should raise awareness of the seriousness of both rape and sexual exploitation driven by women’s vulnerability, working to create a culture of accountability.

   Give women returnees a say in where they resettle. Given continued prejudice, some women may prefer to relocate far from their original homes. The authorities also should give communities in which women will settle the opportunity to voice concerns and discuss how those concerns can be met.

   Ensure that aid distribution avoids backlash. Aid providers should avoid targeting only former Boko Haram women, which can stoke resentment among other displaced people or within communities where such women resettle. Moreover, given that many in the north east see programs that empower women as neglectful of men, aid providers should continue to ensure they do not pass over unmarried young men and elderly men when distributing food, as has happened in the past.

   Allocate more money for the internally displaced, including women returnees, and for regional development more broadly. In 2019, according to the UN, 7.1 million people (2.3 million girls, 1.9 million boys, 1.6 million women and 1.3 million men) in north-eastern Nigeria relied on humanitarian aid. Local authorities badly need funds to meet their needs. Particularly important are funds for education, which returnees value and are critical to the north east’s recovery.

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These measures in themselves will not end the crisis in Nigeria’s north east. As a recent Crisis Group report on one Boko Haram faction, now calling itself the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), details, doing so requires President Muhammadu Buhari’s government to look beyond the military campaign, step up efforts to fill gaps in its provision of basic services that militants increasingly exploit to win support, while avoiding tactics that risk harming civilians. But by helping women who have left Boko Haram return to civilian life in safety and dignity, the authorities can lower risks that those women return
to the insurgents’ ranks and potentially encourage further demobilisation, including among male militants. Increasing support for people displaced by the conflict and more generally for the north east’s development can help repair the frayed relations between state and society in north-eastern Nigeria that have fuelled the insurgency.”


What’s new? Women form an important social base for the Islamist Al-Shabaab insurgency in Somalia. Some help it recruit, generate funds and carry out operations. These understudied realities partly explain the insurgency’s resilience.

Why does it matter? Understanding what Al-Shabaab offers Somali women, despite its brutal violence, patriarchal ethos and rigid gender norms, and, in turn, what women do for the movement could help the Somali government and its foreign partners develop policies to help sap support for the group.

What should be done? While the insurgency persists across much of Somalia, women will likely continue to play roles within it. But the government could develop a strategy against gender-based violence that would signal it is doing what it can to improve Somali women’s plight, while integrating more women into the security forces.

I. Overview

Al-Shabaab’s Islamist insurgency remains a formidable fighting force in Somalia despite years of operations against it. Its staying power stems from the Somali state’s weakness and its own tactical flexibility and ability to generate revenue, navigate clan politics and provide some order in areas it controls. Crisis Group’s interviews with women previously linked to Al-Shabaab, and verification of their statements with former militants and close observers of the movement, suggest that women also help sustain the insurgency. While Al-Shabaab imposes restrictions upon women, it can provide some security and its courts often uphold Islamic family law to their benefit. Some women recruit, fundraise, spy or smuggle arms for the group. While Al-Shabaab remains potent and controls some areas, women are likely to continue in such roles. But by developing a strategy against gender-based violence the Somali government could demonstrate that it is doing what it can to alleviate women’s suffering. It can better integrate women into the security forces and study women’s roles in Al-Shabaab to improve efforts against the militants.

Since African Union (AU) forces ousted Al-Shabaab from major towns across the country in 2014, Somalia’s war has largely ground on in a holding pattern. The government nominally controls population centres, but has struggled to extend its presence further, deliver services or stem graft, tasks made all the harder by worsening relations between Mogadishu and leaders in regional states. Al-Shabaab controls many rural areas, including around the capital, extorts both travellers along major routes and businesses across much of the country, and provides services that many Somalis turn to in the absence of functioning state institutions. It plays clever clan politics, avoiding too close an association with any one clan, but often backing weaker groups against stronger rivals or mediating disputes. While its attacks provoke fury, in places it offers a certain predictability amid the disorder that afflicts much of the country.

Assessing how Al-Shabaab’s rule affects women and the role women play in the movement is hard. Widespread insecurity, the movement’s covert presence and intelligence operations in areas nominally held by the government and the fear it inspires makes gaining access to women associated or previously associated with it difficult. In these conditions, Crisis Group was able to interview a limited number of women formerly married to fighters, as well as relatives of such women, and then verify findings with former male militants, government officials, security officers, activists and rehabilitation advisers. The picture these interviews paint is partial but offers insight into how women in Al-Shabaab-held areas regard the movement and how some actively support it.
Al-Shabaab’s brutal insurgency has entailed considerable suffering and hardship for many women but its rule can bring benefits. It imposes severe limits on women’s comportment and access to the public sphere, restrictions resented across much of Somali society. Where it controls territory it can, however, offer women and girls a degree of physical safety – hardly complete, but still appreciable – in a country where they are otherwise exposed to violence. Through its courts, Al-Shabaab upholds tenets of Islamic family law that, to some degree, protect women’s rights in matters such as divorce and inheritance in a manner the official justice system does not. While many instances of forced marriage between militants and women and girls exist, for some families marrying daughters into Al-Shabaab may bring a degree of financial stability.

Women also appear to play more active roles in the insurgency, and are involved in activities critical to its resilience. They help recruit and proselytise. They gather intelligence that enables military operations or extortion, or ferry explosives ahead of attacks, taking advantage of the fact that security forces tend to watch women less closely than they do men. In a handful of cases, women carry out strikes themselves, though Al-Shabaab deploys far fewer women suicide bombers than, for example, the Nigerian jihadist group Boko Haram. For the most part, women do not participate directly in military operations or decision-making.

Women’s cooperation with Al-Shabaab does not necessarily reflect their sympathy for the movement. In areas where militants dominate or exert influence, paying extortion money, marrying into the insurgency or even actively collaborating can be a matter of survival. Militants coerce people into complying alongside offering incentives. Many who marry militants or otherwise join the movement are still young girls. Even those who voluntarily seek out the movement’s courts tend to do so because the state offers no alternative. That said, some women members do express strong support for the movement and its goals and regard themselves as full-fledged members.

The policy implications of these findings are not immediately evident. While Al-Shabaab’s insurgency persists, women will likely continue to play roles within it. Clearly any enhanced security procedures for women should be carried out cautiously; further screening of women must be conducted by women, for example, lest it generate local anger. Overall, what seems important is to recognise that the militants, notwithstanding their Salafi-inspired doctrine, have a gender strategy of sorts, engage women and, in some cases, meet some of their needs. The Somali government has made some efforts: in government-controlled areas women have greater freedom of movement, an increasing number of girls have joined the school system and the number of female civil servants has risen in recent years. But it could do more. Parliament has failed to pass a sexual offences act, for example, and the government has taken few steps to address sexual violence, including by the security forces. Somalia’s largely broken justice system offers women little.

Making headway on such issues might not do much to alter women’s calculations in insurgent-controlled areas, but would at least signal that the government recognises Somali women’s plight and is prepared to do what is within its power to improve it. By more effectively integrating women into the security forces, studying in closer detail the role women play in sustaining Al-Shabaab’s insurgency and adapting accordingly, the government could also devise a more nuanced strategy against the insurgents.

Ibrahim Sawab, Anemona Hartocollis and Mike Ives, “Nigerians Flee After Men on Motorbikes Shoot Down Mourners,” The New York Times, July 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/29/world/africa/nigeria-attack-boko-haram-funeral.html, reported, “Villagers in northeastern Nigeria are fleeing their homes, leaving everything behind, after armed men on motorbikes roared into their area and gunned down funeral mourners on Saturday, killing at least 65 people, officials said on Monday.” Officials speculated that the attack was made by Boko Haram in retaliation for the militia, organized to protect the village, killing 11 members of Boko Haram in fending off an attack by it some days earlier.

The war with radical Islamists in Nigeria and Togo began to spill over into Benin with an attack on a Safari in a national park, there (Sarah Maslin Nir, "Benin Awakens to the Threat of Terrorism After Safari Ends in a Nightmare: A safari guide knew every watering hole in Pendjari National Park in Benin. He did not

ICG, "Speaking with the 'Bad Guys': Toward Dialogue with Central Mali's Jihadists," Report 276 (Aug 26, 2019). https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/276-speaking-bad-guys-toward-dialogue-central-malis-jihadists?utm_source=SignUp+to+Criss+Group%27s+E-mail+Updates&utm_campaign=e5e1031c2e-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_28_07_13&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-e5e1031c2e-359871089, commented, "War between the state and jihadists in central Mali has led to growing intercommunal violence. To spare civilians additional harm, the government should explore the possibility of talks with the insurgents about local ceasefires and humanitarian aid – while remaining open to broader discussions.

What's new? The war in central Mali has reached an impasse, with the state unable to defeat jihadist insurgents by force. The insurgency and military operations against it have exacerbated intercommunal violence. As a result, some Malians call for negotiations between the government and militant leaders.

**Why does it matter?** The calls for dialogue, while no longer marginal, are still resisted by the government, its foreign backers and parts of Malian society, who see no room for accommodation with the jihadists. Yet experiences negotiating local compromises and humanitarian access with militants suggest that at least some are pragmatic.

**What should be done?** The Malian state should mandate religious leaders to test the possibility of talks with militants, potentially aiming first for local ceasefires and other means of mitigating civilian suffering before broadening the scope. It should also sponsor wider dialogue among central Malians, including jihadist sympathisers, about the grievances underpinning the insurgency.

**Executive Summary**

Military operations aimed at defeating the Katiba Macina jihadist insurgency in central Mali have reached a stalemate, with the conflict fuelling ever deadlier intercommunal violence. In this light, some Malians call on the government to engage the militants in political dialogue. Obstacles to such talks are serious: the Katiba Macina’s demands seem to leave little space for accommodation; it has ties to al-Qaeda-linked militants; and the idea of dialogue generates resistance among many Malians and foreign powers. Nonetheless, central Mali residents, aid groups and religious scholars frequently engage the group to discuss local compromises, humanitarian access and religious doctrine, revealing at least some pragmatism among militants. Given the remote prospects for defeating the Katiba Macina militarily, the Malian authorities should empower religious leaders to explore initial talks with its leaders while seeking a wider dialogue among central Malians, including those sympathetic to the insurgency.

Since 2015, the Katiba Macina has established a strong presence in central Mali, capturing vast rural areas and expelling state officials. By framing longstanding socio-economic and political grievances in religious discourse, the movement’s leader Habibou Raha has won support, in particular – though not exclusively – from Quranic school students and ethnic Peul herders. The group has provided basic justice, security and relief from decades of state predation in areas under its control. Both the Katiba Macina’s violence and military operations against it have widened pre-existing cleavages among ethnic groups, leading self-defence militias to proliferate and intercommunal clashes that now kill more people than fighting between militants and the security forces. Central Mali’s death toll is now the country’s highest, with civilians bearing the brunt. As the war’s costs mount, calls from activists, politicians and religious leaders for dialogue between the government and Katiba Macina leaders are growing louder.

**Enormous challenges stand in the way of such dialogue.** For now, both Mali’s top officials and jihadist leaders reject it. At first blush, the jihadists’ aspirations – in principle, the overthrow of Mali’s state and democratic institutions, their replacement with a theocratic system inspired by the group’s interpretation of sharia and the severing of relations between Mali and its Western partners – leave little room for conciliation. The Katiba Macina’s links to the Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin, a jihadist coalition that pledges allegiance to al-Qaeda, likely narrow its leeway to engage officials. Malian secular elites, Sufi Muslim scholars, human rights groups and victims’ associations express disquiet that talks with jihadists could lead to compromises on the role of Islam in public life. Those communities in central Mali...
that have suffered at its hands would likely resist negotiations. Some Western countries, in particular France and the U.S., expressly oppose the idea. No outside power explicitly backs it.

Despite these challenges, state and non-state actors have regularly engaged the Katiba Macina over the past four years. Malian officials have struck deals over hostage releases. Communal leaders, aid organisations, including Western groups, and religious scholars have discussed with the group its local rule, humanitarian access to areas under its control and the righteousness of its discourse. One initiative that appears to have shown promise involved the Malian government itself mandating religious and traditional leaders to explore what accommodation with jihadists might entail. Such contacts have mostly been local and limited in their objectives; as yet, they have not sought to introduce ceasefires or other means of reducing violence, let alone achieve peace. But they have revealed a degree of pragmatism among Katiba Macina militants, suggesting that even if the odds are stacked against success, dialogue with the group is worth trying.

The Malian government should consider two ways of engaging central Mali's jihadists and their supporters:

- The first would involve empowering Islamic scholars, including three religious figures that Katiba Macina leader Koufa himself has said he would be willing to meet. The scholars could seek to engage Koufa or at least people close to him, initially perhaps to explore ways of reducing civilian harm, such as through local ceasefires. They might also discuss the return of officials, especially those providing services like education and health that residents want, to areas under jihadist control. They might subsequently be able to work on proposals for political and religious reform or open a channel through which officials could talk with militant leaders.

- The second would entail a more comprehensive dialogue among central Malians aimed at establishing a shared understanding of the causes of violence and how to address them. This dialogue would not necessarily include jihadists themselves, but it should involve groups that have tended to support them, notably Quranic school students and nomadic Peul. Given the state’s chronic weakness in central Mali, the dialogue should examine what its return to the region would entail, particularly in terms of regulating access to natural resources, restoring local security and justice provision, devolving authority, ensuring political representation, and improving both Francophone and Quranic education. A first step would be for Mali’s president to empower an envoy to explore how such a dialogue might be organised in the wake of state institutions’ collapse in parts of central Mali.

Pursuing these options would not mean an end to military operations. Indeed, dialogue should be part of a comprehensive plan for central Mali involving military pressure, development aid and efforts to disarm self-defence militias and militants alike. But such an approach would entail a shift of tack, with force used alongside efforts to bring Katiba Macina leaders to the table, rather than in the likely futile hope of defeating the movement on the battlefield.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre), "Dafi, Samoko, Fulani, Dogon and Bozo communities sign peace agreement in Baye in the Mopti region of Mali,“ July 26, 2019, http://secure.campaigner.com/csb/Public/show/dyz2-17sw7-##p2e-7fh3qj68, reported. "The Dafi, Samoko, Fulani, Dogon and Bozo communities of the Baye municipality, located in the area ("circle") of Bankass and the region of Mopti in Mali, signed a peace agreement on Thursday, 25 July 2019 in Baye. The Agreement puts an end to a year-long intercommunal conflict among these communities.

The Baye Agreement is a result of mediation efforts supported in the past month by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). Signed by five community leaders on behalf of the parties, the Agreement puts an end to a year of intercommunal conflicts marked by the loss of lives, displacement of populations, massive theft of livestock and severe restrictions on the freedom of movement of goods and persons.

Through this Agreement, both communities have committed to:

Making an appeal to the community armed groups to put an immediate end to the violence;

Referring to the competent authorities in case of threats or attacks and strongly denouncing all acts of violence committed in the future by members of their community;

Contributing to lifting all embargoes imposed on villages and markets, and facilitating in the rapid return of all displaced persons;
Opposing the theft of livestock regardless of which community the owner is a member of, and facilitating the smooth functioning of rural and pastoral activities;

Informing and raising awareness among community leaders to commit to peace and to only disseminate peaceful messages through social media;

Urging authorities to take all necessary steps to ensure the security of populations and their belongings in the concerned area and in the region of Mopti in general.

'Since the Ogossagou massacre and with the intensification of clashes between armed groups, the smooth functioning of the 2019 transhumance period and agricultural season is severely under threat,' said Abdel Kader Sidibé, HD’s Head of Mission for the Sahel. "The Agreement symbolizes the willingness of the Baye communities to reverse this trend and can foster other similar initiatives." Originating from the struggle for access to natural resources, this conflict was exacerbated by the strong presence of community armed groups and jihadists in the Circle of Bankass.

The mediation process, which was supported by HD, brought together and engaged all the leaders of the different communities, women and youth, members of the municipality of Baye, state authorities, as well as elected officials. The community leaders involved in the process informed local armed groups at each step to ensure their support in the implementation of the Agreement.

HD intends to continue its work by supporting the follow-up committee created at the time of the signature and which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Agreement.

The Baye Agreement is part of HD’s mediation efforts aiming to support stabilization efforts in the border regions of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso.

HD would like to express its gratitude to Canada for its support to its activities in the region. A copy of the Baye Peace Agreement is available here: https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Accord-de-Baye.pdf.

For any further enquiries, please send us an email to: pr@hdcentre.org.

The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre), "Signing of a humanitarian agreement between farmer and herder communities as well as hunters from the area of Djenné in Mali, August 2, 2019, reported August 2, 2019;" Bambara and Bozo farmers, Fulani herders as well as hunters from the area ('circle') of Djenné signed a humanitarian agreement on Thursday, 1 August 2019 through which they have committed to guaranteeing the physical integrity and the freedom of movement of people, goods and livestock in the Circle of Djenné in the Mopti region of Mali.

The Agreement is the result of ten months of mediation efforts led by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD). It was signed in Djenné by representatives of the farmers and hunters (a self-defence group which protects the farmers’ interests) as well as Fulani leaders, in the presence of the Malian authorities represented by the Prefect of the Circle of Djenné.

Through this Agreement, the parties have committed:

- To ceasing and preventing any resort to violence against civilians;
- To respecting established transhumance corridors and facilitating the transhumance process;
- Not to impede the agricultural season/campaign;
- To easing the population's access to weekly fairs and health centres in the area of Djenné;
- To encouraging community leaders to commit themselves to peace through the dissemination of messages of cohesion and appeasement;

To opposing the theft of livestock regardless of which community the cattle’s owner is a member of, and facilitating the search for stolen goods and livestock.

The humanitarian Agreement puts an end to more than two years of intercommunal clashes between (Bambara and Bozo) farmers and Fulani herders which have caused the death of about a hundred people and the displacement of more than 5,000 persons. The intercommunal conflict, which originates from a struggle for access to natural resources, was exacerbated by the presence in the area of Djenné of jihadist armed groups as well as the emergence of the hunters' self-defence group.

The mediation process, which was initiated at the request of the communities and the local authorities themselves, involved all the parties which have an influence over the conflict, including leaders
of the Fulani, Bambara and Bozo communities, officials from the group of hunters, as well as women and youth representatives from all communities. Malian authorities have also been kept closely informed of progress in the mediation process by HD.

A first agreement was signed in Djenné by farmers and herders in November last year. This agreement allowed for a first peaceful seasonal move of livestock. The 1st August Agreement is more inclusive and has a greater reach than the November 2018 one, Abdulkader Sidibé, HD’s Head of Mission for the Sahel, explained. ‘It demonstrates that mutual trust is gradually being restored between the communities, and represents another step towards intercommunal reconciliation. The Malian authorities’ support will be instrumental in consolidating this milestone.’

HD will remain involved in the Circle of Djenné, supporting the follow-up committee (set-up during the Agreement’s signing ceremony) in charge of overseeing the implementation of the Agreement. The Djenné Agreement is part of HD’s mediation initiative which seeks to support stabilization efforts in the regions of Mopti and Ségu in Central Mali.

HD would like to thank the Kingdom of Denmark for its support to the organisation’s activities in Mali and in the Sahel.

A copy of the Djenné Humanitarian Agreement is available in French at: https://www.hdcentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Accord-humanitaire-entre-les-communautés-dagriculteurs-déleveurs-et-les-chasseurs-dozons-du-cercle-de-Djenné-1er-août-2019.pdf. For any further enquiries, please send us an email to: pr@hdcentre.org.”

At least at the moment, as of the beginning of June 2019, the Central African republic is mostly peaceful, following a peace agreement between the government and opposition groups in the countryside, giving opportunity for advances in health and other quality of life areas (Dionne Searcey, “The Doctor Who Stayed Behind to Save Babies in His Long-Suffering Homeland: In the Central African Republic, which ranks next to last in the world on quality of life indicators, a peace accord allows a pediatrician and his trainees to build a future,” The New York Times, June 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/01/world/africa/central-african-republic-doctor-bangui.html).


What’s new? In February, the Central African Republic’s government signed an agreement with armed groups that control large swathes of the country, committing to integrating some groups’ fighters into new army units and their leaders into government. The deal has galvanised international support, but violence continues in the provinces.

Why does it matter? The government, African Union and UN have invested heavily in this agreement, which has the buy-in of neighbours. With strong fol-low-up in-country there is a chance of starting to reverse six years of widespread violence.

What should be done? The government should set clear benchmarks for armed group behaviour; it should eject from government leaders of groups that fail to meet them. The government and international actors should support local peace initiatives. Chad and Sudan should use their influence over armed groups to end their abuses.

Executive Summary
Four months after the government of the Central African Republic (CAR) signed an African Union (AU)-sponsored peace agreement with fourteen armed groups, implementation remains patchy. The mixed units it envisages, which would comprise armed groups’ fighters alongside national armed forces, could help catalyse those group’s demobilisation, but setting them up is proving hard. A new government, which
has awarded armed groups important national and local posts, has proven controversial with a population that wants above all a reduction in violence and predation. Some accommodation with powerful groups is likely necessary, but the government and its international allies should establish benchmarks that would condition armed group representatives’ tenure in government posts on changes in behaviour. They should also support local peace initiatives, which have had some success in forging truces, resolving disputes and reducing bloodshed in provinces where armed groups operate. International actors should maintain pressure on CAR’s neighbours to use their sway over those groups to end abuses.

The agreement, negotiated in Khartoum and signed in Bangui on 6 February, is at least the sixth deal with the fourteen armed groups since some of them seized the Central African capital in 2013, provoking a crisis that endures today. Brokered by the AU, with the involvement of CAR’s neighbours, it followed successful efforts by the regional body’s top diplomats to bring under AU auspices a parallel Russian and Sudanese initiative, which in mid-2018 threatened to fracture international mediation efforts. Like previous such agreements, the deal lays out the conflict’s main causes and commits the parties to resolving disputes peacefully and the armed groups to disarming. It also contains two more significant provisions. First, it creates Special Mixed Security Units, merging some combatants from armed groups with army formations. Secondly, CAR’s president, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, committed to an “inclusive government”, understood by AU mediators and the armed groups themselves to mean giving those groups greater representation.

Implementation of those provisions has run into early challenges. The mixed security units could help kick-start the armed groups’ demobilisation, with some fighters integrating into the army and others returning to civilian life. But the parties’ divergent understandings of the units’ command structures and the armed groups’ reluctance to commit fighters to longer-term disarmament has hampered their formation. The inclusive government has proven especially controversial. On 3 March, President Touadéra’s new prime minister named a cabinet which gave the armed groups few positions, all at relatively junior levels. The groups rejected this and threatened to walk out on the agreement as a whole. After an emergency meeting with armed group leaders hosted by the AU at its Addis Ababa headquarters, the prime minister named another government at the end of March. This second effort gave the armed groups multiple cabinet posts as well as local government positions in areas they control. Many in Bangui reacted angrily to what they see as an unacceptable concession to armed groups.

Thus far, the deal has brought some dividends. It has renewed international attention to CAR and united diplomats behind a single mediation effort. Including neighbours, particularly Chad, in the talks and on a committee set up to monitor the agreement’s implementation could induce them to persuade armed groups that recruit and resupply in their countries to rein in abuses. Given that a few years ago those groups were demanding amnesties and threatening to march on Bangui, simply getting them to the table was an achievement.

Whether the deal has reduced violence is, however, unclear. A lull in major fighting for some months after the deal was signed may well have been due to the rainy season’s onset. The daily grind of violence in the provinces has scarcely abated. On 21 May, one of the Agreement’s signatories perpetrated attacks that killed dozens of civilians in the north west. Moreover, beyond calling for disarmament, the agreement is silent on how to curtail clashes among armed groups, which are more frequent than fighting between them and government soldiers or UN peacekeepers. Indeed, it left many details to be worked out later. In the eyes of many in Bangui, therefore, its main impact thus far has been to reward predatory militias with government slots, for little apparent return.

While some accommodation with the most powerful armed groups is necessary, the government and AU should at a minimum demand that they go some way toward meeting their side of the bargain in return for a share of government power. The risk cited by some AU officials that such an approach could lead armed groups to exit the deal altogether and escalate violence appears overblown. At least the larger armed groups are motivated less by retaining slots in government than by holding onto territory, which they would still do even if losing their government posts. Risks can also be mitigated though an approach that sees the government and its international partners complement national-level dialogue with local peace initiatives.

The following steps would help ensure that the Agreement leads to an improvement in conditions on the ground:
The government, in concert with the Agreement’s guarantors and the UN, and in agreement with the armed groups if possible, should seek to establish benchmarks that those groups must meet in order to retain their government positions. If reaching consensus proves impossible, the government and international actors should impose their own, based on the Agreement’s terms, but in more detail and with timelines attached. Benchmarks could start with armed groups reducing violence, allowing state officials to deploy to provinces and permitting humanitarian organisations to work unimpeded. Over time they should also include steps toward demobilisation, including participation in the mixed security units. Importantly, such benchmarks would also embed the principle of reciprocity in negotiations.

Where their uneven presence on the ground allows, the government and its international partners should support local peace committees that in some provinces have been able to arrange truces and resolve disputes among armed groups. The prefectural committees created by the Agreement to implement its provisions locally should build on these efforts.

The government should step up its public communications, not only concerning February’s agreement, but also its wider approach to negotiations. It should explain to a sceptical public that some concessions to armed groups are necessary, but that such concessions are contingent on those groups reducing violence and taking steps toward disarmament.

Building on recent joint working visits to Bangui, the AU, in concert with the country’s two other main partners, the EU and the UN, should maintain pressure on neighbours to take back foreign fighters following disarmament in CAR, and to use their influence over armed groups to persuade them to reduce violence, allow the state to return to areas they control and eventually demobilise. The AU and UN in particular should seek to reinvigorate bilateral diplomatic channels between CAR and each of its neighbours, particularly Chad and Sudan. Russia, which is increasingly involved in CAR, should lend its support to efforts to demobilise armed groups and maintain pressure on those of CAR’s neighbours with which it has close ties.

"Crisis in Ethiopia: People are being killed and children are starving while the world ignores this crisis," Care, July 24, 2019, http://view.mc.care.org/?q=8c48172b380646a4b3a8bcebe379a32dbefe3f6c08b441774f1c0472abfda4c6ed690e440b2a98ad9366725d8d47fb4a7d86ba7c263d9011f1016e851285d430e6bccc7bb d144477485d9e50, reported, "There is a massive humanitarian crisis happening! But it’s completely off the world’s radar. More than 1 million children and families in Ethiopia are displaced and at risk of extreme hunger. Deadly violence is escalating, and six years of consecutive drought are taking an unrecoverable toll on people there.

More than 800,000 fled violence to neighboring countries in the first part of last year alone. Severe drought is worsening extreme hunger; children are impacted the most. Lack of clean water makes the outbreak of deadly disease more likely. Living conditions are deteriorating every day for everyone. As this crisis worsens by the day, an entire country is suffering in silence. We must do everything we can to help those who have been forgotten."

"Six consecutive years of drought and current violence are spawning massive displacements. Last year, Ethiopia’s worst drought in decades was fueled by the El Niño weather pattern — dangerous for a country where more than 80% of the people are farmers. Living conditions are worsening, the number of malnourished children is constantly growing, and women and girls are at risk of abuse."

Maria Gerth-Niculescu, "’Ethiopia’s ethnic violence shows Abiy’s vulnerability,’ ECAF, July 1, 2019, July 1, 2019,” https://ecadforum.com/2019/07/01/ethiopias-ethnic-violence-shows-abys-vulnerability/, reported, "Isso, along with hundreds of thousands of people of the Gedeo ethnic minority, had run from violent clashes between Gedeos and neighboring Oromos, Ethiopia’s largest ethnic group. The looting and killing was triggered by long-simmering conflict over land."

The crisis is undermining the position of Prime Minister Abiy.

The shocking murders of five high-ranking officials have exposed the gravity of Ethiopia’s crisis. To mitigate risks, politicians should refrain from doing or saying anything provocative, while the federal government and ruling elites take urgent steps to heal deep and dangerous internal rifts.

A series of assassinations on 22 June has jolted Ethiopia. That evening, in Amhara state, the country’s second-largest federal region, gunmen killed regional leader Ambachew Mekonnen and two of his advisers. A few hours later, a bodyguard reportedly shot dead General Seare Mekonnen, chief of staff of Ethiopia’s military, along with a retired officer, at the general’s home in the capital, Addis Ababa. The Prime Minister’s Office linked the killings and cited a coup attempt in Amhara, the federal government imposed an internet blackout across the country – still in effect – and the military launched a manhunt for the alleged mastermind, the hardline Amhara security chief named Asaminew Tsige. State media announced that Asaminew was killed by the military in a firefight on 24 June.

For now, order appears to have returned, in both Addis and Bahir Dar, seat of the Amhara regional government. Still, the events laid bare the extent of the country’s political crisis. To prevent an escalation, politicians from all camps should avoid inflammatory speech or actions. The authorities should take urgent steps to convene discussions – including considering mediation by respected Ethiopians – to calm the wrangling within the governing Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) on issues including power sharing, territorial disputes and demands in certain regions for greater autonomy. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed should consult broadly on General Seare’s replacement to minimise suspicions of ethnic favouritism.

Ethiopia’s political crisis is, in a sense, an extension of the crisis within the EPRDF. Since taking office in April 2018, Prime Minister Abiy has carried out significant reforms at breakneck speed, overhauling the federal security apparatus, making peace with neighbouring Eritrea, releasing political prisoners and inviting exiles back home. These steps, while long overdue, have come at a cost: they weakened the unity of the EPRDF, an alliance of four regional parties that has controlled all tiers of government from the federal to the village level since 1991 and routinely used repressive tactics to sideline challengers. Security reform in particular altered the balance of power in the central government by reducing the number of top officials from the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), one of the EPRDF’s four component parties, representing the Tigray minority that had long dominated the ruling coalition and security apparatus.

One upshot is that ethno-nationalist parties are presently on the rise in Ethiopia’s regional states, pushing strident agendas and presenting themselves as true defenders of communal interests. The EPRDF parties – themselves created to govern autonomous federal states and represent regional demands in the capital, as per Ethiopia’s ethnic federalist system – now feel compelled to outflank them. The heightened ethno-nationalist rhetoric contributes to intercommunal violence, which over the past eighteen months has reached levels unprecedented in many decades in Ethiopia.

