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Libya

They Hoped to Reach Europe. They Were Massacred in Libya. (The New York Times) By Sally Hayden
July 3, 2019

On Wednesday at least 44 migrants were killed and more than 130 injured when an airstrike hit a migrant detention center in Tajoura, 10 miles east of Tripoli, the capital of Libya. Hundreds of men, women and children, mostly from African countries, who left their homes for Europe, have been locked up for months — in some cases for years — at the detention center.

The civil war in Libya intensified in early April after Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the leader of eastern Libya militias, ordered his forces to advance on Tripoli, where the country’s internationally backed Government of National Accord is led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj.

Fighting has continued between General Hifter’s forces and militias loosely affiliated with Mr. Sarraj’s government. A week earlier, forces allied with the internationally recognized government in Tripoli took control of Gharyan, a town south of Tripoli, which was the main supply base for General Hifter’s forces in their campaign to capture the capital.

On Monday, a commander of General Hifter’s forces promised to step up aerial attacks on the capital, claiming the “traditional means” to capture Tripoli had been exhausted. The airstrike that hit the Tajoura detention center came two days later. Mr. Sarraj’s government blamed General Hifter’s forces and called for a United Nations investigation.

But Mr. Sarraj’s government shares the blame for holding the migrants in detention centers inside or close to its military facilities. In May, an airstrike targeting a government weapons store in Tajoura hit 80 meters from the detention center. An Egyptian man who was being forced by the guards to work inside the weapons store was injured.

Mr. Sarraj’s government and the European Union share the responsibility for the deaths of the migrants and for the horrifying
and precarious conditions of their detention in Libya. War crimes against migrants have been carried out by both the government aligned forces and General Hifter’s militias.

For 10 months I have been speaking with dozens of refugees and migrants in detention centers across Libya, who use hidden phones to send me details of how they are treated. Their messages describe a bleak and brutal world of abuse and exploitation. Migrants and refugees detained in Libya have been raped, tortured, starved, sold back to traffickers by guards, and forced to carry weapons for the various militias in the country’s civil war.

Minutes after the first airstrike on the Tajoura detention center Tuesday I got a call from a 16-year-old Eritrean migrant trapped inside. “Oh my God, it is a terrible moment. Pray for us. Oh my God,” he said, his voice trembling and words failing him.

A second strike followed. “The other cell is already destroyed, the people are lost,” the 16-year-old messaged me right after. Photos from the aftermath show blood, body parts and detainees’ belongings. Outside, the detention center, corpses were lined up in black plastic bags. “We picked up parts of their bodies,” a Sudanese detainee messaged me.

Many of those locked up in Tajoura were forced back to Tripoli by the European Union-supported Libyan coast guard, which arrested them while trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach safety in Europe. The European Union has spent tens of millions on this effort since 2017.

Last year, roughly 15,000 people were intercepted on boats at sea and forced to Libyan detention centers, where they are held without charge. In May 2019 alone, 1224 migrants and refugees were returned there.

They are among around 6,000 migrants and refugees, including at least 1200 children, being held indefinitely in Libyan detention centers, in conditions that the former United Nations human rights chief Zeid Ra’ad al-Hussein described as “an outrage to the conscience of humanity.”

The detention centers are ostensibly run by the Libyan government’s Department for Combating Illegal Migration. In reality most of the detention centers are controlled by militias. Around 3,000 detainees, like those in Tajoura, have been trapped on the front lines of fighting. The only legal way out is to wait for the very slim possibility of being evacuated by the United Nations Refugee Agency, or to go back to the country you came from. Refugees regularly accuse the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees of not doing enough to help them.

The lines between military bases and detention centers are thin. Tajoura is a military complex. I have received many testimonies from detainees saying they are forced to assist fighters aligned with the Tripoli government. Guards select people from the migrants’ hangars to move weapons and force some to spend all their time in weapons stores.

I received photos of Sudanese detainees dressed in military fatigues in the Tajoura complex, who were made to guard checkpoints, wash blood from ambulances and clean vehicles loaded with guns. They said they couldn’t resist orders or they would be badly beaten. I was sent a video of another man surrounded by bombs. “If you post this video on the news they will kill me,” he said.

Occasionally, refugees and migrants are taken from Tajoura to the front line and to assist fighters. One former detainee said he was given an AK-47 and told to join the forces aligned with Mr. Serraj-aligned forces. “Many brothers, more than 20 disappeared (since the conflict started in April),” a detainee messaged me in early June. “They took them and they come every time to ask for more. I am so scared right now, I can’t sleep at night.”

In Tajoura detention center’s administration block, there is an isolation room, where detainees who try to escape are abused and interrogated. At the end of May, there was a crackdown on communications in Tajoura. Three men were taken away by guards and tortured. One later sent me photos showing wounds on his hands and legs, saying he was electrocuted and forced to name others who had been sending messages to journalists and activists.

On June 21, two men who tried to escape Tajoura were killed, according to detainees who knew them. Aid workers, speaking anonymously, confirmed there had been an incident that day, but couldn’t say whether anyone died. Many of those locked up are refugees, who have fled war-torn African countries or brutal dictatorships and can’t return home.

The renewed fighting has worsened the situation but deaths in Libyan detention centers aren’t all related to the civil war. Between mid-September and late May, at least 22 refugees and migrants died after being locked up without enough food, water and medical care in Zintan detention center, 110 miles southwest of Tripoli. According to an internal United Nations report that was leaked to me, more than 80 percent of detainees in Zintan could have tuberculosis. Most haven’t been tested.

Instead of moving them to a hospital, some of the critically ill detainees at Zintan camp were moved to a detention center in Gharyan, the front line of the fighting between the government and General Hifter’s forces. Management had complained the
corpses of Christians were piling up, as there was no provision for non-Muslim burials in Zintan.

An Eritrean man, who is being held in Zintan, told me four men and boys tried to kill themselves by grabbing electrical wires. In April, Meron, a 17-year-old Eritrean boy, killed himself by jumping into a septic tank in Abu Salim detention center in southern Tripoli. Meron had fled indefinite military service and a litany of human rights abuses in Eritrea. It took the other detainees — men, women, and children from Sudan and Somalia — more than 30 minutes to get his body out.

On April 23, fighters aligned with the government forces opened fire on refugees and migrants as they prayed at Qasr Bin Ghashir detention center in southern Tripoli, killing several. Detainees there had refused to move to the Zintan detention center, believing it was better to die quickly than suffer a slow death caused by neglect and starvation. At the Tajoura detention center, detainees have been worried about attacks for months.

On Wednesday morning, a 26-year-old from Darfur, Sudan, who is being held at Tajoura detention camp, messaged me. “This is the world, my sister,” he said. “I am in the house of the slaughter. The European Union and the High Commissioner for Refugees must bear responsibility for this massacre.”

**Libya: UN arms embargo violations put Tripoli’s 1.2 million civilians in grave danger (Amnesty International)**

**July 3, 2019**

**The lives and security of Tripoli’s 1.2 million civilians hang in the balance as warring parties use a range of sophisticated weapons imported into Libya in contravention of a UN arms embargo, Amnesty International said today as it released a new video marking three months since the battle began.**

The escalating violence since 4 April has forced more than 100,000 civilians to flee from their homes and knocked out the electricity supply for long periods each day – impacting health care and other basic services in many parts of the city. Rocket and artillery strikes often hit civilian areas far from the frontline and frequently disrupt flights into Tripoli’s only functioning airport.

“The drastic impact of the battle for Tripoli is even visible from space, with satellite imagery showing large swathes of the city now cloaked in darkness. Meanwhile footage and photographic evidence we have gathered and verified from the ground show that civilian areas, homes and infrastructure are bearing the brunt of the damage,” said Magdalena Mughrabi, Deputy Middle East and North Africa Director at Amnesty International.

“The UN arms embargo is meant to protect civilians in Libya. But Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Turkey, among others, are blatantly flouting it by providing sophisticated armoured vehicles, drones, guided missiles and other weapons. The UN Security Council must urgently take steps to enforce the embargo, and the warring parties must respect international humanitarian law and stop recklessly endangering civilians.”

**Background**

Armed conflict in and around Tripoli escalated on 4 April 2019, when forces from the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army, led by General Khalifa Haftar, launched an offensive to capture the city from Libya’s internationally recognized Government of National Accord. Since the offensive began, both through sources on the ground and analysis of verified video content and satellite imagery, Amnesty International has documented both sides violating international humanitarian law – including potential war crimes – with indiscriminate attacks on residential areas and attacks on migrant and refugee detention centres. The UN Security Council imposed a comprehensive arms embargo on arms supplies to and from Libya in February 2011 (Res 1970). Since June 2016 (Res 2292), the Security Council has authorized member states to inspect vessels on the high seas off Libya’s coast believed to be in violation of the arms embargo.

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Despite peace deal, Central African Republic’s population faces daily acts of violence, UN envoy warns (India Blooms)

June 21, 2019

In a briefing, Mankeur Ndiaye, head of the UN Mission to the country, known by the French acronym, MINUSCA, made reference to the “cowardly killing” of 39 people by members of the “3R” armed group – one of the signatories to the accord – in the Ouham-Pendé region of the country on May 21, which led to some 12,000 people being displaced from their homes.

Following a joint mission of the UN, African Union and Economic Community of Central African States, the leader of the 3R group committed to collaborate with the investigations into the killings.

MINUSCA, Mr. Ndiaye told the Council, also launched a military operation in western CAR, designed to improve the protection of the civilian population, prevent new attacks or reprisals and stop armed activity in the region.

Following the operation, three members of 3R were arrested in connection with the May 21 killings. Nevertheless, he continued, the security situation remains fragile, with between 50 and 70 violations of the peace accord reported every week. These include violence against civilians, illegal taxes, and the occupation of public buildings.

Parties to the peace deal must commit to ending violence

All parties to the accord must commit to putting an end to all forms of violence, and to settling disputes through dialogue, he said. They must, as a matter of urgency, conform to security arrangements to which they have already agreed. A crucial step towards reducing inter-communal violence linked to transhumance – the seasonal movement of livestock from one grazing ground to another – is the creation of a special security unit.

The security sector, briefed the MINUSCA chief, is now more representative of the population, more professional and more efficient, thanks to efforts undertaken by the Government of CAR. A recruitment campaign for the police will take place in the coming months, following on from a recently-completed army recruitment campaign.

The people of CAR, expect a lot from peace, declared Ndiaye. They expect to be able to go about their business in peace, to have access to drinking water, to health care, education, jobs and justice. The conditions must therefore be created to bring about an environment in which the economy can improve, and in which young people can find jobs, thus preventing the creation of more armed groups.

Country’s humanitarian situation remains ‘disastrous’

However, the humanitarian situation, he continued, remains “disastrous”, which is putting the prospects for peace at risk: 2.9 million people, half of whom are children, need humanitarian assistance and protection, while 2.1 million face a lack of food security.

The peace process, said Ndiaye, must lead to improved access to humanitarian aid, and the creation of development activities in zones that are now stable.

Adequate support for 622,000 internally displaced people and 590,000 refugees from CAR, sheltering in neighbouring countries, is needed, and the UN’s 2019 humanitarian plan, which requires over $430 million, is currently insufficiently funded, with only 28 per cent of the total reached so far.

The MIUSCA chief pointed out that the many human rights violations that have taken place in the country must be addressed. National consultations on the creation of a Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission will, he said, allow Central Africans to express their opinions on how victims can receive redress, and show the “path towards national reconciliation”.

Elections are also a crucial stage towards reinforcing democracy in CAR, warned Ndiaye. A delay in the adoption of the country’s electoral code could lead to a delay in the preparation of elections planned in 2020-2021.

He noted the creation of a political platform composed of opposition parties and civil society opposed to the peace process, and expressed his hope that opposition to the process will not lead to a rejection of peace, but instead constructive proposals in favour of the development of the country.
Sudan & South Sudan

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in Darfur, Sudan

Democratic Republic of the Congo

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

WEST AFRICA

Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)

Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

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

oko Haram jihadists kill 7 Chadian soldiers, local guard in ambush (africanews english) By Eric Oteng
June 23, 2019

Seven Chadian soldiers and a local guard were killed in a Boko Haram jihadist ambush in Lake Chad, the latest in a surge of attacks in the region, security sources said on Sunday.

Boko Haram militants have been waging a decade-long insurgency in northwest Nigeria, but the conflict has spilled into Lake Chad where Nigeria borders Niger, Chad and Cameroon.

Security sources said the seven Chadian soldiers and the guard were killed in an ambush on Friday in Mbomouga in Chad’s
Ngouboua area, and another 13 people were wounded.

“The Boko Haram forces lost six of their people and left behind two weapons,” one security source said.

Among the soldiers killed was a gendarme colonel, the source said. Another source said three army officers were killed in the attack.

Since 2018, Boko Haram has carried out at least nine attacks on Chad. But the jihadist group has stepped up attacks outside Nigeria after a period of calm last year.

Last month, militants killed four people in an attack on a Cameroonian island on Lake Chad and Boko Haram killed another 13 villagers in eastern Chad.

In March jihadists killed at least 23 Chadian soldiers in an attack on an army post in the group’s deadliest attack on the country’s military.

Since 2015, troops from Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria have been grouped into a mixed, multi-national force in a bid to help fight Islamist militants.

**Troops rescue 95 Boko Haram captives, recover four terrorist flags (The Punch)** By Olaleye Aluko June 24, 2019

Troops of Operation Lafiya Dole have rescued 95 men, women and children who were abducted by the Boko Haram terrorists in Kobe, Boboshe, Dubula and Tafana villages of Borno State, during an extended clearance operation.

The troops, attached to 112 Task Force Battalion and 22 Brigade in collaboration with members of the Civilian Joint Task Force, discovered the victims in some camps at Kobe and Boboshe villages on Saturday.

According to the army on Monday, the troops recovered four terrorists’ flags, two copies of Quran, one generator and two bicycles from the villages.

Meanwhile, in Dubula and Tafana villages, troops retrieved two boxes filled with Quran, five bicycles and assorted clothing materials.

The military said 24 of the rescued children were administered with polio vaccines by the Nigerian Army Regimental Medical Officers and officials of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency.

The villages had been previously unreached in the polio vaccination exercise.

The acting Director, Army Public Relations, Col Sagir Musa, in a release on Monday, said some of the terrorists fled the camps on sighting troops while a few others were shot dead.

Musa said, “In continuation of the ongoing clearance operation, Halaka Dodo, the troops discovered newly established camps in Dubula. The following items were recovered; two terrorists’ flags, two copies of Quran, one generator set and two bicycles. Additionally, 13 women and 26 children were rescued during the operation.

“In another offensive clearance operation to Tafana 1 and Tafana 2 villages, the troops rescued two men, 29 women and 25 children. In all the operations, it was observed that with the rains, farmers are preparing for the season, while the terrorists are using women and children as farm slaves and labourers on their farmlands.”

**Cameroon: Video Shows Separatists Torturing Man (Human Rights Watch)**

June 24, 2019

A video viewed by Human Rights Watch shows armed separatists torturing a man in an abandoned school in the North-West region of Cameroon in mid-May, 2019.

The video, verified by a dozen sources including five people who recognize the school and its location, corroborates previous accounts of torture and occupation of schools by armed separatists documented by Human Rights Watch.

“Once again material is circulating to support allegations that armed separatists are abusing civilians,” said Lewis Mudge, Central Africa Director at Human Rights Watch. “Separatist leaders should immediately direct their fighters and followers to halt attacks, including torture and other abuse aimed at civilians.”
The footage shows at least four separatist fighters threatening and torturing the man, who is wearing only his underwear, forcing him to sit on burning pieces of paper and beating him with sticks and machetes.

An analysis of the dialogue in the video reveals that the victim is a driver from the village of Bali who had been transporting products for Brasseries du Cameroon, a state-owned company the separatists oppose. They have banned the marketing, purchase, and transport of its drink products within the areas they control.

Separatists can be heard accusing the driver of selling Brasseries’ products in the Bali and Batibo parts of the North-West region. The victim, who has yet to be identified, begs his torturers to stop, but they instead threaten to “wash him with gasoline,” implying they will kill him.

The attackers and the victim speak Mungaka, a language common among communities in Bali. The video appears to have been filmed at the Government Technical High School in Bali, as the writing on a school desk shows at the 05:41 mark in the video. Five people from Bali who know the school well told Human Rights Watch that this is the school in the video.

They also said separatists hold and abuse hostages there. The school, which had a capacity of over 800 students, has been closed since mid-2017 due to violence and the separatists’ boycott of education to make the area ungovernable and to signal that the situation in the Anglophone regions is untenable.

The separatists are most likely from a group that controls Bali, whose leader was known as General Koraman. In March, a video surfaced of Koraman declaring that he and his men would intercept vehicles from the Brasseries du Cameroon. Sources suggest that the video was filmed in the first half of May. Reliable reports indicate that Koraman was killed on June 1. Since late 2016, the Anglophone regions of Cameroon have been gripped by deadly violence, claiming the lives of over 1,800 people and forcing half a million to flee their homes. Government forces have killed scores of civilians, torched hundreds of homes, and used torture and incommunicado detention against people suspected of belonging to separatist groups, with near-total impunity. Armed separatists have killed hundreds of members of security forces and assaulted and kidnapped hundreds of people during their increasing attacks and growing calls for secession of the North-West and South-West regions.

Since the crisis escalated, armed separatists have used schools as bases, deploying fighters and weapons and holding people hostage in and near them. Separatists have disrupted normal life in the areas they control by enforcing strikes, consistently targeting school buildings, and threatening education officials and students with violence if they did not comply with separatist demands to boycott schools.

In one case, armed separatists kidnapped two children, ages 16 and 17, from their home in Nkwen, Bamenda, North-West region in the morning of June 8. Their father told Human Rights Watch that the separatists accused the children of studying for the General Certificate Examination: “They arrived with motorbikes, they entered the house with guns and threatened everyone. They said my kids were defying the ban on education. Then, they took them away. They called asking for a ransom. I don’t know how I will find the money. I am scared my girl might be raped.” The children were beaten and released three days later, following a ransom payment.

Armed separatists have also tortured dozens of people. In the past year, Human Rights Watch has documented numerous cases of torture by armed separatists against workers of the Cameroon Development Corporation, who work in the company’s banana plantations near Tiko, South-West region. The workers have been beaten or maimed because they refused to participate in a general strike called by the separatists.

On June 18, separatists kidnapped at least 40 people, including women and children, travelling in a four-vehicle convoy in Bafut, North-West region. Human Rights Watch spoke with two people who escaped. A 37-year-old man from Wum said that about 20 armed separatists ambushed the vehicles: “They came out of the woods, fired in the air, and stopped the cars. They were shouting ‘Amba! Amba!’ (short for ‘Amba Boys,’ how many of the separatists are known and how they refer to themselves) and were threatening to shoot the women.” The separatists beat and robbed the people, then released them on June 19.

Cameroon’s international partners and the UN Security Council should impose targeted sanctions on separatist leaders who bear responsibility for abuses, including torture and occupation of schools, Human Rights Watch said.


“The separatists should know the world is paying attention and those responsible for torture will face the consequences,” Mudge said. “Armed separatists should let children return to their studies and stop using the schools to carry out their campaign.
Mali

Atrocity Alert No. 160: Mali, Yemen, World Refugee Day and the UN Formal Debate on R2P (reliefweb)
June 26, 2019

Cycle of inter-communal violence in Mali intensifies

At least 41 civilians were killed in attacks on the villages of Yoro and Gangafani 2 in the Mopti region of Mali on Monday, 17 June. According to reports, 100 armed men attacked the villages and began shooting civilians, targeting individuals from the ethnic Dogon community. There were also reports that armed men stopped civilian vehicles on nearby roads, separating out Dogon villagers and executing them. At the time of publication, no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Violence continues to increase in central Mali, particularly between the Dogon and Fulani communities. Despite a history of inter-communal tensions over access to land, water and grazing rights, the inability of the government to provide security – combined with the proliferation of small arms over recent years – has led to the rise of armed “self-defense groups.” At least 190 people, including dozens of children, were killed in two massacres during March and early June, with many smaller attacks also targeting civilians from one ethnic community or the other. In a joint statement the UN Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, and the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, said they were “extremely alarmed by the ethnically motivated attacks against civilians in central Mali” and called “on the authorities and all parties involved, including the international community, to fulfill their responsibility to prevent atrocity crimes and protect civilians.”

The Malian government, with the support of the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA), must immediately investigate the attacks on Yoro and Gangafani 2 and ensure that those responsible for inciting, directing and perpetrating the attack are held accountable. When the Security Council considers the renewal of MINUSMA’s mandate later this week, members should prioritize civilian protection, and the need for ongoing efforts to prevent further identity-based violence. MINUSMA should support the government’s efforts to disarm armed groups and promote inter-communal dialogue.

UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia halted due to atrocities in Yemen

On 20 June the Court of Appeal in London ruled that the government of the United Kingdom had failed to adequately assess the actions of the Saudi/United Arab Emirates (UAE)-led military coalition in Yemen prior to issuing licenses for arms exports to Saudi Arabia. According to standards agreed upon by all European Union member states, governments should not license arms exports when there is a clear risk that weapons may be used to perpetrate violations of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The court ruled that “the government made no concluded assessments of whether the Saudi-led coalition had committed violations of [IHL] in the past, during the Yemen conflict, and made no attempt to do so.” Following the ruling the UK government suspended new arms sales to Saudi Arabia until an appropriate assessment is conducted. Several other European countries, including Austria, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands and Norway, have already halted the sale of heavy weapons to Saudi Arabia. On 20 June the United States Senate voted again to block the sale of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE despite a threatened veto by President Donald Trump.

Since 2015 all parties to the conflict in Yemen have perpetrated grave violations of international human rights law and IHL, possibly amounting to war crimes. Parties to the conflict, including the Saudi/UAE-led coalition, have routinely used indiscriminate weapons on civilian-populated areas and targeted civilian infrastructure, such as schools and medical facilities, during airstrikes. According to data reported by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) on 18 June, since 2015 more than 91,000 people have been killed in Yemen, including an estimated 11,700 fatalities resulting from “direct targeting of civilians.” The Saudi/UAE-led coalition is responsible for more than two thirds of all civilian casualties.

In keeping with the Arms Trade Treaty, all UN member states should immediately halt the sale of weapons to parties to the conflict who routinely violate IHL, including Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Record 70.8 million people displaced by conflict, persecution and atrocities

Last Wednesday, 19 June, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) released its annual “Global Trends” report in advance of World
Refugee Day. According to the report, as of December 2018 more than 70.8 million people were displaced by conflict, persecution and human rights violations around the world. This number reflects a 2.3 million increase since 2017 and is the highest ever recorded in the organization’s almost 70-year history.

The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide includes 25.9 million refugees, half of whom are children below the age of 18. Demonstrating the dire consequences of atrocity crimes, 67 percent of refugees came from five countries where war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide have recently occurred: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia. For example, the civil war in Syria, now in its ninth year, is responsible for 6.7 million refugees and 6.2 million internally displaced persons. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria has documented widespread and systematic war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by parties to the conflict.

Among the top ten countries where more than 41.3 million people are internally displaced, eight have recently experienced atrocity crimes, including Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Yemen and South Sudan. The report also highlighted the plight of Venezuelan asylum seekers, who continue to flee the ongoing economic, humanitarian and human rights crisis in that country.

The dramatic increase in forcibly displaced people over the past two decades is not just a reflection of the expansion of conflicts where perpetrators are targeting civilians, but also of the longevity of crises preventing displaced populations from returning home. As noted by the head of the International Rescue Committee, David Miliband, “we are seeing a tragic retreat from diplomacy that should be addressing the root causes of conflict and displacement, whether in Libya or Yemen, Venezuela or Syria. Instead of pursuing accountability for war crimes and investing in peace-building, we are trapped in an age of impunity that is placing civilians, as well as humanitarians, in the crossfire, and driving thousands from their homes every day.”

UN General Assembly to hold plenary meeting on R2P

Tomorrow, 27 June, the UN General Assembly will hold a plenary meeting on “The Responsibility to Protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” as part of the formal agenda of its 73rd Session. The Global Centre encourages all member states to participate in tomorrow's debate.

The plenary meeting will start at 10:00 AM in the General Assembly Hall and will be webcast on UN webtv. For more information follow @GCR2P on Twitter.

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**Liberia**

Liberia: ‘Jungle Jabbah’ Witnesses say Testifying gave them Peace (Front Page Africa) By James Harding Giahyue

June 26, 2019

Garwula District, Grand Cape Mount County – In September 2017 John, Haja Fahnbulleh, two siblings and Satta, their brother’s wife, left their village here and boarded their first international flight, headed to Philadelphia in the United States. The three went on that long trip to do something no other Liberian had ever done: testify against the man who murdered loved ones and committed atrocities against them during the Liberian civil war.

In Philadelphia, the three joined 20 other Liberian witnesses flown in to testify in the trial of Mohammed Jabbateh, the terrifying general with the United Liberation Move of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) who went by the alias “Jungle Jabbah” in the early years of the war. With Jabbateh sitting only 12 feet away in the defendant seat, the witnesses told a shocked and weeping jury tales of torture, rape and cannibalism by Jabbateh and soldiers under his command.

Satta’s testimony, more than any other, left the 12 Philadelphians in the jury visibly moved. Jabbateh, she told the court, ordered his Zebra Battalion to kill her husband (Haja’s and John’s brother). They then cut out his heart and forced Satta, then four-months pregnant, to cook it so Jabbateh and his men could eat it.
Satta spoke carefully, stopping now and then to weep, as she recalled the words of the young rebel who delivered the order.

“Make yourself strong, ma,” he said. “If you don’t do it, he’ll kill us both.”

The Philadelphia Federal courtroom has, for now, become centerstage for those seeking justice for Liberia’s civil wars. With no war crimes court yet established in Liberia, Pennsylvania District Attorneys Linwood C. Wright and Nelson Thayer, with the help of Civitas Maxima and Liberia-based Global Justice Research Project (GJRP), have made it their mission to prosecute war criminals hiding from justice in the diaspora. Jabbateh was given a 30-year maximum jail sentence, the longest ever given for such an offense by a US court. Eighteen months later, a jury in the same courtroom convicted Thomas Woewiyu, the former number two to Charles Taylor, for criminal immigration fraud, also for lying about war crimes. He also faces a 30-year prison term when he is sentenced later this year.

Testifying before the court required tremendous courage on the part of the witnesses who were seeing their torturer for the first time in nearly 30 years.

Hassan Bility of GJRP identified the witnesses. He praises Satta, Haja and John and all the other witnesses who testified in the trials of Jabbateh and Woewiyu for their strength amid fear, threats and the lack of interest by the Liberian government to prosecute the country’s wartime crimes.

“Their coming forward to testify was the beginning of the end of the blanket of fear that had covered victims of the two Liberian civil wars,” says Bility. “Now, that role has been reversed, thus swinging the pendulum of justice and putting all the victims in the position to make history and to break the chain of silence and remove the blanket of fear that covered their desire for justice and accountability,” he adds.

Nearly two years since the trial, Satta, Haja and John (their real names and village are withheld for fear of reprisal) say they are glad to have taken part in the trial.

Satta sits next to a hearth where she is smoldering fish she sells to sell and feed her family. She says the trial has brought her a measure of peace for the first time since the attack. She still grieves for her husband “but not like before” the trial. Her son, whom she was carrying when her husband was killed, is graduating from high school this year. “Allah is great.”

John told the court that another brother was beheaded and his body was set ablaze in the 1995 attack on their village. He also said the trial brought him some peace.

“I was free to testify what happened. The grief that was in my heart has gone away,” says John. He did not feel any fear to be sitting in front of Jabbateh after all those years. “I felt fine to be in his midst to express myself on what happened to me and my late brother they killed.”

John says that he relives his testimony in the Philadelphia courtroom each day. He savors the moment the jury found Jabbateh guilty. “When it happened, it was just like an imagination. I was not expecting that,” he says. “His going to jail will not make for my late brother to come back to life, but at least he must bear some consequence for what he did.”

Haja wept bitterly as she told the court that the ULIMO militiamen threw her three-week-old baby into the rainy night and then gang-raped her. She says Jabbateh’s conviction “satisfied” her heart.

“Because the man is bad. He will not do same again,” she said.

Jabbateh was not tried for war crimes but rather, for criminal immigration fraud committed in the United States when he denied his involvement in the war to immigration authorities. But for prosecutors to win that conviction they had to prove that he committed war crimes. The Philadelphia jury accepted the testimony of the witnesses – that he Jabbateh’s sentence is the longest ever given for immigration fraud in the United States. Jabbateh became the first Liberian to be found guilty in connection to the Liberian Civil War (1989-2003) that killed an estimated 250,000 people. (Former President Charles Taylor is serving a 50-year sentence for crimes he committed in Sierra Leone and his son Chuckie Taylor is serving a 97-year term in the United States where he was tried as an American).

More Liberians face charges in the United States and in Europe in connection to crimes they allegedly committed in the civil war. The Philadelphia prosecutors have been advising other prosecutors on their cases. Other than Woewiyu, Moses Thomas, ex-soldier of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) faces civil charges in the same state. Two other ex-ULIMO generals—Alieu Kosiah in Switzerland and Kunti Kamara in France—have been indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Agnes Reeves Taylor, ex-wife of former President Taylor, has been charged with torture in the United Kingdom. And Martina Johnson, former head of the NPFL artillery and mastermind of the “Octopus” crisis in 1992, is still under house arrest in that first ever war crime case against a Liberian anywhere around the world. At least a dozen more investigations are going on in countries around the world with indictments expected shortly.
Many more Liberians have and will be called to testify. Billity says the early witnesses have paved the way for those who will follow. “Like all other witnesses and victims [and] survivors, these individuals pioneered a cause,” he said.