This dynamic is particularly evident in the two most populous regional states, Amhara and Oromia. In the former, the one-year-old National Movement of Amhara challenges the EPRDF’s Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) by presenting itself as the standard bearer of Amhara interests. It is pressing territorial claims on neighbouring Tigray region and asserting that it would stop the “persecution” of Amharas living outside Amhara state. In the case of Oromia region, leaders of a formerly exiled insurgency, the Oromo Liberation Front, returned in September 2018 amid joyous demonstrations, and on the understanding they would continue its struggle for Oromo rights and autonomy through peaceful and democratic means. Yet since the movement’s return, the military has confronted armed groups associated with it in western Oromia.

Against this backdrop, the 22 June assassinations are ominous signals. The Prime Minister’s Office claims that Asaminew orchestrated the Amhara chief administrator’s killing to oust the regional government. It also has alleged that the two sets of murders – in Addis and in Bahir Dar – were connected, and part of the same plot. Whether or not these claims are correct, the killings highlight the volatility at the heart of the country’s political system despite the enormous promise of the 2018 transition.

Conflicting accounts of the killings’ aftermath have added fuel to the fire. The Prime Minister’s Office said on 23 June that authorities had detained Seare’s assassin. The following day, the Federal Police said he committed suicide just after the killing, but then amended their position to say he was in hospital injured. The confused messaging has led to theories that contest the official account. One such theory is
that an Oromo-led federal government used the crisis to assert control over Amhara region, which is indicative of a brewing power struggle between Oromia and Amhara. A tactical alliance against the TPLF between parts of the Amhara and Oromia EPRDF parties was critical to bringing Abiy to office last year, but is now under strain.

Asaminew has long been a controversial figure. He was jailed along with other ex-military colleagues in 2009, allegedly for being part of the Ginbot 7 opposition group, then banned, and plotting a coup against then Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s government. He was released in February 2018 as part of an EPRDF amnesty before Abiy became prime minister; nine months later, the ADP and the regional government appointed him security chief. His appointment was an indicator of the Amhara ruling party’s increased chauvinism and appeared to be an attempt to claw back popular support from the Amhara ethno-nationalists: Asaminew championed many of the same issues as the National Movement of Amhara and backed efforts to reclaim land that Amhara state leaders say they lost to Tigray in the early 1990s. But his appointment drove the EPRDF parties further apart, worsening the Amhara-Tigrayan territorial dispute and fuelling Amhara-Oromo tensions. Oromo leaders suspected Asaminew of ordering violence against Oromo in an administrative enclave of Amhara region in April and training local Amhara militias across the state.

As a result, federal and regional leaders increasingly considered Asaminew a liability. Ambachew, appointed in March by the regional parliament as Amhara chief, was reportedly about to fire him before being murdered. Asaminew’s death at the military’s hands, and conflicting accounts of the other assassin’s death, could further polarise the situation, particularly by sharpening discord between Amhara and Oromo. The 22 June killings confirm the dangers in handing security portfolios to hardliners like Asaminew who are ready to pander to extreme ethno-nationalists, from whichever of Ethiopia’s ethnicities.

Addressing Ethiopia’s many economic, political and security challenges will require time. For now, however, the most pressing threat is that the 22 June killings could trigger intensified power struggles and violent reactions in politically sensitive locations across the country. The EPRDF and government should take urgent steps to restore calm, including:

- A clear commitment by Prime Minister Abiy to try to rein in intra-EPRDF dissension, in recognition of the gravity of the country’s political crisis. The EPRDF parties will have to resolve differences over sharing federal power, internal borders and regional autonomy. For now, however, they need to put those differences aside in order to help the government maintain order. That may be difficult, given the pressure they face from within their own ethnic constituencies, but it is necessary. All party leaders should be open to mediation by respected Ethiopians if they cannot ease problems in EPRDF forums and should publicly commit to work with the Reconciliation Commission, established by parliament in December 2018, to investigate the causes of past conflicts in order to prevent future violence.

- A concerted effort to counter damaging rumours. The federal and Amhara governments should, as best they can, keep the public informed about what they know and do not know as the situation unfolds. The Prime Minister’s Office statement issued on 23 June went some way toward that goal, though it should release any evidence it has linking the Ambachew and Seare assassinations in order to quell speculation.

- A push to keep the military united and prevent its politicisation. Seare’s assassination raised troubling questions about divisions within the military, though government sources stress that it was an isolated incident. For the most part, the military has remained cohesive and effective during the transition, even as Abiy has taken steps to reform it, notably by seeking to rebalance its upper echelons away from Tigrayan predominance. An initial challenge lies in the appointment of a new chief of staff. The next in line, Deputy Chief of Staff and Head of Military Operations Berhanu Jula, is an Oromo, and his appointment could fuel tensions with Amhara nationalists and other opponents stemming from allegations that Abiy favours his own Oromo ethnicity. The prime minister should consult across the political spectrum and take a consensual decision on Seare’s replacement.

- In tandem with these official steps, all politicians – inside and outside the EPRDF, and representing all the country’s regions and peoples – ought to refrain from exploiting the situation through provocative rhetoric or hate speech, whether out of anger or as part of calculations of self-interest. Ethiopia’s transition has been an inspiration across Africa and beyond. The 22 June assassinations have shaken that transition but, if prudence and precaution prevail, they need not derail it.”
IGC, "Time for Ethiopia to Bargain with Sidama over Statehood," Briefing 146 / Africa 4 July 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/ethiopia/b146-time-ethiopia-bargain-sidama-over-statehood?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=d01388d23a-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_07_04_10_36&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1db8c11ea-d01388d23a-359871089, commented, "Southern Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, the Sidama, is set to declare a new regional state on 18 July. To reduce conflict risks, the Sidama should resolve sensitive issues before forming the entity, while the government should urgently organise a constitutionally mandated referendum on the question.

What's new? Officials representing the Sidama, southern Ethiopia's largest ethnic group, are threatening to unilaterally declare the formation of a new regional state within Ethiopia's federation on 18 July, unless the government meets a constitutionally mandated deadline to organise a referendum on the issue before that date.

Why does it matter? Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's planned transition toward multi-party democracy has already been marred by violence. If the federal government accedes to the Sidama's constitutional demands without proper preparation, it could aggravate deadly unrest. But seeking to frustrate the demands is equally perilous.

What should be done? Abiy should offer Sidama leaders a referendum date that is the earliest operationally feasible. If the Sidama still declare their state unilaterally on 18 July, they should delay its formation until sensitive issues, particularly relating to multi-ethnic Hawassa city, are resolved.

I. Overview

Leaders of the Sidama people in southern Ethiopia have threatened to unilaterally declare their own regional state within Ethiopia's federation on 18 July 2019. Each of the country's ethnic groups is constitutionally entitled to a vote on forming a new state if its governing council requests one. The poll is supposed to take place within a year of the request, which in the Sidama's case came on 18 July 2018. Yet with the deadline for the vote only two weeks away, the Ethiopian authorities have neither set a date nor started preparations. If poorly managed, Sidama statehood aspirations could fuel violence and deepen an ongoing crisis within Ethiopia's ruling coalition. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and other coalition leaders should seek agreement with Sidama leaders, ideally on a later referendum date. If that proves impossible, and the Sidama declare a new state unilaterally, then their leaders should delay the state's implementation while the parties resolve contentious issues. Deploying the army to stop the Sidama from declaring statehood, as Abiy seems ready to do, risks provoking greater bloodshed.

With little time remaining, the government has no good option. Granting the Sidama their state could trigger unrest in the restive Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Regional State that is home to around one fifth of Ethiopia's more than 100 million people. A particular flashpoint is Hawassa city, now the Southern Nations regional capital, which the Sidama intend to designate as their own capital, potentially provoking opposition and triggering a fraught contest for what are currently Southern Nations' assets. Minorities in the city and elsewhere could resist the new Sidama state. Moreover, its formation would intensify other statehood demands, particularly those of the Wolayta, the second largest ethnic group in the south. It could catalyst a violent unravelling of the Southern Nations.

Conversely, seeking to block Sidama statehood would likely lead to mass protests by Sidama that could also turn lethal. The Sidama are in no mood to accept further delays to forming a state for which they have long campaigned. Their quest has gathered momentum that will be hard to stop. Sidama activists from the Ejjetto ("hero", in the Sidama language) movement that has spearheaded the campaign say failing to hold the vote on time would breach their constitutional rights and justify self-declaration. The Ethiopian constitution and electoral laws make no provision for what happens if a statehood referendum does not take place within a year of its request, beyond that the upper house of parliament should resolve any dispute.

The Southern Nations upheaval comes at a difficult time for the country. Since assuming office, Prime Minister Abiy has embarked upon important reforms but contended with burgeoning inter-ethnic violence, which has killed thousands and displaced millions in the past two years. The Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the ruling coalition which comprises four regional parties, is fraying. The EPRDF party that governs Southern Nations has lost most of its authority. The EPRDF parties
representing Ethiopia’s two large ethnic groups, the Amhara and Oromia, are squeezed by ascendant ethno-nationalist movements within their own regions and, in response, have adopted harder-line positions in power sharing and territorial disputes. The killings of five top officials, including the military chief of staff, on 22 June, both reflected the EPRDF’s internal crisis and threaten to aggravate it. The EPRDF has proved incapable of responding effectively to the brewing crisis in Southern Nations, while national security concerns have hardened the mood in the capital Addis Ababa.

It is imperative that Prime Minister Abiy and federal authorities hold immediate talks with Sidama leaders. Deploying the security forces in a bid to prevent the Sidama from self-declaring may prove costly. It could leave Ethiopian troops policing mass Sidama protests that turn violent, pitting protesters against security forces and Sidama against other ethnicities. Instead, Prime Minister Abiy should seek an agreement with Sidama leaders that ideally entails a date for a referendum as early as operationally feasible, and, assuming that voters in that plebiscite endorse the proposal, a timeline for that state’s formation. For their part, Sidama leaders should accept such a compromise, which would hew closely to the constitution and would carry the smallest risk of conflict.

If it proves impossible to reach such an agreement and Sidama leaders move toward declaring their own state on 18 July, they should at a minimum agree to delay its formation to give themselves time to resolve contentious issues related to the new state. Particularly important is to soon reach agreement among federal and regional authorities, Sidama leaders and other Southern Nations ethnic groups’ leaders on plans for Hawassa, a fair division of regional assets and the relocation of the Southern Nations capital. The government also must manage other statehood aspirations that the Sidama’s new state will likely fuel. Prime Minister Abiy and other senior officials should build on a regional government study to negotiate with other groups on arrangements for a possible new configuration of multi-ethnic southern states formed from the rump Southern Nations. International partners and the federal government could offer increased budgetary support to help fund the new states and offset losses from the inclusion of relatively prosperous Hawassa within the new Sidama state.

IGC, “Chad: Avoiding Confrontation in Miski,” Report 274 / Africa 17 May 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/central-africa/chad/274-chad-sortir-de-la-confrontation-miski?utm_source=Sign-Up-to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=a0e56578f5-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_05_16_10_17&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-a0e56578f5-359871089, commented, “Risks of an escalation in Tibesti are high as friction is rising between the state, gold miners and the local ethnic Teda population. The government should lift what has become a blockade of the village of Miski, dial back its rhetoric and enter talks with the population.

What’s new? In the gold mining areas of Tibesti in northern Chad, friction is rising among the state, gold miners and the local ethnic Teda population. In late 2018, clashes erupted between Chadian troops and a self-defence group in the town of Miski. Tensions and risks of a new escalation remain high.

Why does it matter? Neighbouring Libya’s intensifying conflict and an increasing number of violent incidents in southern Libya make Chad’s northern border zone a high-risk area. In this light, the deterioration of relations between the Teda and the Chadian state poses a particular threat for Tibesti’s stability.

What should be done? To help repair relations between the Teda and the government and avoid another confrontation, the government should lift what has become in effect a blockade of Miski, dial back its rhetoric and enter talks with the self-defence group and the population. Chad’s international partners should encourage such steps.

Executive Summary

Tensions are escalating in northern Chad’s Tibesti region, on the country’s border with Libya and Niger. An influx of outsiders attracted by gold, the region’s increasing militarisation and Tibesti’s predominantly ethnic Teda population’s deep distrust of the central authorities have all contributed. Strains are especially evident in the mining areas of Kouri Bougoudi and Miski, notably over the management of resources from mining. The authorities have been quick to assume, erroneously, that miners are complicit with Chadian rebels in southern Libya. In turn, locals suspect the government wants to seize what they view as their gold. In Miski, tensions culminated in clashes at the end of 2018 between the army and a local self-defence militia. Since then, Chadian troops have retreated to 100 kilometres outside
the town, blocking access to it. With fresh instability in Libya threatening to spill into northern Chad, N'Djamena should avoid at all costs another bout of fighting, and should instead seek to open talks with Miski’s self-defence militia and local leaders.

**Tibesti has been fertile ground for rebellions since Chad’s independence in 1960. It is also pivotal to the country’s stability, particularly given its proximity to southern Libya, which has been plagued by instability, inter-ethnic conflict and a rise in trafficking since the 2011 overthrow of Libyan leader Muammar Qadafi, and has become a safe haven for Chad’s rebels.** After Qadafi’s demise, N’Djamena lent support to the Teda populations that dominate Tibesti and are present in southern Libya, relying on them to exercise some control over the sensitive border zone. But the recent deterioration of relations between the Chadian state and the Teda in Tibesti makes it a high-risk zone, particularly as the risk of conflagration in Libya mounts due to Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s ongoing offensive on the capital Tripoli, and levels of violence increase in southern Libya.

Since 2012, the region’s gold boom has attracted traders, thousands of miners, Chadian soldiers and army defectors and Chadian and Sudanese rebels, all seeking to profit from the windfall. Chadian rebel groups make regular incursions from southern Libya. The mix provokes considerable anxiety for the Chadian authorities. They worry that gold mines may become hives of rebel activity and funding and that members of the armed forces, notably high-ranking officials profiting from mining, might build relations with the government’s enemies. The government’s concern is understandable. But its public discourse unhelpfully conflates migrants with potential rebels, gold miners with opposition forces and Chadian rebels or local-defence militias with terrorists. By accusing local populations of complicity with bandits and anti-state forces, it incenses many Teda.

Miski is a microcosm of such tensions. Inhabitants suspect those close to the inner circles of power of wanting to control the town’s gold mining. The authorities interpret local resentment as a challenge to their authority. A tipping point came in August 2018, when the government decided to integrate Miski from Tibesti into Borkou region, where the Teda are a minority and less influential. It then fired canton chiefs who opposed that decision. In Miski, people reacted furiously. Local monitoring committees set up in 2013 to oversee and levy taxes from gold mining morphed into a self-defence militia, under the command of two of the deposed canton chiefs and others with a past in the Chadian army and rebel groups.

In late 2018, N’Djamena responded with force, as President Idriss Déby deployed Chadian elite forces under the command of his son Mahamat Idriss Déby, alias Kaka. Those troops entered Miski, but after a draining month of guerrilla warfare with the self-defence militia that killed or injured several dozen soldiers, they withdrew and regrouped some 100 kilometres from the town. The government’s approach now involves isolating Miski – making the gold-mining areas “unliveable”, in the words of one minister – by controlling main roads to stem the flow of supplies and closing up some wells critical to the desert region’s livelihood. The blockade could have dire humanitarian consequences and has stoked local defiance.

**The result is a dangerous stand-off. The self-defence militia, which enjoys local support, demands Miski’s reintegration into Tibesti, the return of the cantons and a legal framework, one that guarantees some profits stay in the region, for any future industrial mining (prospects of such mining happening any time soon are remote but nonetheless generate considerable disquiet in Miski).** For Déby, the Miski crisis is not just about gold. He wants to project strength at a time when signs of dissent within the ruling elite and armed forces are ever more evident, a severe economic crisis and austerity measures sow public discontent and top officials fear, particularly after President Omar al-Bashir’s downfall in Sudan, that public protests could escalate into further unrest. In reality, however, the government’s crackdown and isolation of Miski is hazardous and likely to create further problems for Déby. As rumours circulate of another military offensive and the government’s rhetoric hardens, the crisis risks spiralling out of control.

**This scenario can still be avoided. Miski’s self-defence militia is protesting local issues and does not seek to overthrow Déby’s government. Most of its demands can be met without major concessions.**

**Steps to defuse the crisis would involve:**

> The Chadian government should dial back its rhetoric, rebut stories about another military intervention in Miski. It should ease Miski’s strangulation, reopen roads into the area, put wells back into operation and facilitate humanitarian access to the town. It could also revisit its decision to shift Miski from Tibesti region to Borkou, and declare that it is open to talks.
Such dialogue would involve state representatives, the self-defence group, but also traditional chiefs and deputies from the region. Teda figures recognised by the government and locals, including current and former senior officials, could potentially mediate. Topics on the table should include the distribution of revenues from gold if it is ever mined on industrial level, the appointment of more Teda in the region’s military hierarchy and a roadmap for the reintegration of militiamen who lay down their guns.

In return, self-defence committee representatives should signal publicly that they are willing to negotiate with state authorities.

Chad’s international partners, particularly UN agencies, the EU and European governments, should both push for dialogue and encourage the government to facilitate humanitarian access to the region."


The United Nations refugee agency said more than 300,000 people had fled in the face of large-scale clashes between two ethnic groups, the Hema and the Lendu, in Ituri province, which borders Uganda and South Sudan. But officials said that the estimate was conservative."

"In Congo, a New Plan to Fight Ebola Follows a Government Power Struggle: After the resignation of the country’s health minister, the president will take over the response to the epidemic and distribute a new vaccine," *The New York Times*, July 26, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/26/health/ebola-africa.html, reported, "Faced with a lethal Ebola outbreak threatening eastern Africa, public health officials are conceding that their battle plan is failing and have proposed a comprehensive new strategy for containing the virus.

It envisages reframing the epidemic as a regional humanitarian crisis, not simply a health emergency. That may include more troops or police to quell the murders and arson that have made medical work difficult, as well as food aid to win over skeptical locals."


Moïse Katumbi is one of the richest persons in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) – and a political force to be reckoned with. A self-made man, he accumulated his wealth running mining and transport companies in the southern Katanga province. He is popular in Katanga, in part because he is president of a successful football team, Tout Puissant Mazembe, based in the provincial capital Lubumbashi.

Katumbi first fled the DRC to neighbouring Zambia in the chaos of the civil war in the 1990s. In the early 2000s, President Joseph Kabila, who had succeeded his father, Laurent, after his assassination in 2001, invited Katumbi back to the country to help him fix Katanga’s mining sector. Katumbi chose to return on 11 July 2003, to coincide with the date when the state of Katanga declared its short-lived independence – a period many Katangais still recall with nostalgia.

His political career took off in 2007 when he was elected Katanga’s governor. He boosted his popularity by contributing to the province’s economic development – targeting corruption, encouraging foreign investment and improving infrastructure. For years, he was a member of Joseph Kabila’s People’s
Party for Reconstruction and Democracy. In the summer of 2015, however, he had a falling-out with Kabila after trying and failing to dissuade the former president from seeking a third term. (The Congolese constitution bound Kabila to a maximum of two terms, but he long sought ways to overcome this limitation.) In September of that year, Katumbi resigned as governor.

Many Congolese expected him to run for president in elections initially scheduled for November 2016. But in May, after the government accused Katumbi of hiring mercenaries in a coup plot, he fled the country again, this time to Belgium. He subsequently was convicted in absentia on separate property fraud allegations and sentenced to three years in jail. Katumbi has consistently denied all charges, calling them politicised. In August 2018, he tried to re-enter the DRC in order to submit his candidacy for president in polls that Kabila, after several delays, had finally slated for that December. The government denied him entry.

Ultimately, under pressure from African and Western governments, Kabila decided not to run for a third term. Instead, he sought to handpick his successor. That proved no easy feat. His preferred candidate, Ramazani Shadary, failed to win at the polls and a parallel vote count, widely regarded as credible, suggested that Martin Fayulu, an opposition politician backed by Katumbi, had prevailed in a landslide. Yet the Electoral Commission declared Félix Tshisekedi, another opposition figure, the winner. Kabila appears to have engineered victory for Tshisekedi, whom he viewed as less dangerous to his interests than Fayulu; Kabila and Tshisekedi reportedly struck an informal deal pursuant to which the new president gave his predecessor unspecified assurances about his future.

Under Tshisekedi, the DRC’s political space is opening up. In his inaugural speech he pledged to free political prisoners, close the secret police’s detention centres and allow exiled politicians to return. He has made some progress toward fulfilling all these promises. Katumbi has been one beneficiary: in late April, the Court of Cassation, the DRC’s supreme court of appeals, overturned the property fraud conviction. In May, prosecutors also dropped the coup plot investigation, paving the way for Katumbi’s return.

In keeping with his proclivity for historically resonant dates, he chose 20 May for his return to Lubumbashi, three years to the day since his exile, and a national holiday under the DRC’s long-time president, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (1965-1997). Dressed in white – a colour he chose to symbolise peace – Katumbi arrived in Lubumbashi, where he was welcomed by tens of thousands of supporters, also wearing white, who proceeded to rally peacefully in the city centre. National and local media covered the homecoming favourably.

What impact will his return have on the DRC’s politics?

Tshisekedi could use an ally in pursuing his ambitious political agenda, and Katumbi arguably fits the bill.

The new president is struggling in the face of resistance by Kabila, who remains an important power behind the scenes. Though Kabila’s intended successor Shadary lost the presidential election, his Common Front for Congo (FCC) coalition won a parliamentary majority in the legislative contests, the results of which were equally disputed. The FCC’s several constituent groups control almost three quarters – 346 of 500 – of the National Assembly seats and the constitution mandates that the prime minister hail from the parliamentary majority’s ranks. It took Kabila and Tshisekedi four months to settle on a candidate before finally naming Sylvestre Ilunga Ilunkamba, a member of Kabila’s party and experienced politician, on the day of Katumbi’s return, diverting some attention from events in Lubumbashi.

Although Tshisekedi cannot come close to challenging the FCC’s majority even if he forges an alliance with Katumbi, he could nonetheless strengthen his position. Katumbi’s Ensemble is the largest opposition coalition, with at least 66 seats, and Tshisekedi’s Heading for Change alliance has at least 47. (Both could gain additional seats in Beni, Butembo and Yumbi where polls were postponed due to security concerns.) Moreover, the legislative balance of power could shift further were FCC deputies to defect, whether out of political opportunism or for other reasons.

In short, a Tshisekedi-Katumbi alliance might not carry immediate benefits for the new president but it would help balance Kabila’s overwhelming influence. Yet, although it would be more natural than his tense “marriage of convenience” (as press outlets have called it) with Kabila, it would represent a break from the recent past.
Indeed, in a sign of friction between the two men, Katumbi backed Tshisekedi’s rival Fayulu in the 2018 presidential race. Along with other major opposition leaders, Katumbi and Tshisekedi had formed a coalition called Lamuka (“Wake Up”, in Lingala) to contest the elections. Lamuka decided to throw its weight behind the relatively unknown Fayulu as its presidential candidate. But Tshisekedi broke ranks shortly after the coalition was formed, under pressure from his party, the Union for Democracy and Social Progress, to run separately. Fayulu, convinced that he was robbed of his victory, has maintained his call for new elections and for Tshisekedi’s resignation.

In an interview with Crisis Group on 15 May, Katumbi said he saw no point in being too hard on Tshisekedi. “The enemy of the population is not the one who won the elections, but the one who organised them”, he explained. While refraining from overtly supporting Tshisekedi, he praised the new president for his work to protect freedom of expression. Referring to the Court of Cassation decision, he maintained his innocence and rejected the idea that the court’s decision to rescind his conviction was politically motivated. Importantly, he stressed the importance of separating Tshisekedi from Kabila and avoiding pushing the president into his predecessor’s arms. He sounded the same note while addressing the crowd in Lubumbashi on 20 May, when he urged Kabila to afford his successor some space, using the metaphorical phrase “un véhicule ne peut pas avoir deux chauffeurs (a car can’t have two drivers)”.

**What does Katumbi’s return mean for the Congolese opposition?**

With Katumbi now serving as its rotating head, Lamuka is still projecting a united front. But it is unclear how long this can hold. The coalition featured Katumbi’s return prominently on Twitter, and in interviews announcing his return he reaffirmed his commitment to the opposition coalition. He likewise has made clear that he would not join the government. Still, when he spoke to Crisis Group, Katumbi said he has advised Fayulu to forget the past and move forward, because his demand for new elections is untenable. He cited this stance as evidence that he is “un homme pragmatique (a pragmatic man)”.

Lamuka’s other major figure is Jean-Pierre Bemba, Kabila’s vice president from 2003-2006. Bemba was also barred from running in 2018 and likely continues to harbour presidential ambitions. On 13 May, with Fayulu by her side, Eve Bazaiba, secretary general of Bemba’s Movement for the Liberation of the Congo, announced that Bemba would also be returning to the DRC within three weeks. His homecoming may further strain the coalition. Like Katumbi, he will tour the DRC’s 26 provinces in the coming months. Whether he will do so with Katumbi or with Fayulu has not been confirmed.

**The DRC’s political landscape remains fractured, with shifting alliances and ongoing tactical manoeuvring.** This presents the president with a dilemma: enjoying only a relatively weak base of support, he will need to look to the opposition to bolster his presidency’s stability; yet the main opposition figures also have their own ambitions and, if given significant space, could quickly become powerful contenders in the 2023 election.

Sarah Maslin Nir, “It Was a Robust Democracy. Then the New President Took Power,” *The New York Times*, July 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/04/world/africa/benin-protests-talon-yaya.html. After 52 days under virtual house arrest, the former president of the West African nation of Benin was set free and fled across the border to Togo last week without a word to his supporters or the media.

Who had held him? The country’s current president, Patrice Talon, a businessman whose grip on the country — formerly one of Africa’s most stable democracies — has grown increasingly autocratic since his election in 2016.


Two years after Mr. Jammeh lost an election and fled, investigators are holding what some experts have hailed as the most accessible truth commission in history. Officials have been methodically interviewing killers and victims, eliciting testimony into the deaths and disappearances of hundreds of
people. Central to their effort is a live feed that sends that testimony through YouTube, Facebook, television and radio — directly into phones and homes around the country."

"But for all the excitement about the stream, some Gambians are questioning whether simply hearing the truth will be enough to deliver justice. It’s unclear if the commission will lead to trial or prison for perpetrators. Admitted killers are being released after their testimony. Mr. Jammeh is in exile, and no one knows if he will ever be prosecuted."

ICG, "Running Out of Options in Burundi," Report 278 / Africa 20 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latest-updates/report, commented, "Talks about ending Burundi’s crisis — sparked by the president’s decision to seek a third term — have fizzled out. With elections nearing in 2020, tensions could flare. Strong regional pressure is needed to begin opening up the country’s political space before the balloting.

What’s new? After almost three years, the Inter-Burundi Dialogue has ended in failure. Next steps are unclear as regional leaders reject handing over mediation to other institutions while not committing wholeheartedly themselves to resolving the crisis. Elections due in 2020 carry a real risk of violence unless political tensions ease.

Why did it happen? The East African Community (EAC) took the lead on mediation in Burundi though it lacks the requisite experience, expertise or resources. Absence of political will and divisions among member states, coupled with the Burundian government’s intransigence, made successful dialogue among the parties impossible.

Why does it matter? Without urgent intervention, the 2020 elections will take place in a climate of fear and intimidation. This would increase risks of electoral violence and people joining armed opposition groups and ensure that Burundi continues its descent into authoritarianism, raising prospects of another major crisis with regional repercussions.

What should be done? Regional leaders should use their influence, including threats of targeted sanctions, to persuade the government to allow exiled opponents to return and campaign without fear of reprisal. The EAC, African Union and UN should coordinate to prevent Bujumbura from forum-shopping and not allow Burundi to slip from the international agenda.

Executive Summary

After almost three years, the Inter-Burundi Dialogue has ended in failure. The talks, led by the East African Community (EAC), came in response to a political crisis sparked by President Pierre Nkurunziza’s April 2015 decision to stand for a third term. They were unsuccessful for a variety of reasons, notably EAC member states’ divisions and disinterest. Even now, regional leaders refuse to hand over the mediation to either the African Union (AU) or the UN, but are not prepared to commit wholeheartedly to resolving the crisis. The paralysis is worrying, as elections are due in 2020 and, unless political tensions ease, the risk of violence is high. No one expects the polls to be free or fair, but they could at least be peaceful with opposition politicians able to compete without fear of reprisal, thereby preserving a degree of pluralism that might help prevent another descent into conflict. Much, however, depends on Nkurunziza’s willingness to open up political space and the readiness of regional leaders, in particular the Tanzanian and Ugandan presidents, John Magufuli and Yoweri Museveni, to nudge him in that direction.

In July 2015, at the height of the crisis, the EAC established the Inter-Burundi Dialogue, appointing President Museveni as mediator and, later, former Tanzanian president Benjamin Mkapa as facilitator to assist him. The regional body took the lead under the AU’s principle of subsidiarity, which holds that peace and security issues in Africa should be dealt with at the most local level. The EAC was not equipped for the task, however. It is first and foremost a forum for economic integration, and as such had no experience or expertise in complex political mediation. It also lacked sufficient financial resources and, with Nkurunziza loyalist Libérat Mfumukeko as secretary general, was open to accusations of bias.

Compounding these institutional shortcomings was a lack of political support for the dialogue from EAC heads of state. Historical political rifts among these countries, combined with economic rivalries and heightened personal animosities among their leaders, prevented the region from forming a consensus on how to resolve the crisis. Since the beginning of the crisis, regional leaders have increasingly seen Burundi as an ally or a tool in these disputes and thus have been reluctant to antagonise Nkurunziza by using their
leverage to force him to negotiate. Without regional backing, Mkapa found it impossible to bring the parties together for face-to-face discussions.