John is urging witnesses to come forward and tell their stories. “The only advice I get for them is that they must feel free,” John says. “They must not be afraid to explain whatever that happened to them.”

He says dead victims such as his brother were counting on their living relatives and witnesses to crimes to speak for them. “They are in the grave. They will not talk to you, but if you take that challenge they will feel that you work for them.”

Liberia is under immense pressure to set up a war crimes court to address crimes committed during its civil war. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has given the George Weah administration only up to July next year to set up the court and implement other recommendations of the 2009 Truth and Reconciliation Commission report. Satta, Haja and John say they would testify in a Liberian court if they are called.

“If the court comes here and they call me [to testify], I will go [and] tell them what I know,” says Satta. “The thing that happened to us that’s [no] small thing,” she says. “I can do that one.”

“I will go there!” exclaims Haja. “I enjoyed [testifying against Jabbateh],” she adds. “I feel fine because Jungle Jabbah did bad to me.”

“Of course, when that happens here, then the other people who want to (commit crimes) will be afraid,” John says. “They will not be thinking to bring war here anymore.”

Liberia: War Crimes Court Talks Begin (allAfrica)
July 1, 2019

The UN High Commissioner for Human RightsMichelle Bachelethas questioned the government of Liberia’s road-map for justice for victims of the Liberian Civil War and the establishment of the War Crimes Court.

Madam Bachelet also expressed concerns about the low budgetary support to the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and at the same time expressing alarm over the situation of Gender and Domestic violence in Liberia. The UNHCHR boss made the statements when Vice President Jewel Howard Taylor paid a courtesy call on her at the Geneva United Nations Headquarters.

According to a dispatch from the VP’s office, Madam Bachelet commended the government of Liberia for respecting the rights of Liberians who peacefully assembled on June 7, 2019 to protest.

She thanked the government of Liberia for the passage of the Land Rights Act while calling for implementation of the instrument as well as the reactivation of Transparency agencies to fight issues of corruption and human rights abuses.

Responding, the Liberian Vice President highlighted the passage of the Domestic Violence Act by the Legislature, lamenting however that the issue of Female Genital Mutilation was not addressed in the Act.

She agreed that the INCHR of Liberia is challenged financially but pointed out that the entire country’s economy is under pressure and appealed to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for financial support to the INCHR.

On the issues of the War Crimes Court, VP Howard-Taylor pointed out that the two major issues perennially discussed from the previous Government of former President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to the current Government, were the issues of corruption and the establishment of the War Crimes Court.

On corruption, Madam Howard-Taylor accentuated the need for the establishment of a specialized corruption court to expeditiously adjudicate incidences of corruption.

She recalled her days at the Liberian Senate when she crafted a bill which called for the establishment of a corruption court, which was tabled because of its sensitive nature.

On the issue of the War Crimes Court, the Vice President said President Weah is concerned and has mandated the Ministry of Justice to develop a roadmap and make the necessary recommendations to the Cabinet in order to make a determination. VP Howard-Taylor then expressed her belief that a “War Memorial” could be greatly helpful as it is a key component of both restorative and retributive justice systems.

“This War Memorial when established, like the case of Rwanda, will unearth the level of casualties, identity of the victims and
explain the historical occurrences involving the Liberian Civil War," VP Howard-Taylor explained.

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Kenya

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Kenya: Nairobi Police Executing Suspects (Human Rights Watch) By Human Rights Watch
July 2, 2019

Police in Kenya have killed no fewer than 21 men and boys in Nairobi’s low-income areas, apparently with no justification, claiming they were criminals, Human Rights Watch said today. The extrajudicial killings point to a broader problem of police using excessive, unlawful force in the name of maintaining law and order in Nairobi’s informal settlements and failing to comply with the law in ensuring all police killings are reported, investigated, and those responsible for unlawful killings are prosecuted.

Since August 2018, police have shot dead, apparently unlawfully, at least 21 men and boys whom they alleged were criminals in Nairobi’s Dandora and Mathare neighborhoods alone, Human Rights Watch found. Rights activists in those neighborhoods believe that, based on the cases they know about and those reported in the media, police have unlawfully killed many more in the past year. Under Kenyan and international law, the police should only intentionally use lethal force when it is strictly unavoidable to protect life.

“Police are arresting unarmed people and then gunning them down, and neither the police service nor its watchdog agency is doing much to stop it,” said Otsieno Namwaya, Africa researcher at Human Rights Watch. “The authorities should promptly investigate these cases and hold to account any police officer responsible for unlawful use of force.”

In April and May 2019, Human Rights Watch interviewed 35 people including witnesses, family members of victims, medical and social workers, activists, and police personnel including the police spokesman in Nairobi. Human Rights Watch worked closely with partner organizations in Dandora and Mathare in identifying victims and families.

A businessman who is also a police informer told Human Rights Watch that the police have a list of people they plan to kill, including petty thieves and, in a few cases, men and women who have had disagreements with individual police officers.

Last April alone, and in a span of just three days, police in Mathare shot dead seven men who they said were involved in crime, without apparent justification for using lethal force, Human Rights Watch found. The men were not armed, did not resist arrest, and had either surrendered or were being held by the officers at the time of the killing.

On April 14, police shot dead Kevin Gitau, 25, who was due to travel out of the country to take up a job offer in the Middle
East, according to his family members. On April 17, police shot six men in the Mlango Kubwa area. Staff at a community rights organization in Mathare, who have been documenting the killings and offering psychosocial support to relatives of victims, said that one of the six was a 17-year-old boy.

In May 2017, the community organization in Mathare documented police killings of 57 men and women, allegedly for links to crime, in Mathare alone in one year. Independent Medico Legal Unit (IMLU) and the Kenya Human Rights Commission, both Nairobi based human rights organizations, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, a state funded constitutional institution, have over the years consistently reported on killings by police in low income areas.

Kenyan media frequently report on killings as part of law enforcement actions in low-income neighborhoods. In October 2018, the Star newspaper reported that police in Dandora, Mathare, and Majengo killed at least 17 people in a seven-day period. The same month, the Daily Nation reported that police killed at least 101 people in Nairobi and more than 180 people across Kenya in a nine-month period. It was not clear from the media reports whether any of these killings could be considered justified.

Human Rights Watch has also documented extrajudicial killings in the context of election violence and counterterrorism operations in Nairobi and the northeastern region, and at the coast in counterterrorism operations.

Under Kenya’s National Police Service Act of 2011, lethal force is only justified when strictly unavoidable to protect life. Kenyan security forces should abide by the United Nations Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, which stipulate that law enforcement officials should use nonviolent means and resort to lethal force only when strictly unavoidable to protect life. The basic principles also require governments to ensure that arbitrary or abusive use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials is punished as a criminal offense.

The Police Service Act requires police officers who use lethal fire to report to their immediate superior, explaining the circumstances that necessitated the use of force. Police also are required to report for investigation any use of force that leads to death or serious injury to the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA), a civilian police accountability institution created in 2011 to investigate and prosecute officers implicated in abuses.

In the cases Human Rights Watch documented, the police did not report the killings or initiate the process for an inquest, which is also required by law. Despite the oversight group’s efforts to investigate some of the killings since 2013, when it became operational, its work has led to only five convictions, according to an IPOA official.

The police spokesman, Charles Owino, said he did not have full information on the status of investigations but urged the oversight authority to investigate the killings. “Any officer who breaches the law must face the consequences as an individual,” he said. “In the case of the killings in Dandora and Mathare, IPOA ought to investigate such killings and ensure the culprits are prosecuted.”

Kenyan police should ensure justice for the victims of police killings and avoid appearing to be shielding those implicated, Human Rights Watch said. The National Police Service should work with community justice centers to ensure justice for the victims and support the oversight authority’s efforts to hold those responsible to account. The oversight authority should thoroughly investigate all police killings in Nairobi and across Kenya and ensure that all those responsible for unlawful killings are held to account.

“These killings are happening right under the nose of police commanders, who have done nothing either to stop them or to hold those responsible to account,” Namwaya said. “Both the police and the oversight authority need to call a halt to these executions and to make sure that the police know they will face justice if they unlawfully kill suspects.”

Killings by Police in Nairobi

Police officials at the Pangani station, which patrols Mathare, one of the areas where people were killed, told Human Rights Watch they were aware of the killings but could not discuss details. In the Dandora neighborhood, police have also shot dead suspects, apparently without justification, Human Rights Watch found.

Over the past five years, police across Kenya have appeared more inclined to justify killings in Mathare, Dandora, Eastleigh, and Kayole, and other low-income neighborhoods in the media rather than push for investigations. In some cases, police have posted photos, which Human Rights Watch saw, of bodies of their victims on social media, without informing the victims’ relatives of the killing, Human Rights Watch found.

In April 2017, a video emerged of a police officer killing two teenagers in broad daylight on the streets of Eastleigh, responding to public outcry by saying that it was because the teenagers were criminals who had killed an officer. The authorities never investigated the killings. Instead, the police defended the killings on grounds that the two teenagers were armed “criminals” who had in the past killed a police officer.
Seven Mathare residents told Human Rights Watch they believe the same officer is now heading a team of officers called the Pangani Six, who carry out targeted killings of alleged crime suspects in Mathare and Eastleigh areas. Residents in Dandora believe a similar team of officers in Kinyago station are operating as a hit squad, and that there are similar units in several other informal settlements in Nairobi, a claim the police spokesman denied.

A police informer from Dandora said the officers there have a list of suspects targeted to be extrajudicially executed, and that most of the killings are carried out by specific officers who have a joint WhatsApp group and other social media platforms on which they share information about future targets or those already killed.

Organizations documenting such killings say that they have increased since September 2013. At that time, the media quoted a senior police commander and a cabinet minister, who were speaking at a public gathering, saying the state had issued a “shoot to kill” order against suspected criminals. Thereafter, senior police officers justified the decision during TV interviews. Two police officers in Nairobi told Human Rights Watch in May that the order is still in place.

Government officials and senior police commanders have repeatedly boasted that police have succeeded in reducing crime and that the officers have a “right” to use lethal force, since criminals are always armed.

Killings in April 2019

Police killed seven men and boys on the nights of April 14 and April 17 in Mathare, Human Rights Watch found. In all the cases, witnesses said the victims were shot either when kneeling in front of the police on the streets or in the custody of the police after being arrested.

At about 5 p.m. on April 14, police in Mathare grabbed Kevin Gitau, 25, as he got off a bus from downtown Nairobi, forced him into their vehicle, and drove away, a witness said. The next day, his family saw the news that he had been killed on social media, accompanied by pictures of his body.

Dandora police posted photos of Gitau lying in a pool of blood and said the police had gunned down a dangerous criminal. The family found his body at the city mortuary later that day. A witness to the arrest said he recognized a member of the “Pangani six” group of police officers among the police who arrested him.

A relative and two activists in Mathare said the same officer had arrested him on February 2, accusing him of stealing a phone, but released him following an online campaign by activists. A friend of Gitau’s said that, following his release, the officer told Gitau that he would kill him.

Police officials at the Pangani station, overseeing the area where these killings occurred, told Human Rights Watch they were aware of the killings but could not discuss any details. In the Dandora neighborhood, police have also shot dead suspects, apparently without justification, Human Rights Watch found.

On April 17, the same killer squad of police officers killed five young men and a boy in two separate locations, witnesses said.

In one incident on April 17, about six police officers raided the home of 17-year-old Benson Kavindo in the Mlango Kubwa neighborhood and accused him of theft. A neighbor said: “We could hear him pleading for his life and saying he was not a thief, but police just dragged him out of the house and shot him dead just a few meters away from the house. He was kneeling down when police shot him.”

The same morning around 5 a.m., the police killed three other boys and men, ages 17 to 25, who lived in the streets of Mathare, as they are homeless. Mathare residents said two of the victims spent their time combing through a small dumpsite in Mlango Kubwa. Their unidentified bodies remain at Nairobi City Mortuary. The whereabouts of the third victim, nicknamed Jaluo, remain unknown.

One witness, who said he watched the killings through an opening in his door, said he saw Jaluo shot dead:

“They were around six officers. They all aimed at him and fired at the same time. It was like a firing squad. The officers then carried the body away. We don’t know where they took the body.”

Killings on October 26, 2018

On the morning of October 26, police pursued two suspected robbers to Dandora Phase Four. A police statement to the media later that day said the suspects had ambushed a motorcycle taxi driver, robbed him of his motorbike, and raped his passenger before they escaped.

Witnesses and relatives told Human Rights Watch that police tracked the suspects to a hideout and shot one of them dead and pursued the second as he escaped over rooftops. The suspect fell into a house when one of the rooftops caved in, and the police
who were pursuing him arrived at the scene and shot and killed him on the spot.

Three neighbors who witnessed the killings said that the police pulled three men who had been sleeping in the house that collapsed out into open ground outside of the house. The neighbors said that the three were kneeling outside, as commanded by the officers, surrounded by six armed officers when a female officer from Kinyago arrived and shot the kneeling men dead.

Relatives identified the victims as David Kariuki, a 38-year-old seller of used shoes, and his two nephews Peter Mwangi, a 22-year-old student at Kisii University, and John Gathufatu, a 17-year-old secondary school student. Human Rights Watch saw a report by the chief government pathologist, which says that Kariuki was killed by one bullet in the mouth and two in the chest while Mwangi and Gathufatu were each killed by a single bullet in the head.

Moments later that same morning, the same female officer, the witnesses said, shot a fourth victim, 22-year-old Samuel Musili, a student at Dandora Secondary school, who had climbed a tree in the neighboring compound. She ordered him to climb down from the tree and kneel, then shot him in the head, the witnesses said. The local station commander said he was aware of the killings but declined to talk about them, saying the oversight agency was best suited to provide information about the killings.

Killings on August 28, 2018

On August 28, just after noon, two officers from Kinyago police station in Dandora raided a makeshift scrap metal shop near the dump and killed the owner, Alex Githuku Macharia, 34, together with four other men: Jacob Chege Kaberi, 24; Davis Tekei, a 21-year-old employee of Githuku’s at the scrap metal shop; 22-year-old Fredrick Ochieng, and a 29-year-old public minibus conductor, Vincent Mandu Oduor. A sixth man slipped into the nearby buildings and escaped unharmed.

The man who escaped told Human Rights Watch that one of the police officers demanded that the six men surrender a gun the officer claimed Githuku had. Githuku, who was kneeling alongside the others with hands raised, as the police directed, denied having a gun. A second police officer arrived and opened fire on the men, killing five, the sixth man said.

Caroline Mwatha, a staff member at Dandora Community Social Justice Centre, was among the first to arrive at the scene and interviewed witnesses and relatives of the victims and said that the men were unarmed and kneeling when they were killed. Mwatha was later killed under suspicious circumstances, which activists believe could have been in retaliation for her work, a claim police have denied. Police said Mwatha died after an attempted abortion went wrong.