Talks have taken place sporadically, with facilitators shuttling between the two camps. The opposition parties started out with their own preconditions and red lines, but eventually demonstrated their readiness to compromise, most significantly dropping the demand that the president step down. The government, however, has been intransigent throughout, consistently refusing to participate in the mediation in good faith. By pitting the EAC, AU and UN against one another, Nkurunziza successfully resisted the various forms of external pressure exerted on Burundi – intense public criticism, the threat of an AU military force, the withdrawal of vital financial aid and sanctions on prominent political figures. Instead of moderating its behaviour, the government has consolidated power and begun to dismantle protections for the Tutsi minority provided for by the 2000 Arusha peace agreement that ended Burundi’s long civil war.

As a result, and despite the EAC’s efforts, as well as those of other international actors, Burundi remains in crisis: its economy is on life support, more than 350,000 refugees reside in neighbouring states, most of the government’s political opponents are in exile and those who stayed are subject to severe repression. If elections take place under these circumstances, many Burundians will likely reject them, potentially resulting in street protests that could turn violent and increase support for armed opposition groups, as happened in 2015.

While the government is unlikely to fully open the political space ahead of the polls, it should be possible to push for conditions that allow the opposition to contest in safety, preserve a degree of political pluralism and prevent the escalation of violence. Four things are required to achieve this outcome:

The government should allow opponents in exile to return and campaign freely without intimidation, arrest or violence. It should also let external monitors observe preparations for the polls as well as the voting and counting.

Regional leaders should use their influence over President Nkurunziza to ensure that the government undertakes these steps. They should publicly state their willingness to freeze senior government and ruling-party figures’ assets and be ready to review Burundi’s membership in the EAC if the country does not make progress toward more credible elections.

The AU should revive its High-Level Delegation to Burundi, and if necessary reconstitute its membership. It should expand the delegation’s mandate to enable it to build consensus in the region and encourage EAC leaders to help advance talks. The AU should negotiate with the Burundian government an increase in the number of human rights observers and military experts it deploys in country. It should use this augmented contingent to monitor the security situation, including opposition politicians’ safety, and assess preparations for the forthcoming elections, including whether conditions for a more credible vote exist. The AU Peace and Security Council and the High Level Delegation should use reports from the AU team on the ground to inform their diplomacy on the crisis. The Assembly of Heads of State, meeting in extraordinary session in July 2019, should endorse these measures.

The EAC, the AU and the UN should closely align efforts to ensure that Nkurunziza does not forum-shop. Crucially, they must not allow the crisis to fall off the international agenda.

If no significant headway has been made before the end of 2019, the EAC, AU, UN and other external actors should call for the elections to be postponed for six months. This would give the government ample additional time to get its house in order and forestall potential complaints from Bujumbura and its allies that it has had insufficient time. The EAC, AU and UN should use the extra months to redouble efforts to press the government to improve conditions for credible and peaceful elections. If the vote proceeds without a change in conditions on the ground, either as scheduled or after a postponement, external actors should not support or observe the poll and should minimise diplomatic contact with any resulting government and the EAC should suspend Burundi and freeze its senior leaders’ assets.

"Mozambique’s president and the leader of country’s main opposition group signed a new peace accord Tuesday, pledging to end years of violence and work toward peaceful elections in October."

**Latin American Developments**


Now, in a deal to assuage his American counterpart and avert a trade war, Andrés Manuel López Obrador will have to deploy some of that force to patrol borders instead.

Under an agreement hammered out in marathon negotiations with American officials over the last few days, Mexico agreed to send up to 6,000 National Guard troops to its southern border with Guatemala. It also agreed to allow more asylum applicants to wait in Mexico while their cases are pending in the United States."


Earlier this year, faced with record-setting homicide rates, Mr. López Obrador announced he would combine the navy, army and federal police into a new security force to curb violence and fight organized crime.

Now just days after the new National Guard began to be officially deployed across the country as the centerpiece of Mr. López Obrador’s security plan, police officers have rebelled."

The government says it’s a sign of corruption in the police, the police say they will be paid less, forced to work away from home under military officers who do not understand policing. Just what is the reality of the situation?

ICG, Falko Ernst, Senior Analyst, Mexico, "Mexico’s Hydra-headed Crime War," Our Journeys / Latin America & Caribbean 3 June 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/mexico/mexicos-hydra-headed-crime-war?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=f9ebaa18d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_06_03_11_23&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab6c11ea-f9ebaa18d-359871089, commented, "It may seem that Mexico’s crime war, which has left over 100,000 dead in its wake, could not get any worse. But interviews with gunmen in deadly Tierra Caliente show that it can, as criminal organisations break into smaller and smaller parts, driving up the death toll."

The body, dumped under a highway overpass, is charred beyond recognition. At the morgue, it takes four days to identify it. A day longer, and authorities would have laid the corpse to rest in a mass grave, alongside dozens, maybe hundreds, of others that no one ever claimed. But the parents of Josefina, 19, suspect that the body might be their missing daughter. The flames have spared a small patch of the inner lower lip. The tissue is enough for a positive match with a sister’s DNA. Now, at least, Josefina will get a proper wake and funeral.

Finding who killed her is another and more vexing matter. The vast majority of murders in Mexico are not investigated, much less solved: the impunity rate sticks stubbornly above 95 per cent. An inquiry is even less likely if, as in this case, everything points to a narco-style execution. For the authorities, that would have been the end of it.

Not so for Josefina’s family. Word gets around about the killers and their motives. She was a puntera – a lookout – for one of more than twenty criminal groups battling it out over Tierra Caliente, or Hot Land, in the central Mexican state of Michoacán. It’s a common career choice among youngsters of this semi-arid region measuring 120 by 50 km, but it alone does not explain her fate.
The Bull, a lieutenant in one of Tierra Caliente’s armed groups, shares his story with Crisis Group analyst Falko Ernst. He called the perpetual conflict “a moronic war”. CRISISGROUP/ Falko Ernst

Josefina’s father was in it, too, earning his daily bread as a sicario, or foot soldier, for some contras, as rival criminal groups call each other. For that fact alone, her bosses started to suspect that she might be leaking information. Out of paranoia they killed her and – to send a message – burned the body and placed it where they knew it would be found. The father’s bid for revenge leads, shortly afterward, to his own death. He pleads with his commander to send him into battle against Josefina’s bosses and catches a bullet. Only a small entry hole is visible on his chest, his neighbours tell me, but his lungs fill up with fluid until he can no longer breathe.

**Ground Zero**

More than 100,000 people have died violent deaths in Mexico since the government declared war on organised crime in 2006, portraying it as a battle of good versus evil. The death toll is indeed reminiscent of a war zone, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet says, while visiting the country in April. And, it appears, the war is getting worse. Thus far, 2019 is on track to become the third consecutive year in which Mexico will record the highest number of homicides in its history.

Tierra Caliente is ground zero. It’s the first place where the army deployed en masse against the narco's, a laboratory for the myriad methods that successive governments have said would root the drug lords out. Thousands of first degree homicides in Mexico 2006 -2018

Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security, Secretariat of the Interior Mexico.

A single cartel, the Knights Templar, once reigned supreme in Tierra Caliente. It had a reputation for ruthlessness, justifying the dismemberment of bodies by saying God had sent its soldiers to instil order in Tierra Caliente. Back in 2012, when they received me for interviews, the cartel’s leaders would assert: “Here, we are the law”. But twelve years of attrition took their toll. The state wore down the Templars with tactics ranging from targeted killings of kingpins to frontal military assaults and then broke the cartel with vigilantes.

Made up of ordinary citizens fed up with the cartel’s abuses but also Templars attempting a coup d’état against their leaders, these so-called autodefensas were like a Trojan horse. Working hand in hand with the federal government, they fractured the Templars. The kingdom crumbled, leaving a trail of warring fiefdoms mostly led by former mid-level Templar commanders. To this day, not a single one of them has been able to impose overall control. Narcos-feuds have turned into full-throttle combat. Ambushes and hours-long shootouts have become the stuff of everyday life, along with displacement of countless residents from their homes.

**Perpetual Disorder**

According to the Bull, a heavily built fighter whose two-decade trajectory has elevated him to lieutenant, a new crisis of loyalty among the narco’s has spawned a sense of perpetual disorder. “It’s become like [the top clubs in] soccer”, he says. “One day you play for América, the next day you put on the Monarcas’ shirt”. Local warlords will change their allegiance in the blink of an eye for the promise of territorial and financial gain. Trust, the glue of any cohesive enterprise, is all but gone.

It’s hard to track who’s who, and who’s fighting whom, much less who’s on top.

The remnants of the Knights Templar have switched sides three times in one major battle, going from mortal enemy to ally back to mortal enemy of the Jalisco Cartel New Generation, Mexico’s supposed new criminal powerhouse, which is looking to transform Michoacán into one of its satellites. In the same period, the Templars have bounced back and forth four times – enemy-ally-enemy-ally – in their position vis-à-vis The Viagras, another of the region’s criminal protagonists.

And that’s just the Templars. Overall, there have been dozens of fractures in the Michoacán crime world over the past six years. The proliferation of warring sides confuses the combatants themselves, some say.

The only thing that’s certain, somebody close to a longstanding family of traffickers tells me, is that ‘they are all narco’s’.

Each fissure redraws the front lines, ushering in fresh spates of killings. And each split carries the conflict deeper into society. Friends and neighbours – or even families, as happened in Josefina’s case – suddenly find themselves on opposing sides. The violence becomes intimate, often driven by personal revenge rather than competition over illicit markets, making the cycle ever harder to break.
Furthermore, says the Bull, “you know who the kid is who brought the boss his soda”. That is, once you’ve been allied with another group, or pretended to be, you know its entire social base, including the civilians in its ambit. Or you know how to find out who they are. You have the information you need to make a list of targets should your former allies turn into enemies.

Everyone familiar with Tierra Caliente’s conflict is quick to lament the loss of values, the bygone days when ordinary people were off limits. But the region’s agrarian livelihoods are precarious, and the narcos’ activity helps sustain them. It’s in every farmer’s interest – indeed, it’s common sense – to stay in the narcos’ good books. You say yes when they ask you for “favours”, whether catering food, fetching medicine from town, hiding guns or bullets in houses, or even taking wounded fighters to the clinic. But saying yes also means courting the risk of ending up on their rivals’ list. Hence the houses burned down, the disappearances, the people uprooted from their homes.

The State’s Limit

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador won a landslide victory in the 2018 elections largely thanks to his promises to swiftly end ‘the war’ and the corruption that lubricates collusion between state officials and organised crime.

No one in Tierra Caliente got the memo, however. That becomes blatantly obvious after I pull off the highway connecting the region’s main hubs. The five blocks around the exit are paved and patrolled by state police. Their station is freshly painted, shining bright white-and-blue in the midday sun.

Josefina’s killers left her body in the station’s line of sight.

Just 50 metres on, the asphalt turns to dirt, and a puntero who looks about seventeen stands guard. He is smack in the middle of the road, holding a two-way radio, scanning traffic for anyone suspicious. ‘The police never enter here’, remarks the taxi driver, who was recommended to me as trustworthy. And for months, locals say, neither has the military.

Another kilometre down the road, two white pickup trucks appear behind us. The menacing growl of their engines announces them, and they race past us to vanish in clouds of grey dust. We roll up the windows and continue dead-slow until the air clears. The pickups’ manoeuvre unnerves the driver. “But at least they didn’t stop us”, he says, explaining that this means they know who I am.

We stop at a shallow river. I need to wade across it on the last part of my journey to a tiny settlement, tucked away in the Sierra Madre del Sur’s foothills.

I’ve arranged to meet some Templars who are using the hamlet as an operational hub, along with their allies of the moment. Just over a year ago, it was impossible to take the road from the highway to the river. Everything south of the waterway, including the village where I’m headed, belongs to those still flying the Templar flag. Another group claims the 14 km stretch from the northern bank up to the highway. They used to be Templars, too, but when the autodefensas emerged in 2013 they saw a chance to expand their power, turning their coats.

Templars and ex-Templars fought four years of battles over a handful of bridges and villages, a steady stream of death buying temporary advances. At times, the fighting cut off civilians south of the river from the outside world. Hoping to smoke out the enemy, contras were blocking roads to food, water, medicine and even the local priest.

‘For What?’

Now the feuding warlords have teamed up again to confront a shared threat. The jaliscos, as members of the Jalisco Cartel New Generation are called here, are pushing in from the west. The Templar and ex-Templar foot soldiers have to forget past treason and pain. Or so the bosses ordain each time they rebrand contras as comrades in arms.

It can be hard to swallow for the ones doing the fighting, and the dying, down in the dirt. One warrior who’s seen his share – enough to say goodbye to the capos – is Ramón. When we last met, two years ago, he and seven young sicarios, as well as the former Mexican Army special forces sniper under his command, had been deployed to hold the southern river bank as the Templars’ last line of defence against the contras’ recurrent offensives.

The battle gear he brandished then – an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle, a tactical vest holding additional magazines and a two-way radio – is gone. Instead, he wears a dressy shirt, designer jeans and shiny black Lacoste sneakers. “Things have changed since the last time you came here”, he tells me, having a young sicario pour me a cold beer by a local volleyball court we’d settled on as a meeting point.
Anger foams up as Ramón lays out his reasons for switching jobs to become the right-hand man to someone ‘dealing with the government’ – a white-collared emissary from the criminal world to officialdom. ‘I never complained about life here’, he says. He spent nights hiding out in the bare hills that loom in the background, embracing his rifle, squatting under a blanket thrown over his head and shoulders, and drifting in and out of the light sleep of a sentry, even in the pounding rain.

‘Initially, we were just taking back what was ours’, he recalls, ‘but then they [the bosses] wanted to take areas over from others. It was like Vietnam for the gabachos [here, meaning for the U.S.]. It wasn’t our people, we didn’t have their support, it couldn’t work. We suffered many, many losses. And for what? Ambition. Nothing’.

Weighing more heavily on his mind was the decision from on high to forge a pact with precisely the people he had been previously tasked to wipe off the map. ‘I killed fifteen of them in an ambush’, Ramón states matter-of-factly, ‘but after that they fucked with my family, coming to my house, trying to take my young children. How’s that possible? You do not fuck with families!’

Due to his new position, he now makes only sporadic visits to the area. But by no means has he forgotten his grudges from the past. He references Josefina’s death, whose family he knows, as a case in point. ‘I’ll be frank with you’, he says, summing up, ‘The bosses may have forgiven them, but I never will. If I run into one of those sons of bitches, fuck it. Maybe they kill me, but not before I kill three of them. Minimum. That’s why, he says as he points to the SUV in which he drove his family here, he keeps a handgun in a mount by his right leg at all times.

**New Blood at the Ready**

Ramón lasted eleven years as a sicario. Many others, wearying far more rapidly of the hardships and moral contradictions, simply don’t return from their four days of monthly leave. Desertions notwithstanding, Tierra Caliente’s illegal armed groups find it easy to replenish the ranks.

One reason is the lack of decent legal alternatives, as the mother of twenty-two-year-old sicario Emilio tells me as she fries up a whole fish on her wood-fired stove for lunch in a village a stone’s throw from where I met Ramón. Emilio quit for a while, too. But when pay for half-days of harvesting limes under the scorching Tierra Caliente sun dropped below 200 pesos, or around ten dollars, he asked the local commander for another chance.

The monthly salary of 12,000 pesos, up from 8,000 now that he’s heading teams of sicarios, beats what a day labourer makes in the orchards. To Emilio, though, it’s always been about more than that. The first thing he points to as we sit down to talk shop are the papas, or “potatoes”, that go into the oaxacan pozole, which comes to Michoacán to do bad things, to extort and kidnap.

**Una Guerra Pendeja**

Youngsters like Emilio provide the fuel without which the bosses’ war machine would quickly grind to a halt. But, also due to the lack of discipline of some, many do not last long. That’s where mercenaries like José come into play. A Chinese-made AK-47 dangling on his back, he stops in a local shop on a day off from his duties 20 km to the north, where heavy fighting displaced one hundred civilians the previous week. He is here to drop off his laundry.

When José sees me, an outsider half-dozing in a hammock amid the day’s peak heat, his penetrating, light-blue eyes glint in contrast to his weathered skin. The shop, a shack of wooden planks stocking sugary soft drinks, Corona Lights and a handful of essentials, is run by a family that has granted him refuge. They have also helped quell doubts that I might be “someone sent by the North Americans”. He cracks open a beer and pulls up a chair, explaining that he’s enjoyed chatting with foreigners since doing time in a U.S. prison.
He wanted to retire long ago, following a good run in the States cooking “biker crank”, a methamphetamine, “by the ton” and distributing cocaine. But he got caught and lost it all, including six houses he says he’d purchased in Kansas. So he had to start out from scratch back home.

José makes no bones about the fact that he’s in it for the money. He thinks the talk about loyalty-bound, cohesive cartels is overblown. “Don’t kid yourself”, he says. “There’s no such thing as free favours here”. His group, he goes on, might entertain ‘friendly relations’ with some of their local counterparts. But the sole reason they’ve made the four-and-a-half-hour journey south west from the state of Querétaro to join the fighting is the buena feria, the lucrative deal, offered to them. For him, it brings in 50,000 pesos per month. For a package of vehicles and 30 fighters, he says, they charge the local boss a monthly sum of one million pesos, or $ 50,000. Wages are extra.

In the short term, the capo’s investment pays off. Shortly after our chat, José’s band wins a battle, pushing the jalisos north. As he’d vowed to do, they take the fight to the state capital of Morelia and to Uruapan, a hub of Michoacán’s $ 1.5 billion avocado industry and a magnet for criminals looking to make big bucks from extortion. In both cities, in the following days, a series of attacks kill at least twenty people. Mutilated bodies lie in the streets, alongside handwritten threats to the Jalisco Cartel New Generation.

Most likely, it’s just another episode in the bloody perpetual battle over Michoacán. There are ways to foster peace here – local mediation, searches for disappeared persons, a halt to violence against civilians and deserters – but they’re probably a long way off.

Indeed, just a week later, the Bull writes to me. He says the jalisos have reacted to José’s band’s victory by bringing in their own mercenaries from other states. The backlash appears but a matter of time. Mexico’s crime war, he says, might be moronic – una guerra pendeja. At the moment, though, there’s no end in sight."

Guatemala. In May 2019, was in danger of losing its international panel of investigators working with Guatemalan prosecutor to fight wide-spread corruption in high places, as the only candidate for President of the country who supports keeping the international panel, Thelma Aldana, was disqualified from running by a court ruling. May 16 (Elisabeth Malkin, “Latin America Risks Losing Potent Weapon Against Corruption,” The New York Times, May 19, 2019).

Elisabeth Malkin, “Alejandro Giammattei, a Conservative, Wins Guatemala’s Presidency,” The New York Times, August 11, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/11/world/americas/guatemala-election.html, reported, “A conservative former prisons director was elected Guatemala’s president on Sunday, in a race that took place against the backdrop of a migration crisis in which thousands of Guatemalans leave the country each month. Alejandro Giammattei, 63, who was making his fourth run for the presidency, won nearly three-fifths of the vote in beating Sandra Torres, the former first lady, according to preliminary results from Guatemala’s election board.

Neither candidate inspired much confidence and just over 42 percent of eligible voters cast ballots.”


What is happening in Honduras?
Tensions between the administration of President Juan Orlando Hernández and a months-old national protest movement have intensified in recent weeks and crossed the line into violence. On 24 June – four days after Hernández ordered the military to crack down on demonstrations across the country – military police burst onto the campus of the Autonomous University of Honduras in the capital city of Tegucigalpa. They opened fire on students, wounding at least four. Altogether clashes have claimed at least three protesters’ lives – and resulted in dozens more injuries (chiefly on the protesters’ side).

The tensions initially arose in reaction to a government initiative to restructure the country’s health and education systems – both segments of the economy that employ large numbers of public-sector workers. The Hernández administration kicked off the reform initiative by decree early in 2019 but protests began in earnest only after the Honduran Congress enacted implementing legislation in late April. Fearing that reform would result in privatisation and mass layoffs, trade unions representing doctors, nurses and teachers urged their members into the streets. May saw several national strikes, with protesters blocking major highways in mass mobilisations.

By early June, both the administration and Congress had walked back their formal actions – revoking the relevant decrees and nullifying the legislation – but by then the range of protesters had expanded and the grievances they were protesting had multiplied. It did not help that in early May the government published a new penal code creating new penalties for public criticism of government figures and feeding worries that the government would use the law to suppress free expression and peaceful assembly when it is scheduled to come into effect in November. (The government has since agreed in principle to amend the new code.) The protest movement grew beyond the trade unions that were initially involved and came to include other unions, university students, human rights defenders and land rights activists; even some branches of the police joined the demonstrations. Protesters also came to focus on a new demand: calling for President Hernández’s resignation.

Other government efforts at calming the waters have also failed to win over the protesters. On 13 June, following failed attempts to engage with a handful of health and education associations, the government sought to launch a national dialogue. But the Platform for the Defence of Health and Education – a Honduran consortium that brings together key representatives from its namesake professions – chose not to take part in the dialogue, imposing a list of nine preconditions for its participation going forward, and convened its own parallel talks on 18 June.

Facing a growing protest movement that shows no signs of abating, and after clashes between protesters and police became more dangerous, Hernández ordered troops deployed on 20 June.

What’s the background to the protests?

The protests reflect public discontent with the current government – led by the weak and increasingly isolated President Hernández – and are exacerbated by the growing political polarisation that has enveloped the country since a coup ousted former president Manuel Zelaya (now leader of the leftist opposition party Libre) ten years ago.

Hernández has served two scandal-ridden terms. In 2015, he faced accusations that his 2013 presidential campaign had benefited from funds illegally siphoned from the Honduran Social Security Institute. In 2017, accusations of fraud marred his election to a second term, and violence marked the aftermath. Post-electoral clashes between police and protesters resulted in 23 deaths and 1,351 arrests amid allegations by the UN that the police used excessive force.

Moreover, last year, U.S. authorities detained Hernández’s brother in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges, and prosecutors recently revealed that the Drug Enforcement Administration investigated Hernández himself for the same crimes in 2013. Recent surveys by Cid Gallup show the president’s approval rating dropped from 61 to 36 per cent since 2017. Another recent poll found that more than 80 per cent of interviewees said they do not trust the country’s main judicial and political institutions.

President Hernández has weathered political turbulence thanks in part to the backing of some powerful allies – including the Catholic Church, the ruling National Party, the private sector, the security forces and the U.S. – but some of those allies are showing signs of frustration. After years of support for Hernández, the Episcopal Conference, which heads the Honduran Catholic Church, issued an unusual statement at the start of June, condemning the Honduran government’s response to the protests, criticising the judicial system’s lack of independence and lamenting the political elite’s estrangement from the Honduran people.
Within the National Party (which has enjoyed a near monopoly on political power since the coup), high-level figures such as the president of the Congress, Mauricio Oliva, have kept their distance from Hernández during the crisis, rarely accompanying him in public appearances. Former President Porfírio Lobo went so far as to leave the party, found a new political movement and suggest that Hernández resign. While business organisations in Tegucigalpa have stayed loyal to the president, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Cortés, a leading private-sector association based in the country’s most industrialised region, stated on 2 June that corruption and mismanagement have damaged the Honduran economy more than the protests have.

Anger has bubbled up even among the security forces, whose loyalty has been a pillar of support for the National Party. Since the coup, they have fared well – benefiting from frequent funding increases and doubling in size over ten years. Nevertheless, on 18 June, several hundred members of the police special forces refused to leave their barracks, explaining that they did not wish to “repress the people” and demanding better working conditions. Although the strike ended two days later, the action left an impression of weakening support for the administration.

The U.S. has also slightly toned down its political support after years of praising the Hernández government for fighting drug trafficking and organised crime, although its embassy in Tegucigalpa has been quite reluctant to adjust its message. It maintained its supportive tone even after President Trump’s March 2019 announcement that he would cut $615 million in aid to the Northern Triangle countries, including Honduras, because they were doing too little to curb northward migration. (Washington has since partially restored the aid.) After protesters set its front entrance on fire on 31 May, the embassy released a statement in support of the president. But when clashes with protesters turned deadly, and human rights organisations began denouncing the police for use of excessive force, the embassy shifted its rhetoric to demanding accountability for the deaths and injuries in the streets.

The country’s growing political polarisation is to some extent a reflection of wounds that have not healed from the 2009 coup that drove Manuel Zelaya from office. Hondurans who did not support the coup have from the beginning tended to see in the Hernández government what one civil society leader called ‘a soft dictatorship’. A UN-backed dialogue among the country’s three main parties last year managed to channel grievances into a debate on electoral reforms. But, despite modest progress, the process has stalled during the current crisis, and inter-party relations – which were not strong to begin with – have dramatically deteriorated. Emboldened by the recent street protests, Libre started staging what it called a ‘legislative insurrection’. Since May, its deputies have been performing acts such as burning the constitution in Congress (ostensibly to protest its constant infringement by the current government) and throwing firecrackers during votes. They are demanding that the Hernández government step down.

Where is the crisis headed?

Honduras finds itself in a vicious cycle: the current crisis is partly a response to worsening economic, security and humanitarian conditions, which the unrest could turn still worse. The government is not completely intransigent – it stepped back from some of its most unpopular moves and has shown an openness to dialogue. But it has also been prone to misread the challenges it is facing, branding protests, street blockings and looting as a conspiracy between the opposition and criminal elements to destabilise the country.

Instability is badly hurting the Honduran economy. Juan Carlos Sikaffy, president of the Honduran Council of Private Enterprise, recently estimated that since April the economic damage of national strikes, street closures and mobilisations, compounded by vandalism and looting, has been over $400 million, or around 1 per cent of the country’s GDP. Already 60 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and only 20 per cent earn the minimum wage, which by itself is nowhere near sufficient to support a household. The unrest could press more Hondurans into economically precarious lives.

Hernández’s has staked much of his claim to public and international support on Honduras’ record of halving the number of homicides over the past eight years, but the statistics remain jarring and have recently taken a turn for the worse. Honduras is still among the most violent countries in the hemisphere, with around 40 murders per 100,000 inhabitants, and impunity rates for these crimes remained at 87.3 per cent in 2017, according to a report by the Alliance for Peace and Justice. Moreover, the police reported 192 more homicides between April and the end of June than over the same period last year, and the Honduran Observatory of Violence reports a 50 per cent increase in mass killings over roughly the
same period. With the country beset by protests and many security personnel focused on containing them, there is a risk that unchecked criminal violence will further intensify.

Political instability, widespread insecurity and impunity, and economic distress, accentuated by climate change-induced droughts — affecting more than 170,000 families living in the country’s Dry Corridor, according to the National Commissioner for Human Rights — push thousands of desperate Hondurans to flee every month. Although the mass exodus started well before the current crisis, the number of departures has leaped since April. Around 300 people leave Honduras every day, and around 175,000, or almost 2 per cent of the total population, have been apprehended at the U.S. southern border since October 2018. Apprehensions have boomed in the past couple of months, numbering more than 36,000 in May alone, compared to fewer than 10,000 in October 2018.

What can be done?

The immediate goal for all parties should be de-escalation. To help set that in motion, the government should make another effort to enter into substantive dialogue with the Platform for the Defence of Health and Education. To avoid the cold shoulder it received when it last made this offer, it should make clear that it is prepared to make concessions on issues of core concern to the Platform, including exploring whether there are more resources in the national budget to invest in health and education infrastructure. It should also commit to reining in security forces’ heavy-handed response to protests and to promoting accountability for human rights violations that they may have perpetrated during the crackdown. While this dialogue cannot address the full range of frustrations that have surfaced during the recent wave of protests, it would be at least a beginning, and could offer a reason for both sides to step back from the increasingly dangerous escalatory cycle that has developed.

On the political front, opposition parties, particularly Libre, should temper their demands that Hernández resign. His immediate exit would merely lead to early polls under the same flawed electoral system the opposition says produced a fraudulent result in 2017. The opposition’s focus should shift to ensuring the implementation of critical electoral reforms. These include the digitisation of the national registry of persons, which would help mitigate voting irregularities, and the creation of a national electoral council to oversee elections and an electoral justice court to settle disputes. Congress passed a package of constitutional changes to enable the creation of these institutions in January 2019, but they require implementing legislation to become a reality.

Finally, foreign partners, particularly the U.S., should make clear that political support for the Hernández government is conditional on the latter taking steps toward dialogue with the opposition and advancing the fight against corruption and impunity. In this connection, Washington should press Honduras to commit to renewing the four-year mandate of the Organization of American States-backed Support Mission Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras. While none of these steps will in itself be sufficient to reverse the polarisation that has pulled Honduras apart, they might help stop the situation from worsening in a country that can ill afford further strain.”

Following months of frustration in the implementation of the Colombia-FARC peace agreement: Nicholas Casey and Lara Jakes, “Colombia’s Former FARC Guerrilla Leader Calls for Return to War” August 29, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/world/americas/colombia-farc-rebel-war.html, reported, “A former top commander of Colombia’s largest rebel group [and a key facilitator in achieving the peace agreement], the Revolutionary Armed Forces, vowed a return to war and issued a new call to arms on Thursday, almost three years after the rebels signed a peace deal to disarm.

The commander, whose real name is Luciano Marín but is known by the alias Iván Márquez, said in a video that his group, known as the FARC, would return to fighting because of what he called the government’s violations of the peace agreement.

The announcement could signal a shattering of the agreement, which ended a war that lasted 52 years, displaced millions from their homes, and left at least 220,000 dead.”

Previously:

years ago, Crisis Group found that major threats to Colombia's peace process with former guerrillas all intersect in the Pacific coastal district of Tumaco. Our Colombia analyst Kyle Johnson made it his mission to find out more.

I'd travelled to many places in Colombia before I joined International Crisis Group, but never Tumaco. My first impression was that it’s a town that shares many qualities with others on the Pacific coast. It’s made up of two built-up islands and some mainland barrios, tucked into a maze of estuaries along Colombia’s south-western border with Ecuador. Just one road runs in and out. Around 115,000 people live in the town itself, with another 89,000 in the surrounding countryside. The great majority of residents are Afro-Colombian.

The more time I spent there, however, the more I came to see Tumaco as embodying Colombia’s political and economic dilemmas in microcosm. Despite a peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia in 2016 (FARC), rebel dissidents, criminal gangs and other armed groups proliferate throughout. It is a cocaine production hub with easy access to seaborne smuggling routes and a higher proportion of land used to grow coca leaves than anywhere else in Colombia. Its politics are so corrupt that several former mayors are in jail. Tumaco also suffers the country's highest rates of unemployment, with many of its people working in the informal economy, and others in the drug trade.