Another activist who witnessed and later documented the killings described the incident to Human Rights Watch:

A known officer from Kinyago police station first arrived, ordered them to kneel, and demanded guns from them, which they denied having. Another officer from Kinyago station arrived minutes later in the middle of the argument and just opened fire on the six, who were kneeling and pleading that their innocence, killing five instantly. One escaped, but they had no guns.

Geoffrey Mayiek, an officer who commands the Buruburu Police Division and who also oversees Kinyago station, told the media the five men were “suspected thugs” and that police recovered firearms and drugs from the scene. Mayiek said police recovered three firearms and 14 rounds of ammunition from the suspects, who had been using the dumpsite as their hideout.

Activists in Dandora said that police at Kinyago station have threatened witnesses and relatives of victims of the killings not to pursue justice. Two days after the killings, a police commander summoned the relatives of one of the victims to the Kinyago station and cautioned them against talking to the media or to investigators and promised to reward those who heed his advice, activists and family members said.

“After that meeting with the commander at Kinyago station, relatives and witnesses stopped cooperating with investigators who had started looking into the killings,” an activist said.

Two activists and a relative of one of the victims in Dandora said that police were also implicated in the killings of three other unidentified men in Dandora in January and February 2019.

Police Response

Human Rights Watch interviewed Charles Owino, the police spokesman, and the police commanders who supervise the officers implicated in the killings Human Rights Watch documented. The commanders at Kinyago and Pangani stations said they were aware of the killings but declined to discuss details of the killings or the status of investigations, and instead referred us either to Owino or IPOA.

Human Rights Watch found that, in each of the 21 killings in Dandora and Mathare, the police failed to prepare preliminary reports about the killings for sharing with the oversight agency, the Internal Affairs Unit, and the Inspector General’s Office,
according to an IPOA investigator who knows about the cases. The police also failed to conduct an inquest in each of the killings as required by law, and Owino confirmed that inquests should have been conducted.

Officials at the Kinyago police station said investigations were underway in both incidents of killings in Dandora in 2018. Relatives of victims and activists pursuing justice for victims said, however, that investigations in the August killings have stalled because witnesses have withdrawn after receiving threats. An official of the police oversight agency said that, despite a lack of cooperation from the Dandora police, it is investigating the October 2018 killings.

An IPOA official said that investigators have difficulties proceeding with the August killings as witnesses have stopped cooperating with the agency’s investigators. The investigations into the police killing of seven men and boys in Mathare in April have also stalled because witnesses are afraid of testifying against the police, some due to direct threats they received from people they believe are police officers, said an official of the oversight agency. The official said the agency is investigating the October 26 killings.

It appears that police have done little to support the oversight agency’s investigations such as by providing preliminary reports, and activists and relatives of victims in one of the Dandora cases said police had intimidated witnesses.

Owino contended that police in Dandora and Mathare had in many cases acted lawfully to protect the public against criminals and said that Dandora is safer than it was five years ago because of the work of police in containing crime.

He also said that police responsibility to control crime and protect people is not a license to break the law and urged the oversight agency to take action on all the killings. “We do not protect officers who break the law and, if there are officers involved in unlawful killings, they should just face the law as individuals,” he said. “IPOA should investigate these killings and hold those responsible to account.”

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He fled Rwanda after the genocide ended and went to Canada, where he was denied refugee status because of his role in the massacre, prosecutors said. He was arrested by U.S. border agents in 2014 when he illegally crossed into Maine and claimed asylum, authorities say.

On his asylum application, authorities said, Teganya concealed his membership in the MRND and falsely claimed he had not persecuted any Tutsis.

FLASHBACK: RWANDAN MAN WANTED FOR WAR CRIMES ARRESTED AT US BORDER

Prosecutors had asked the judge to give Teganya 20 years in prison, claiming that he not only lied on his asylum application but also in court, painting his victims as the liars and dressing "himself in the garb of the persecuted rather than the persecutor."

"These are the most significant, most corrosive, most morally culpable lies possible," Garland said. "They deserve the most serious penalty." Teganya's public defender, Scott Lauer, requested that his client receive about five years behind bars. In court documents, Lauer described Teganya as a religious father of two who has led a "quiet and unassuming life" over the past 25 years. Lauer also noted that Teganya was not charged with any of the crimes attributed to him during the genocide.

"It is not the place of this court to transform itself into a tribunal to punish that conduct," Lauer said.

Saylor said he struggled with his sentencing decision, noting the enormity of the tragedy and the allegations against Teganya, but also that the man was not charged in his courtroom of the rapes and murders.

"The basic question is: Do I sentence him as a liar or do I sentence him as a murderer, or a rapist, or genocide participant?" Saylor asked.

Saylor said he ultimately believed the appropriate prison term was within the sentencing guidelines for the crimes with which Teganya was convicted.

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court on Thursday against their convictions for crimes against Serb and Croat civilians illegally detained at the Silos camp, the Krupa barracks and the 9th of May elementary school in the Hadzici municipality.

The crimes were committed between 1992 and 1996.

All eight men were found guilty in July 2018, after a six-year trial, of illegally detaining the civilians and holding them in poor conditions in the three detention centres.

The court found that some prisoners were beaten, humiliated and forced to do hard labour while detained.

But all the defendants were acquitted of crimes against prisoners of war, after the court found that all the people detained in the three detention centres were civilians.

Djililovic, the president of the wartime presidency of the Hadzici municipality, was sentenced to ten years in prison, as was Kazic, who was the commander of the Bosnian Army’s 9th Brigade.

The former commander of the local police station in Hadzici, Fadil Covic, and the warden of the Silos camp, Becir Hujic, were sentenced to eight years in prison.

Sabic, who the court said was the de facto commander of the Pazaric police station in Hadzici, and Halid Covic, the deputy warden at the Silos camp, were both sentenced to six years.

Former Krupa barracks warden Serif Mesanovic and former guard Nermin Kalember were given five years.

Djililovic’s lawyer Vasilija Vidovic told the state court’s appeals chamber on Thursday that the verdict wrongly determined that her client had the intent to unlawfully arrest Serb civilians.

“Not a single piece of evidence indicates that he had an effective control over military structures [that detained the prisoners],” Vidovic said.

Lawyer Kadrija Kolic said his client Fadil Covic, as commander of the local police station, had no control over the prisoners because they were captured “during armed combat”.

“The Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina had full control over Silos,” Kolic said.

The state prosecution meanwhile urged the appeals chamber to impose longer sentences on the eight defendants.

Bosnian Serb Ex-Soldier Appeals Conviction for Bosniaks’ Murders (Balkan Insight) By Lamija Grebo
June 21, 2019

Bosko Devic’s defence appealed on Friday against last year’s verdict convicting him of involvement in the murders of four Bosniaks in the village of Gornji Kamicak in the Kljuc area on August 11, 1992.

The defence argued that there procedural violations during the trial, that the facts were wrongly established and that there were contradictions in the testimonies of some witnesses.

It asked for the verdict to be quashed and a new trial held.

“Your honour, this man is innocent. He was not in Gornji Kamicak on August 11, 1992 between 9pm and 9.30pm [when the crimes were committed],” said his lawyer Marinko Brkic.

Brkic explained that Devic had a solid alibi, since he was deployed with a work unit and engaged in digging holes for a power line at another location, which the lawyer said was confirmed by several sources.

However, prosecutor Olivera Djuric said that none of the witnesses who give the alibi confirmed that they saw the accused on at another place on that day.

In a statement that was read out in court by his lawyer because Devic had forgotten his glasses, the defendant said that the verdict was not just and lawful.

He said that he was not in the village of Gornji Kamicak on the evening of August 11, 1992, and that he did not detain the four civilian victims or participate in their murders.
“I never participated in a search with a unit. I did not arrest, detain, interrogate, mistreat or abuse,” Devic insisted. Meanwhile the prosecution urged the court to increase the ten-year sentence handed down to Devic.

“We believe that the punishment is too light, it should have been longer,” said prosecutor Djuric.

**Bosnia Convicts Serb Ex-Soldier of Killing Bosniak Family (Balkan Insight)** By Marija Tausan
June 24, 2019

Former Bosnian Serb soldier Sretko Pavic was sentenced to 13 years in prison for the detention and killing of five Bosniak civilians, all members of the same family, near Prijedor in 1992. This article is also available in: Shqip Macedonian Bos/Hrv/Srp

Sretko Pavic (standing) in court. Photo: Bosnian state court.

The Bosnian state court found Sretko Pavic guilty on Monday of having participated in the murder of five civilians in the village of Rizvanovici in the Prijedor area in the second half of July 1992, and sentenced him to 13 years in prison.

The verdict said that the civilians, all members of the Causevic family, were found in a forest and then detained in a building next to a checkpoint in Rizvanovici.

A day after they were detained there, Pavic and another Bosnian Serb soldier called Pero Stevandic took them out and killed them in the vicinity of a nearby school building. Stevandic has since died.

Presiding Minka Kreho recalled testimony given by a witness who saw the defendant and Stevandic take away the civilians and then heard a burst of gunfire.

“The defence witnesses, including the defendant, did not cast doubt on evidence concerning Pavic’s participation in the murders,” Kreho said.

The court also determined that Pavic, as a member of the Volarska Company with the Sixth Ljubija Battalion of the Bosnian Serb Army, was aware of a widespread and systematic attack against the non-Serb population in the area at the time.

This is a first-instance verdict and can be appealed.


The trial of Zijad Srabovic, Refik Morankic, Ahmet Bajric, Abid Arapcic, Senaid Cosic, Pasaga Cajic, Samir Dzambic and Mirsad Zilic, who are charged with the inhumane treatment, torture and murder of civilians detained in the city of Lukavac and nearby Modrac from June to October 1992, opened at the Bosnian state court in Sarajevo on Tuesday.

Srabovic, the former assistant commander for security at the local Territorial Defence force headquarters, and former military policemen Bajric, Cajic, Dzambic and Zilic are accused of committing crimes at the secondary school in Lukavac, where they beat and tortured Serb civilians with electric shocks. One of the prisoners died.

They are also accused of abusing two prisoners, Aziz and Radenka Sahat, who were held at the elementary school building in Lukavac because they had radio equipment and allegedly collaborated with the Bosnian Serbs.

According to the charges, the military policemen beat Aziz Sahat and forced him to run around the school gym naked, while Srabovic told him: “You’d better admit [the offence]. I cannot get them under control. They will kill you.”

Srabovic has also been charged with having committed and failed to prevent inhumane treatment, torture, murder and the unlawful detention of civilians.

Morankic is accused in his capacity as an employee of the Territorial Defence headquarters in Lukavac and commander of a military unit known as Fiko’s Unit and as a member of the Croatian Defense Council in Modrac, as well as being the commander of the Klaonica detention facility in Modrac.

He is accused of setting up the unit and the prison, ordering the unlawful detention of civilians, and committing, enabling and failing to prevent torture, murder and inhumane treatment.
Morankic and three members of his unit – Ahmet Bajric, Abid Arapcic and Senaid Cosic – have been charged committing crimes at the Klaonica detention facility. According to the charges, Serb detainees were beaten up, sexually abused and hung on a cattle hook with their hands tied.

The indictment also alleges that a woman from Fiko’s Unit would enter and step on the detainees with her heels, extinguish cigarettes on their bodies and cut them.

Arapcic has further been charged with having hit one detainee, who then died.

Prosecutor Eldin Biuk said that Lukavac was a small community and that everybody knew the defendants. She said that Morankic used to bring in convoys with food and had a lot of authority locally, and was capable of forming his own unit and setting up a prison.

Morankic’s defence lawyer Senad Dupovac said meanwhile that he would call witnesses who would refute the allegations, particularly the one about the defendant having a lot of authority in the area.

Meanwhile defendant Bajric told the court that allegations in the indictment looked like “science fiction” to him.

Bajric said that he would show during the trial that he “was not involved in many of those things”.

The first witnesses will testify on July 2.

**Bosnian Serb Ex-Soldier Convicted of Wartime Killings in Prijedor (Balkan Insight)** By Marija Tausan
June 27, 2019

The Bosnian state court in Sarajevo on Thursday found Boro Milojica, a former member of the 6th Ljubija Battalion of the Bosnian Serb Army, guilty on two counts of the murder of Bosniak civilians in the village of Hambarine in the Prijedor area in July 1992.

Witnesses at the trial described how Milojica killed one man at a checkpoint in Hambarine and another who was sitting in front of his house with his family.

However, Milojica and another member of the same battalion, Zelislav Rivic, were found not guilty of the murders of other Bosniak, Roma and Croat civilians in July 1992.

Milojica was acquitted of involvement in the killings of nine Roma civilians who had been brought to dig a grave for the Bosniak victims because of a lack of evidence, and of killing another man in a nearby forest because no one saw the murder.

Both Milojica and Rivic were cleared of the murders of five more civilians at the checkpoint in Hambarine, and of killing a Croat civilian, again due to a lack of evidence.

The verdict can be appealed.

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Remnants of the Islamic State are engaged in a campaign of violence, extortion, and terrorism in Syria and Iraq in an apparent effort to regroup after the disintegration of the jihadist group's land caliphate earlier this year.

These ISIS fighters have reverted to insurgent tactics, forcing U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces and Iraqi security forces to adjust their strategy from the focus on countering a conventional threat. Some experts are concerned this could be a sign the group is preparing to make a push to retake lost territory.

The SDF, supported by U.S.-led Operation Inherent Resolve forces, has conducted more than 50 operations targeting ISIS "sleeper cells" in northeast Syria since the defeat of the land caliphate on March 23, according to U.S. Central Command. They have reportedly led to the capture of more than 140 ISIS fighters and the removal of more than 3,000 improvised explosive devices and unexploded ordnance.

One of the most recent operations took out a cell in Abu Naytl on June 18. ISIS members were trying to incite violence and threaten tribal leaders before a contingent of 1,000 SDF soldiers cleared them from the Syrian town.

"Operations like this show just how much progress has been made in destroying Daesh," Maj. Gen. Christopher Ghika, deputy commander for stability for Operation Inherent Resolve, the mission to defeat ISIS, said in a statement Friday, using another term for the terrorist group.

"But that doesn't mean the fight is won," Ghika said. "Daesh doesn't need territory to remain a global and regional threat as it attempts to resurgence. Our resolve remains firm, and we will continue to assist our partners in consolidating their gains and pursuing the remnants of Daesh."

SDF counterterrorism units reportedly arrested five ISIS sleeper cell members Wednesday in Raqqa and Manbij. Both cities
were caliphate strongholds. Members of the Raqqa Internal Security Forces, a police unit formed in 2017 after the fall of ISIS in the city, arrested six ISIS members in April who were allegedly responsible for explosive attacks against civilians in the area. Another 63 were captured in Raqqa in February.

Neighboring Iraq has fallen victim to similar attacks. The Iraqi Civil Defense Directorate said that more than 6,100 acres of agricultural crops were incinerated by ISIS agents over the course of two weeks in May. ISIS said these attacks were retaliation against farmers who refused to pay them protection money. Other ISIS members have reportedly engaged in sniper attacks and suicide bombings.

Jennifer Cafarella, research director for the Institute for the Study of War, told the Washington Examiner that referring to the cells as sleepers takes away from the fact they are organized units focused on degrading and delegitimizing local governments.

"To me, they're not isolated pockets of surviving ISIS remnants but rather a reconstituting insurgent force akin to the force, for instance, that the U.S. faced in Iraq during the surge," Cafarella said, referring to the additional U.S. troops sent to Iraq in 2007.

Some experts and national security officials expected ISIS to revert to its insurgent origins after the defeat of its land caliphate. The group has also made significant advances in other parts of the globe. In April, terrorists believed to have had ties to ISIS killed 258 people and injured at least 500 in a series of Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka. An ISIS affiliate in the Philippines killed 20 people and injured more than 100 in the January suicide bombing of Jolo Cathedral.

ISIS presence in Africa has grown significantly since the fall of the caliphate. In a video message released in April, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi praised adherents in Libya for a successful attack in the desert town of Fuqaha and noted forces in Burkina Faso and Mali have pledged allegiance to him.

Cafarella believes ISIS, despite major losses, wants to reestablish its land caliphate in Iraq and Syria and expand its presence across the globe. She pointed to the group declaring itself to be in a "battle of attrition" on May 29 as evidence of its intentions. ISIS engages in these phases on a yearly basis, so Cafarella expects the group to make a move next summer.

"I think the open question is whether ISIS will set enough conditions in its favor by that time to attempt a new land grab or whether it will determine that it needs to conduct another phase of operations to degrade its enemies in advance of the land grab," Cafarella said.

U.S. Central Command continues to work with local partners in its fight against ISIS, but as defense officials continue to reorient the military to take on competitors like China, there are concerns among some experts that the ISIS fight will be overlooked.

**Turkey will continue anti-PKK operations in Iraq, Ankara notifies Iraqi envoy (Kurdistan 24)**

By Karzan Sulaivany

June 29, 2019

Turkey will “firmly” continue its airstrikes in Iraq, Ankara said on Sunday in response to Baghdad’s earlier condemnation of two such bombardments that killed five Kurdish civilians in the Kurdistan Region.

Iraq’s Foreign Ministry on Saturday described Turkey’s ongoing incursion into the country as “unilateral acts of war” that violate Iraq’s sovereignty and called on Ankara to end its cross-border campaigns, which result in dozens of civilian casualties annually.

Following this, the Turkish Foreign Ministry summoned Iraq’s charges d’affaires in their embassy in Ankara, Issam Mohammad, and guaranteed him that Turkey’s operations in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region against alleged Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) targets would “firmly continue,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hami Aksoy said, according to Anadolu Agency.

Aksoy also said the Iraqi side had been informed that their statement on the recent incidents was “unacceptable” and did not fall in line with “the positive momentum” bilateral ties gained in the latest high-level visits.

In two separate attacks on Wednesday and Thursday, Turkish jets bombarded border regions, killing five civilians, injuring six others, and causing material damage.

Before the Iraqi Foreign Ministry’s comments, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) released its own statement in which it asked both Ankara and the PKK to put an end to their conflict in civilian-populated areas of the Kurdistan Region.

The PKK has been engaged in a decades-long insurgency against Turkey over Kurdish rights and self-rule. Turkey, the United
States, and the European Union all designate it as a “terrorist” organization.

In the past year, Turkey has carried out military operations against PKK fighters based within the Kurdistan Region with continued regularity. Turkish forces have crossed into the region up to 20 kilometers deep in some areas to target the group.

Such attacks have led to the evacuation of many villagers from the Kurdistan Region as Ankara’s warplanes continue to damage residential and agricultural lands, and, on occasion, kill civilian bystanders about whom there are no claims of PKK affiliation. Aggrieved locals have long urged both sides to take their conflict elsewhere.

**Iraq condemns attack on Bahraini Embassy in Baghdad (Arab News)**
June 29, 2019

**Iraq on Friday condemned an “attack” by protesters on the Bahraini Embassy that prompted Manama to recall its ambassador from Baghdad.**

Upset by Manama’s hosting of a US-led Middle East peace conference, at least 200 stormed the Bahraini Embassy in Baghdad on Thursday night to protest against Bahrain’s participation in the US-led economic “deal of the century” plan for Palestine. Around 54 people were reportedly arrested.

Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi’s office issued a statement early on Friday that read: “The Iraqi government will never tolerate such acts, and affirms its absolute rejection of any action threatening diplomatic missions.”

Iraqi authorities deployed additional troops to disperse the protesters and secure the embassy, which sources said appeared to have been targeted by Kata’ib Hezbollah, one of the most powerful pro-Iranian armed factions in Iraq.

The protesters burned US and Bahraini flags outside the embassy in Mansour, western Baghdad, before entering the inner courtyard, taking down the Bahraini flag and replacing it with a Palestinian flag. The gesture seemingly symbolized their rejection of US President Donald Trump’s recently unveiled economic plan to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Bahraini capital Manama this week hosted a two-day “Peace to Prosperity” workshop to discuss the plan, which was attended by Jared Kushner, Trump’s adviser. Palestinian authorities rejected the proposal, which does not address the two-state solution, and refused to participate in the workshop.

Although shots were heard ringing out in the vicinity of the embassy for about eight minutes, no casualties were immediately reported. Iraqi Interior Minister Yassin Al-Yassiri went to the embassy in an attempt to “calm the situation” and meet the Bahraini ambassador. Security was heightened in nearby areas. Saad Maan, the official spokesman for the Ministry of Interior said Al-Yassiri had stressed that the security of embassies and diplomatic missions is a red line that must not be crossed under any circumstances. He also revealed that the minister will appoint a committee to investigate the incident and the individuals responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the embassy and its staff.

The Iraqi government expressed its “deep regret” over what it described as “encroachment on the embassy building” and “acts of sabotage that violate the law and the authority of the state and the immunity of diplomatic missions.”

Meanwhile, Bahrain’s foreign ministry summoned on Friday Iraq's Charge d'Affaires in Bahrain Mohammed Adnan Mahmoud Al-Khafaji to address concerns about Thursday’s attack by protesters on the kingdom’s embassy in Iraq.

The Assistant Undersecretary of GCC and Arab Countries Affairs Yusuf Mohammed Jameel handed Al-Khafaji a memorandum of protest following Thursday’s attack, Bahrain News Agency reported.

Jameel added that the Bahraini ministry of foreign affairs welcomed the statements issued by the Iraqi government and ministry of foreign affairs rejecting this attack.

He stressed the importance of holding the perpetrators of the attack accountable and ensuring that these kinds of acts would not happen again.

June 28, 2019

**Drone attacks on Saudi Arabia's oil industry in May originated in Iraq, not Yemen, US officials have concluded, according to a Wall Street Journal (WSJ) report.**

The report, which was published on Friday, drew questions from Iraqi officials who asked Washington for more information supporting the claim.
US officials familiar with the intelligence on the May drone attacks said they had originated in southern Iraq, the WSJ reported, adding that it most likely pointed a finger at Iran-backed armed groups in that region.

Yemen's Houthi rebels, who have been battling a Saudi-led military coalition for more than four years, had claimed responsibility for the May 14 drone attacks against the East-West pipeline. The attack forced a brief shutdown but caused no casualties.

The drone attack happened two days after four vessels, including two Saudi oil tankers, were damaged by sabotage off the coast of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The suspected attacks took place against a backdrop of US-Iranian tension following Washington's move last month to try to cut Tehran's oil exports to zero and beef up its military presence in the Gulf in response to what it called Iranian threats.

There was no immediate comment by the US State Department.

At a weekly news conference on Tuesday, Iraqi Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi told reporters that US officials had contacted Baghdad recently, alleging the drones may have taken off from Iraq.

The prime minister denied the attacks could have come from Iraqi territory.

"All of our intelligence services and our air force denied these reports because the airspace is known," he said.

"As far as we are concerned, we have no proof and we have no evidence in this matter," Mahdi added.

He said none of the Iraqi intelligence or military services that monitor its airspace detected any launch.

"There was no movement on that day on this subject," he said.

Bahrain recalls ambassador to Iraq over embassy attack -statement (Jerusalem Post)
June 28, 2019

Bahrain recalled its ambassador to Iraq for consultations on Thursday after demonstrators broke into the courtyard of the kingdom's embassy in Baghdad and took down the flag to protest a U.S.-led meeting in Bahrain on Israeli-Palestinian peace.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Bahrain condemns the attack on the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the Republic of Iraq by the demonstrators (which) led to sabotage in the embassy building," said a statement on the ministry's website.

Marine testifies Navy SEAL did not stab Iraq captive (ABC news) By Julie Watson and Christopher Weber
June 27, 2019

A Marine who worked jointly in Iraq with a decorated Navy SEAL accused of murder testified Thursday that the platoon chief did not stab a wounded teenage Islamic State prisoner as alleged by other platoon members.

Marine Staff Sgt. Giorgio Kirylo said he watched as Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher tried to save the 17-year-old captive and never saw him use his hunting knife on him.

Gallagher is accused of fatally stabbing the adolescent captive while he was under his care in Iraq in 2017 and to shooting civilians. He has pleaded not guilty to murder and attempted murder.

After the boy died, Kirylo said he moved the corpse to pose for a "cool guy trophy" photo because it was the platoon's first Islamic State prisoner captured from their battlefield.

He said he lifted up the teen's body to put the corpse's head on his foot when a bandage on his neck popped up. Kirylo testified that he saw no stab wounds under the dressing.

He said each member of the platoon took turns posing with the body, and no one was upset.

He said the platoon members took turns taking photos with the body because they were excited that they had coordinated an air strike with Iraqi troops that had killed Islamic State fighters including the captive's commander.
"This was our unofficial war trophy," the Marine Raider said.

Kirylo statements contradict those of SEALs who testified that Gallagher, who was on his eighth deployment, stabbed the prisoner.

Two of the SEALs testified that they witnessed the stabbing, but one — Corey Scott — said he was the one who ultimately killed the militant by plugging his breathing tube with his thumb as an act of mercy.

The Navy said it is reviewing Scott's statements following his stunning testimony last week and it may press perjury charges.

Kirylo said he was close friends with several SEALs who reported the stabbing, but he now considers them liars. Many of the SEALs who testified said their names were made public and spread on social media because they came out against the chief. One indicated that taking the stand has jeopardized his career.

Kirylo described the team as full of young SEALs who complained about Gallagher putting them close to the front lines and stealing their care packages. He described Gallagher as an "old school" SEAL whose aggressive style was forcing ISIS fighters to come "out of the woodwork into a shooting gallery."

He said the night after the militant died that one of the SEALs encouraged the team to delete the photos, telling them it was a war crime. Kirylo told them it was not.

The military jury on Thursday also saw videotaped testimony taken June 3 from the Iraqi general who handed over the war prisoner after he was injured in the airstrike outside Mosul.

Gen. Abbas al-Jubouri, whose forces were partnered with U.S. troops, testified that he ordered his troops to hand over the militant to Gallagher and his fellow SEALs because he wanted to keep him alive for interrogation later.

The general said during defense questioning that he did not see Gallagher harm the captive in any way — and if he had, he would have spoken up.

"If he did any mistake with this kid, or if anyone had from the Navy SEALs, I would have stopped them," al-Jubouri said.

When he was shown photos of the dead militant with bandages around his neck and tubes in his chest, al-Jubouri said he did not recall seeing the boy with all that.

**Iraq Will Not Take Sides Amid U.S.-Iran Tensions, Deputy Prime Minister Says (Haarez)**

June 27, 2019

*Iraq will not take sides amid tensions in the Middle East, the Iraqi deputy prime minister said on Thursday, as tensions between the United States and Iran escalated.*

"We shall not align ourselves with certain countries or be party in an alliance against others," Thamer Ghadhban, who is also Iraq's oil minister, said in London.

Recent events in the Middle East, particularly in the Gulf of Oman, "posed a serious threat to peace in the region and the free and uninterrupted passage of oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz," he told the CWC Iraq Petroleum Conference. In May, influential Shi’ite clerics Moqtada al-Sadr and Qais al-Khazali warned against getting involved in the conflict, saying it would turn Iraq into a battlefield and inflict much harm.

Iraq's populist Shi’ite cleric al-Sadr said in a statement that any political party that would involve Iraq in a U.S.-Iran war "would be the enemy of the Iraqi people."

Al-Khazali, the leader of an Iranian-backed group, said he is opposed to operations that "give pretexts for war." As U.S.-Iran tensions escalate, there've been concerns that Baghdad could once again get caught in the middle.

**Iraq could face another summer of bloodshed (The National)**

June 27, 2019

*Hundreds of protesters converged on the streets of the southern Iraqi city of Basra last week.*

Demonstrators across the province are calling for structural change to fix rampant corruption, a stagnant economy, high unemployment and underfunded public utilities.
Protests in Iraq are common, but last summer’s demonstrations saw an escalation into violence. Hundreds were wounded and killed after clashes with police forces, and many thousands more were arrested. Government buildings were set on fire, and the province was on the edge of revolt.

Despite the violence, little has changed. The government still suffers from mismanagement and fraud. The country's elite have done little to improve conditions for the lower classes.

As temperatures creep closer to 50°C and the struggling electrical grid and fresh water supply are strained, many question whether the protests will spiral into similar violence.

On this week’s episode of Beyond the Headlines, host Campbell MacDiarmid speaks with Dr Renad Mansour, a research fellow in the Middle East and North Africa program at Chatham House, and Belkis Wille, senior Iraq researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Syria

200 corpses found in mass grave in Syria’s Raqqa (France 24)
July 3, 2019

Two hundred corpses, including those of people believed to have been executed by the Islamic State (IS) group, were found near the Syrian city of Raqqa, a local official and a war monitor said Wednesday.

The mass grave contained the bodies of five middle-aged men in orange jumpsuits of the kind typically worn by IS group hostages, Yasser al-Khamees and the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

"They were shackled and shot in the head," said Khamees, who heads a team of first responders.

They were believed to have been killed more than two years ago, he said, adding that his team was not immediately able to identify them.

The grave also included the bodies of three women who were believed to have been stoned to death, Khamees and the Observatory said.

"Their skulls were severely fractured and displayed signs of stoning," the local official added.

The digger said his team first discovered the mass grave early last month on the southern edges of Raqqa, the IS group’s former so-called "capital" in Syria.

As many as 800 people could be buried there in total, he said.

Its discovery could help identify even more of the several thousand people whose fates remain unknown, including foreigners imprisoned by the IS group.

The IS group took full control of the city of Raqqa in early 2014 and made it the de facto Syrian capital of its infamous cross-border so-called "caliphate".

US-backed forces ousted the IS group from the devastated city in October 2017, leaving the Raqqa Civil Council (RCC) to run it.

The RCC has been retrieving bodies from the rubble across Raqqa, left in ruins by the months-long assault to oust the IS group.

In February, an exhumation team uncovered a mass grave holding an estimated 3,500 people in Raqqa’s Al-Fukheikha agricultural suburb -- the largest to date.
Several other mass graves have already been identified around the city, including one in the neighbourhood known as "Panorama," from which more than 900 bodies were exhumed.