There are people and institutions working unevenly to improve the situation. The Catholic Church is a positive and influential force for change, helping to organise communities, denouncing human rights violations and promoting peace initiatives. Meanwhile, as in many rural parts of the country, a mix of honest, well-intentioned and also occasionally corrupt soldiers and police are frustrated by their inability to expand state control. In many cases, they are just trying to survive their deployment.

Demobilisation in Real Time

I fly in from Bogotá for the first time in March 2017 in an effort to find out more about the town and its troubled transition toward peace. The journey is just over one hour by air, though it would have taken over 24 hours by road. We approach the town over the green coastal jungle and drop down toward the most alluring part of Tumaco: an island on the edge of the Pacific Ocean with a one-runway airstrip, a military base, a sandy beach and some hotels for mainly Colombian tourists.

My aims are modest in these first few days. I want to make contacts with residents and government officials, begin our research and build up Crisis Group’s name in the city. Things are tense, with homicide rates spiking because of fighting between FARC rebels and a breakaway guerrilla faction. Soon after chatting to a community leader by phone, I am surprised when he calls back to invite me to a school in a neighbourhood I’d never heard of. He promises a breakthrough in my quest to meet the FARC breakaway faction.

I follow his instructions and take a motorcycle taxi to the school. As I go down the main “road” in the neighbourhood – about six feet wide, paved with cement and built on stilts over water – a young man stops me. He tells the driver to leave the neighbourhood. “Are you coming to the meeting?” he asks me. I say yes, and he escorts me to the school.

Inside the school, I'm astonished to see a negotiation underway between the dominant FARC dissident leader and three Ministry of Defence officials. An audience of some twenty people is arrayed behind too-small schoolroom desks, including a Catholic priest, someone from the UN human rights office and several community leaders. All eyes follow the arrival of an unknown foreigner. Nobody asks me anything as I find a chair and sit.

The negotiators have already been at it for some time. I am surprised at how directly and practically they discuss complex issues I want to learn about: disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, for example. In less than two hours, they settle the disarmament process for all 330 members of the FARC dissident group. As a show of goodwill, the rebels introduce to the government officials one of Tumaco’s most wanted men. The commander goes by Chicken, an incongruous nickname given the fearsome reputation of his violent, ill-disciplined militia. They promise that he, too, will disarm. The officials are astounded to have him in front of them, and to discover he was sitting at the back of the classroom all along.

The last item officials, dissidents and attendees discuss is that there should be “no more statements to the press” — something that could complicate my goal of interviewing participants. As the gathering disperses, I stay behind. The community leader introduces me without ceremony to Chicken as
“the guy who came to speak to you”. It does not go smoothly. Everyone assumes that I am with the media. It is hard to convince them that I’m not looking for news stories. I explain that Crisis Group tries to talk to all sides in a conflict and explores practical ways to prevent or end violence. One mid-level dissident officer concludes I am writing a book.

Chicken relents. He sends some men out to make sure the building is secure, then asks me to read out my whole list of questions, one by one. Some FARC commanders can be quite closed – in fact they are trained to be like that – and I worry the meeting will have little value. But after a while he warms up, even seems to enjoy getting his thoughts and feelings off his chest. We spend about 90 minutes together. We pause when an unknown motorbike enters the neighbourhood and look out a second-storey window to follow its progress. He radios his fighters to follow it and get it out of the area. Things relax again, and as I take my leave, he even says it’s fine to cite him by name.

A Colombian Crossroads

Tumaco is unlike the wide-open spaces or jungles elsewhere in Colombia. In order to meet conflict-hit communities and rebels in the countryside I usually have to fly, then travel for hours by boat, motorbike, truck or on foot. Here everything seems around the corner. When the phone call comes that so-and-so is ready to meet, I can usually walk there, moving quickly to the densely populated, poor, violent barrios dominated by dissident groups.

With each new contact, I feel my way forward, taking any advantage to deepen my understanding of relationships and events here. On my eighth trip to Tumaco, I meet another group of FARC dissidents. The group’s commander has just been killed by the narcotics police, and the group wants to tell his story. They say they’re looking for a journalist to tell their story to. I explain I work for Crisis Group. They decide that they’re willing to chat either way. A go-between manages to arrange it in just a few hours.

A mid-level FARC dissident, a low-level fighter and the go-between take me by boat to a village about two hours north of Tumaco, consisting of roughly 50 houses several kilometres inland. Members of the breakaway group are there, though they try to be inconspicuous. A large speedboat shows up in the afternoon with about fifteen armed fighters on board. During the day there, we listen to the townspeople about the now-dead commander, known as David, describing him as a saint who the police killed in cold blood, a version of events officials deny. Their story weaves seamlessly between things I know to be true and statements that I suspect cannot be accurate. A few days later I interview the same mid-level officer who brought me to the meeting and he says that David’s ideology was the “well-being of the people.”

I notice similar dynamics and motivations in my interactions with three of the five non-state groups operating in Tumaco that I’ve spoken to. Some realise their image is terrible and want to change it. They believe telling their story will help.

But things don’t always work out as planned. We advance toward an interview with a prominent local commander known as Guacho, but pull out when his group claims responsibility for killing two Ecuadorian journalists and their driver in April 2018. Another time, a journalist and I take a small boat to a village called La Caleta to meet a commander. We make it there, but in the end he does not. He’s on the offensive after another armed group attacked him and his group the night before. Back in the city, fighters from his group tell me that four kids from their neighbourhood sent to the rural battlefront died in this counterattack.

Interviewing armed group leaders can be dangerous so I take precautions. I know that it’s not wise to get too close to any leader, as the other armed groups in the city can think you are collaborating with their enemies. I am careful when I first sit down with them. The first meetings are usually so they can warm to their narrative. I ask few, if any, difficult questions. Later, I can probe more boldly. When one FARC dissident fighter claims no one in his neighbourhood is involved in the fighting – despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary – I ask him about evidence made public by the state. “What about the intercepted phone calls?” “What about the killing on Father’s Day?” “How do you explain the shootouts with police?” Or “Why is your commander in prison?” The police have captured some of the group’s fighters, charging them with various killings. Despite a difficult interview, with vigorous questions and answers, the tone stays professional and we meet regularly when I am in the town.

Amid the crime and violence, the low-level people, the foot soldiers, often have sad and harrowing stories. Talking to them, I hear of how they join as adolescents, some as young as twelve, and face hardship, stress and trauma. One who joined at the age of twelve tells how his best friend was killed and
he became a fighter to get revenge. Others say they joined after being abused and abandoned as children. Once in the group, these fighters do not strike it rich. I interview a fighter who spent two days looking for a way to wash, as his neighbourhood – and much of the city at the time – did not have running water. On only one occasion, speaking to a high-level drug trafficker, do I meet someone involved in the violence who has had a full high-school education.

As I spend more time in the area, I also talk to community leaders, NGO members and churchgoers. With them I can talk about our day-to-day lives, grab a beer, have lunch. One or two even visit me in Bogotá. It creates a bridge of trust. I test out our findings and recommendations informally, better understand how the city works, and hear them express the fears the people have. They also share with me their ideas for solutions to Tumaco’s many problems.

**State Security**

It turns out that it is more difficult for me to develop contacts with the army and police than the armed groups. In Tumaco, the interaction between the security forces and the gangs is a curious duet. Some 500 members of non-state armed groups operate in the city, and 11,000 thousand police and soldiers cater to the whole of Tumaco and other towns in the region. Their strategy for bringing peace, stability, and protection to the area is to kill or capture gang and cartel leaders. But while this strategy may look good to politicians in Bogotá, it is not changing much here on the ground.

For example, targeting armed group leaders has not helped the authorities gain control of the barrios, where non-state groups can easily retain the upper hand even when the police make some effort to be present. Part of the problem is the fleeting nature of this presence. During the day, the police hang out in places which aren’t typically violent, for instance along the main roads, sending sporadic patrols into the barrios. They go in and leave, providing little by way of sustained protection. The groups watch their every move, and resume normal activity after they depart. At one point, while I’m with FARC dissidents in the city, three heavily armed policemen walk through the streets of the neighbourhood and leave. Nothing happens and in future visits, it is clear that nothing changes.

I manage on occasion to talk to someone from the Colombian navy force that patrols the coast off Tumaco, the head of the armed forces in the region and other senior figures. They meet me mainly for public relations purposes, and usually want to give me the message that “the strategy is working”. Sometimes I sense they know that they are only putting a plaster on a gaping wound. But it’s their job to do what they can.

Police, army and navy personnel are mostly posted from other parts of Colombia. Among them are those who are genuinely motivated by patriotism and committed to the fight against drugs and violence. Others are more cynical about the assignment. They simply want to survive it and then move on from remote Tumaco. Still others are in league with armed groups and profiting from corruption alongside them.

On my eleventh trip to Tumaco I meet some of the counter-narcotics police. They open up quickly, anxious to tell their story. They are tired of looking to locals like the bad guys, fighting a futile war. They even take me up in one of their helicopters to show the scale of the problems they face. From up there, it’s easy to see why they think the country is being ravaged by an unstoppable force.

We fly along the Mira River – the region’s main waterway – and over improvised pools of stolen oil, set ablaze to refine it into gasoline used to process coca leaves into coca paste. A massive illegal gold mine operates just across the river from the neighbouring district of Barbacoas, and it is unclear if the town or the mine is bigger. In some parts, fields of coca stretch as far as the eye can see. The police are under heavy pressure from the central state to eradicate as much coca as possible. But these agents on the frontline of the drug war say they can only do so much. For instance, the law says state security can’t touch crops in areas populated by indigenous people, though coca fields are abundant there. Even when security forces manage to cut down coca bushes, it spoils just one harvest and the fields are replanted soon afterward. If the police burn down the coca labs, they face backlash from ordinary people whose principal source of income has just been destroyed. Security forces may be hitting the drug trade but, locally at least, it is fostering hostility to the state.

The officers in the helicopter appear genuinely angry at the burning pools of stolen oil, but at ground level we get a different perspective on the police. While travelling in a taxi not far from those pools, three young men stop our car. They tell us to wait because two “filled” vehicles are coming up the road. We observe the passage of pickups stacked with barrels of illegally produced gasoline. When the
young men allow us to proceed, we see the contraband pass unhindered through a police roadblock no more than five metres away.

**Coca Territory**

Tumaco’s overlapping worlds of state and non-state, legal and illegal, are most highly visible in towns along the main road or small settlements scattered throughout the rural jungle and hills of Tumaco. Wherever I go, the economy is often entirely reliant on the coca trade. Most fighting in the region is for control of drug-producing territory, the engine of violence since the early 2000s.

Along the road to Tumaco sits the town of Llorente. It has huge supermarkets, casinos and brothels clearly profiting from booming economic activity. Llorente lives almost completely off the drug trade: it is home to countless transactions where coca paste and cocaine are bought and sold, coca farmers buy whatever they need and coca leaf pickers come here to spend their cash. Most of those in this area are not Afro-Colombian, as in coastal towns like Tumaco. In fact, many came from the neighbouring inland province of Putumayo some fifteen years ago, so locals have dubbed it Putumayito, or little Putumayo.

Given that the state isn’t fully present, armed groups often step in to create their version of law and order. In Llorente, the notorious commander Guacho set up traffic rules and introduced photo ticketing to end traffic jams along the main road. Cars and trucks very quickly began behaving themselves. Guacho’s group has now lost control of that stretch of road, and the traffic is terrible again. But his civic gesture underlines an enduring problem for the police: how do you establish rule of law where almost everything is based on or controlled by illegal forces?

**Poverty, inequality and a lack of jobs also fuel the drug trade.** Many young men and boys in Tumaco — and indeed up and down Colombia’s Pacific coast — are ready to take the risk of earning $20-30,000 working on a ship taking drugs up to Central America, for example.

When I take a walk with some locals down to the edge of the sea through one of the barrios, where the houses rise on wooden stilts above the sea, I stumble onto a sight of young men and a speedboat, which they are filling with tuna. It is immediately suspicious. The vessel bears no resemblance to a fishing boat, and there is no reason for it to be filled with tuna. Cocaine deliveries to the international market often start on vessels disguised as fishing boats, which take shipments out for transfer to fast ocean-going boats on the high seas. No one here wants to be in a photo. I act as if I don’t know what is going on and quickly leave. Being a witness to drug operations, even unintentionally, can get someone in serious trouble with armed groups and traffickers.

**An Important Lady**

Family is important to the functioning of the area’s armed groups. One commander I meet has seventeen children, several of whom fight for the armed group he leads. In September 2018, I renew contact with another group that also looks like a family business. It once belonged to the FARC but never demobilised under the 2016 peace deal. The FARC murdered its first commander, known as Don Ye, in November 2016, who then was replaced by his brother, David, killed by state security forces weeks before I visited his family home in September 2018. The authorities say his sister was also the financial brains behind the group and their drug trafficking operations. I go to visit their mother, who many say runs part of the group.

We’re in a poor neighbourhood of Tumaco but the mother’s house is huge, three storeys high and opulent. It has elaborate and expensive-looking decorations and furnishings, typical for people in the drug business. I gradually realise the mother is the one giving orders, sorting issues out as they arise right in front of me. But she denies leading the armed group or that her kids were criminals. I know the latter is simply not true.

Still, this important mother is flattered by the outside attention that I represent. I feel a bit surprised myself to be sitting with her. As far as I know, the only other outsider who has met her is a Colombian journalist. I see that she wants to tell her side of the story, to defend her children, to argue the armed group has been good for the region. She gives me a CD of songs in homage to Don Ye and pamphlets in which the armed group says they “provide order”. She later sends me a video of David’s funeral. Two weeks later, another armed group in the city attacks her house, leading to a massive shootout between fighters from David’s group and this rival outfit.

**A Deal Unravels**
As time goes by, it’s clear that the demobilisation deal I witnessed on my first visit is not working out. When the big day for the dissident groups to disarm comes in March 2017, only 128 of the 330 people on the list show up to hand in their weapons. Soon afterward, the 200 who didn’t disarm start attacking those who did. By October 2017, most of those who demobilised are back to fighting. The violence between these now-divided groups quickly becomes worse than ever before. Too much of what I see in Tumaco as I continue to return follows a similar rhythm – progress toward tampering down on criminal networks and violence is often illusory and impermanent.

Leaving the airstrip after my most recent trip in June, my head is still filled with questions. I came to Tumaco initially to focus on whether the FARC dissidents maintained something of their guerrilla ideology, but instead I found that many people in the region are occupied with something more basic: struggling to make enough money to buy food. I wonder how even the most patriotic members of the security services can face their jobs when the scale of the problems is so enormous. Coca eradication and burning drug labs seem like sound plans in air-conditioned meeting rooms and faraway capitals, but how can they be defended when they cannot accomplish their objectives on the ground? And what does a war on drugs mean in a region where right now the only economy that counts is the drug economy? A simplistic approach to eradicating the drug trade seems doomed to fail in Tumaco. Bogotá and the donors that support it need to create a licit economy that presents an alternative—no easy task either.

The questions will keep multiplying. But thanks to the unique access the people of Tumaco are granting me, I am now being given ever more ways to argue that the causes of Colombia’s still rumbling conflicts are not just guerrillas, crime and the international cocaine trade. **These challenges are all very real, but they are also linked to problems that run even deeper — a precarious licit economy, the very limited presence of a state unable to respond to local needs, and people’s search for survival in a harsh, unpredictable environment.**

ICG, "Calming the Restless Pacific: Violence and Crime on Colombia’s Coast,” Report 76 / Latin America & Caribbean 8 August 2019, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/076-calming-restless-pacific-violence-and-crime-colombias-coast?utm_source=Sgn+Up+to+Crisis+Group%26s+Updates&utm_campaign=6e46c9398f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_08_08_10_25&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-6e46c938df-359871089, commented, “Three years after the FARC peace deal, Colombia’s Pacific region has seen surges of both dissident guerrilla activity and drug-related crime. To better aid this historically neglected area, the state should expand its presence, speed up development projects and improve educational opportunities for all.

**What’s new?** Violence, coca production and drug trafficking have spiked along Colombia’s Pacific coast since the 2016 peace agreement between the government and FARC guerrillas. New and old armed groups battle for control over communities, territory and illegal business, triggering ongoing displacement and low-intensity warfare.

**Why does it matter?** Long one of Colombia’s poorest and most peripheral regions, the Pacific’s struggles highlight huge difficulties in improving security without addressing economic and political roots of armed group recruitment and the co-option of communities by organised crime.

**What should be done?** Instead of depending on a counter-insurgency strategy or a “kill/capture” policy to dismantle armed groups, the Colombian government should prioritise building a stable, trustworthy civilian police and state presence, demobilising combatants, fulfilling its peace accord promises on local development and coca substitution, and furnishing educational opportunities for local people.

**Executive Summary**
Colombia’s Pacific is struggling to cope with conflict and violent crime festering amid extremes of poverty, squallor and neglect. More than any region of the country, the Pacific states have seen the 2016 peace deal with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) sullied and spoilt by dissident ex-guerrillas, a resurgent National Liberation Army (ELN) insurgency, and a booming drug trade rooted in huge concentrations of coca and easy access to ocean trading routes. For President Iván Duque’s centre-right government, the most fitting response to armed violence in the Pacific and elsewhere has been to toughen law enforcement. This approach has led to the killings of several wanted leaders, but has not addressed the conditions that drive underemployed men to criminality or armed groups. Establishing a stable and
trustworthy police and state presence, demobilising these groups, fulfilling the peace accord’s promises and enhancing educational opportunities are critical steps to stopping the treadmill pushing young Colombians into armed violence.

Races such as Tumaco, a waterside town in Colombia’s extreme south-west, the port city of Buenaventura or the department of Chocó have become synonymous with the grisly peaks and troughs of hostilities among armed factions. Since the FARC peace accord, myriad other groups – successor schisms of the guerrilla movement, the ELN, local outposts of the Gaitanista drug cartel and other criminal clans – have exploited local people’s grievances toward political elites, provided opportunities in the drug trade or other illegal businesses, and deployed raw firepower to co-opt and coerce communities. A largely Afro-Colombian and indigenous population, already enduring some of the country’s highest poverty rates, has borne the cost. High murder rates, mass displacement or forced confinement of populations, sexual violence and the murder of community leaders show few signs of abating.

The Spanish colonial state, whose representatives were primarily located in the country’s Andean highlands, long neglected the Pacific and handed it over to mining interests reliant on imported slave labour. Afro-Colombian communities, and to a lesser extent indigenous peoples, make up most of the Pacific population, while the state’s reach and public services remain feeble: only 0.4 per cent of school students in the region go to university, compared to 30 per cent nationwide, and even then local public universities are oversubscribed. The region has, however, transformed rapidly in one respect. Buenaventura port, which handles 60 per cent of goods coming into and out of Colombia, has undergone extraordinary modernisation and expansion, becoming a major source of tax revenue. At the same time, locals have been exposed to the country’s highest rates of homicide and forced disappearances, due mostly to the city’s growing drug trade.

Successive governments have recognised the ongoing failings in the state’s approach to the Pacific, promising local development, infrastructure improvements and expanded public services. The FARC peace accord added to these pledges the promise of economic investments based on public consultations, as well as a voluntary coca crop substitution scheme. Mass protests against chronic state neglect in Buenaventura in 2017 paralysed the port for three weeks and only stopped after the government pledged a further $3.5 billion for local development. But the scale of the economic divide separating the Pacific from the rest of the country, the weaknesses and corruption of local authorities, and the preference of some officials in Bogotá for investments that boost Colombia’s trading competitiveness with little regard for their local impact, mean the region is unlikely to see the fruits of these efforts for decades.

Meanwhile, President Duque’s government has opted for a tougher approach. Security forces have killed several dissident FARC leaders, while authorities have ended negotiations with the ELN. Bogotá has embraced a return to counter-insurgency through so-called “Strategic Zones of Comprehensive Intervention”, involving coordinated civil and military efforts to clear areas of armed groups and entrench state control; Tumaco is one of the first such zones. The government has bolstered forced coca eradication, and is keen to return to aerial fumigation.

But it risks replicating the patchy record of previous interventions unless it can staunch the flow of young men into armed groups proffering status and riches, establish credible law enforcement in violent areas and instil greater trust in state institutions. Essential to these efforts are policies that would ensure a stable presence for civilian police and state institutions; enhance opportunities for combatants from dissident guerrilla or criminal groups to demobilise, as has happened already in Tumaco; fulfil the peace accord’s pledges on local development, coca substitution and alternative rural livelihoods; and ensure far greater access to education in a region where it is scant.

Latin America’s Pacific rim stands out as one of its fastest-growing, most buoyant regions. Colombia’s coastal residents, however, have so far seen few of the benefits from the trading boom and many of the drawbacks. Regrettably, its people are used to hardship and neglect. If the Colombian authorities wish to improve their lives and reduce the region’s rampant violence and displacement in more than a fitful fashion, they should train their eyes on reducing the causes that make a life in arms seem so attractive.”

“Venezuelan special forces have carried out thousands of extrajudicial killings in the past 18 months and then manipulated crime scenes to make it look as if the victims had been resisting arrest, the United Nations said on Thursday in a report detailing wide-ranging government abuses targeting political opponents.

Special Action Forces described by witnesses as ‘death squads’ killed 5,287 people in 2018 and another 1,569 by mid-May of this year, in what are officially termed by the Venezuelan government ‘Operations for the Liberation of the People,’ United Nations investigators reported.”

Anatoly Kurmanaev and Isayen Herrera, “Venezuela’s Maduro Cracks Down on His Own Military in Bid to Retain Power,” The New York Times, August 13, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/13/world/americas/venezuela-military-maduro.html, reported. “Top military leaders have repeatedly declared their allegiance to the Maduro administration. But over the past two years, as the oil-rich economy crumbled and a majority of Venezuelans were left without sufficient food and medicine, factions within the security forces have staged at least five attempts to overthrow or assassinate the president.” Anyone in the military known or suspected of being disloyal to President Maduro has been treated extremely harshly, often with extreme torture and death.

Anatoly Kurmanaev and Isayen Herrera, Fuel Shortage Is Crippling Agriculture in Venezuela: Already facing a deep economic crisis, the country is seeing food production shrink drastically as mismanagement and American sanctions make gasoline scarce,” The New York Times, July 6, 2019, “In Venezuela, where hunger is rampant, a farmer recently had to abandon his entire crop. Guiding a pair of oxen, he drew a wooden plow over his field, turning over thousands of shriveled carrots.

The trucks that would pick up his harvest never came, he said.

A fuel shortage has been gripping the country since May, bringing the nation’s already struggling agriculture industry to the brink of collapse and threatening more hunger and malnutrition in a nation where nearly half the population is already eating fewer than three meals a day.”


Principal Findings
What’s new? A year after countering a civic uprising with lethal force, President Daniel Ortega’s government has reached agreement with Nicaragua’s opposition on two issues: releasing all political prisoners and strengthening citizens’ rights. Despite significant progress on these fronts, talks about electoral reforms and justice remain on hold.

Why does it matter? Nicaragua’s economy is collapsing and Ortega faces deepening international isolation. But he still can resolve the crisis through dialogue. The alternative would likely be renewed clashes between state and opposition supporters and expanded international sanctions.

What should be done? President Ortega and the opposition should fully implement their existing agreements and convene a third round of talks to tackle pending issues. The U.S., OAS and EU should welcome the advances, while making clear that if the government fails to meet its promises they will impose further costs on it.

Executive Summary
A chance still exists to resolve Nicaragua’s simmering crisis peacefully. Talks between the government and opposition have been on-and-off, and marked throughout by a legacy of deep mutual suspicion following last year’s brutal crackdown on street protests. Even so, under mounting international pressure and facing a severe economic downturn, President Ortega invited the opposition to resume
dialogue in February. The two sides reached agreement on two issues: the release of hundreds of political prisoners and a commitment by Managua to respect citizens’ basic rights. While major progress has been made, these still need to be fully implemented under international supervision for talks – currently on hold – to resume. The end result should be a broader settlement that meets both sides’ core interests: a more level playing field in early elections and justice for the victims of last year’s violence for the opposition movements, and a return to stability, lifting of existing sanctions and a lowering of tensions, both domestically and with international partners, for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) government.

The Nicaraguan crisis erupted in April 2018, when unpopular social security reforms prompted mass demonstrations that police and para-police units met with lethal violence. However, fragile channels of communication between the two sides remained open and, unlike similar contacts between the government and opposition in Venezuela, at times relatively productive. In March, both sides agreed that those detained in connection to last year’s uprising be released, charges against them dropped and that the government would restore citizens’ rights, including those of peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. However, they made no more progress before 3 April, the deadline they had set for this round of negotiations, and talks have remained in limbo since. On 20 May, the opposition said it would withdraw from further negotiations until the government releases all prisoners. Since then, the government has freed almost all remaining prisoners – a move that the opposition applauded – and passed an amnesty law to annul charges against them.

Fresh talks toward a comprehensive deal are critical to avoiding another escalation and should happen soon. The opposition and international actors should welcome the government’s prisoner releases thus far, while seeking clarification on the status of 200 other reported prisoners and the legal charges most of those released still face. Opposition factions should bridge internal divides and develop a more coordinated strategy and realistic demands, recognising that the next round of talks may be prolonged, President Ortega will likely not resign and elections, even if held early, will not take place within months. The Organization of American States (OAS), EU and U.S. should maintain the threat of further sanctions if the government impedes progress. Sanctions, if they become necessary, should be calibrated: multilateral not unilateral, targeted at key officials and businesses, and paired with benchmarks for how they could be lifted. To monitor compliance with accords, regional and multilateral bodies, including human rights delegations, should be allowed back into Nicaragua.

Assuming the parties resume talks, they should aim for agreements on two core issues:

Credible and possibly early elections, albeit not prior to late 2020 in order to allow sufficient time for essential electoral reforms. These should draw on past agreements between the government and OAS, and include reform of the Supreme Electoral Court.

The establishment of a Truth Commission composed of both opposition and government-appointed representatives, potentially with international expert participation. Its mandate should go beyond investigating and ensuring accountability for last year’s violence by assessing the root causes of Nicaragua’s recurring cycles of armed conflict.

President Ortega agreed to resume talks almost certainly in order to preserve his rule at a moment of acute economic and political weakness; much of his negotiating strategy has been to stretch talks as much as possible and exhaust the opposition. This approach is risky, since opposition and foreign powers could lose patience, leading to a heightening of the regional and international pressure Ortega is determined to lessen. In releasing most political prisoners, Ortega himself appears to have opted for the wiser course. He should now build on this commendable gesture, fully implement existing agreements and seek a lasting settlement that could help his government escape international condemnation and fresh sanctions, prevent worsening economic distress and stave off future unrest.”

major headache for much of Latin America. Regional governments should seek to find common ground and coordinate their efforts with the EU’s International Contact Group to push for a negotiated transition.

**What’s new?** Venezuela’s political and economic crisis has split Latin America, debilitated its regional organisations and spurred a mass exodus that is overwhelming under-resourced public services in Colombia and elsewhere. The failed 30 April uprising in Caracas and the humanitarian effects of U.S. sanctions underline the urgency of a negotiated settlement.

**Why does it matter?** Deadlock in Caracas, deep political polarisation within and among Latin American states, and growing tensions among powers such as the U.S., Russia and China raise the real danger of worsening unrest in Venezuela, cross-border instability and military escalation.

**What should be done?** Latin American states close to Venezuela’s two sparring camps should join forces with the EU’s International Contact Group and others to push for a negotiated transition, enabling pragmatic Venezuelans to transcend the impasse, form a cross-party government and pave the way to fresh elections.

I. Overview

Few issues are more contentious in today’s Latin America than Venezuela and its multifaceted crisis, marked on 30 April by a sudden and short-lived uprising. On one side are governments supportive of chavismo, the movement established by Venezuela’s late president, Hugo Chávez, that has run the country for the past twenty years; on the other are the majority of states, which regard Chávez’s successor Nicolás Maduro as a dictator who is destabilising the region. The stark polarisation has already caused havoc in Latin America’s regional cooperation institutions. One of them, the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), is effectively dead after a decade of existence. Another, the Organization of American States (OAS), is deeply fractured.

Possibly the most active regional forum is now the Lima Group of fourteen countries (including Canada), created in August 2017 with the purported aim of restoring Venezuelan democracy. The Lima Group recognises opposition leader and National Assembly chair Juan Guaidó as Venezuela’s interim president. Many of its members expressed support for the opposition leadership’s bid, backed by a handful of soldiers, to restore “constitutional order” in the April uprising. Meanwhile, the Latin American countries that continue to support Maduro – Bolivia, Cuba and Nicaragua – find themselves increasingly on the receiving end of threatening rhetoric from U.S. officials and eager for support from major extra-regional powers Russia and China. The Venezuelan embassies lying empty in certain countries of the Americas illustrate the diplomatic no man’s land between these two sides: most countries have ejected Maduro’s diplomats and welcomed Guaidó’s emissaries, but the latter have neither money nor any real authority.

Divisions on Venezuela also run deep within countries. From the moment he took power in 1999, Chávez has split Latin American public opinion in two, and Maduro has only widened the fissure. Election after election across the region has been coloured by polemics over how close leftist candidates are to Chávez and Maduro. The alignment between the current Venezuelan opposition leadership and the Trump administration, with its anachronistic bombast about rolling back socialism and invoking the Monroe Doctrine, has only sharpened the polarisation, allowing much of the left to paint the conflict as an effort to resist an imperialist U.S., of which Guaidó is branded as a mere puppet.

As Venezuela’s economic turmoil and political crackdown worsen, their impact on the domestic concerns of other Latin American countries has grown more complex. Well over three million people have fled the country, with most of them relocating within the region, above all in Colombia, Peru and Ecuador. Elsewhere, although absolute numbers are much smaller, the scale of the exodus relative to the size of local populations is sometimes even greater. The Venezuelans’ presence has put a burden on inadequate and under-resourced public services, generating increasing xenophobia that has been exploited by local politicians and alarmed national governments, spurred tighter border controls and led to violent flare-ups, such as those in the north-eastern Brazilian state of Roraima in August 2018 and the Ecuadorian city of Ibarra in January this year.