Yemen

Arms supplier BAE denies it has any responsibility to investigate Yemen atrocities (The Independent) By Arron Merat
June 24, 2019

UK arms manufacturer BAE has appeared to give a false statement to shareholders, claiming the UK government and not the company itself is responsible for investigating war crimes in Yemen.

When asked if BAE systems monitors whether weapons are being used to target civilians in Yemen, the company’s chairman told shareholders that it is the British government that carries out the investigations.

Sir Roger Carr made the comments on 9 May at his firm’s Annual General Meeting in Farnborough, responding to questions about evidence of BAE-supplied planes and bombs striking schools, hospitals, markets and other civilian sites during the Saudi-led coalition’s aerial air campaign in Yemen, now in its fifth year.

“We look to the government who are the people who can do the investigation, who can ask the questions who can demand answers”, Sir Roger told his shareholders at the meeting.

But the government has repeatedly said it does not independently investigate alleged reckless or deliberate attacks on Yemeni civilians – acts that would violate international humanitarian law and invalidate arms export licences to the Kingdom.

In a written response to a parliamentary question in 2018, Mark Lancaster MP, a minister in the MOD, said that: “The MOD does not investigate allegations of IHL (international humanitarian law) violations. The Saudi-led Coalition is best placed to do this.”

Andrew Smith of Campaign Against Arms Trade told The Independent that “BAE is hiding behind the government and the government is hiding behind the Saudis,” in response to Sir Roger’s remarks.

The Saudi-led coalition, which is armed with BAE aircraft and bombs, has been accused of the UN of targeting civilians “in a widespread and systematic manner”.

Some 90,000 have been killed from the aerial bombardment, and the crippling blockade of Yemen’s Red Sea ports by Saudi warships has left over 13 million, or nearly half the population, on the brink of famine.

On Thursday, the British government was forced to suspend approving the sale of weapons that could be used in Yemen, following a legal judgement that one of its processes were unlawful.

The government has said it is appealing the decision and says it will take 10 weeks to review existing licences.

Three open licences awarded by the government to BAE in 2013 and 2014 for the export of air to surface missiles – Paveway, Storm Shadow and Brimstone bombs – remain in force.

When it comes alleged misuse of British weapons in Yemen, the government does not carry out independent investigations, instead relying on Saudi Arabia’s assessment via the coalition’s Joint Incident Assessment Team (JIAT).

The JIAT is a military body comprising of 20 officers from the Saudi-led coalition, and almost never attributes responsibility for civilian strikes to the coalition.

On the occasions that Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and the World Food Programme were targeted, the JIAT has blamed the humanitarian organisations for failing to share their coordinates.
Human Rights Watch accused the JIAT in a report last year of failing to “meet international standards regarding transparency, impartiality, and independence.”

BAE Systems bases have 6,300 staff inside Saudi Arabia training Saudi pilots and conducting round-the-clock maintenance to ensure planes are war ready.

When asked during the AGM if BAE would decline to sell weapons if she believed they might be used to target civilians, Sue Tooze, a Senior Manager in the firm’s UK Exports and Control department, said: “BAE has a responsible trading policy.”

On the matter on Sir Roger’s comments on the government carrying out investigations, BAE told The Independent in a statement that it complies “with all relevant export control laws and regulations.”

CAAT’s Mr Smith said that “The war in Yemen cannot be fought without BAE.”

“They have been essential providing the bombs and the jets which Saudi Arabia has used to kill almost 100,000 people in the last four and a half years.”

Riyadh’s combat jets comprise parts made in various countries, but around half are made in the UK, assembled by BAE. It also produces parts for the US planes, which comprise the other half of the Saudi fleet.

The UK has sold arms worth £4.7bn to Saudi Arabia since the brutal war in Yemen began in 2015.

A House of Lords report in February said the weapons sales were probably illegal and “causing significant civilian casualties.”

And all five major opposition parties have called for a ban on the sale of arms to Saudi Arabia, calling it “morally reprehensible” to continue doing so.

The US Senate also voted last week to block a major weapons sales to Saudi Arabia, a move likely to be supported by the Democrat-led House of Representatives, before it reaches the president’s desk, when he is likely to enact a veto over the block. Congress is unlikely to be able to secure the two-thirds majority needed to overturn his veto.

**Saudi Cabinet: Houthi attacks branded ‘war crimes’ (Arab News)**

June 26, 2019

The recent wave of deadly terrorist attacks by Iranian-backed Houthi militants on civilian targets in the Kingdom were on Tuesday branded as “war crimes” by the Saudi Cabinet.

A ministerial council meeting, chaired by King Salman, condemned ballistic missile and drone raids, which it said presented a major threat to regional and international security.

In the wake of Sunday’s second terror strike this month on Abha International Airport, which killed a Syrian national and left 21 civilians injured, ministers stressed the right of the coalition to take all necessary measures to deal with the attacks under international laws.

The Cabinet session, held in Jeddah, welcomed a joint statement by the US, the UK, the UAE and Saudi Arabia expressing concern over rising tensions in the region caused by the “dangerous” peace-destabilizing activities of Iran in Yemen, the Kingdom and throughout the region.

Ministers offered their condolences to family members of the Syrian who died during Sunday’s Houthi attack on Abha airport in the south of the country and wished a speedy recovery to the people wounded in the strike.

In other business, the Cabinet highlighted the final communique of an emergency meeting of Arab finance ministers, which pledged their commitment to providing a safety net to support the Palestinian authority’s budget to the tune of $100 million each month.

The Kingdom was also thanked for its continued backing for the Palestinian cause.

Meanwhile, in a statement to the Saudi Press Agency, Minister of Media Turki Al-Shabanah said the Cabinet emphasized that the choice of Saudi Arabia to become the first Arab country to be granted full membership of the intergovernmental Financial Action Task Force, was due to its efforts in combating money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Cabinet session also gave the green light to the Saudi culture minister to discuss two memorandums of understanding
The chairman of the Saudi General Entertainment Authority (GEA) was authorized to hold similar talks on MoUs with his opposite numbers in the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain.

**Yemeni officials say Saudi-led coalition airstrikes kill 7 (The Washington Post)** By Ahmed Al-Haj
June 29, 2019

Yemeni officials say Saudi-led coalition airstrikes have hit a house in the southwestern province of Taiz, killing at least seven people from one family.

They say the two airstrikes took place Friday in the Khadir district, and that the dead included a woman and four children.

The officials spoke on Saturday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief media.

The Saudi-led coalition has been at war in Yemen against the Iran-backed Houthi rebels since March 2015.

The fighting has killed over 91,000 people, and has driven millions to the brink of starvation.

Mohamed Abdel Salam, a spokesman for the Houthis, said that the airstrikes wounded a “number” of people.

There was no immediate comment from the coalition.

**ICICL calls on Intl. Criminal Court to open probe into war crimes in Yemen (Mehr News Agency)**
July 2, 2019

On July 1, Iranian Center for International Criminal Law (ICICL) filed a communication under Article 15 of the Rome Statute to the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court requesting the Prosecutor to open a preliminary examination on war crimes allegedly committed by the so-called Saudi-led coalition since 2015 and during the ongoing non-international armed conflict in Yemen.

The communication is submitted with the aim of supporting Yemeni victims by bringing those individuals responsible for the commission of most serious crimes of concern to the international community as a whole to justice, and fighting against impunity which Yemen has been suffering from for a long time by offering the Prosecutor a path to justice that should be followed.

In its communication, ICICL has provided legal arguments based on publicly available information, disseminated by UN bodies, independent NGOs and the media, in order to convince the Prosecutor to initiate preliminary investigations on the alleged war crimes committed on the territory of Yemen, namely intentionally directing attacks against civilians; intentionally directing attacks against personnel, installations, material, units or vehicles involved in humanitarian assistance missions; attacks against buildings dedicated to hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected; intentionally directing attacks against protected objects, including buildings dedicated to education.

Since 2011, Yemen has been the theatre of a number of simultaneous and overlapping armed conflicts, but the current armed conflict in Yemen is taking place between the forces loyal to the self-appointed President Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi and the Popular Committees affiliated with the Houthis. In 2015, a coalition of certain States, mostly from the Arab world led by Saudi Arabia, intervened in the conflict in support of Mansour Hadi and conducted several armed attacks against the Yemeni people. Based on publicly available documents and surveys conducted by international NGOs or organs of the UN, these attacks, in many occasions, were in violation of the rules and principles of international law, and in particular, international humanitarian law.

Yemen is not a State Party to the Court, and, therefore, the ICC lacks territorial jurisdiction to engage in the situation of Yemen. The communique, nevertheless, has relied on personal jurisdiction of the World’s Criminal Court with regard to Jordanian, and to some extent British, nationals, since Jordan and United Kingdom are both States Parties to the Rome Statute, and have been involved in the current armed conflict in Yemen. Jordan is one of the members of the Saudi-led Coalition, and UK has been supplying the Coalition with weaponry and intelligence information, and as the communication, argues, officials of these States are responsible, whether as the principal or accessory, for the crimes committed by the Coalition in Yemen.

CC is an international criminal court established in 2002 by the Rome Statute to fight against impunity around the world by prosecuting individuals responsible for the commission of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of
aggression. To date, there are 122 States parties to the Rome Statute.

Special Tribunal for Lebanon

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

Israel and Palestine

Trump's 'deal of the century': 17 things we learned (Middle East Eye) By Chloe Benoist
June 26, 2019

The US 'Peace to Prosperity' plan for Palestine focuses on the economy and future of Gaza and the West Bank - but skimps on Israel's role.

Ahead of the Bahrain conference this week, the White House unveiled its “Peace to Prosperity” proposal for Palestine - part of US President Donald Trump's “deal of the century”.

The plan, led by Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and senior advisor, is a jargon-laden economic roadmap on how to distribute more than $50bn.

Its intention is clear: to build enthusiasm for turning Palestine - only referred to as "Gaza and the West Bank", lest one believe Palestinian statehood is on the cards - into a new Dubai or Singapore. Middle East Eye has looked at the plan – already unanimously rejected by the Palestinian leadership - to decipher its economics-heavy approach. As with all visions of the future, it is as notable for what it left out as for what it included.

1. No mention of the occupation...

The plan and its accompanying “programmes and projects” booklet run to 136 pages, detailing at length where the Palestinian economy needs a boost. But the White House fails to mention one issue, without which, according to the UN, the Palestinian economy would be more than double its current size: the Israeli occupation.

As has been pointed out by several observers, Israel’s decades-long occupation of Palestinian lands isn’t mentioned once: the closest it gets is a reference to “higher-wage, high-growth occupations”, meaning jobs – which is far removed from how most people understand the term in the context of Palestine.

Similarly missing are related terms such as “siege”, “blockade” and “settlements”, as well as any acknowledgement as to how Areas A, B and C - the different parts of the West Bank under Israeli or Palestinian Authority (PA) control since 1995 - would be affected.

One has to read between the lines to find any allusion to Israeli policies which negatively affect Palestinians, such as “protracted crisis”, “logistical challenges”, “impediments to growth”, “resource constraints” and “regulatory barriers to the movement of Palestinian goods and people”.

2. ...or refugees
Another word absent from the document is “refugee”. More than two million refugees live in Gaza and the West Bank, yet the Kushner plan fails to address how they are affected by the drastic cuts in US aid to UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees.

Yes, the plan dedicates $13.7bn in prospective funding to Lebanon and Jordan, now home to an estimated 2.5m Palestinian refugees, but there is no mention as to whether any of the money will actually be for Palestinians.

3. Jerusalem is off the table

In January 2018, Trump promised to take Jerusalem “off the table”. The “Peace to Prosperity” document does just that, failing to mention the holy city. This is in line with the US decision to move its embassy to Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in May 2018, thereby recognising it as the capital of Israel in spite of long-standing Palestinian claims to East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

It remains unclear what, if anything, the White House thinks should be done with the estimated 300,000 Palestinians who currently live in East Jerusalem, annexed by Israel against international law in 1967.

4. Israel keeps a low profile

The document heavily downplays Israel’s role in regional tensions: when it is mentioned, it is usually tucked away amid a list of “neighbours” and “key trading partners” such as “Egypt, Israel and Jordan” rather than on its own.

Some of the economic suggestions are set to benefit Israel financially, including the sale of water to Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan; the provision of gas and electricity to Gaza; the promotion of increased trade with Egypt and the occupied Palestinian territory; and the use of spyware tech by Jordan.

5. US still prioritises arms for Israel

Kushner’s plan for Palestine says that it has the “potential to facilitate more than $50 billion in new investment over ten years”. But only $27.8bn of that will go directly to the occupied Palestinian territory, while the remainder will go to neighbouring states.

That $27.8bn is around 27 percent less than the $38bn ten-year military aid deal that the US made with Israel in 2016.

6. US tells Palestine: It’s your fault

With no mention on Israel’s role in the conflict, the White House emphasises that the Palestinians are responsible for their current predicament and that, should the “deal of the century” fail, it would be their own doing.

“Ultimately, however, the power to unlock [this vision] lies in the hands of the Palestinian people,” the document reads at one point. While the Kushner plan promises to “unleash” Palestine’s potential, it never comes close to revealing who or what restrained this potential in the first place. Elsewhere it states that “a lasting peace agreement will ensure a future of economic opportunity for all Palestinians”. A lasting peace with whom? The question is left unanswered.

It also implies awareness that “peace for prosperity” is a futile exercise: several sweeping statements begin with conditional clauses, such as “If implemented” or “If the government realises its potential”.

7. Education questions are unanswered

The Trump administration’s oversight of what prevents Palestine from growing is demonstrated nowhere better than when it comes to education.

Here, the document concedes that “Palestinians have among the highest graduation rates in the region”, but does not explain why many Palestinian schools “are stretched beyond their capacity”. It emphasises the need to “focus on supporting schools operating in underserved communities”, but makes no mention of the numerous EU-funded schools in Area C of the West Bank that have been torn down by Israeli forces for failing to secure nearly impossible-to-obtain construction permits. Nor is there mention of the 500,000 Palestinian students affected by the US’s decision in 2018 to cut all funding to UNRWA.

The plan promises $300m in scholarships for Palestinian students to study abroad, but fails to address how Palestinians currently on such schemes struggle to obtain visas to leave the West Bank and Gaza.

Sports, health care, agriculture and tourism are likewise assessed without context and assigned solutions with little regard for the reality on the ground.
8. 'Jared, are we giving property rights to Palestinians?'

Kushner’s plan places a large emphasis on Palestinians’ “property rights” - the phrase is used 13 times throughout the document. “Land registration is a critical step in the transformation of the Palestinian economy” it states on page 32. It later adds: “Strong property rights are critical to realizing this future.”

The plan fails, however, to mention the systematic expropriation of Palestinian land by Israel from 1948 until the present day. Many refugees still hold the deeds and keys to the homes they left behind in historic Palestine, as do Palestinians whose lands and homes in the occupied West Bank have been seized by Israeli settlers.