As we show below, each country has its own ideological, diplomatic and domestic motives for its positions toward Maduro and Guaidó. States on the front line of Venezuela’s humanitarian emergency – the Andean countries, Brazil and Panama – wish for an urgent change of government in Caracas, but they fear the effects upon their territories of deepening instability or any outside military intervention of the kind increasingly suggested by Washington. Political leaders in other countries line up on two sides, some
international actors need to show willingness to compromise; potential domestic spoilers need to be neutralised; and deeply polarised states most affected by the spillover from Venezuela have a considerable stake in preventing the crisis from worsening, while those trying to mediate the political conflict enjoy the Maduro government’s trust to a greater or lesser degree. The weight of Latin American support for a peaceful, negotiated settlement will depend to a large extent on whether some from within these two groups of states can join forces in seeking a credible peace process in Venezuela. Only one Lima Group country, Costa Rica, is currently a member of the International Contact Group. But the Lima Group’s announcement on 3 May that it is seeking an urgent meeting with the Contact Group suggests that others are considering joining or backing this initiative. Broader Latin American support for this or another comparable mediation effort is essential to increase pressure on all sides in Venezuela for negotiations that will avoid violent conflict, restore representative, inclusive politics and pave the way for credible elections.”


What’s new? After a failed opposition uprising to oust Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in April, a discreet diplomatic effort by Norway now offers the best prospect for finding a peaceful negotiated settlement to the country’s political crisis and averting more violence and instability.

Why does it matter? Venezuela’s economy is in freefall, infrastructure is failing apart and millions have fled. Without a negotiated solution, the risks of violence will multiply and threaten to spill over regionally. A small window of opportunity has opened but could close again at any moment.

What should be done? Pragmatic elements on both sides should seize this fleeting opportunity to seek a compromise solution including early, free, fair and internationally monitored elections and guarantees against a winner-take-all outcome. External allies of government and opposition, together with more neutral international actors, should back these efforts and coordinate their support.

Executive Summary

The Venezuelan opposition’s failed bid to topple President Nicolás Maduro on 30 April presents a fleeting opportunity to reach a negotiated settlement to the country’s costly political and economic crisis. The uprising ended ignominiously, as not a single military unit ultimately backed Juan Guaidó, the chair of the National Assembly whose claim to the interim presidency on 23 January has been recognised by dozens of countries. This failure dashed hopes of a swift victory among the opposition and its external backers. But the events also shook the government, already reeling from catastrophic economic conditions, as they exposed serious internal rifts. With polls suggesting a majority of Venezuelans back a peaceful resolution and with renewed international attention to the crisis, talks brokered by Norway offer the best (albeit slender) chance for a solution. To that end, pragmatic elements on both sides need to show willingness to compromise; potential domestic spoilers need to be neutralised; and deeply polarised international actors need to show flexibility and fully back Norway’s initiative.
Venezuela’s crisis has reached epic proportions. Its hyperinflationary economy is in freefall; at the end of May, the Central Bank admitted GDP had shrunk by nearly 48 per cent from 2013-2018 and that inflation last year topped 130,000 per cent. Independent estimates are gloomier. Spill-over effects are equally catastrophic: Colombia and other Latin American countries must contend with the bulk of a migrant exodus that, to date, totals four million Venezuelans. Worse may yet come. Awash in weapons, the country also is home to many armed groups, including paramilitaries popularly known as colectivos, organised criminal gangs and current and former guerrillas from Colombia’s National Liberation Army (ELN) and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebel groups, raising the possibility of a bloody internal conflict in the absence of a political settlement.

At this point, no party should have reason to feel confident. Predictions of Maduro’s early exit proved wildly premature, as repeated efforts to persuade the armed forces to break with the government fell flat. As time goes by, the opposition will increasingly bear the brunt of both growing public impatience and recurring internal fissures. While this may give the government and its supporters, known as chavistas, satisfaction, they too are under pressure. They remain highly unpopular, are reeling under sweeping U.S. sanctions, including those seeking to cut off Venezuela’s oil revenue, and learned on 30 April that significant government figures had been conspiring with the opposition.

The two sides’ external allies can hardly feel more optimistic. For the Trump administration, the events of 30 April must have come as a significant wake-up call, exposing the distance between expectations and reality. Others tied to the opposition doubtless feel similarly disillusioned and, for those in the region, increasingly worried about the risks of a protracted crisis. Russia, China and Cuba, the government’s main partners, may well have been pleased by the failure of the uprising, but they can be under no illusion that the crisis can be resolved absent a negotiated solution. Recouping their economic investment in Venezuela doubtless will require a new government and an end to sanctions.

In short, the Oslo process – which was already under way prior to 30 April, and has seen two rounds of negotiations since then – has come at the right moment. Whether the parties fully realise that is another question. Indeed, both still seem to feel that time is on their side. Every day it continues to hold power is seen as a victory by the government; every day the government demonstrates its inability to resolve the crisis or break out of its isolation is viewed as a success by the opposition. Their positions remain far apart, not least on the question of whether and when Maduro should resign, the timing and conditions of new elections, and the issue of lifting U.S. sanctions. The opposition is deeply sceptical of the government’s good faith. The government fears the opposition wants to wipe out chavismo. The past weighs heavily too: three previous attempts at domestic dialogue since 2014 were scuppered by political differences, government unwillingness to make or implement any major concession, and opposition divisity. Hardliners in both camps are watching closely.

Still, Venezuela’s unprecedented economic and humanitarian collapse, coupled with the sense shared by many that neither side can win, and that violent escalation could ensue, has encouraged a degree of pragmatism among some elements in both camps. On the still-polarised international scene there are also tid signs, if not of outright convergence, at least of diminishing divergence. The International Contact Group for Venezuela, jointly chaired by the European Union and Uruguay, is building global support for a negotiated settlement ending in fresh elections, and has courted Latin American countries opposed to Maduro as well as regime allies such as China, Cuba and Russia. Washington, for its part, has all but dropped dangerous hints of a military intervention, while regime allies profess to support negotiations.

Elements of a potential deal can be divided into three baskets. First are necessary pre-electoral confidence-building measures that, on the government side, could include releasing political prisoners, allowing exiled politicians to return, winding down the chavista-controlled National Constituent Assembly and restoring some of the opposition-controlled National Assembly’s powers and, on the opposition’s, support for sanctions relief to address the most urgent humanitarian issues. A second phase would entail election-related measures to ensure a level-playing field, including reconstituting an impartial National Electoral Council, reforming the Supreme Court, registering diaspora Venezuelans on electoral rolls, and, of critical importance to chavismo, lifting at least some significant U.S. economic sanctions. Finally, a third package would comprise post-electoral guarantees, including power-sharing arrangements and other measures to ensure the system is not winner-take-all. Potential steps include restoring
proportional representation in legislative elections, reintroducing presidential term limits, and reinstating an upper chamber to provide checks and balances, along with assurances that chavistas will not face persecution or marginalisation if they lose power and that the military will remain intact and its interests protected.

At this writing, a third meeting in Barbados – is under way, but Guaidó faces pressure from sceptical harder-line opposition elements who insist that Maduro must go before negotiations restart. Such a position is untenable, but the government – which initiated a widespread crackdown after 30 April, arresting the deputy chair of the National Assembly and forcing many MPs into hiding or exile by announcing the lifting of their parliamentary immunity – has done little to encourage flexibility on the opposition side. The release of several dozen political prisoners in response to the 19-21 June visit of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet was accompanied by more arrests and, on 29 June, by the death after interrogation of a detained naval officer.

Reaching a deal in Barbados will mean not only agreeing on the elements outlined above, but also overcoming objections from actors who are not in Barbados: hardliners (those on the government side who fear losing everything if power change hands, or those in the opposition who view talks as a means used to buy time by an autocratic government on the verge of collapse); the U.S. (some of whose punishing sanctions will have to be lifted in advance of elections); Cuba (which the U.S. accuses of playing a pivotal role in propping up Maduro); and Venezuela’s armed forces (which have considerable economic and institutional interests they will want preserved).

Venezuela has witnessed enough false starts in prior negotiations to warrant a high degree of doubt about the outcome of the current talks. But conditions for a settlement are as good as they have been. To help get there, Venezuela’s public should both pressure its leaders and give them the political space necessary for compromise, while external actors should seek to coordinate their positions in favour of Norway’s efforts. The alternative to an agreement risks being an entrenched political status quo amid deteriorating humanitarian conditions and heightened refugee flows or, worse, all-out violent conflict. Barbados represents the country’s best hope, and the window may not remain open for long.”

Anatoly Kurmanaev, "Venezuela’s Leader Suspends Talks With Opposition," The New York Times, August 8, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/08/world/americas/venezuela-maduro-opposition-talks-barbados.html, reported, "President Nicolás Maduro of Venezuela has suspended mediated talks with his country’s opposition movement, to protest the Trump administration’s latest sanctions. The move threatens what many analysts and diplomats consider to be the country’s best chance of ending a crippling political and economic crisis."

ICG, Bram Ebus, Consultant, "Venezuela’s Mining Arc: A Legal Veneer for Armed Groups to Plunder, "Op-Ed / Latin America & Caribbean 8 June 2019, Originally published in The Guardian, https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/venezuela/venezuelas-mining-arc-legal-veneer-armed-groups-plunder?utm_source=Sign+Up+to+Crisis+Group%27s+Email+Updates&utm_campaign=7e52674a82-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_01_28_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_1dab8c11ea-7e52674a82-359871089, commented, "Late 2016, Nicolás Maduro tweeted a photograph of himself with a smile on his face and a gleaming ingot in his hands – but not all that glitters is gold. Venezuela claims to possess some of the largest untapped gold and coltan reserves in the world, and the country’s gold rush picked up when the president decreed the creation of a massive area of 112,000 sq km destined for mining, known as the Orinoco mining arc. In a recently published development plan Venezuela set the goal to produce more than 80,000 kilos of gold a year by 2025. The project, launched in February 2016, was supposed to drive development, but many mining projects announced by the government have failed to materialize, and the mining arc now seems little more than a legal veneer for plunder by an expanding range of armed groups.

Multiple non-state armed groups are spreading their hold over southern Venezuela, adding another unpredictable factor to the country’s current crisis – and complicating any efforts for a peaceful resolution.
Their methods and origins may be different, but their motivation is one which has driven violence in Latin America since colonial times: a hunger for gold and other valuable minerals.

Venezuelan crime syndicates have run informal mines for years. More recently, Colombian guerrillas – dissidents from the now-demobilized Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Farc) and members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) – have expanded their reach hundreds of miles into Venezuela.

The groups are deeply entrenched in local communities, and often work in volatile alliances with parts of the military who privately profit from illegal mining.

At least 300,000 people work at wildcat mines which have caused huge environmental damage, and sparked a malaria epidemic.

Confrontations between the rival armed groups make southern Venezuela one of the most violent regions in Latin America. 'Everybody wants to be boss,' explained a former miner who fled to Colombia to avoid the escalating violence.

Numerous sources confirm the army’s participation in illicit mining and report that military death squads have occasionally entered mines to settle disputes. Most killings go unrecorded, but local media have reported more than a dozen massacres since 2016. Municipalities in the mining region cope with homicide far above that of Caracas, the world’s most violent capital city.

Of these factions, the ELN is one of the most prominent, operating in 13 of Venezuela’s 24 states and extending its reach across the southern mining regions to form a corridor across Venezuela to near its disputed border with Guyana.

The ELN’s tactical and ideological alignment with the Venezuelan government is grist to the mill for those arguing for a military intervention against Maduro.

But any foreign incursion could potentially trigger a disastrous escalation of violence, possibly leading to a low-intensity conflict that would cause tremendous suffering for Venezuela’s most vulnerable populations.

The ELN is now Latin America’s biggest guerrilla army, and has vowed to defend Maduro’s government in the event of a foreign intervention.

Local sources have described how the guerrillas embed themselves in local communities, giving political and military training.

'They make [the locals] fall in love, offer them weapons and they indoctrinate them,' said one indigenous leader from Bolivar state. As in Colombia, the rebels intervene in local disputes and offer a measure of authority in lawless areas – wildcat miners confirm that they prefer the presence of the guerrillas over the brutal and less tolerant Venezuelan crime syndicates.

So what should be done? The freedom with which armed groups operate south of the Orinoco river reflects the weakness of the Venezuelan state. But threats of foreign military intervention will simply embolden the guerrillas and strengthen their ties to Caracas.

Humanitarian aid is essential for the inhabitants of the region, but its safe entry will depend on the Venezuelan government’s consent – and will not be served by the sort of forced entry attempted in February.

The communities facing the most urgent humanitarian needs are remote and indigenous populations in the south, which are already suffering from epidemics and shortages. Food shortages are exacerbated by the dependence on gold as currency in mining towns.

Outside actors should work to clean up Venezuelan mineral supply chains. Foreign states should enforce due diligence frameworks on mineral exporters and commodity exchanges to minimize risks that they buy minerals that finance conflict and human rights abuses.

For now, the extraction of gold, coltan and other minerals funds armed groups and harms indigenous communities. Even the minerals that are sold by Venezuelan state companies and the Venezuelan central bank (BCV) stem in part from the same mines controlled by armed groups and should therefore be classified as conflict minerals.

Forgotten parts of southern Venezuela are of key importance to the political future of the country. Communities abandoned by the state – and the armed groups that prey on them – merit more concern from international actors disputing Venezuela’s future. Peace in Venezuela cannot be achieved without taking the south into account.”
U.S. and Canadian Developments


It also raised concerns that the Saudis could gain access to technology that would let them produce their own versions of American precision-guided bombs — weapons they have used in strikes on civilians since they began fighting a war in Yemen four years ago."

David E. Sanger and Nicole Perlroth, "U.S. Escalates Online Attacks on Russia’s Power Grid," The New York Times, June 15, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/15/us/politics/trump-cyber-russia-grid.html, reported, "The United States is stepping up digital incursions into Russia’s electric power grid in a warning to President Vladimir V. Putin and a demonstration of how the Trump administration is using new authorities to deploy cybertools more aggressively, current and former government officials said."

Ivan Nechepurenko"Kremlin Warns of Cyberwar After Report of U.S. Hacking Into Russian Power Grid," The New York Times, June 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/17/world/europe/russia-us-cyberwar-grid.html, reported, "The Kremlin warned on Monday that reported American hacking into Russia’s electric power grid could escalate into a cyberwar with the United States, but insisted that it was confident in the system’s ability to repel electronic attacks."

And yet again a major mass shooting in the U.S. makes the headlines (while many, now all too common, do not make national news), as 12 Baltimore civil servants were shot to death, allegedly by a coworker, in their city office building, May 31 (Alan Blinder, Glenn Thrush and Sandra E. Garcia, Virginia Beach Shooting: A City Grieves Its Workers a Day After Horror," The New York Times, June 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/01/us/virginia-beach-shooting.html).

And again: Simon Romero, Manny Fernandez and Mariel Padilla, "Massacre at a Crowded Walmart in Texas Leaves 20 Dead," The New York Times, August 3, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/03/us/el-paso-shooting.html, reported, "A 21-year-old gunman armed with a powerful rifle turned a crowded Walmart store in this majority-Hispanic border city [of el Paso, TX] into a scene of chaos and bloodshed on Saturday, stalked shoppers in the aisles in an attack that left at least 20 people dead and 26 others wounded, the authorities said.

"The authorities identified the gunman as Patrick Crusius, from a Dallas suburb. He was taken into custody after he surrendered to the police outside the Walmart. The authorities said they were investigating a manifesto Mr. Crusius, who is white, may have posted before the shooting, which described an attack in response to "the Hispanic invasion of Texas."

The manifesto mirrored racist language used by President Trump in tweets, as has occurred by other shooters.


And among the many more smaller and less spectacular mass shootings, about once a week, that do not make headlines, Manny Fernandez, Neil Vigdor and Christopher Mele "Texas Shooting Leaves 7 Dead and At Least 21 Injured Near Odessa," The New York Times, September 1, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/31/us/odessa-shootings.html, reported, "Seven people were killed
and at least 21 others were injured in a brazen daylight drive-by mass shooting in the West Texas cities of Midland and Odessa on Saturday, as a gunman drove on the highways and streets opening fire on residents, motorists and shoppers, the authorities said.

Kevin Roose, ""Shut the Site Down," Says the Creator of 8chan, a Megaphone for Gunmen," The New York Times, August 4, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/technology/8chan-shooting-manifesto.html, reported, "In recent months, 8chan has become a go-to resource for violent extremists. At least three mass shootings this year — including the mosque killings in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the synagogue shooting in Poway, Calif. — have been announced in advance on the site, often accompanied by racist writings that seem engineered to go viral on the internet."

U.S. treatment of immigrants coming and attempting to come into the U.S. across its southern border has continued to be a major issue with several complaints of violations of human rights, first of denying entry or asylum to those deserving it, and even more serious, separating families and incarcerating children under inhumane conditions. Despite court orders not separate families, and a year after President Trump officially ended family separations, as of the end of July 2019, an additional 900 separations and detentions of children have occurred. Protests against the practice have been rising, including pressure on firms and individuals not to provide goods and services to ICE or the private firms operating detention centers. Some firms have stopped doing so (Miriam Jordan, "No More Family Separations, Except These 900," The New York Times, July 30, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/30/us/migrant-family-separations.html).

Frances Robles and Alejandra Rosa, "The People Can't Take It Anymore": Puerto Rico Erupts in a Day of Protests," The New York Times, July 22, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/22/us/puerto-rico-protests-politics.html, reported, "Hundreds of thousands of people swept through the capital of Puerto Rico on Monday, shutting down a major highway and paralyzing much of the city in the latest in a series of furlous protests over the island's embattled governor, Ricardo A. Roselló. The protest was one of the largest ever seen on the island, as Puerto Ricans streamed into the capital on buses — and some on planes from the mainland — in a spontaneous eruption of fury over the years of recession, mismanagement, natural disaster and corruption that have fueled a recent exodus."

"Oregon Becomes Second State in Nation to Support Nuclear Ban Treaty," Veterans for peace, July 25, 2019, https://www.veteransforpeace.org/pressroom/news/2019/07/25/oregon-becomes-second-state-nation-support-nuclear-ban-treat?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=6be9ca63-feb9-4c5f-ac83-ca92424e6f71, reported, "Today, Oregon's House of Representatives voted to approve Senate Joint Memorial 5 (SJM 5), which urges congress to lead a global effort to reduce the threat of nuclear war, making it the second state in the nation after California to pass such legislation in both chambers. The bill passed the Oregon Senate on May 20th.

Navajo Nation held a Navajo Nation healing ceremony, in July 2019, with members of all branches of the Nation's government participating, to heal the frustrations, resentments and other negative feelings that occur in the course of governing and to restore a feeling of unity and collaboration. [Ceremony alone will not overcome disharmony, but it plays a useful role in doing so that the U.S. and many state and local governments might note] (Rima Kinst, "Healing the Nation ceremony launched summer cession," Navajo Times, July 17, 2019).
DIALOGUING

AN E-MAIL NOTE ON INVESTMENT BANKS AND FOSSIL FUELS

Ted Cloak, tcloak@unm.edu

The big investment banks, a/k/a Wall Street, are deeply invested in fossil fuel securities. Their executives and directors, and the members of Congress they support, sincerely believe four things:

1. If we stop extracting and selling oil and gas, those investments will become worthless. The banks will fail, as in 2008 or even 1929.
2. If that happens, the economy will crash, throwing the country into chaos.
3. It is much more important, and necessary, to save the economy than to try to stop the onrushing climate catastrophe.
4. They must therefore use every resource they have to prevent Progressive Democrats and other Climate Hawks from taking power in 2020.

I think we’re seeing the outcome of those beliefs in the constant denigration of Progressive Democrats and their program in the public remarks of Establishment Democrats and in the popular press.

The Banksters and the Oil Barons have unlimited funds to spend, so the Progressives must rely on very efficiently organized grassroots efforts to overcome them. The Bernie Sanders campaign has already begun such efforts.

The primary election is less than a year away.
I hope the Progressives can unite for this epic struggle very soon.

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NOT ACTING ON CLIMATE CRISIS IS AT OUR PERIL

Alon Ben-Meir,* August 14, 2019

Climate change is real and is visible for all to see. The scientific evidence is overwhelming, and denying that climate change is already upon us, especially as the president and his party does, flies in the face of the indisputably dire consequences that will be inflicted on all humanity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) special report is the final call—the most extensive warning yet on the risks of rising global temperatures and its far-reaching implications.

The US is the second-largest polluter in the world, and more than any other country it bears the responsibility to cut down on gas emissions. Moreover, the IPCC says that limiting global warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) will require “rapid, far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society.” It will be very expensive, but the window of opportunity isn’t yet closed. We must act now to avert the catastrophic impact of climate crisis before it is too late.

There are today 1,500 oil and gas firms listed on stock exchanges worldwide – together they are worth over $4.5 trillion. With everything we are doing to transition to green sources energy, fossil fuels—primarily petroleum, natural gas, and coal—still provide 80 percent of the energy consumed in the US.

Michael E. Mann, a noted climatologist and geophysicist, has observed that the science he and his colleagues does is “a threat to the world’s most powerful and wealthiest special interests.” This explains the self-serving denials of people like Trump, who choose to ignore that there is a looming disastrous climate crisis.
Mann further argues that the fossil fuel industry uses its immense resources to discredit the science and scientists, running a disinformation campaign on a global scale to mislead the public and policymakers alike. He calls this “the most villainous act in the history of human civilization, because it is about the short-term interests of a small number of plutocrats over the long-term welfare of this planet and the people who live on it.”

California offers one glaring example of climate change. Presently, the average wildfire season is 78 days longer than it was in 1970. Climate change has led to hot and dry conditions that increase the activity of wildfires. The average burned area is now much larger – as much as 600 percent in some types of forest.

Temperatures, soil moisture, and the presence of trees and other forms of fuel are all factors that impact the risk of wildfires – and they are also factors with strong direct or indirect links to climate variability and climate change. Canada is currently spending $1 billion every year to fight fires, five times what it spent in the 1990s.

Tragically, climate refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are just another facet of this crisis. People are forced to leave their homes due to “sudden or gradual alterations in their natural environment” – these alterations may be due to sea-level rise, extreme weather events (like hurricanes such as the one that battered Puerto Rico), or drought and water scarcity. The disappearance of Lake Chad in West Africa due to desertification has fostered armed conflict, which has driven more than four million people into camps.

In the United States itself, climate change has caused a large number of IDPs. Ninety percent of the population of Paradise, CA (which was mostly destroyed in last fall’s Camp Fire) has not yet been able to return to their homes. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, over 1.2 million people within the US were displaced in 2018 alone due to natural disasters, many of which are amplified by climate change.

One of the big problems is that climate refugees do not have any officially recognized definition or protections. The most vulnerable regions are sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America; studies show that by 2050, nearly 150 million people from these regions could be displaced due to climate change.

Sadly, under Brazil’s far-right president, Jair Bolsonaro, the Amazon rainforest is being cut down at an alarming pace. Protections that were in place for the past two decades are no longer enforced and the deforestation rate has risen dramatically, as the New York Times reports. In fact, the clearing and burning of forests accounts for roughly eighteen percent of all global greenhouse gas emissions due to human activity. Massive deforestation is systematically eliminating one of the best resources our planet has for absorbing carbon (trees themselves, which process carbon dioxide into oxygen), which means that what we are witnessing in the Amazon and elsewhere is a major blow against the efforts to reduce anthropogenic climate change.

Rainforests are home to the highest concentration of plants and animals found anywhere on Earth. Their rampant destruction is a human tragedy, as we are undoubtedly erasing from the earth species that are still unknown to science.

Along with the rainforests, coral reefs are among the most biodiverse ecosystems found on the planet, which protect coastlines and provide habitat and shelter to countless marine organisms, and they are now dying at a horrifying rate. Twenty seven percent of monitored reefs have been lost, and over 30 percent are at risk of being lost within the next few decades.
The reasons for this unfolding tragedy are clear enough. Coral mining, overfishing, blast fishing, pollution, warming oceans and ocean acidification are among the major contributing factors. Sylvia Earle, an American marine biologist and former chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, pointedly observes that “Half the coral reefs are still in pretty good shape, a jeweled belt around the middle of the planet. There’s still time, but not a lot, to turn things around.”

The Financial Times says “the world is on track to overshoot the targets of the Paris climate agreement” and the temperature will rise by 3 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, a level that would disrupt life around the planet. The EPA knows everything stated in this article and some, but Trump and his operatives in Congress refuse to face the climate crisis as it does not serve their twisted economic agenda. Indeed, environmental deregulation is criminal and no Republican, including the president, has the right to contaminate our air, water, and land only to make the rich richer.

Being in control of the House, the Democrats must now make climate change a national emergency. They must insist on restoring environmental regulations by attaching them to future spending bills. They must leave no stone unturned to ensure that no business can financially benefit anymore from deregulation, at the expense of the health and well-being of every American, who will suffer greatly from chronic diseases related to climate change.

Moreover, every state of the union that has not joined the 24 states in the US Climate Alliance should do so immediately and enact similar rules and regulations to address climate change hazards, consistent with the Paris Agreement.

Climate change equally impacts Democrats and Republicans alike; young and old; white and persons of color; men, women, and children; and every species. Those who are running for office, including the presidency, must be warned that unless they publicly commit to support any and all measures to address climate change, they will be held accountable and denied the votes they need to be elected.

Certainly, by defeating Trump in the next election and winning back the Senate, the Democrats, hopefully with the support of some Republicans, will be able to avert the catastrophic impact of climate change while there is still time.

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AVAVAVA

COMMENT TO THE PUGET SOUND CLEAN AIR AGENCY (PSCAA)
NOT TO PERMIT THE TACOMA LIQUIFIED GAS PROJECT

Stephen M. Sachs,* August 30, 2019

I propose strongly that the Tacoma Liquified Gas project permit should be denied for several reasons, procedural and substantive.

In terms of procedure, the project should be delayed until there is proper consultation with the Puyallup Tribal Nation who has a major interest in whether the project goes forward, and therefore must be consulted according to federal policy. To date, the Puyallup Tribal Nation has not been consulted about this project. There has yet to be required consideration about how this project will impact or affect the tribe’s health, sustainability, jurisdiction, treaty and hunting fishing rights which are protected by treaty. Since the tribe’s treaty rights are at stake, the Agency should avoid a long lawsuit over the issue and consult properly with the tribe in advance, as is required by law.
In terms of substance, though it also involves flawed procedure, the project is too dangerous to be allowed to proceed on both local and national/global grounds. Locally, liquid natural gas is a highly toxic extremely explosive substance. Leaks in pipes and storage facilities, which industry records show are common, cause serious health problems in areas surrounding such sites. If there is a sufficient leak, the gas will spread over a wide area until it ignites in a potentially extremely large and wide spread explosion. In addition to the great danger accidents, having such a facility in a populous area risks an extremely deadly attack. Experience and common sense show that no liquid natural gas facility should be built in any area in which there are people.

In this case, to date, there has been no public health impact assessment conducted for this project. The risk for pollution and toxic contamination is far too great for local communities, while the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) that was submitted for this project was flawed and used outdated science to evaluate greenhouse gas emissions.

Nationally and globally, the project should not be built because it will contribute greatly to increasing the amount of methane and carbon being put into the atmosphere increasing global warming induced climate change at a time when atmospheric warming is reaching a critical stage. Already oceans are rising threatening islands and costal areas and bringing greater and greater flooding. Extreme weather is increasingly causing major damage to people, and property - including to agricultural production in the U.S. and world-wide, as has been progressively been experienced this summer and over the last few years. Scientists are virtually unanimous that if more greenhouse gasses are put in the air the situation will become worse and soon reach a point of no return in causing world-wide catastrophe. As it is essential to stop increasing production of gas, oil and coal, and in fact reduce it, no project should be built that increases such production, as Tacoma Liquified Gas project would, if completed. Moreover, since this is the case, it is likely that if the project were begun it would soon be shut down, causing huge economic loss as well as damage to the environment with no return, that could be avoided by not beginning the project in the first place.

I urge you not to permit the project.

*Stephen M. Sachs is Professor Emeritus of Political Science, IUPUI, Senior Editor of IPJ and Coordinating Editor of Nonviolent Change.

TRUMP MUST NEVER LISTEN TO THE WARMONGER BOLTON

Alon Ben-Meir,* May 23, 2019

Waging a war against Iran, or even thinking of doing so, is sheer madness. Trump has thus far wisely rejected the warmonger National Security Advisor John Bolton’s outrageous advice. Waging another war in the Mideast, this time against Iran, would have not only disastrous consequences for the US but will also engulf our allies from which they would suffer incalculable human losses and destruction. Bolton was the architect behind the devastating war in Iraq in 2003, which inflicted more than 5,000 US casualties and a cost exceeding two trillion dollars, allowed Iran to entrench itself in Iraq, and gave way to the rise of ISIS.

The Iraq war would be child’s play compared to a war against Iran, who will put up a fight, far worse than all of the wars in the Middle East since 1948 combined. Much of the Middle East will be in flames. American casualties will be many times that of the Iraq war.

Trump should never listen to Bolton, who is being strongly influenced by Crown Prince bin Salman and Netanyahu, who seem to encourage him to attack Iran. They are dangerous men, and want to prevail over Iran at the expense of the United States by dragging it into an unwinnable war. No matter how much
death and destruction Iran will suffer, it will be there to stay. To think that regime change in Iran, as Bolton and Pompeo continue to advocate, will usher in a democracy is an illusion that will never materialize.

The US efforts to establish democracies in Egypt and Libya in the wake of the Arab spring offer glaring examples of the US' dismal failure. To resolve the conflict with Iran by toppling the clergy through the use of force is not the answer. Iran technically will lose such a war, but that in no way guarantees that regime change and democracy will follow. The answer lies through negotiation and only negotiation, until all conflicting issues that separate the US and its allies from Iran are settled peacefully.

Israel’s and Saudi Arabia’s concerns that if Iran acquired a nuclear weapon would severely compromise their national security is exaggerated at best and unfounded at worse. Even if Iran acquires such weapons, Tehran will not use them preemptively or in retaliation to a conventional attack on its nuclear facilities and high-value military assets. If Iran is actively seeking nuclear weapons, it is doing so strictly for defensive purposes, just like Israel, Pakistan, North Korea, and India.