Is this what Kushner and Trump, who had an Israeli settlement named after him this month in the Golan Heights, have in mind? The detail is unclear.

9. Palestinians are customers, not citizens

“Peace to Prosperity” has clearly been authored by writers with a business background (Trump has long touted his experience as a businessman; Kushner is an investor and real estate promoter). The documents are full of management language that calls for a “business-friendly” approach to “unlocking human potential” through “investment-led growth” by fostering an “incubator ecosystem” and a “strong local start-up culture”.

Perhaps most telling is the line: “Good Palestinian governance requires commitment to its customers: the Palestinian people.” In the absence of a proper state, the plan implies that Palestinians are not citizens, but consumers whose political aspirations can be met by goods and services.

10. Let Palestinians eat cake - and 5G

The document’s business-like approach includes several ambitious high-end goals, like turning Gaza into a “modern metropolitan city”, a central online e-government system, and developing 5G access across the Palestinian territory.

Such proposals seem out of touch compared to the basic necessities of which many Palestinians are still deprived. For example, 53 percent of residents of Gaza live in poverty today. On the technology side, Israel only lifted its ban on Palestinian telecom operators accessing 3G networks a year ago.

11. Setting the bar high

One of the plan’s goals is for Gaza and the West Bank to score 0.70 on the World Bank Human Capital Index, which measures the potential of a population’s labour. If Palestine were to achieve this, then it would put it ahead of some of the economies cited elsewhere in the plan as examples, including mainland China (0.67), the UAE (0.66), Bahrain (0.67) and Lebanon (0.54).

Another suggested goal is that Palestinian governance scores 60 or above on Transparency International’s Corruption Index. That’s way above the 36 scored by Bahrain, host of this week’s conference, and more than double the 28 achieved by Lebanon. Even Israel, in existence for more than 70 years, only manages 61.

12. Gaza as the next Rio?

The plan also alludes to several visions for Palestine as a high-end touristic destination. At one point it suggests that the 40km of Gaza’s Mediterranean “could develop into a modern metropolitan city overlooking the beach, drawing from examples like Beirut, Hong Kong, Lisbon, Rio de Janeiro, Singapore, and Tel Aviv”.

No mention is made of the state of the coastline polluted as Gaza’s fragile infrastructure finds itself unable to process waste that ends up in the sea - or that Palestinians are currently prohibited by the Israeli navy from venturing more than a few miles from shore.

The plan also suggests that one reason why the Palestinian tourism sector isn’t thriving is because Palestinians, well-known across the region for their hospitality, need to partner with “leading international hospitality schools” such as the United Arab Emirates Academy of Hospitality.

13. Palestine as the next Singapore?

Ambitious metrics aside, it is also revealing that some of the places cited as examples for any future Palestinian economy are not noted for their tolerance or freedom of speech.

The plan cites states like the UAE or Singapore, which have been accused by groups such as Human Rights Watch of trading political rights for the benefit of economic advancement - an accusation that Palestinians have levelled against the Trump
administration's "Peace to Prosperity" plan.

Comparisons are also made with Beirut as an example of a seaside metropolis: these seem ill-thought out, given the Lebanese capital's ongoing struggles with the privatisation of public spaces and its nonexistent urban planning.

14. Cultural faux pas

The report hails how “the West Bank and Gaza” have been cultural centres “from ancient to modern times”. It recognises Palestinian contributions to “the region’s most renowned artists and poets” - but fails to cite any examples.

In defence of the White House, to describe the likes of Mahmoud Darwish, Ghassan Kanafani, Sliman Mansour or Annemarie Jacir as noteworthy would be to acknowledge how crucial politics and national aspirations have been to Palestinian culture during the past half-century.

Ironically, the report does mention the Nabi Musa festival as a “great cultural legacy should be celebrated and supported”. A core tradition of this religious event is an annual pilgrimage from Jerusalem to Jericho – a route that’s impossible for Palestinians to follow if one accepts the Trump administration’s view of Jerusalem as exclusively Israeli.

15. Cash for neighbours’ gas, power, tech

Several infrastructure projects in other countries are listed as potentially helpful to Palestinians, such as Egyptian electricity lines feeding into Gaza or upgraded Jordanian frontier crossings. But other proposals are more baffling and have no apparent direct benefit to Palestinians.

The plan argues, for example, that tourism in neighbouring countries will have a trickle-down effect on Palestinian tourism. This ignores that the Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt is regularly closed. Or that Lebanon officially refuses entry to individuals with Israeli stamps on their passports.

The plan earmarks $1.5bn for a natural gas hub off the Egyptian coast to “help coordinate energy development in the Eastern Mediterranean”; and $500m to provide Jordan with “national cybersecurity infrastructure and capacity building” to “open up opportunities for more international cyber collaboration”. While the benefits of these projects to Palestinians are unclear, Israel has long-standing interests in both Mediterranean gas reserves and cyber security and spyware technology.

16. Lebanon is not on board…

A total of $6.33bn is budgeted for Lebanon in the plan, including $200m to “support regional trade integration to incentivise exporters to become engaged in regional value chains to significantly reduce the cost of doing business in the region”.

This may come as a surprise to some observers for three reasons. First, Lebanon does not share a boundary with either Gaza or the West Bank. Second, it has not sent any representation to the Bahrain conference. Third, unlike Egypt and Jordan, it refuses to have any diplomatic or economic relations with neighbouring Israel.

Is the Trump administration hoping to lure Beirut into better ties with Israel? Some in the Lebanese parliament believe so. Nabih Berri, parliament speaker, said on June 23 that “those who think that waving billions of dollars can lure Lebanon, […] into succumbing or bartering over its principles are mistaken”.

17. …and neither is the 'Strawberry King'

The document of the plan is illustrated with photos of smiling people drinking water from a tap (a distant memory in Gaza), or hiking through countryside (much of which has been taken over by Israeli settlers).

Especially prominent are images of strawberry farmer Osama Abu al-Rub, which seem to have repurposed from USAID brochures where he is described as the "Strawberry King". Al-Rub, who lives in Qabatiya, south of Jenin, was also featured in a 2017 USAID video after receiving assistance - but he said this week he is unhappy with his appearance in "Peace to Prosperity" documentation.

"I am very upset by the publication of my family photos and the US manipulation in promoting the 'deal of the century'," he told MEE. "We are ashamed of this project aimed at liquidating the Palestinian cause. It is impossible to accept it or to be one of its tools."

Palestinian West Bank village targeted in month’s sixth apparent hate crime (The Times of Israel) By Jacob Magid
June 27, 2019

Police on Thursday opened an investigation into an apparent hate crime targeting a Palestinian village in the northern West Bank, where 13 cars were found with their
tires slashed and Hebrew hate slogans were spray-painted on walls.

“Let’s wake up and expel the enemy,” read one phrase daubed on a wall on the outskirts of Sarta, near the Barkan industrial zone. “Non-Jews in the land = enemies,” read another.

Thursday’s incident was the sixth apparent hate crime in June, but police have yet to apprehend any suspects. The previous attacks targeted Sinjil, Deir Istiya, Kafr Malik, Einabus and Yasuf — villages in the central and northern West Bank.

Despite the dozens of hate crimes targeting Palestinians and their property in recent months and years, arrests of perpetrators have been exceedingly rare. Rights groups lament that convictions are even more unusual, with the majority of charges in such cases being dropped.

The incidents, often referred to as price tag attacks, are usually limited to arson and graffiti but have sometimes included physical assaults and even murder.

In December, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs released a report that showed a 69 percent increase in settler attacks on Palestinians in 2018 compared to 2017.

Europe protests ‘deal of the century’ (Middle East Monitor)
June 27, 2019

Protesters gathered in various European cities on Tuesday to demonstrate against the “Peace to Prosperity” conference taking place in Bahraini capital Manama.

Protests took place in Brussels, Berlin, Copenhagen, Milan, Gothenburg, Athens, London and The Hague, with most gathering outside the cities’ US embassies. Participants carried posters and banners saying “Palestine is not for sale”.

The protests – organised by local activists – were held in response to this week’s workshop to unveil the economic portion of the US Administration’s “peace plan” for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, dubbed the “deal of the century”.

The conference was attended by representatives from the US, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, the IMF and other international organisations, but the Palestinians boycotted the conference and the Israelis were not invited.

The US unveiled its $50 billion plan to revive the Palestinian economy, to be split among the occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. The funds will be raised through an investment fund managed by a Multilateral Development Bank, but there are severe doubts as to whether donor governments will be willing to make contributions when the political differences at the heart of the long-standing Palestinian-Israeli conflict have yet to be resolved.

On 64th Friday of Great March of Return and Breaking Siege, Israeli Forces Wound 128 Palestinian Civilians, including 38 Children, 3 Women, 7 Paramedics, and Journalist (IMEMC News)
June 29, 2019

On Friday, 28 June 2019, in excessive use of force against peaceful protesters on the 64th Friday of the Great March of Return and Breaking the Siege, Israeli forces wounded 128 Palestinian civilians, including 38 children, 3 women, 7 paramedics, and a journalist. Four of those wounded sustained serious wounds.

According to observations by PCHR’s fieldworkers, the Israeli forces who stationed in prone positions and in military jeeps along the fence with Israel continued to use excessive force against the protesters by firing bullets and tear gas canisters at them. As a result, dozens of the protesters were hit with bullets and teargas canisters without posing any imminent threat or danger to the life of soldiers.

On Friday, 28 June 2019, the incidents were as follows:

At approximately 16:30, thousands of civilians, including women, children and entire families, started swarming to the five encampments established by the Supreme National Authority of Great March of Return and Breaking the Siege adjacent to the border fence with Israel in eastern Gaza Strip cities.

Hundreds of protesters, including children and women, gathered adjacent to the border fence with Israel in front of each encampment and its vicinity tens and hundreds of meters away from the fence. The protesters chanted slogans, raised flags, and in very limited incidents attempted to approach the border fence and throw stones and Molotov Cocktails at the Israeli forces, who fired live and rubber bullets at them.
The Israeli shooting, which continued until 19:30, resulted in the injury of 128 Palestinian civilians, including 38 children, 3 women, 7 paramedics, and a journalist. Among those wounded, 41 were hit with live bullets and shrapnel, 36 were hit with rubber bullets and 46 were directly hit with tear gas canisters. In addition, dozens of civilians suffered tear gas inhalation and seizures due to tear gas canisters that were fired by the Israeli forces from the military jeeps and rifles in the eastern Gaza Strip.

PCHR reiterates Palestinians’ right to peaceful assembly to confront Israel and its forces’ denial of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination, right to return and right to end the occupation of the Palestinian territory.

PCHR stresses that the Israeli forces should stop using excessive force and respond to the legitimate demands of the demonstrators, particularly lifting the closure which is the real solution to end the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

PCHR reiterates the reported published in February by the UN Commission of Inquiry which emphasizes what came by PCHR and other Palestinian and international human rights organizations. The report at the time concluded that the Israeli violations may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

PCHR emphasizes that continuously targeting civilians, who exercise their right to peaceful assembly or while carrying out their humanitarian duty, is a serious violation of the rules of international law, international humanitarian law, the ICC Rome Statute and Fourth Geneva Convention.

Thus, PCHR reiterates its call upon the ICC Prosecutor to open an official investigation in these crimes and to prosecute and hold accountable all those applying or involved in issuing orders within the Israeli Forces at the security and political echelons.

PCHR also emphasizes that the High Contracting Parties to the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention should fulfill their obligation under Article 1; i.e., to respect and ensure respect for the Convention in all circumstances and their obligations under Article 146 to prosecute persons alleged to commit grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

PCHR calls upon Switzerland, in its capacity as the Depository State for the Convention, to demand the High Contracting Parties to convene a meeting and ensure Israel’s respect for this Convention, noting that these grave breaches constitute war crimes under Article 147 of the same Convention and Protocol (I) Additional to the Geneva Conventions regarding the guarantee of Palestinian civilians’ right to protection in the occupied territories.

Palestinians slam US ‘war crimes’ after envoys open East Jerusalem tunnel (The Times of Israel) By Jacob Magid and Toi Staff
July 1, 2019

The Palestine Liberation Organization on Sunday slammed the participation of senior US officials at a ceremony opening an ancient Jewish pilgrimage road excavated in the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem as participation in a “war crime,” and said the Trump administration was fanning the flames of the conflict.

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman joined other Israeli and American bigwigs in symbolically breaking down a wall, which led to the “Pilgrimage Road,” a now-subterranean stairway that was said to have served as a main artery for Jews to the Temple Mount thousands of years ago.

Archaeologists have been excavating at the City of David National Park in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan for the past eight years. The area has several tiny Jewish enclaves. The PLO condemned the construction of the tunnel and lambasted the US for the envoys’ involvement.

“We consider the participation of (US Mideast Envoy) Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman to be criminal collusion in the commission of a war crime that must be condemned as well as universally and unequivocally confronted,” the statement said.

“The US administration has partnered with the fundamentalist settler organizations to provoke religious tensions and fan the flames of conflict,” the PLO said. “Together, they present a threat to international peace and security.”

The Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism where the biblical Jewish temples stood, and which today houses the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam’s third holiest site, has been one of the biggest flash-points in the Israeli Palestinian conflict in recent years.

Earlier, the Palestinian Authority’s chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, tweeted that Friedman, who before becoming the ambassador was a contributor to settlement causes, was himself “an extremist Israeli settler.”
The ceremonial event angered the Palestinian Authority, as well as several left-wing Israeli NGOs, which claimed the opening of the site would further entrench an Israeli presence in eastern parts of the city that Palestinians hope will one day serve as their capital. While Trump said his decision in late 2017 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital did not relate to the borders of the city, which would be determined in a final peace agreement, Sunday’s ceremony appeared to indicate some American recognition of Israeli sovereignty in East Jerusalem. “Whether there was ever any doubt about the accuracy, the wisdom, the propriety of [US] President [Donald] Trump recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, I certainly think this lays all doubts to rest,” said Friedman as before bashing through the wall with a sledge-hammer.

“It confirms with evidence, with science, with archaeological studies that which many of us already new, certainly in our heart: the centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people,” Friedman told the crowd of nearly 100, among whom were Sara Netanyahu; Israel’s Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer; former Jerusalem mayor and current Likud MK Nir Barkat; Republican Senator Lindsey Graham; mega-donors Miriam and Sheldon Adelson; and the US ambassadors to Portugal, France and Denmark.

Friedman explained that his decision to attend the excavation event as a US ambassador stemmed from the deep significance Israel’s capital had vis-a-vis American history. “The spiritual underpinnings of our society, the bedrock of our principles in which we honor the dignity of every human life came from Jerusalem,” he said. “This place is as much a heritage of the US as it is a heritage of Israel.”

Speaking shortly after Friedman, Barkat declared — to applause from the US envoy and other members of the crowd — that the latest archaeological find will “hopefully [allow] the world [to] understand why we will never, never divide the city of Jerusalem.”