No one knows better than the Revolutionary Guard and the clergy in Tehran that using nuclear weapons for either defensive or offensive attacks is tantamount to suicide. Israel as a nuclear power will always maintain second-strike capability and will not hesitate for a moment to respond in kind and inflict unacceptable damage from which Iran can suffer for decades.

Like any other country, Iran wants to live and prosper in peace. Yes, it has been and still is involved in many nefarious activities throughout the region. And yes, it has the ambition of becoming the region’s hegemon. But, in the final analysis, Iran will weigh the benefits versus the disadvantages that it can garner by being a constructive player in the Middle East.

However, Iran will fight with all its might against regime change imposed on it by a foreign power or otherwise. The Iranian government, led by the clergy, has every right to govern itself in any manner it chooses. Its current military preparations are only in response to the United States’ threats to use force to effect regime change. Tehran has in no way any offensive designs in mind, and Bolton cannot fool anyone otherwise. I give credit to Trump for being in fact the one who is resisting Bolton’s and Secretary of State Pompeo’s adventurous streak.

Certainly, Iran’s behavior is not acceptable. Iran must stop threatening Israel and other countries in the region, and disabuse Netanyahu in particular of the notion that Tehran is out to destroy Israel. A resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will also disabuse Iran from using that conflict to justify its enmity toward Israel.

There is no better or more urgent time than now for the EU to interject itself in an effort to ameliorate the growing tension between the United States and Iran. The EU should initiate behind-the-scenes negotiations with Iran and agree with the US on a joint cohesive strategic plan to mitigate the conflict with Iran. The new negotiations should be based on quid pro quo aiming to achieve a comprehensive deal in stages that could lead to a permanent solution.

Every conflicting issue should be placed on the table. Iran must stop meddling in the affairs of other states, freeze its research and development of ballistic missiles, and end its support of extremist groups such as Hezbollah and waging of proxy wars in Yemen and Syria. In return, the EU and the US should offer Iran a path for normalizing relations and removing sanctions, and assure it that the West will not seek regime change.

This kind of cooperation and high level of transparency will serve the objective of reaching regional stability from which Iran can benefit greatly, instead of continuing its nefarious activities which invite even more severe sanctions, and potentially a devastating war.
Neither Tehran nor Washington want war, and every party directly or indirectly affected by the conflict with Iran—especially Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf states—will greatly benefit from a new, peaceful agreement with Iran.

Trump must not engage the United States in another war in the Middle East. We have and continue to pay dearly for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, and we are still fighting the latter. Of all the promises that Trump made in his political campaign for the presidency, preventing another war is the one promise he must keep.

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**LIBYA: THE BLITZKREIG BREAKS DOWN: NEGOTIATIONS NEEDED**

Rene Wadlow,* July 18, 2019

Dozens of people were killed in an air raid on 3 July 2019 on a detention center holding migrants in a camp at Tajoura, a suburb of Tripoli according to the U.N. Support Mission in Libya. Most of those killed and wounded were Africans from Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia who had hoped to reach Europe but were blocked in Libya. Others held in the detention center had been returned to Libya, arrested trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea.

In 2018, some 15,000 persons were intercepted on boats at sea and returned to Libya, placed in detention centers without charge and with no date set for release. The detention centers are officially under the control of the Government of National Accord's Department for Combating Illegal Migration. In practice, most of the detention centers are controlled by militias. The former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights has described the conditions in these detention centers as "an outrage to the conscience of humanity."

Since the outbreak of armed conflict on the outskirts of Tripoli on 3 April 2019, many persons have been killed or wounded in what General Khalifa Hifter hoped would be a blitzkrieg advance. He badly underestimated the degree of military response that he would meet from the militias loyal to the Government of National Accord led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj. Since the blitzkrieg bogged down, in the absence of a ceasefire, the humanitarian situation is dramatically degenerating.

The dramatic conditions in Libya have a double aspect. One is the need to create a stable administrative structure of government taking into consideration the geographic and ethnic diversity of the country. The second aspect is the humane treatment of refugees and migrants from other countries who have tried to cross Libya or have been returned from failed crossings of the Mediterranean.

Therefore, the Association of World Citizens, as an immediate step, calls for a humanitarian ceasefire and the resumption of U.N.-led negotiations in good faith among a broad spectrum of Libyan political parties.

Secondly, the Association of World Citizens calls for an end of returning refugees and migrants to Libya. Other countries must welcome migrants while longer-range cooperative structures are put into place. Migration issues will continue to challenge the world society.

* Rene Wadlow is President, Association of World Citizens.
The demolition of 10 buildings by Israeli forces in the Sur Baher neighborhood in East Jerusalem today, totaling around 70 apartments, is a grave breach of international humanitarian law and sets a dangerous precedent, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said today.

The majority of the structures are located in Areas A and B, which fall under Palestinian civil control, including for planning and building matters, as designated by the Oslo Accords.

"Israel’s security arguments to justify these demolitions sets a dangerous precedent that leaves thousands at heightened risk," said NRC’s Palestine Country Director, Kate O’Rourke. “The commission of grave breaches of international humanitarian law must be challenged by the international community.”

An Israeli military order issued in 2011 designated a buffer zone of 100 to 300 meters on both sides of the separation barrier in Sur Baher and prohibited construction in the Wadi al-Hummus area of the neighborhood as a security measure. While the number of structures facing similar risk is difficult to estimate, local residents say that roughly 100 additional buildings could be at heightened risk of demolition in Sur Baher alone.

Sur Baher land in Area A, B, and C remain part of the West Bank, but the route of Israel’s separation barrier left them on the Israeli side, preventing the Palestinian Authority from accessing or delivering services to these areas. Nonetheless, the Palestinian Authority still issues building permits to the residents as permitted under the Oslo Accords.

Residents, represented by attorney Saher Ali and the Society of St. Yves, a Jerusalem-based human rights organization and local NRC partner, petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice to request the cancellation of the military order prohibiting construction or, alternatively, a reprieve from demolishing the structures. On 11 June, the court dismissed their petitions.

The developments in Sur Baher come amid renewed momentum to further entrench and tighten Israeli control over key locations across East Jerusalem. Since the beginning of the year, Israeli authorities have demolished 140 Palestinian-owned structures in the city, according to OCHA. Together with an increase in eviction cases, these demolitions point toward an intent to accelerate forcible transfer of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem and alter the demographic composition of the city.

Israel’s destruction of property in Sur Baher breaches its obligations under international humanitarian law and other peremptory norms of international law, including the duty to maintain territorial integrity and the prohibition on acquisition of territory by force.

**Background**

- On 11 June 2019, the court dismissed the petition by residents of Sur Baher, citing a "military-security justification to restrict the construction." The ruling canceled two orders, reduced four to partial demolition, and upheld six for complete destruction. The court also confirmed stop work orders against three landowners with prepared foundations for construction. According to OCHA, “the demolitions would displace three households, comprising 17 people, including nine children, and would otherwise affect an estimated 350 people.”
- On Sunday, 21 July, the High Court of Justice denied all requests to delay the demolitions. Israeli authorities declared Sur Baher a closed military zone effective from 22 to 24 July.
• The Fourth Geneva Convention outlines the protection of property in occupied territory, prohibiting any destruction of real or personal property, except when military operations render such destruction absolutely necessary. Unlawful and wanton destruction of property amounts to a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

• An advisory opinion in 2004 on the separation barrier, issued by the International Court of Justice, stated that the course Israel has chosen for the barrier was unnecessary to attain its security objectives.

• International law requires third states to take measures to ensure Israel ceases the wrongful conduct, makes full reparation for the loss, and guarantees non-repetition.

For interviews or more information, please contact: NRC's media hotline: info@nrc.no, +47 90562329.

THE STAKES HAVE NEVER BEEN HIGHER IN ISRAEL’S ELECTIONS
Shabtai Shavit and Alon Ben-Meir,* August 1, 2019

As Israel prepares for the parliamentary election in September, its second in five months, most national security experts, politically savvy individuals, and academics suggest that this election may well be the most critical since the year 2000. Since that time, the geopolitics and regional security have changed dramatically, which could lead either to regional conflagration or peace, which largely depends on who the next Israeli prime minister will be and the general political leaning of the new government.

There is a growing consensus among Israelis that if Prime Minister Netanyahu forms the next government, Israel will lose a historic opportunity to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement based on a two-state solution, in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace.

The question is, how to deprive Netanyahu and his Likud party of winning a relative majority that will allow him to form the next right-wing government—a government which would dangerously escalate regional tensions and forfeit any prospect of an Israeli-Palestinian peace for the foreseeable future.

The answer is that if Kahol Lavan (Blue and White Party), which was established last April and led by Gantz and Lapid, put the country’s national interests first by ending their personal squabbles, articulating a unity of purpose, and focusing only on national security—where they have an overwhelming advantage over Netanyahu—it can potentially defeat a Likud Party led by Netanyahu and form the next government.

Netanyahu, who is now the longest-serving prime minister since the founding of the state, has skillfully made his name synonymous with Israel’s national security. It is true that he has contributed to making Israel a regional power, but he failed to reach an Israeli-Palestinian peace, which would provide the ultimate security for the state. Instead, he resorted to fearmongering, persuading a majority of Israelis that the Palestinians cannot be trusted and that a Palestinian state will pose the greatest menace to Israel’s long-term national security.

Now, Netanyahu is running again using the same sinister technique of fearmongering, presenting himself as “Mister Security” who alone can save the country from a perilous future. After serving 11 consecutive years as prime minister, however, Netanyahu has become ever more power-hungry and corrupt. He faces possible charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust in connection with three cases. He is now fighting for his political life, hoping that his re-election will spare him from facing up to 10 years in jail if convicted.

As such, Netanyahu has now become a greater liability than an asset to Israel’s security. His vow
to never to allow the establishment of a Palestinian state under his watch and his leaning toward the annexation of the West Bank will render Israel nothing short of a garrison and apartheid state living by the gun, which is to Israel’s detriment as an independent democratic state with a sustainable Jewish majority.

This is particularly worrisome at a time when the Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, have openly allied themselves with Israel against their common enemies — Iran and Global Jihad/Radical Islam — and clearly indicated their willingness to forge peace with Israel, once an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is achieved.

Kahol Lavan must now seize the unprecedented opportunity to deny Netanyahu another term by assuming the mantra of national security. They should dramatically change Israel’s trajectory toward peace with the Palestinians, even though they are avoiding speaking about a two-state solution which most of them privately embrace, provided that Israel’s security is not compromised now or at any time in the future.

Although Israel can militarily defeat any country or a combination of countries in the region, Israel has legitimate reasons to be concerned about its national security, which is embedded in the psyche of every Israeli. These concerns can be traced back to the Holocaust, decades of enmity from the Arab states, Iran and its surrogates’ (Hezbollah and Hamas) continuing existential threats, terrorism, and future uncertainty given the region’s instability and power rivalries.

By embracing national security, they entertain unquestionable superiority in matters of security over Netanyahu, which is a prerequisite to any peace. Lieutenant General Gantz and his colleagues, former Defense Minister and Lieutenant General Moshe Ya’alon and Lieutenant General Gabi Ashkenazi have the credentials and enjoy tremendous credibility in safeguarding the country’s national security.

What is critically important, however, is that Israel’s ultimate national security rests on a permanent peace with the Palestinians. In any peace talks, they will insist that every measure must be taken to ensure the security of the state, without compromising the establishment of an independent Palestinian state that fully cooperates with Israel on all security matters.

The shifting political dynamic in the region, in addition to Egypt and Jordan’s peace with Israel, is that the majority of the Sunni Arab states recognize that Israel is the region’s superpower, with the most advanced technology, which these states desire. But above all, Israel’s military prowess provides the ultimate shield to protect them from Shiite Iran.

To be sure, Israel faces a critical crossroad and the stakes have never been higher. The leaders of Kahol Lavan stand an excellent chance to garner a relative majority and form a new coalition government with the center and left-of-center parties.

According to almost all polls, a majority of Israelis fully support the two-state solution. They want to be assured, however, that the state’s security will not be compromised with the creation of a Palestinian state but rather enhanced, especially if an Israeli-Palestinian peace is achieved in the context of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, as part of the new Middle East which is being built in front of our eyes.

Kahol Lavan, together with a block of the center-left parties, have a historic opportunity to realize it.

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TRUMP’S EMBRACE OF WHITE SUPREMACY IS POISONING AMERICA’S SOUL

Alon Ben-Men, “Trump’s Embrace of White Supremacy Is Poisoning America’s Soul” August 6, 2019

Within 13 hours, two mass shooting took place—in El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio—killing 31 innocent people and injuring twice as many. We normally hear about these horrifying incidents, express sorrow and bewilderment, talk about gun control, and move on. Politicians, including Trump, dispatch their old and tired expressions of condolences and offer prayers to console the bereaved families of the victims. But then we go about our daily routine, knowing that the next mass shooting looms as if it were a natural phenomenon like a thunderstorm, in the face of which we can do nothing. And tragically, the vicious cycle continues.

This time, however, something far more sinister and profoundly troubling is at play. Race, guns, and immigration were so artfully combined by a racist president who is sworn not to pass meaningful gun control laws to please his base, promotes racism to divide the country, and calls Hispanic immigrants “invaders” to make them targets. During the past few months, Trump spent over a million dollars on Facebook ads with the word “invasion” in big letters to spread fear among his constituents and create an atmosphere ripe for violence against people of color.

In the first 216 days of this year, 251 mass shootings took place—killing over 520 people and injuring at least 2,000. Is it just a coincidence that of the ten worst mass shootings in American history, five took place since 2016? Can anyone suggest that Trump has nothing to do with it? Leave it of course to Trump to blame the press, mental illness, and even video games of being behind the frequency of mass shootings.

Darker and more ominous days await us. Mass shootings cannot be addressed in isolation but in the context of the general environment in which we are living. The country is politically divided, our values are being stomped on, racism is consuming our social fabric, white supremacists parade their bigotry with pride, and the president contributes to the epidemic of gun violence by spreading hate to promote his political agenda.

When a president makes racism and bigotry the order of the day, and Republican leaders condone it by virtue of their silence, it poisons our social and political organs and defies the very premise on which this country was founded.

The mass shooting in El Paso was explicitly motivated by hate, claiming there is a “Hispanic invasion of Texas”. It was a hate crime targeting Hispanics, whom Trump sees as alien, rapists and criminals, taking away jobs, sapping public resources, and above all changing the color of the country. This is the message that Trump is conveying to his white supremacist followers, that America is becoming ‘browner’ and something must be done to prevent that from happening, all while pointing the finger at Hispanic immigrants as the culprits.

True, mass shootings have occurred before and may continue for years after Trump leaves office. The degree to which mass shootings slow or escalate, however, depends not only on the passage of strict gun control laws but on the action or inaction from Trump and the Republican party, because they must bear the full responsibility for the sorry state of affairs in which we find ourselves. I do not hold my breath waiting for our racist-in-chief to do anything about it.

In fact, the precise opposite will happen. At a time of looming elections, Trump will continue to drum up his racism and dehumanizing of immigrants, and use toxic language against anybody who looks Hispanic. He believes that fomenting social division is a brilliant strategy to nurture his white supremacist base which listens to him and follows his preaching. The shooter in El Paso echoed precisely Trump’s...
sentiment. And while Trump is talking about some gun control legislation, neither he nor his submissive Republican Senate will consider or debate any such laws that may alienate any segment of his followers.

While the Democratic candidates for president continue to bicker about healthcare, taxes, and climate change, however important these issues may be, they have not only ignored the need for gun control laws, but more important failed to address where the country is headed under Trump’s watch. While they labeled Trump as a racist, they have not focused on the implications of his racist utterances and how devastatingly that impacts America’s social cohesiveness and tolerance, which is the moral glue that keeps the country together.

The Republicans, on the other hand, seem to have totally abdicated their moral responsibility and resolved to enable Trump and use him to promote their socio-political and economic agenda. The fact that America’s international standing is at an all-time low and domestic social disintegration is alarmingly unfolding does not seem to bother the Republicans, who put their personal and party interest above the nation’s.

Just imagine what might happen if Trump loses the next election? Having polarized the country politically to the degree that he has, his poisonous rhetoric against people of color, concoction of a Hispanic invasion, alignment with white supremacists, and catering to his base has created an extraordinarily ominous environment that invites extremism and violence.

Although at this juncture enacting gun control laws remains critically important, they are not enough to remedy the damage that Trump has done to America. Under his watch, America has lost its soul. He has sown hatred, nurtured divisiveness, and pitted one segment of the American people against the other. Antisemitism has reached a new high, people of color are targets of disdain and discrimination, corruption and obstruction of justice is at the top, and alas, mass shootings are further escalating.

Trump will be damned by history for tearing the country apart, and as long as he is in power, we should expect that America’s values and its moral standing will continue to degrade potentially to a point of no return.

Trump is dangerous, and the American public must unseat him to save America’s soul before it’s too late.

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IN MOROCCO DIFFERENCE IS A strength

Caroline Kirk,*

Morocco’s belief in the strength of pluralism has energized me and shown me that difference can serve as a strength for any country, whether it is religious or secular, large or small, developed or developing.

I was told that there are spiritual answers to the question, “Why Morocco?”—every person has a story to explain why they are in this country. The hospitality, emphasis on community, and religious practice are only a few of the reasons Moroccans and visitors have provided. While personal narratives and my own experience have intertwined to affirm this point, so do the tenants of community and participatory development that I have witnessed as an intern at the High Atlas Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to local initiatives that community beneficiaries determine and
manage.

My first week in Morocco, after traveling toward the Amazigh village of Akrich, we stopped at a tree nursery. The seemingly small plot of pomegranate and fig saplings is the backdrop to a linkage of cultural cooperation. While Jewish pilgrims visit the mausoleum of Rabbi Raphael Hacohen year after year, a Muslim man, Abderrahim Beddah, serves as the caretaker of the land. This relationship helps the High Atlas Foundation engage a women’s cooperative in the neighboring village. Initiatives are interconnected.

Now these multicultural nurseries are receiving government support. The National Initiative for Human Development has provided land-assessments to monitor the viability of an organic fruit tree nursery near the mausoleum of Rabbi David-Ou-Moshe in the Ourzazate province. They will begin implementing a project that will generate more than one-million trees over five years.

Sustainable development was created through, and continues to depend on, interfaith partnerships. If Beddah did not share the story of Jews crying on the journey to visit their saint and express his deep appreciation for their faith, then this partnership would be unlikely. However, the investment Moroccans make when they support their neighbors is a testament to development that depends on pluralism.

This concept resurfaced in a new friendship. The Ministry in Charge of Moroccans Living Abroad and Migration Affairs - in cooperation with the Association of Friends of the Jewish Museum - fund to bring Jewish people with Moroccan heritage back to discover their roots, meet government and religious leaders, and encourage local investment.

The High Atlas Foundation interns were invited to attend a shabbat dinner during the program for these Moroccan-Jews, and it was at that dinner that my observations were confirmed. I met a woman who has grown up in France, but her parents were from Agadir, Morocco. This was the first time she traversed the site of her great-great-grandparents’ graves and engaged with her heritage. We got to talking about religious coexistence and respect. She put it quite simply—“in Morocco, Jews and Muslims are first Moroccan. They live well together because their identity is placed in the fact that they are neighbors.” She told me she believed that allegiance should be first to one’s country and then to religion, at least in how it is outwardly expressed. We both agreed that country needs to be respected…humanity needs to be respected.

Pluralism is a framework written into Morocco’s foundational documents. Development requires all parties, faiths, and populations of Morocco. I have seen this visiting a women’s cooperative where dialogue and decision making are priorities. I have seen this in visiting the grave of a venerated Jewish saint, guarded by a Muslim. I have seen this in the logistical processes that allow for the purchasing of carbon credits and maintenance of olive, walnut, and carob farms.

In 2008, King Mohammed VI announced a vision for Morocco in which “culture serves as a driving force for development as well as a bridge for dialogue.” Moroccans are stepping up to the plate, imagining and wrestling to manifest this vision. The country’s potential should serve as an example. But we must not forget that there are villages still plagued by diarrhea, girls not in school, and trees left unplanted. These examples remind us that although potential is not lacking, resources are forever necessary. Volunteers should never back down in fear of not doing enough. Passion for understanding others, learning a new language, or living immersed in a beautiful expression of religion should be motivation to bring you to Morocco. Finding or supporting organizations like the High Atlas Foundation is integral to this vision.

My spiritual explanation to “Why Morocco?” has come to rest in my hope for this pluralistic
and collaborative future of development. Creating cooperatives, living together, and working toward a common goal or vision is very “Moroccan.” But it is also very “human.” I wonder how life would look if other countries began to call for pluralistic-driven development in their constitutions, laws, policies, and institutions?

*Caroline Kirk is a third year student at the University of Virginia. She spent the summer of 2019 interning at the High Atlas Foundation, working on interfaith and multicultural initiatives.

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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: I am saddened increasingly by the escalating harm the Trump administration, and other extremists, are inflicting, and attempting to inflict on people and the planet. Fortunately, some of it is being stopped by legal and political action. But too much is continuing. At this time, worldwide, there is growing energy for moving to better times, if only enough people will act for it. Each location is different, so what happens will vary from place to place. But while action needs to be appropriate for the moment, the longer it takes to bring positive change, the worse the harm, especially for the environment, and resulting injury to people and most beings. So I continue to encourage all of us to reach out inclusively to build the bridges necessary to create a transformation to harmony.

ARTICLES

THE ECONOMIC COST OF DEVASTATING HURRICANES AND OTHER EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS IS EVEN WORSE THAN WE THOUGHT

Gary W. Yohe*


June marks the official start of hurricane season. If recent history is any guide, it will prove to be another destructive year thanks to the worsening impact of climate change.

But beyond more intense hurricanes and explosive wildfires, the warming climate has been blamed for causing a sharp uptick in all types of extreme weather events across the country, such as severe flooding across the U.S. this spring and extensive drought in the Southwest in recent years.

Late last year, the media bared that these and other consequences of climate change could cut U.S. GDP by 10% by the end of the century – “more than double the losses of the Great Depression,” as The New York Times intoned. That figure was drawn from a single figure in the U.S. government’s Fourth National Climate Assessment. (Disclosure: I reviewed that report and was the vice chair on the third one, released in 2014.)
If that sounds scary, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that that figure was drawn incorrectly from a significant misreading of the report - which actually offered a range of a loss of GDP from as low as 6% to as high as 14% by 2090.

The bad news, however, is that a more meaningful assessment of the costs of climate change – using basic economic principles I teach to undergrads – is a hell of a lot scarier. Record flooding has submerged homes and highways across the country, like these in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Reuters/Drone Base

Tallying the costs

First, let’s look at how government agencies, insurance companies and the media calculate and report on the economic costs of disasters.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in 2018 hurricanes Michael and Florence each caused about US$25 billion in damages, contributing to a total toll of $91 billion from that year’s weather and climate disasters. In 2017, the NOAA’s total was even bigger: $306 billion, due to the massive destruction from hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.

But these tallies are not really valid measures of economic damage. Instead, they simply reflect estimates of what people think will need to be invested to rebuild what was damaged or destroyed in the storms, floods or fires.

To really understand the economic costs of an extreme weather event, it’s important to consider all the investment that is being “crowded out” or lost to cover those rebuilding costs. Put another way, there’s only so much money to go around. And that $25 billion being used to rebuild means $25 billion is not being used for other public and private investment opportunities that are more forward-looking or more likely to promote growth.

Accounting for growth

Instead, I believe a fundamentally more sound way to do this is to use something called “growth accounting.”

Growth accounting incorporates the productive use of capital and innovation into the equation. The question we want to ask is what happens to GDP growth when recovery efforts from extreme events crowd out productive investments, like building new factories or roads and bridges?

Returning to NOAA’s estimated losses for 2017 and 2018, productive investment fell about $400 billion in total in those years as a result. That is, had those disasters not happened, investment would have been that much higher. And that diminished investment translates into less growth in gross domestic product – a measure of all an economy produces in a given period.

If similar experiences in extreme events occur for the next 10 years – which is not a bad assumption given that four of the most expensive years in history have occurred in the last five – U.S. GDP in 2029 would be about 3.6% lower than it would have been otherwise, based on my calculations using growth accounting. That amounts to an economy that’s $1 trillion poorer as result of these extreme weather events crowding out productive investment.

This is the real cost of a world in which these types of massively destructive disasters happen more frequently.
The costs to repair and rebuild after disasters like tornadoes crowds out more productive investments. Reuters/Richard Rowe

Sooner and scarier

Returning to our 10% figure, 3.6% is comparatively smaller, of course, but it’s much sooner, which makes it much scarier.

Why?

Because the number of extreme events and their destructive power keeps increasing at an accelerating rate. If we can expect to take a $1 trillion hit over just the next decade, the costs by the end of the century are hardly fathomable.

So while I may disagree with the numbers The New York Times and others use in tallying disasters, they are right to try to spur readers to action.

The situation is just a lot more dire then anyone realizes. With any luck, the size of the figure will frighten us to do more to stave off the worst.*

*Gary W. Yohe is Huffington Foundation Professor of Economics and Environmental Studies, Wesleyan University. Disclosure statement. He was Vice Chair of the Third National Climate Assessment (2014) and reviewer of the Fourth. He is Co-editor-Chief of Climatic Change, a member of the New York City Panel on Climate Change, and long term senior member of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

TRUMP’S THREATS TOWARDS IRAN AREN’T WORKING. HERE’S WHY
BY TREATING THE IRANIAN REGIME AS A MONOLITH THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION RISKS CLOSING ONE OF THE FEW REMAINING AVENUES FOR DEFUSING THE CRISIS.

Stephen Zunes and Medea Benjamin*

Reproduced with authors’ permission from the Progresseive, July 17, 2019m https://progressive.org/dispatches/trumps-threats-towards-iran-arent-working-zunes-benjamin-190717/Republished.

The Trump Administration has imposed sanctions against more than 1,000 Iranian entities, including Iran’s Ayatollah Ali Khameeni, targeting almost every significant sector of that nation’s economy. But recently it reversed course, backing off its threat to sanction a top Iranian diplomat, Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in response to concerns that it would foreclose any diplomatic recourse.

Targeting Zarif—who lived in the United States for thirty years, including high school, college, and graduate school—is particularly ironic, given that he is a leading moderate voice in Tehran. Unlike most autocratic regimes, where power is centralized in a political party, a military junta, or a single dictator, Iran’s government is divided between conservative clerics, the moderate president, the military, the parliament, and other forces.

Successful diplomacy with Iran depends on cultivating ties with the moderates and isolating the extremists. By treating the Iranian regime as a monolith and targeting Zarif, the Trump Administration risks closing one of the few remaining avenues for defusing the crisis.

Despite not formally sanctioning him, the Trump Administration is still intent on isolating the diplomat. The State Department is limiting Zarif’s movements to a six-block area between United Nations headquarters, the Iranian mission, and the residence of Iran’s UN ambassador.
This is a far greater limitation than the United States imposed on such notorious figures as Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi and Zarif’s rival, hardline former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was allowed to speak at Columbia University, various media outlets, and elsewhere. It would appear that the Trump Administration is more afraid of moderation than extremism.

In February, we were among a small group of American scholars and peace activists who met with Zarif at the Iranian Foreign Ministry in Tehran. Zarif described how the nuclear deal was the result of ten years of posturing and two years of intense, painstaking negotiations, during which he and Secretary of State John Kerry met no fewer than fifty times to hammer out every line in the agreement.

Zarif was able to convince his government, over the objections of hardliners, to agree to destroy billions of dollars’ worth of nuclear facilities and material and accept a strict inspections regime in return for the lifting of debilitating sanctions. Iran has honored its agreement, as confirmed repeatedly by the International Atomic Energy Agency. But—in response to the United States breaking its part of the agreement by re-imposing sanctions and forcing others to do so—Iran earlier this month increased its stockpiles of enriched uranium. From the Iranian perspective, it makes no sense to stick to an agreement that the United States has violated by withdrawing and imposing crushing sanctions, while the rest of the world does little to ease the blows.

Despite the unpopularity of the Iranian regime, which was evident in our conversations with ordinary Iranians, anger at the United States for reneging on the deal and re-imposing sanctions runs across the political spectrum.

The United States’ big mistake in Vietnam was failing to recognize that the power attained by the Communists came from their ability to rally the nationalist sentiments of their people. Massive U.S. military force only strengthened the resistance against what civilians saw as foreign invaders. Similarly, the Islamist leaders of Iran have been successful in appealing to nationalism when they feel their country is unfairly targeted.

Indeed, we saw far more flags and nationalist symbols on display in Iran than religious imagery. Iranians are among the most stridently nationalistic people in the world. Pride in their nation’s 2,500-year history is universal. In talking to ordinary Iranians during our visit, while we found widespread anger at the corruption and heavy hand of the Iranian regime, people also believe that their government is right to resist U.S. sanctions and military threats. They would rather risk a war than give in.

Iranians wonder why they should accede to Trump Administration demands that they totally eliminate their nuclear program, which under the strictures of the seven-nation nuclear agreement would not result in a single nuclear bomb, while their neighbors Israel, Pakistan, and India continue to develop their nuclear arsenals. Iranians also wonder why they should bow to U.S. demands to eliminate ballistic missiles while rivals Israel and Saudi Arabia continue to develop theirs with U.S. assistance.

Every criticism the Trump Administration levels against Iran—its suppression of women and religious minorities, lack of free and fair elections, ongoing human rights abuses, support for oppressive governments and extremist militias, a growing military arsenal, intervention in regional conflicts—can be made for Saudi Arabia, a major U.S. ally and purchaser of billions of dollars’ worth of U.S. weaponry. In fact, Saudi Arabia is arguably worse on every one of these counts.

Saudi military spending is several times that of Iran, even though it has less than one-third of Iran’s 82 million people. Even Israel and the United Arab Emirates, each with less than one-tenth of Iran’s population, has a higher military budget than Iran. The United States’ Gulf allies spend at least eight times more on their militaries than does Iran. Add to that advantage, the thousands of U.S. troops, along with dozens of Navy ships (include two aircraft carriers), B-52 bombers, and over thirty military bases
surrounding Iran on three sides. Trump’s insistence that Iran poses a serious threat to regional security is absurd.

Like it or not, the Trump Administration must accept the fact that Iran has been a regional power for close to two and a half millennia. Imposing brutal sanctions, threatening Iran with obliteration, and marginalizing moderate voices like Zarif’s is not going to change that.

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IRAN AND THE WEST: CULTURE AND NONVIOLENT CHANGE

Robert W. Hotes, Southern Illinois University (Retired)

Political tensions between the West and Iran have deep historic roots. Although Iran’s clear intention to develop nuclear weaponry is central to debate concerning relationships between Iran and the rest of the world, this intention reflects a long history of struggle by the Iranian people to maintain cultural identity. While the nuclear issues are important, cultural differences and conflicts between Iran and other Muslim nations remain key factors. This article examines the role that Iran’s struggle to maintain its cultural identity has historically played in the Iran’s relations with the West and the Arab world.

It is the suggestion of this writer that an application of the process of Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a process of organization development analyzing and stressing positive cultural values, may be of use in advancing the cause of nonviolent change in relations between Iran and the West. Rather than focus on negative elements in a situation, AI techniques address inherent assets upon which positive change may be built. AI uses a strength-based approach to move towards positive change (Cooperrider et al., 2001). The present article is planned as the first in a series focusing on Iran’s political history and future and suggesting potential AI strategies for supporting positive change in Iran’s relationships subordinate with the rest of the world through improved cultural understanding.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a nation whose people have a long and proud history. Yet they have often been treated as inferiors by the West and its Arab Allies. In the opinion of this writer, based upon research and first-hand experience, current problems between the West and nations of the Iranian Plateau stem from issues of pride and culture. The struggle for control of petroleum is secondary to the Iranian people’s struggle for acceptance of their culture and identity by Western nations and by the rest of the Muslim world.

Prior to and during the revolution that led up to the deposing of the last Pahlavi Shah of Iran the present author was part of a team that supplied technicians to serve as lead instructors for the imperial Iranian military. Through that experience the role of weaponized culture in influencing political change became a subject of interest for research into Iranian political culture.

Cultural ignorance on the part of the Western providers of technical services combined with disrespectful behavior led to deep resentment on the part of many Iranians. The origins of these tensions lie in centuries of conflict, ambition and mistrust between Iran and the West and in the resentment of non-Arab Muslims toward the hegemony of the Arab Muslim states and in the aggressive dominance of Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world. In the program under analysis it was found that many of the personnel selected to act as technical trainers were experienced in overseas assignments but had little understanding of Islamic culture or of Iran. These technical experts were given minimal training in understanding the history and the cultural sensibilities of the Iranian people. In this writer’s experience such technicians often showed contempt for their Iranian counterparts, referring to them as ‘ragheads.” In this program technicians from
the U.S. were selected from a pool of military veterans based on their skills demonstrated in active duty or reserve service. Minimal attention was given to cultural understanding or survival language skills. Substance abuse and mental health issues were factors in some cases. Neglect of cultural factors at times resulted in seriously dangerous and damaging situations for the technical personnel and their mission.

Relations between the West and lands now claimed by the Islamic Republic of Iran stretch far into pre-classical antiquity with struggles between the empires of Persia and those of Greece and Rome, and later the interests of Russia, turkey Great Britain and the United States. When the tides of religious, political and social change swept into Central Asia in the sixth Century CE they encountered societies built upon the foundations laid by previous civilizations and empires. Pre-Islamic Iran, the Persia of classical times, had a rich religious, political and cultural history. Persian influence and political domination stretched from Asia to Europe where it successfully challenged the Greco-Roman cultures for centuries. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Iran has continued to struggle against not only against what it judges to be corrupting Western influences but also in defense of its Shia interpretations of Islam. This struggle includes opposition to Saudi-led Sunni Islamic thought and practice in its political form.

As evidenced in the current (2019) conflict in Africa, a central consideration for Iran is the struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia for cultural and moral leadership of the world’s Muslims. Iran’s strategy for asserting its position as the leader of the Islamic world is based on moral stature in preservation of the values espoused by Islam. Most Iranians speak Pashto or Farsi with others using languages related to Turkish. These languages are not semantically related to Arabic. Most Iranians are Indo-European in ethnic background. They are overwhelming Shi’a Muslims and have long struggled to maintain their identity with the culture of the ancient Persian empires in the face of the Arab domination of the Muslim world. As the site of the holy city of Mecca and a cultural heritage traceable to these revelations of the Islamic message to the Prophet Mohamed, Saudi Arabia leads the culture of those who follow the Sunni understanding of Islam. As the main proponent of Shia Islam Iran challenges hegemony of Saudi Arabia’s Sunni practices and policies over all of Islam. In order to assume moral leadership of the Islamic world the Islamic Republic points to what it labels as corruption and abandonment of true faith by the Saudis. In particular, it seems important to Iranian leaders to counter the Saudi military alliance with the United States through steadfast opposition to Israel, alliances with Russia, and recognition as a nuclear power.

The articles planned for this series will address ways in which AI strategies may be able to increase understanding of Iran and its culture in the struggle for nonviolent change. Cultural understanding is a powerful tool for advancing the cause of world peace.

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NETANYAHU’S DEFUNCT STRATEGY TO KEEP HAMAS AT BAY

Alon Ben-Meir,* May 9, 2019

Netanyahu has served as prime minister for the past 11 years, coinciding with Hamas’ rule over Gaza ever since it usurped power in 2007 from the Palestinian Authority after a brief violent confrontation
between the two sides. During this period, Netanyahu has deliberately perpetuated the conflict with Hamas as a means by which to promote his sinister political agenda. At no point has he contemplated finding a mutually acceptable solution that could end the hostilities and gradually lead to peaceful coexistence. Instead, he has portrayed Hamas as an irredeemable foe committed to Israel’s destruction, insisting there is nothing that Israel can do other than maintain the status quo and handle Hamas with force.

The recent flareup between the two sides is just another violent episode in a continuing bloody conflict, including three wars that killed thousands of Palestinians and scores of Israelis, not to speak of the massive destruction inflicted on Gaza and the social and economic dislocation that the Israelis endured.

Netanyahu often uses disproportionate force to ‘teach Hamas a lesson’. He knows, however, that the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is of such magnitude that it is impossible for Hamas and the public to accept, as in the past, incremental and temporary relief while the blockade remains in place and hopelessness and despair continue to reign. Predictably, the vicious cycle of violence continues, and managing rather than solving the conflict has been Netanyahu’s strategy all along.

Netanyahu is resisting calls from his own party, as well as from some of the opposition members, to invade Gaza and decapitate Hamas’ leadership—as Energy Minister and Security Cabinet member Yuval Steinitz described it to Army Radio on Monday, “to get rid of Hamas, we have to conquer Gaza.” He and others foolishly believe that such a drastic move would guarantee calm and lead to a peaceful transition from Hamas to the PA, which is nothing short of a pipedream. Unless Israel occupies Gaza permanently, a new cadre of Hamas leaders will rise almost overnight who will be even more militant and resilient than the current leadership.

Netanyahu objects to another incursion, fearing that this time Hamas will not agree to any ceasefire that does not permanently provide relief and lead to the lifting of the blockade, which he vehemently opposes.

He also refuses to reoccupy Gaza, as this would force the Israeli government to care for nearly two million Palestinians, which would be nothing short of a nightmare. Not only would such an ill-conceived move require the establishment of a massive security apparatus that will constantly put the lives of soldiers at serious risk, it would also cost hundreds of millions of dollars annually to sustain.

Netanyahu has constantly strived to prevent any reconciliation efforts between the PA and Hamas, which allows him to claim that there is no negotiating partner. And when the PA and Hamas have agreed twice in the past to form a unity government, Netanyahu refused to enter peace talks, insisting that he won’t negotiate with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas.

Netanyahu often accommodates the Egyptians in dealing with Hamas, given Egypt’s important role in mediating between Israel and Hamas. Egypt is interested in maintaining calm in Gaza, but does not mind the punishing blow that Israel frequently inflicts on Hamas. As Hamas is an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which Egypt has designated as a terrorist organization, it imposes serious restrictions on the crossing of Palestinians from Gaza into Egypt.

Finally, Netanyahu consistently opts to maintain pressure on Hamas by seizing any opportunity to interrupt the flow of goods and building materials to ensure that Hamas remains vulnerable and dependent on Israel’s goodwill. He wants the Palestinians in Gaza to blame Hamas and Islamic Jihad for their plight, hoping to instigate unrest—which has not materialized in any significant way. He skillfully led the majority of Israelis to believe that Hamas is a mortal threat while ignoring the irreversible facts on the ground, which he must face in order to find a permanent solution to the conflict with Hamas.

Gaza is in effect a large open-air prison with nearly two million destitute Palestinians that cannot be wished away. Gaza is territorially separated from the West Bank and is governed by Hamas, which
embraces a different ideology than the PA. There is no prospect that the PA and Hamas will reconcile their differences; Hamas will not relinquish power and surrender their arsenals to the PA, which, from its perspective, is tantamount to capitulation. Hamas’ priority is to end the Gazans’ ‘imprisonment’ and it will continue to fight and sacrifice to achieve an end to the blockade.

It should be made clear though that Hamas has been its own worst enemy. Even though it knows Israel is here to stay and no power can dislodge it, it openly calls for Israel’s destruction, which plays directly into the hands of Netanyahu and a majority of Israelis. Hamas’ militancy and buildup of military arsenals provides further proof to many Israelis that Hamas is an irredeemable enemy that deserves what has befallen it.

The validity of this argument, however, does not change the reality that the Palestinians in Gaza are largely living under subhuman conditions. And regardless of Hamas’ bellicose narrative against Israel, it too wants to end the conflict without being humiliated in the process. The solution to the conflict with Hamas is not another incursion into Gaza, or raining destruction from the air, or decapitating Hamas’ leadership, and certainly not re-occupying Gaza. Instead, Israel needs to treat Gaza as a separate entity from the West Bank, as there is hardly anything in common between the two sides.

Hamas has proposed time and again a long ceasefire (Hudna) for 15-20 years, during which Israel would allow Hamas to embark on building infrastructure, housing, hospitals, schools, seaports, and other development projects. This would create thousands of jobs and an improved quality of life that every Palestinian in Gaza yearns for.

These projects should be implemented under the supervision of a special international commission to ensure that all funds raised from donor countries, including the US, the EU, and the oil-rich Arab states, are channeled to these projects. Hamas would certainly develop a vested interest in safeguarding the new development, and would therefore refrain from provoking Israel, and rein in Islamic Jihad to maintain the calm.

Hamas knows that Israel will always be able to wreak havoc on Gaza should it not fully adhere to the terms of the ceasefire. A long-term ceasefire in conjunction with confidence-building measures will certainly change the nature of the bilateral relations between Israel and Hamas, which could gradually lead to lifting the blockade altogether. Furthermore, a resolution to the conflict between Hamas and the PA can and should take place, provided that it will not in any way undermine Israel’s national security, after Israel resolves its separate conflict with the PA.

There are many cynics who believe that peace between Israel and Hamas is nothing but an illusion. On the contrary, anyone who maintains that the current situation is sustainable is misguided, as they ignore both the turmoil and the bloodshed over the past 12 years, and the reality on the ground that cannot be changed.

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**ALBANIA’S SELF-CONSUMING CORRUPTION UNDERMINING PATH TO EU ACCESSION**

Alon Ben-Meir and Arbana Xharra,* July 2, 2019

At a time when Albania was expected to make significant progress in its accession talks with the European Union (EU), some member states are unwilling to support the negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. France in particular argued that the EU must deepen integration among existing
members and reform its unwieldy decision-making processes before it contemplates adding new countries. Moreover, political corruption, organized crime, and inequality, coupled with domestic tensions caused by the major political parties in Albania, gave further credence to the EU’s decision to postpone accession negotiations until October of this year.

That said, distancing Balkan countries from the EU gives even more freedom to Russia and Turkey to assert themselves in the Balkans, as they have been working hard to strengthen their ties to the region. Both Erdogan and Putin hope to prevent the Balkans’ integration with the EU by manipulating the largely corrupt political elites in these countries.

In May, the European Commission recommended that accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia begin as soon as possible, stating that the two countries have “delivered on reforms.” But after a meeting in Luxembourg in mid-June, a minority of EU member states declined to support the commission’s proposal to open accession talks.

NATO member Albania, which Transparency International rates as one of Europe’s most corrupt countries, has only made limited progress in combating corruption, including money laundering and bribes, despite firing crooked judges and prosecutors. European ministers met in Luxembourg last year and agreed to open talks, but in June the decision was unexpectedly postponed.

Tens of thousands of protesters, led by opposition leaders in Albania, marched against Prime Minister Edi Rama, throwing Molotov cocktails at the entrance to his office and calling for him to quit over alleged election fraud and corruption. Even though the protesters are in favor of EU accession, nevertheless many EU countries see this political tension as a sign that Albania is not yet ready to join.

The Ambassador of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to Albania, Bernd Borchardt, condemned the protests, stating that “...we completely condemn those who try to use violence as a short political path; they will fail”. Protesters harassed him by holding demonstrations in front of his residence, writing “Borchardt shame on you” on the wall outside his apartment.

The leaders of the main political parties are accusing each other of corruption, while seeking the power to rule the country which is facing major problems. The Washington Post recently revealed that the leader of the opposition, Lulzim Basha, who called for the protests, and two other party officials have been accused of illegally spending about $650,000, which is linked to Russia through a lobbyist and a foreign company.

Corruption in Albania is nothing new. Eight years ago, Ilir Meta, the current president, appeared in a video that was leaked to the media, discussing a bribe from a businessman to the tune of €700,000 with another former minister, Dritan Prifti. An earlier review of the video by British and American experts stated that the tape was authentic, but the court subsequently ruled the expert review as inadmissible.

According to Albania’s Foreign Minister Gent Cakaj, while the prospects of opening accession talks might be affected by the opposition’s behavior, this cannot and should not be considered a serious impediment. “...[I]t is clear that the opposition’s behavior adversely affects the dynamics of the reforms (especially when it comes to judicial and electoral reform), in Albania as noted by the Commission Report itself; and negatively impacts the reputation of our country... It is clear that Albania must be assessed based on its evident progress rather than on the power-games of the opposition.”

Addressing Meta, who was elected President in 2017 with his support, Rama said that “Those who are trying to stop that process are wrong. They are playing with fire and they are burning themselves in front of the law.”

Even though the protests and allegations of corruption are not linked directly to the EU’s decision,
they hurt the image of the country ahead of a decision by the European Union. The political tension in Albania is feeding those countries in the EU, who argue against Albania’s accession. Meanwhile, the US and the EU have warned the opposition against inciting violence.

Enton Abilekaj, a journalist from Albania, says that the international community supports the government, and that’s why the protesters are reacting. “[The international community’s] stances against the extreme acts of the opposition and in favor of partial election on June 30 are dividing the public opinion in another dispute about the role of western countries in Albania,” adding that “being stuck for this long waiting for European integration, is a failure of the Albanian government to fight the organized crime and corruption.”

The EU’s focus in Albania has been on making progress on judicial and anti-corruption reforms. According to Epidamn Zeqo, the reasons why the accession criteria were set up by the EU in the first place are related directly to Albania’s challenges in fighting corruption and organized crime. Integration can be delayed in case political tension continues. Albanian leaders have the responsibility to convince the EU that they are ready to open talks and not miss this historic chance.

Although the EU is aware that Erdogan’s and Putin’s objectives are to cement their power in these countries, which directly challenges Western strategic interests and values, delaying this decision puts these countries at risk, as the delay only advances the strategic interests of the two rivals in the western Balkans—Russia and Turkey.

Turkey and Russia have been targeting the Balkans for the past several years (which they view as easy prey) in an effort to coopt them into their spheres of influence. They promulgate their sinister political agenda by investing in major national projects strategically calculated to have the greatest economic and political impact on the financial market, and by using submissive politicians to do their bidding.

Whereas Putin does not hide his animosity toward the Western alliance and tries to undercut their interests anywhere he can, Erdogan wants to have it both ways. He wants to maintain Turkey’s membership in NATO and presumably still desires to join the EU. Yet, he seems willing to undermine the EU’s and NATO’s strategic interests in the Balkans by cozying up to Putin while entrenching Turkey in Serbia, only to serve Turkey’s interests.

France and the Netherlands are correct to suggest that the EU must first deepen integration among existing members, reform the cumbersome decision-making processes, and ensure that candidates such as Albania address their endemic corruption problems before it adds new members. It would be more prudent, though, to commence the accession talks while insisting that the Albanian government must, during the negotiating process, clean up its act in earnest as a prerequisite to continuing negotiations.

The Albanian government must understand that while it can have normal relations with Russia and Turkey, it should prevent them from dominating the country’s political discourse and financial sector. Albania’s future prosperity and security rest on accession to the EU. To that end, it must take all the necessary social and political measures to accelerate the process of integration, which is of significant strategic importance to the EU as well.

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INSIDIOUS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE ROMA IS EUROPE’S SHAME

Alon Ben-Meir and Arbana Xharra,* June 12, 2019

Two weeks ago, a 29-year-old Roma woman was physically attacked in the middle of the day in Kosovo, after a false accusation spread that the victim had been kidnaping children. Social media provided a platform for hate speeches and misleading information, which often precipitates violence against innocent Roma people. Generally, the hatred and disdain toward Roma by the Balkan and wider European population is sadly embedded in their psyche and cultural orientation. This largely explains why a Roma woman was beaten on a city street while a crowd of young people watched with utter indifference. One wonders why European governments are not taking all the necessary measures to stop this type of appalling behavior, especially in countries that aspire to join the EU.

According to the European Commission, there are 10-12 million Roma living in Europe, out of which one million live in Western Balkan countries. They are the largest ethnic minority in Europe, largely live in poverty, and are victims of prejudice, violence, social exclusion, child abuse, and sexual slavery. It was reported in 2018 that hundreds of Roma children have been trafficked in the Netherlands alone as sex slaves. Even though EU countries have banned discrimination against the Roma community, they still face major obstacles in education, access to healthcare, and certainly job opportunities.

In reaction to the attack on the Roma woman, Kosovo’s Ambassador to DC, Vlora Citaku, shared a personal anecdote describing how Kosovo society has discriminated against Roma people for decades. She wrote, “Nurije and Fitimi were in my class. They always sat in the back of the classroom even though the teacher asked them to sit with us. But we made fun of them, we wouldn’t touch them, play, or talk to them. One day when Nurije fell sick and didn’t come to school for weeks… our teacher tried to make us play together and would punish us if we hurt or made fun of them. They stopped going to school because we became intolerable … and it is all our fault”.

Representatives of the Equal Rights for All Coalition (ERAC) in Kosovo strongly condemned the attack and the misinformation that led to it, and beseeched the community not to encourage acts of violence.

The World Bank report “Breaking the Cycle of Roma Exclusion in the Western Balkans”, published in March 2019, explains how Roma face multiple barriers and constraints that hinder their ability to amass human capital, participate in the labor market on an equal basis, and benefit economically. “The insufficient stock and accumulation of human, physical, financial, and social capital have hindered the ability of Roma households to generate income over the life cycle”, says the report.

Many Roma live in isolated communities and are often unaware of or unable to access social services and programs available. Illiteracy, lack of access to information, absence of trust in local authorities, and even lack of perceived need (as in the case of childcare) are among the barriers faced by Roma.

Sadly, it is not only in the Balkan countries where Roma communities face discrimination and physical violence. In many EU states, including Hungary, Italy, and the United Kingdom, Roma are confined to segregated areas, denied basic education and job opportunities, and routinely suffer racist assaults in city streets and campsites, often with police complicity.

Attackers have sought out and violently assaulted whole families, burned their homes, and nearly wiped out a whole community in settlements across Europe. Violence against Roma is gravely underreported, and Roma are often viewed as scapegoats for broader societal ills, often characterized as outsiders who are inferior citizens and are unwanted in their respective communities.
The Roma community was persecuted by the Nazi regime, viewed as a threat to the “superior Aryan” race. Himmler declared that the Roma were to be placed on “the same level as Jews and placed in concentration camps.” Seventy-four years after the fall of the Nazis, the situation of Roma in Europe hasn’t improved much. Although Roma are no longer victims of genocide, they still face high levels of discrimination, abuse, and violence.

In Hungary in 2009, a Roma man with his 5-year-old son were shot and killed while fleeing their home, which was set on fire by attackers. In March 2019 in Paris, a series of vigilante attacks were sparked by false reports of attempted kidnappings. A violent attack last summer on a Roma encampment outside of the city of Lviv in Ukraine left one dead and four others injured, including a young boy and a pregnant woman.

The situation is not improving, even though for many years the EU has focused action on preventing Roma discrimination. In 2011, the European Commission produced an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, assessing each country’s strategy and integration policy measures. Since 2013, the European Council adopted a recommendation on effective Roma integration measures in the member states—a first ever EU-level legal instrument for Roma inclusion.

Xhemal Ahmeti, a journalist and historian originally from Macedonia, says that according to the latest reports published by human rights organizations, the Roma are most affected in Romania and some Balkan countries such as Serbia and Macedonia. “They are also used by the politicians, especially during the election campaign. When [politicians] need crowds of people, they instrumentalize the Roma community with little money to get their electoral support”, says Ahmeti.

Given the systematic human rights violations of Roma people, top-ranking EU officials in particular must prioritize addressing the routine ill-treatment of Roma because it is a core violation of basic human rights, which the EU is supposed to espouse. Civil society, the media, and NGOs should be mobilized to campaign against Roma discrimination, raise awareness about the gross discriminatory practices, and the damages it causes to society.

The Roma community issue and their treatment must seriously be addressed by the European Commission, and especially by the prospective Balkan candidate countries who wish to join the EU. The EU must make it clear to these countries that they must take immediate and significant measures to address the discrimination against Roma in all aspects of life, particularly in the fields of education, healthcare, and professional skills. Otherwise, they would risk the continuing accession process, if not the prospect of joining the EU altogether.

According to the World Bank’s latest report in March 2019, “Roma inclusion is not only a moral imperative... This is particularly important in aging societies because absorbing Roma entrants into the labor force can help counteract shrinking working-age populations. Roma are a young population, and this youth bulge can be turned into a demographic dividend through proper investment in education and basic services.”

Discrimination based on race, sect, religious belief, or gender is sadly ingrained in our system as human beings. Distinguishing ourselves from the “other” largely because of our belief in our superiority or exclusivity gives us a sense of false empowerment that we enjoy exercising, even, if not especially, by inflicting unbearable pain and suffering onto the other.

Whereas we cannot change human nature, we can change our behavior and become more tolerant and facilitate Roma integration in all walks of life. We should do so not only for the sake of social harmony and peace, but for the overall productivity and progress that can be made when equality and justice prevail.
The phenomenon of genocide has baffled historians for many generations. The question that has been and continues to be asked is what goes through the minds of leaders, however despotic and ruthless, to conclude that committing genocide against their real or perceived enemies will provide them with salvation that only the extermination of other people would bring? And what does that say about us as human beings, who have failed to adopt “never again”, sworn to in the wake of World War II, as the mantra to guide us in preventing the occurrences of genocides?

It seems that we settled on the notion that modernity and civilization, and international laws that prohibit crimes against humanity, will be enough to prevent future genocides. To the contrary, modernity is where genocide reached its pinnacle, enabling countries to murder on an assembly line, such as the genocide committed by Germany against the Jews. Obviously, this notion is completely misguided, as is evident by the genocides in Kosovo, the Sudan, and Rwanda that were perpetrated nearly five decades after the conclusion of the second World War.

The various motives that prompted previous leaders to commit such large-scale genocides have not changed, as xenophobia, racism, discrimination, and intolerance remain very much a part of human society. Even a cursory review of what is happening around us at the present, from China to America, suggests that the roots of genocide have not been eradicated. Indeed, as long as we continue to see each other from the prism of a different religion, different color, different race, or different ideology, and blame others for our plight, the prospect of future genocides still looms high.

The genocides that occurred over the past 110 years were motivated by different rationales but led to similar horrifying consequences.

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks advocated for the formation of an exclusively Turkish Muslim state. The policy of “Turkey for the Turks”, and rejection of any nationality that did not subscribe to Islam, led to the decimation of nearly 2.5 million Pontic Greeks and Armenians. In Rwanda, genocide was perceived as the only way to break out of a historical cycle of discrimination and oppression of the Hutu majority by the Tutsi minority.

The Germans believed that they belonged to a superior race—Aryan—while the Jews belonged to an inferior race that threatened to contaminate and pollute German society and culture. Serbia adopted a strong exclusionary ideology, proclaiming that Serbia was for Serbians and that other nationalities should leave or be eliminated. Finally, in Sudan, competition for scarce resources and north Sudan’s takeover of the southern Sudanese, the majority of whom are non-Muslim and non-Arab, sparked genocide there.

Methods of extermination

The states that perpetrated genocide by and large used similar methods to exterminate their
enemies. Against the Pontic Greeks, the Ottomans employed massacres, death marches, summary expulsions, arbitrary executions, rape, and forced conscription into labor battalions.

The Serbian military’s effort to reassert control over the region was accompanied by atrocities such as the destruction of over 500 villages and killing of an estimated 15,300 civilians. Twenty thousand women were raped, and thousands disappeared. Serbia’s response to NATO’s intervention was to drive out all the Kosovar Albanians, pushing nearly 1.2 million refugees into neighboring Albania, Macedonia, and Montenegro.

The Turkish policy of exterminating Armenians was carried out under the guise of deportation. Massacres were carried out through mass burnings: 80,000 Armenians in 90 villages were burned in stables and haylofts. Thousands were killed by drowning – women and children would be placed onto boats that were capsized in the Black Sea. Turkish physicians also contributed to the planning and execution of the genocide. All in all, nearly 1.5 million Armenians were extinguished.

In Germany, the Extermination of the Jews, the “Final Solution”, began with mobile killing groups called Einsatzgruppen. They gathered Jews town by town, marched them to huge pits, stripped them, lined them up, and shot them with automatic weapons. Immediately following the Wannsee Conference in 1942, Jewish men, women, and children were methodically killed with poisonous gas. More than six million Jews perished over a period of four years.

In Rwanda, an unofficial militia group called the Interahamwe was mobilized; at its peak, this group was 30,000 strong. In addition to brutal mass killings, systematic rape was also used as a weapon of war during the genocide.

The Darfur genocide began in 2003 with the mass murder and rape of people living in Western Sudan, carried out by the Janjaweed, a government-funded group that continued attacks until 2010. The Janjaweed are ethnic Arab militia groups, which would follow government attacks from the air with scorched-earth campaigns, burning villages, and poisoning wells.

Strong pan-Turkish and pan-Islamist propaganda began to appear in the Ottoman press in early August 1914, which alienated and intimidated non-Muslims; the Ottomans believed that the Christian Pontic Greeks were tainting the population and threatening the integrity of the Muslim-majority nation-state. Ottoman authorities created a propaganda campaign, claiming that Armenians were a threat to national security, in part because of some Armenians’ support of Russia in the ongoing World War. Because most Turks were illiterate, anti-Armenian propaganda was primarily disseminated in the sermons of Muslim mullahs and by town criers, who labeled Armenians as spies, infidels, and traitors. The promotion of Islamism was critical, as it was the central ideology behind the Armenian and Greek genocides.

One of the major tools of Nazi propaganda was a weekly newspaper, Der Stürmer (The Attacker), which proclaimed at the bottom of the front page of each issue, “The Jews are our misfortune!” The newspaper regularly featured cartoons of Jews in which they were caricatured as hooked-nose and ape-like. The Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, headed by Joseph Goebbels, employed art, music, theater, films, books, radio, educational materials, and the press. Propaganda encouraged passivity and acceptance of the impending laws against the Jews. Nazi films portrayed Jews as subhuman, wandering parasites, infiltrating Aryan society.

Milosevic’s propaganda campaign was based on the Nazis’ techniques, with the added power of television. To weld the population together, official propaganda drew on the sources of the Serbian mystique, that of a people who were the mistreated victims and martyrs of history, and that of Greater
Serbia, indissolubly linked to the Orthodox religion. Serbian television and radio’s repetitive use of pejorative descriptions against Croats, Bosniaks, and Albanians quickly became part of common usage.

Hutu extremists in Rwanda also used the media to their benefit. Local officials and government-sponsored radio stations called on ordinary Rwandan civilians to murder their neighbors. Radio was utilized to provide the location of specific Tutsis to be targeted. Radio was also used to justify the genocide; radio hosts discussed discrimination the Hutus suffered under the Tutsis.

In the Nuba Mountains and southern Sudan, crimes against humanity were justified by characterizing victims – Christians by and large – as ‘infidels’ (kafir). In Darfur, with a mostly Muslim population, a different kind of rationalization for slaughter was required. The regime categorized Darfuris as infidels by connecting them with Judaism, and emphasized that the Fur, Zaghawa, and Massalit were non-Arab; the Zaghawa tribe in particular was portrayed as having Jewish origins. All the tribes were then seen as generally non-Muslim and therefore evil, sub-human, and unable to be trusted.

Measures to prevent future genocide

As we have witnessed, the concept of “never again” that was coined in the wake of the Holocaust and embraced as the mantra for future generations to prevent genocide failed to materialize. Acts of horrifying genocide occurred time and again during the past three decades; Rwanda, Sudan, and Kosovo provide telling examples. What is necessary then is to create awareness, especially among the young generation, about the horrors of genocide that human beings are capable of inflicting on others, and stop pretending that modernity and civilization provide a natural shield against future genocides.

The fact that the current young generation is becoming increasingly less aware of genocides that occurred even two decades ago is extremely worrying. For example, less than 35 percent of Americans are aware there was an Armenian genocide. In Britain, 800 students from 15 schools were asked if they had any knowledge about genocides that occurred since the Holocaust; 81 percent could not name any modern genocide, only 13 percent knew about the Rwandan genocide, 5 percent knew about the atrocities in Bosnia and Cambodia, and a mere 2 percent knew about the Darfur genocide.

There are several measures that all nations ought to take to prevent future genocide, albeit not a single or a combination of such measures can ensure that genocide will never happen again. Nevertheless, we must remain vigilant and do whatever it takes to prevent mass killings.

First, it is crucial that the study of genocide in general be offered as a course that all middle and high school students should be required to take. There is no doubt that learning the history, psychology, motivation, and methodology used to effect mass executions is a necessary step that would help prevent future genocide. In this regard, listening to the stories and experiences of genocide survivors in a classroom setting is critical because unlike reading about genocide (which is vital), sharing the experience of what a survivor has endured, especially when describing the horrifying consequences, humanizes victims and leaves an indelible mark in the minds of the students. In addition, it is necessary to provide books, other printed materials, and videos produced specifically for those age groups to see and feel the level to which human beings are capable of descending.

Second, it is essential that communities hold symposiums and town hall meetings to discuss mass killings with speakers who have personally experienced or are noted authorities on genocide. These should be held on the anniversaries of various genocides, coinciding with public awareness campaigns to ensure that these atrocities are remembered. Organizations focused on educating about and preventing genocide, such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Enough Project, should lead the way in holding such events, given their credibility and expertise on the issue of genocide. Inviting the press to cover such events will remind people that we are living in a time when such atrocities can still happen, and
that each and every one of us must assume a role, however small, to promulgate knowledge of the unfathomable acts that sadly are still a part of our nature as human beings.

Third, acknowledging that mass murders have in fact occurred, and taking certain measures to prevent it from ever happening again, such as the case with Germany, can go a long way to prevent history from repeating itself by creating a process of reconciliation to heal the wounds. As such, we must not allow countries like Turkey (including its Ottoman predecessors), who committed unspeakable atrocities against the Greeks and Armenians in the wake of World War I, to deny its crimes against humanity with impunity. Even now, Turkey under President Erdogan refuses to acknowledge Turkey’s historic crimes. Every country should follow France’s and Germany’s footsteps and pass laws that make the denial of the Pontic Greek and Armenian genocides a crime punishable by jail time or fine, or both.

Fourth, it is imperative that the UN or EU (preferably the EU to prevent political jockeying), create a commission to monitor conflicts within or between countries that could lead to genocide. Preventive measures can take place to avert such conflicts from escalating. That is, early intervention could certainly de-escalate tension and mitigate conflicts. For example, early intervention in Rwanda could have prevented the genocide against the Tutsis.

There were clear signs that the tension between the two sides was building up; UN peacekeeping forces commander General Roméo Dallaire notified his superiors in New York that genocide was imminent in a memo now known as the “genocide fax”. The fact that nearly 800,000 were slaughtered within a 90-day period was not a spontaneous outburst, but clearly a premeditated scheme that had been in the works for a long period of time.

Finally, in the age of unprecedented social media that allows us to reach millions of people in a few minutes, it should be fully utilized to create greater awareness about genocides. However controversial the use of social media may be, its overwhelming pervasiveness cannot be ignored, and its power must be used to create public awareness about past genocides that would help prevent future gross violations of human rights.

On the same note, companies like Facebook, whose platform was used to incite genocide in Myanmar, and Twitter, which was groundbreakingly used by ISIS to promote its ideology, must be held responsible and be proactive in removing content inciting hatred and violence.

The civil war in Syria that has so far led to the deaths of over 600,000, five million refugees, and as many internally displaced, by definition is not a genocide. However, indiscriminately bombing towns and villages from the air to kill tens of thousands of innocent people is still akin to genocide. When such atrocities can take place both in Syria and in Yemen with little to no effort to stop them, it suggests how inept and indifferent the international community has become, which allows such horrifying carnages to take place.

It is these types of gross human rights violations that are happening with impunity by the perpetrators, along with the ongoing genocides against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and Yazidis, Kurds, and Christians by ISIS, that raise serious questions about our ability to address such horrific crimes. We can, if we only will it. But we are still unwilling to rise and take whatever measures necessary to prevent such atrocities.

What has changed, and what have we learned from previous genocides? Very little. As long as we put our short-sighted political interest above human lives, we prove we have leaned little from history and are condemned to repeat it time and again. We must hold up the mantra of “never again”, and act before it’s too late.

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TO PREVENT BRAIN DRAIN, KOSOVO MUST ERADICATE CORRUPTION

Alon Ben-Meir and Arbana Xharra,* May 15, 2019

On the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the end of Kosovo war, the country is facing a dramatic large-scale brain drain. Every day, young professionals wait in long lines in front of EU embassies to apply for visas to legally leave Kosovo in the search for job opportunities and more promising futures. While it may be argued that massive brain drain is a problem that some European and Western Balkans states are facing, Kosovo’s migration is becoming increasingly acute, especially because of the endemic corruption among the political elite, much of the business sector, and many private and government institutions.

The massive emigration of nearly 100,000 people that occurred in 2013 alone is so alarming demanding that the Kosovo’s government tackle the problem head-on with the support of the US and the EU if Kosovo is to remain a viable country with a secure future.

According to Balkan Insight, a 2016 report from the German Interior Ministry listed Kosovo and Albania as the top countries whose citizens requested asylum in 2015. Kosovars filed 37,095 requests. Only Albanians, with a total of 54,762 requests, filed more.

“Unlike the previous migrations of Albanians from Kosovo over the last 50 years, this new wave is different in that these young people are leaving for good, never to return to the country ruled by the elites who stole their future”, says Ilir Deda, Member of Parliament of the Republic of Kosovo and Vice-President of the Liberal-Democratic centrist party Alternativa. According to him, this trend will continue until Kosovo matures and takes decisive political and practical steps by ending two decades of endemic corruption of its leaders and their parties.

“Kosovo political elites are engaged in unchallenged nepotism, sleaze, misusing of public funds, and impunity that have aroused the feeling of weakness, lack of perspective, and depressed citizenry”, says Lulzim Peci, former Ambassador to Sweden and current Executive Director of the Kosovo Institute for Policy Research and Development.

What is particularly worrisome is that the new emigrants are mostly professionals who lost hope and accuse their deeply corrupt government of showing complete indifference to their needs. They feel trapped, and leaving the country appears to them as being the only viable option.

In Kosovo, where unemployment has reached an alarming 30%, the politicians are the richest class in the country. Many big businesses have greatly expanded thanks to politicians’ support — who received millions in return for “their efforts.” Although the EU has deployed a police and civilian mission in Kosovo (EULEX) to prosecute corruption, it has largely failed. In fact, corruption has only become worse under the mission’s watch.

The current US Ambassador to Kosovo, Philip Kosnett, in the ‘Week Against Corruption’, said that government officials continue to accept bribes, interfere in the justice system, and employ their relatives in public institutions. The EU representative in Kosovo, Nataliya Apostolova, reminded Kosovo’s citizens that corruption is ruining their country’s image.

The US and EU “pressure” to fight corruption and deal with the country’s socio-political and
economic ailments have largely failed. The US and the EU must now change their approach because their strategic interest aligns with the Balkans’ and Kosovo’s strong desire to integrate with the EU and NATO.

It is common knowledge in Pristina that the US has directly interfered in Kosovo’s domestic affairs with little or no opposition, because the US is seen as a reliable friend. In 2011, Kosovo’s parliament elected first female president, Atifete Jahjaga, who was proposed by the US. In 2015, under US pressure, the Kosovo Parliament passed a law to create the Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office, a court based in the Hague that has jurisdiction over Kosovo war crimes. Last December, Kosovo created an Army, defying Serbia and even NATO, but with the full support of the US.

There are many steps the US and EU should take to assist Kosovo in revitalizing its economic sector, encourage social involvement, and push for political reform that would substantially reduce over time the numbers of the young who are leaving the country and precipitating the most disturbing brain drain. They can help Kosovo leave behind the doldrums in which it finds itself, and chart a new path that Kosovo’s government and institutions should fully embrace that would lead the country to a better and promising future.

To send a clear signal to the entrenched corrupt Kosovar officials, US officials should regularly meet with trustworthy politicians and refuse to engage crooked officials in any social settings while preventing high-level businessmen from receiving EU and US visas. This will send an unambiguous message to the public that there is no international support for those self-serving officials who are undermining Kosovo’s future wellbeing.

To nurture an independent juridical system, US and EU should expand training programs for young judges, lawyers and prosecutors and expose them to the ways the US and EU handle prosecution in dealing with corruption, and push for anti-corruption legislation.

In addition, the US and EU should exert all necessary pressure on the government to reform the educational system, including technical training to provide new job opportunities and prepare a new generation to assume leadership positions.

Since Kosovo wants to join the European Union, the EU is in a position to demand that the government begin a systematic process to clean up their acts by fully adhering to the EU’s requirement to qualify for membership and fully comply to the democratic principles, human rights, freedom of the press and untainted judiciary.

Moreover, the US can help Kosovo to develop commercial opportunities by creating a better business climate for foreign investments while encouraging business interaction between western Balkan economies. A healthy economy allows employers to raise salaries – currently the lowest in the region – which can, at least in part, help to stem emigration of youth, especially young couples who can hardly make ends meet.

Of particular importance, the US ought to insist that at least 20 percent of its financial aid to Kosovo is dedicated to participatory sustainable development projects. Communities can choose their own projects where the youth would be directly involved, develop a strong sense of belonging, feel needed, find meaning in their work and develop a vested interest in their projects and thus the motivation to stay.

For these initiatives to work well, top officials must commit to protect human rights, end arbitrary incarceration and police brutality, prevent human trafficking, and protect free speech and free media outlets while undertaking social and political reforms to strengthen the democratic foundation.

In the final analysis, however, every single official ought to remember that Kosovo has emerged from the ashes of many thousands of men and boys who were slaughtered by the Serbian military to
prevent the rise of an independent and free Kosovo. They have a moral responsibility and a sacred duty to put the country’s national interest above their own and prevent brain drain, as the future of Kosovo rests on the vitality of its youth, in which every single Kosovar has a stake.

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HOPEFUL FUTURES: THE LINK BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND DERADICALIZATION

Caleb Tisdale*

Attracting young people to radical, extremist ideas is not hard. Just ask the ISIS recruiters behind one of the most effective propaganda presences in the world. Extremist groups are so effective at recruitment because the target audience is easily identified and appealed to: those who are at the margins of society. Radical ideologies offer an alternative to social and economic conditions - high unemployment, lack of purpose, social displacement - that have left them vulnerable.

One of these marginalized groups is Moroccan male youth convicted of non-violent crimes. Despite the best efforts to provide conditions that are adjusted to this population, there is still a risk that these young men feel detained, delinquent, and sequestered away from society. They can be left idle, isolated, and frustrated. Without opportunities to find relevance in society, reintegration to society is not an easy task. A High Atlas Foundation assessment found that a recurring theme among Moroccan youth is an unfulfilled need to define themselves. They are seeking a purpose in life. Lack of education, employment, and therefore social value are some of the main drivers towards subscribing to radical ideologies. Instead of taking the path leading to becoming productive members of society, youth may find a home within extremist groups.

Cultural and social displacement within Morocco pose a threat to both national and international security. Morocco’s High Commission of Planning reported that the youth unemployment rate in Morocco is 39 percent, when adjusted with the disguised unemployment rate that impacts over one million young adults. This is consistent with the Middle East and North Africa region where youth account for 51 percent of all unemployed, according to the UNDP Arab Human Development Report. Further, one out of four unemployed Moroccans has a high level college degree. Brookings published a report in 2017 with evidence supporting that those with unmet expectations for economic and social improvement are at a higher propensity to radicalization. Morocco is also seeing a continued shift towards urbanization, which has in turn created a strain on job creation.

All these factors contribute to a cultural displacement for unemployed youth who are increasingly vulnerable to radical ideologies. Youth with unproductive time miss out on opportunities to develop skills that will allow them to successfully reintegrate with society. These extremist groups seek to offer a sense of purpose and belonging that is otherwise lacking among disenfranchised youth.

There is a clear solution: human development.

The High Atlas Foundation believes that human development is a means to alleviate the
stress of these alienations. The purpose of the Oummat Salaam Initiative is to enable youth inmates and unemployed youth to receive skills-building, mentorship, and integration exercises necessary to become effective volunteers and promote development within their communities.

The goal of detainment, especially with youth, should not be to punish. It should prepare them for reintegration with society by teaching important and employable skills. This can come in the form of education opportunities, such as classes, metalworking and painting workshops, and organic agricultural training.

One focus of the Oummat Salaam Initiative is to provide chances to develop agricultural skills to such youth. Young men will gain knowledge and skills associated with: “organic agriculture, securing organic certifications, installing water efficiency systems, monitoring and documenting carbon offsets, organic processing of certified product, association and cooperative creation and management, and facilitating participatory planning” (HAF). The purpose of this project is to create opportunities and provide young men with skills that will allow them to reintegrate as productive members of society.

The Moroccan Kingdom’s goal is to achieve sustainable development in all regions. The Ministry of Agriculture projects, for example, that a billion trees need to be planted to realize this goal. Agricultural skills, such as grafting and others, are therefore highly employable.

I had the opportunity to meet many of the boys who already benefit from this project. When asked about their futures, they shared dreams of travelling and starting businesses. As we walked and talked, the boys happily showed off their metalworking projects, the shop that they had painted, and the trees they had planted. They made sure to point out all the grapes, pomegranates, and olives we passed. We could tell they were proud of themselves. The nursery allows them to practically learn about the importance of agriculture. They learn how necessary trees are, watch them grow in the nursery, and pick the fruit themselves. By learning practically, the boys quickly become experts. They are encouraged because they know they are gaining valuable skill sets for their future.

A marginalized portion of the population has an opportunity to become productive members of society. When given these types of experiences, these young men will create a path for themselves that will increase the likelihood of rehabilitation, reintegration, and contributions to communities. While these children may not have the brightest past, they have hopeful futures.

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IMMIGRATION POLICY AND NONVIOLENT CHANGE: CONSIDERING AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY APPROACH

Robert W. Hotes,* Southern Illinois University/University of Illinois Springfield

In recent (2019) months immigration policy has been a source of conflict and disagreement in both Europe and North America. An important focus of attention has been upon British withdrawal from the European Union and the plans of the United States President to fund a physical barrier to illegal entry into the United States by refugees from Latin America via Mexico. While rhetoric has largely focused on political issues relating to the construction of physical barriers, humanitarian and cultural issues have been given little attention.
Debate concerning U.S. immigration policy often focuses on humanitarian principles and the fear of a negative impact of immigration. In many cases such fear may be attributed to prejudice and mistrust. This article is part of a series which proposes to examine how applications of Appreciative Inquiry to immigration policy may be useful. In fact, evidence supports the notion that lack of understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures is important in understanding resistance to immigration. This article stresses the application of Appreciative Inquiry to issues around culture that affect immigration policy both in the United States and Europe.

As economic beings, humans often are concerned with challenges that they perceive as coming from sources that are culturally different. Elements of culture include such perceivable artifacts as religion, language, customs and many more factors. These factors are perceived by individuals and groups as marking the identity of a culture to which a person belongs. In an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach to facilitating nonviolent change emphasis is put on identifying the positive elements in the system of interest. From an assessment of strengths and positive qualities areas of needed change may be targeted. Economic and socio/behavioral benefits to the United State and other nations may be garnered from strong positive immigration policies. Particular attention should be paid to opportunities for nonviolent change through educating citizens on the true benefits of diversity and equitable immigration policies. It is the opinion of this writer that multiculturalism based upon understanding and respect offers a hope for nonviolent change within developed nations and the world. Understanding and respect can make positive contributions to nonviolent change.

There are ways in which behavioral scientists can advance multi-cultural understanding in order to foster nonviolent change. General understandings derived from the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) seem to be pertinent.

Although research regarding AI is not the focus of this article, for purposes of this discussion, AI is seen as a set of valuing activities and strategies that focus on identifying and strengthening positive aspects of a system or organization. Applying AI requires an acceptance of societal, individual and organizations cultures as an essential subject of inquiry.

**Immigration Policy offers a Promise of Economic Strength for the Future.**

When Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in 2002, they stimulated an Important line of inquiry into how fear of loss may impact human decision making. Contemporary political challenges in much of the economically developed world center upon decisions made about immigration. Significant contemporary immigration policy in the developed nations is derived from fear of cultural change and loss of privileged status on the part of currently dominant groups. Fear of the other is an evolutionary protective response. At present there is little evidence that fear of economic and cultural damage attributable to immigration is beneficial to the economically developed societies. Immigration may be seen as having positive economic benefits. Several technologically advanced nations, including Germany and the United States have for decades benefited significantly from the ability to acquire talented individuals from other countries. This process has not always been smooth. In some case there have been difficulties in adjustment on both sides, Phobia, racism on either or both sides and duplicity on the part of all parties involved have also been factors unfortunate factors in limiting successful immigration policy.

As conceptualized by Cooperrider (1987) and others, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) provides a methodology for examining the photoreactors within a structure as a basis for positive change. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) involves an analysis of the positive aspects of a system in order to facilitate change. As applied to immigration policy, an AI approach would look at positive impact that immigrants might have on the societies that receive them. Such potential impacts might include economic contributions to the vitality of a society. Immigration of talented younger such as workers may in part offset the aging demographics of many industrial societies. Difference often engenders fear in many
species. In the case of human societies, there is strong evidence that Accepting and encouraging diversity may result in economic development and robustness. Aging populations in Europe, Japan, China, Russia as well as the United States point to a need to acquire the contributions of a youthful workforce bolstered through immigration. Despite data that point to benefits, political factors in several European countries as well as in the United States have led to a misunderstanding of the benefits of appropriately managed immigration to industrialized economies. Evidence suggests that the resistance of groups of persons who have been born in economically developed countries to accepting immigrants is based upon misinformation and fear.

Enabling the entry of individuals who are ready and willing to become part of a society and contribute to its welfare can produce valuable economic results. An important issue centers upon the way in which individuals who immigrate are received into the society. Several factors influence this process. While humanitarian considerations are very salient in developing immigration policy, understanding the benefit of immigration to the countries of destination must be considered.

**Immigration as a Stimulus for Fear**

While this article stresses a cross-cultural and international perspective, contemporary conditions revolving around immigration policy in the United States are used as relatively familiar examples, with selected other situations mentioned with equal weight intended by the author. Several European nations are experiencing similar debates. Policies for immigration in Asian nations are not discussed due to lack of information available at this time.

For many immigrants who seek residence in developed countries of Europe or North America a principal reason for wishing to enter the country to which they are immigrating is economic or political pressure. In terms of historical patterns, a significant difference might be seen between typical migrant workers in contemporary Western Europe and those who enter the United States. In the history of the United States there were periods in which immigration was actively encouraged. With a large territory and expanded economic possibilities in both agricultural and manufacturing, the influx of immigrants into the country was encouraged. Arguably, there was an implicit and explicit contract developed progressively between the newcomers and the landed residents that there would be an integration and acculturalization of the immigrants into the culture and value system of the U.S.

An assumption was that persons who were in immigrant status would at some point be integrated into the cultural fabric of the receiving country, that is, into the culture and values of the United States. Evidence points to this having been the case regarding expectations during the periods of mass immigration into the U.S. at the time of the industrial revolution and the periods before and between the two world wars. Groups from Ireland, and Central and Southern European countries were instruments in providing the labor that allowed high productivity in the production of war materials. A clear expectation was that the immigrants would adapt to the culture of previously established residents. This expectation became part of the so-called “melting pot” theory. This assumption has been challenged by recent evidence.

According to the so-called “melting pot” theory dominant espoused in the United States of the 19th Century, cultural differences among the immigrants would be submerged in a developing culture of the host environment. During the First World War and its aftermath, for example, German American immigrants were subjected to pressure to demonstrate their “Americanness” by setting aside the use of the German language in church and social situations. Similar social pressures experienced by Italian and Eastern European immigrants as well. As cultural centers, ethnic expressions of community were replaced by those that emphasized the dominant culture. It was anticipated that a common “American culture would arise in preference to the cultures of immigrant origin.
As a broad example of pressures on immigrant groups for cultural homogeneity, churches, synagogues, mosques and temples were tacitly encouraged by the receiving culture to encourage the use of English in services. For Catholic and Jewish immigrants, the use of liturgical languages remained, with Latin being the predominant liturgical language for Roman Catholics until the 1960's. Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Russian, Korean, Chinese, Spanish and many other languages in continued use for religious expression. Despite xenophobia in many receiving cultures, there are no substantial data to indicate immigrants who respect their linguistic and cultural traditions while participating in the receiving culture do not become societally integrated.

Culture remains a means of preserving and strengthening expressions of group and individual identity. Although many cultural groups maintain and proudly affirm aspects of their cultural identities, the development of mass media, especially television, has fostered the emergence of a shared culture within each of the developed nations. The diffusion of the internet, television and portable “smart” devices such as tablets and cell phones has contributed to the development of “base cultures” in several developed nations. Yet as recent massacres in New Zealand and the Netherlands

A Cultural Melting Pot or a Rich Tapestry

The cultural melting pot envisioned in the decades of major immigration in the United States Ethnic and geopolitical factors have influenced the particularity seen among groups immigrating into the United States from Latin American countries. In developing the thread that follows it is important to note that while noting specific perceived differences in immigrant populations the point of view of the author is appreciative and respectful. When specific cultural features are noted, the impressions are offered with honor and respect and without any criticism or comparative valuing intended. Indigenous peoples in are equal contributors to the culture of the Americas. Melded with Spanish and Portuguese influences, outcomes have been the development of unique and highly developed cultures within the host communities. In the United States, for example, there has been a significant and important impact of cultural traditions of Latin pre-Columbian and Hispanic cultures joined with the rich influences of African American heritage.

Adding to the unique and advanced cultures of first nation societies in the Western Hemisphere, many cultures have continued to be dynamic forces for economic progress. Along with cultures originating in Africa and Asia Spanish and Portuguese cultures have been particularly strong, as have influences from the Middle East and Northern Europe. Openness to experiencing the cultures of groups other than one’s own can lead to a shared identity and a reduced risk of violent behavior on the part of extremists.

One of the characteristics of resistance to immigration is a misunderstanding of motives that immigrants may have for leaving their home countries. Immigrant workers may be motivated to seek residence and employment in a developed country because of economic difficulties in their home nation. In current experience in developed nations such as Britain and the United States, immigrant workers in the host country may be the principle support of their families remaining in the country of origin. While some immigrants are seeking asylum because of violence in their countries of origin, as was the case with early European immigrants to the United States, many others are seeking new lives for themselves and their families. Using techniques such as those developed for AI may facilitate development of positive immigration policy and the reduction of fear that may lead to violence.

Discussion

Immigration policy has caused significant challenges to international efforts to promote cultural harmony. Following the general concepts of behavioral economics, it is imperative that the factors that lead to fear of difference be understood and addressed. It seems evident that knowledge has a fear-reducing effect and that this reduction may lead to behavioral change. AI strategies seem useful in assisting in bringing about nonviolent change in attitudes concerning immigration,
Fear leads to reluctance on the part of members of a community to accept members of another culture. Using the techniques of AI can be a way to educate populations in such a way that may be seen can be seen as valuable contributions rather than as threats. AI techniques concentrate on discovering value in cultural artifacts and accordingly may fit well with the science of behavioral economics in contributing to nonviolent change. Subsequent articles in this series will explore techniques that may be used by behavioral scientists to facilitate this process. Behavioral science approaches to understanding the value of human capital offered through immigration seem economically and morally preferable to solutions based on artificial physical barriers, as history in China, Britain in the Roman period, and East Berlin have demonstrated. Appreciative Inquiry techniques may facilitate nonviolent change through improved immigration policy.

Reference:

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AGRICULTURAL LITERACY: A SOLUTION TO YOUTH IDLENESS AND UNEMPLOYMENT:
Field work for youth: How getting their hands in the soil could help young Moroccans land a job.

Anya Karaman, "Agricultural Literacy: A Solution to Youth Idleness and Unemployment"
At a juvenile detention center in Fes, it feels like summer camp is all year round. There, “maximum security” is an open, white building complex, “delinquents” are watering plants and planting seeds, and the only guard in sight, if you’re lucky, is a wild peacock patrolling the grounds.

For many of us, the term “juvenile detention center” does not strike summertime sentiments. But in Fes, the all-boys Center for the Protection of Children deviates from the norm in more ways than one. Beyond its disarming quietude, the center distinguishes itself from most of its kind by showing how agricultural expertise can augment youth rehabilitation and social reintegration.

Atman Khayi, director of operations, explains that the goal of this center is “not to punish” but rather to “educate” the youth they take in. Instead of experiencing traditional disciplinary methods—like isolation, punishment, and restriction of movement—detained boys are given opportunities to work, learn, and grow as they serve out their sentences. While the boys live under constant watch, they are also afforded responsibility in the form of agricultural skill building. They are trained and taught hard skills such as water irrigation, crop management, weeding, and tree grafting. With thirty-six boys at the center on one given day—and that number fluctuates with the daily intake and release process—the effect of the center’s active approach to agricultural skill building is visible.

One such boy at the center comes from a rural farming family. On a recent site visit, him and nine other residents took a small group of High Atlas Foundation staff members on a walking tour of the facilities and nurseries. When we asked him, “What’s something you’ve learned here that you didn’t know back home?” he paused for a minute. “I’ve learned how to plant and take care of trees since my home mainly focuses on wheat and barley,” he answered.

Most boys at the center come from backgrounds like his: rural farming households that derive their income from low market-valued cereal crops, like barley. The low market-value of these traditional staple crops has made subsistence agriculture unsustainable. The Ministry of Agriculture reported in 2019 that while the staples occupy approximately 75% of usable agricultural land, they represent only 10-15% of agricultural revenue and only 5-10% of employment in the sector. Concurrently, the Ministry of Agriculture’s goal as part of their Green Morocco Plan is the creation of 600,000 new jobs.

Boys like the one just mentioned pose a unique solution to both concerns. Once their sentence is served the boys are released to their families, taking with them important environmental and agricultural practices they developed at the center—not the least of which being the cultivation of organic, non-cereal crops. Not only do the boys benefit from applying their expertise at home—thereby improving their employability—but the families also learn improved methods of farming. The agricultural value chain grows with every boy who comes through the center and every family that adopts sustainable, high-demand practices.

How does this inter-dependent approach expedite youth rehabilitation? Perhaps it’s the freedom of choice that the center’s staff affords the boys. While nursery tending is a primary interest of most of the boys, they have the freedom to engage in other activities they find more enjoyable. One boy told us that he doesn’t like “being in the farm in the summer,” so instead he spends his time welding, building, and painting. His interests are made useful and valuable by the staff, who believe that the boys should be engaged in some hands-on activity, whatever it may be. There is enough diversity in activities that the boys are never idle for too long. Their productivity reaps real, tangible results they can point to as the fruit of their labor. When they can see the direct result of their work, they learn that there are financial, personal, and even environmental benefits in becoming productive members of society.
The center’s bountiful array of activities highlights a more pressing concern facing Morocco today: recruitment of stigmatized youth by radical political groups. For boys seeking a purpose in life after time served, the center offers opportunities to enter the job market with industry-specific skills and knowledge. But the future of idle youth who are not engaging in agricultural skill building is unclear. Furthermore, this center is just one of twenty-one in all of Morocco; for the young boys who are not given the same responsibilities as those in Fes, they are entering a society more urbanized and more competitive than when they left it. Dissonance between the world they’ve entered and the world they’ve left leaves them vulnerable to radical groups with ideologies promising acceptance, purpose, and spiritual fulfillment.

As the gap between the skilled and the unskilled widens, it becomes more important than ever to invest in programs committed to giving unengaged youth a chance at employment. If there’s something to be learned from the Fes Child Protection Center’s approach, it’s that despite their prior transgressions in life every child should have a seat at the table, a chance at personal and professional betterment. Already, we see that the benefits of pulling an extra seat up are felt far beyond the center’s gates.

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MEDIA NOTES


Shlomo Swirski, Yaron Hoffman-Dishon, Etty Konor-Attias, "Annexation Trumps Start-up Nation: Two Settlement Projects = Two Different National Agendas" (showing that "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict affects not only international and domestic politics but also Israel’s society and economy"), published by

USEFUL WEB SITES

UN NGO Climate Change Caucus, with numerous task forces, is at: http://climatecaucus.net.


350.org focuses on stopping and mitigating global warming induced climate change: http://act.350.org/.

The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) is concerned with the proper use of science in decision making, and of using science to prevent public harm in many areas, especially concerning the environment: www.ucsusa.org.

The Indigenous Environmental Network works on environmental issues from an Indigenous point of view: http://www.ienearth.org.

The League of Conservation voters (LCV) is concerned with environmental issues: https://www.lcv.org.

Food & Water Action Fund (https://www.foodandwateractionfund.org) and Food and Water Watch (https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org) work to protect food and water.

Ocean River Institute is a non-profit that provides opportunities to make a difference and go the distance for savvy stewardship of a greener and bluer planet Earth: https://www.oceanriver.org.

Waterkeeper Alliance is a global movement for swimmable, drinkable, fishable water: https://waterkeeper.org.

WildEarth Guardians works to protect and restore wildlife, wild places and wild rivers in the American West: wildearthguardians.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.


The Environmental Defense Fund works on environmental issues and policy, primarily in the U.S.: http://edf.org.


SaveOurEnvironment.org, a coalition of environmental organizations acting politically in the U.S.: http://ga3.org/campaigns/0908_endangered_species/xuninw84p7m8mxxm.


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-oceania.com/0annexanchorc/about-rainmakers.html.

Green Ships, in fall 2008, was is 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.


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.transcendafrika.net.

Americas Program: www.cipameicas.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.


Noviolenceactiva.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=ifVI4N6x%2B8od%2FyQP7%2F2hEePjkCiqRSZQ. Additional resources in Spanish are on-line at the website: TrainingforChange.org. Mostly training materials, plus some articles on nonviolent strategy.

Center for Global Justice is at: https://www.globaljusticecenter.org.


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, ESOP, 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 Research Association has a new website, as of November, 2007: http://www.ipraweb.org.

The International Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) Program’s American University website, 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/.


TRANSCEND Network for Peace Development Environment is at: https://www.transcend.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.


Jewish Voice for Peace and Jewish Peace News: www.jewishpeacenews.net.


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.worldsecurity institute.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://conflictaandcollaboration.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.

Confitti 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/ii-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, IPE, 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 each other 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.

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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/.

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