Several dozen activists from the Peace Now settlement watchdog protested outside the East Jerusalem event. The left-wing NGO has branded the Pilgrimage Road “the controversy tunnel,” adding that it had “caused the evacuation of Palestinian homes in the neighborhood and increased tensions between Palestinian residents and Jewish settlers, who have been acting more intensively than ever in recent years to Judaize the neighborhood, as part of an effort to sabotage the two-state solution.”

Footage from the Peace Now protest showed one activist being detained by police.

The PA’s foreign ministry released a statement earlier Sunday condemning the “imperialistic Judaization plans,” which it charged were aimed at changing the status quo in the city. It slammed the Trump's administration for “fully supporting the imperialistic settlement enterprise led by the far-right in the occupation state” over the officials’ participation.

Greenblatt dismissed the criticism as “ludicrous,” adding on Twitter that “we can’t ‘Judaize’ what history/archaeology show. We can acknowledge it; you can stop pretending it isn’t true! Peace can only be built on truth.”

The Pilgrimage Road, which ascends from the Pool of Siloam to the Jewish Temple, dates to no earlier than 30-31 CE, during the time of the notorious Roman governor Pontius Pilate. That was the period when Jesus was sentenced to death, City of David archaeologist Nahshon Szanton said in a 2017 video tour of the site.

“Unlike most archaeological digs which begin from the ground down, this excavation was done subterraneously, beneath the hustle and bustle of modern Jerusalem,” Doron Spielman, vice president of the City of David Foundation, wrote in a Times of Israel op-ed on Sunday. “Dozens of fiber optic cable cameras were used to decipher where to excavate, while maps and diagrams made by archaeologists over the last century and a half paved the way forward,” he wrote.

However, Emek Shaveh, a left-wing organization committed to protecting archaeological sites as the shared heritage of all cultures and faiths in the country, disagreed with the City of David findings, saying that although the street is presented as part of the pilgrimage route, “the horizontal excavation method, and the paucity of scientific publication, do not allow us to know for sure when the street was built and how it was integrated into the urban layout of Jerusalem.”
Campaigners hailed an "historic" ruling by the United Kingdom's court of appeal declaring British arms sales to Saudi Arabia for use in its war against Yemen unlawful as a potential turning point in the conflict.

The decision in London on Thursday follows a challenge by the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) that accused the UK government of licensing arms sales despite a clear risk their use could breach international humanitarian law.

Although it will not halt the Saudi-led war in Yemen - in which an estimated 100,000 people have died since 2016 - it adds enormous support to international efforts to end the conflict.

"This ruling is huge," said Sam Perlo-Freeman, a research coordinator at CAAT.

"We can see that arms sales for use in Yemen are now being challenged internationally - in the US and Europe - but this from a court in one of Saudi Arabia's top two arms suppliers takes that to a whole new level.

"It is historic in terms of the government's approach to export licences being found to be illegal and adds huge momentum to the campaign both in this country and internationally for a halt to arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-led coalition."

Since the Saudi-led coalition began its military intervention in Yemen in 2015, the UK has licensed at least 4.6 billion pounds ($6bn) worth of arms to Saudi forces. Weapons and military support from Britain to Saudi Arabia - that now accounts for 43 percent of London's arms exports - is crucial to the war effort.

However, public disquiet has grown about Britain's role with a poll commissioned by CAAT indicating only six percent of people in the country support arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

The UK's sales have significantly bolstered the Saudi air force's capability to carry out air attacks in Yemen. The final six Typhoon jet fighters of 72 ordered in 2007 were delivered in 2017. The following year, Riyadh signed a memorandum of intent to buy an additional 48 Typhoons.

CAAT has been arguing for three years that the sales break UK laws, which block export licences if there is a clear risk of weapons being used in "serious violations" of international humanitarian law.

Perlo-Freeman added: "We welcome this verdict but at the same time really think it should not have taken a three-and-a-half-year court procedure to get the UK government to even start considering doing the right thing.

"The British government's whole priority in promoting arms exports over everything else and in choosing to support and enable the Saudi-led war on Yemen - which is causing the worst humanitarian catastrophe in the world - is fundamentally wrong."

The UK government must now change the way it assesses the risk of breaches of international humanitarian law before approving exports. Prime Minister Theresa May has already said the government will appeal against the ruling.

The court's decision also does not mean that licences to export arms to Saudi Arabia must immediately be suspended, and it will not affect existing stocks of weapons held by the country or ground support and maintenance provided to the Saudi air force by BAE Systems personnel.

"We are now calling for an immediate end to all arms sales to Saudi Arabia and that the UK simply should not be supporting the Saudi-led war in Yemen at all," Perlo-Freeman said.

Anna Stavrianakis is a senior lecturer in international relations at the University of Sussex and an expert on the arms trade. "This legal decision finally provides some accountability for the UK's role in the war in Yemen and the humanitarian disaster it has caused," she told Al Jazeera.

"Not only has the government spent four years providing diplomatic cover for the Saudi-led coalition's abuses committed with UK- and US-supplied weapons, it has also expended significant amounts of energy in trying not to know, or be seen to know, about possible violations of international humanitarian law.

"At long last, the government has been held accountable for its reckless policy."

The London-based Stop the War Coalition welcomed the court of appeal's decision. Spokesperson Lindsey German said it should result in a complete change of British policy and end any logistical or political support for the war.
"We are delighted at the ruling but it should never have come to court," German told Al Jazeera. "Our government has repeatedly been prepared to sell arms to the Saudis, one of the most repressive regimes in the world.

"This should stop immediately, and the British government should apologise to all those who have suffered as a result of its policy."

But the UK government has significant interests at stake and "will do as much as it can to carry on supporting the war", added German.

"Most people in Britain are opposed to the killing of civilians and to the Yemen war. We must continue to build protests and organise against it, making clear to whoever becomes prime minister that this barbarism has to end."

The humanitarian crisis caused by the war in Yemen has been described as the world's worst and has put nearly 10 million people at risk of starvation.

Human rights groups have long dismissed British government arguments - that its approach was lawful, that it operated "robust" export controls, that its military advisers working with Saudi forces had not been directing air raids, and the Saudi-led intervention was endorsed by the United Nations.

Earlier this year British ministers provided an additional 200 million pounds ($250m) to Yemen to help feed 3.8 million people, bringing total UK humanitarian support to the war-torn country to 770 million pounds ($980m).

Aid organisations such as Oxfam have said this "incoherent policy means that what it gives with one hand, it takes away with another", while other groups claim the UK is ignoring alleged Saudi war crimes.

Mark Kaye of the Save the Children charity, which works in Yemen to alleviate poor humanitarian conditions, said: "The ruling essentially is what we have been pushing the UK government to acknowledge for the last three to four years of this conflict - that continuously fuelling this conflict by selling weapons to the Saudi-led coalition is both morally and legally wrong.

"We are pushing the UK government to accept that this new legal advice means it needs to reevaluate its engagement with the Saudis, it needs to cancel all of the arms exports that it currently has, and do a proper review of its processes and policies to make sure that there are no British-made bombs resulting in the deaths of innocent people in Yemen."

Kaye added the poor humanitarian conditions in Yemen - from a cholera outbreak to mass displacement by flooding and the destruction of hospitals in Saudi air raids - are as bad as ever.

"We are seeing very little tangible improvement on the ground - in fact, if anything, we are seeing things getting worse."

**In Rare Rebuke To Trump, Senate Votes To Block Saudi Arms Sales (NPR)** By Amy Held
June 20, 2019

*Amid rising tensions in the Middle East, the Senate voted to rein in President Trump's powers, passing three bipartisan resolutions on Thursday blocking the administration from selling billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia.*

Seven Republicans, including Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, joined all Democrats in voting for the measures blocking against sales to Saudi Arabia, each passing 53-45.

With 22 separate sales pending, the other 20 resolutions involved arms sales to other allies, including the United Arab Emirates. They were voted on en bloc, whereby four Republicans joined the Democrats in that 51-45 vote.

While sending a strong signal to the administration, all three Senate votes failed to get enough votes to override a pledged veto by the president.

The House must now pass a joint resolution of disapproval, which would then go to the president's desk. It is also not expected to pass a veto.

Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., introduced the measures, citing Saudi Arabia's role in the war in Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition has been engaged in a multi-year campaign against Houthi rebels, often with disastrous consequences for the civilian population.

"If the Senate wants to show the world that, even if you are an ally you cannot kill with impunity, this is the moment," Menendez said on the Senate floor.
But the White House said the U.S. has taken "a number of actions to help the Saudi military mitigate the risk of civilian casualties in Yemen, including training and advising the Saudi military to help them improve their targeting processes to minimize civilian casualties."

In a statement, the White House said halting the arms sales "would send a message that the United States is abandoning its partners and allies at the very moment when threats to them are increasing."

"Saudi Arabia serves as a bulwark against the malign activities of Iran and its proxies," the White House said, adding that the resolutions would affect the ability of American partners "to deter and defend against Iran's hostile acts."

The administration has said it has the authority to carry out the sales because of an "emergency" in the Gulf, citing Iran's aggression in the region. The White House declared the emergency and approved the weapons sales May 24, the same day it announced the deployment of 1,500 troops to the Gulf region.

Following last year's grisly slaying of U.S.-based journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate, Congress has called for holding Saudi Arabia accountable, even as the administration has affirmed U.S.-Saudi ties.

Sen. Rand Paul, who was among the handful of Republicans who voted to ban the weapons sales, referenced Khashoggi on the Senate floor Thursday, saying "there is high confidence that the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia butchered a dissident with a bone saw ... You would think that would give us pause as to giving Saudi Arabia or selling Saudi Arabia more weapons."

"We don't sell weapons to Russia. We don't sell weapons to China because we have disagreements and we don't think it would be in our best interest to sell them weapons," said Paul, calling Saudi Arabia itself, "untrustworthy."

Also Thursday, the Court of Appeals in the United Kingdom ruled British arm sales to Saudi Arabia for use in the Yemen War are unlawful.

International Trade Secretary Liam Fox said the government would suspend new sales while it looks into the implication of the ruling.

The Taliban has launched a major attack in Afghanistan’s capital (Vox) By Alex Ward
July 1, 2019

An attack on Monday by the Taliban in Afghanistan has killed roughly 40 people — including children — and injured around 100 more. It’s a stunning reminder of how bad the situation in the country remains after nearly two decades of war and relatively little attention paid by President Donald Trump and 2020 Democrats.

The Taliban took responsibility for a multifaceted strike in Kabul, Afghanistan’s capital, which included a car bomb and a lengthy gun fight. A private war museum, a television station, schools, and sports agencies were damaged by the Taliban’s blast.

Nooria Nazhat, the spokesperson for Afghanistan’s ministry of education, told the New York Times that at least 51 students were wounded when the car bomb that initiated the attack at rush hour damaged two school buildings.

That’s tragic, not least because just two days earlier Afghan National Security Adviser Hamdullah Mohib tweeted, “Our
youngest citizens have the most to gain from peace and security.”

A gun fight between Taliban militants and Afghan security forces lasted around eight hours after the attackers bombed the ministry of defense and made their way inside the compound. An unknown number of security forces and all five insurgents are dead.

It’s likely the death and injury toll will continue to rise in the next few hours and days.

For many who witnessed the attack, it was terrible. “We were sitting inside the office when the world turned upside down on us,” Zaher Usman, who works at Afghanistan’s culture ministry just 500 feet from the blast, told the AFP on Monday. “When I opened my eyes, the office was filled with smoke and dust and everything was broken, my colleagues were screaming.”

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani has condemned the attack, calling it a crime against humanity.

Mohib told me hours after the assault that “it was an indiscriminate attack that took the lives of many innocent civilians, many of whom were kids. We condemn it in the strongest terms.”

“We face a brutal and cruel enemy who has no regard for any values or principles,” he continued. “I visited some of the victims tonight in the hospital, and I saw children as young as 7 years old. We are grieved by the casualties but we stand strong in defiance of our people, our country and our fundamental rights of freedom.”

The question now is why the Taliban, an Islamic insurgent group that harbored al-Qaeda prior to the 9/11 attacks, chose to launch such a devastating assault. The answer may lie in the timing.

The attack may scuttle US-Taliban peace talks

Negotiators from the US and the Taliban began a seventh round of peace talks on Saturday in Qatar. The main discussion is about how to negotiate the withdrawal of US troops — which Trump wants — in exchange for guarantees that the Taliban won’t allow terrorist groups to operate in Afghanistan again.

But the talks have been marred by violence. On Friday and Saturday, for example, around 300 Afghan and Taliban fighters died in multiple attacks. An uptick in fighting was always likely as the spring season is typically the most violent in the country. The Taliban announced in April that it would initiate a bloody spring offensive, and dozens from both sides are dying daily.

The Washington Post reports that the talks underway on Monday were set back by the latest attack. Which leads to an important question: Why would the Taliban launch such an assault? Experts I spoke to have two theories.

One is that the insurgents hope to put pressure on the US by eroding its will to stay in the country. The other is that there remain factions inside the Taliban that don’t want to negotiate peace and therefore continue to exact violence in the capital and elsewhere. As of now, it’s unclear which theory best explains the timing of this attack.

What is clear is that few politicians in the US, especially those running for president, are paying attention. Trump barely mentions the war in Afghanistan, and 2020 Democrats have largely left the situation untouched, other than to say they want to end America’s “endless wars.”

Rep. Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Rep. Tulsi Gabbard (D-HI) did get into an argument about whether the US should remain engaged in Afghanistan or get out of the country entirely during the first Democratic presidential debate last week. But that’s about the extent of the Afghanistan discussion.

When I asked Daniel Bolger, a retired Army three-star general who served in Afghanistan, what the US should do in response to the Taliban attack, he said: “Leave.”

“We have lost too many of our men and women, and the poor Afghan people have lost even more,” he continued. “This thing has dragged on way too long with no end in sight. The Afghans kill each other. It’s tragic, but it’s not our war.”

The Taliban targets Afghan media out of fear of losing the information war (TRTworld) By Mohammed Harun Arsalai
July 4, 2019

Media is increasingly becoming a target in Afghanistan as the Taliban’s campaign for hearts and minds falls short.

The Taliban’s deadline to media workers in Afghanistan has passed but Afghan journalists remain steadfast and cautious after
the threats. The group initially demanded an end to “anti-Taliban propaganda” from Afghan local and national media by Monday.

However, on Sunday, July 1st, the Taliban killed at least six people and 116 injured more, 51 of those injured were school children making the attack particularly heinous.

Five schools are also said to have been damaged. The attack on the Afghan Ministry of Defense logistics centre took place at 9AM in a busy area where streets were jam-packed with children going to school and government and military workers commuting to work.

Taliban insurgents had warned that they would start targeting Afghan journalists unless the media stop broadcasting the US and Afghan government-sponsored advertisements aimed at countering the Taliban’s narrative, dissuading recruitment and encouraging the public to report insurgent activity.

In a statement, the Taliban said Afghan media must change their attitude toward the Taliban and must stop airing anti-Taliban ads “or else they will no longer be regarded as media outlets and will instead be regarded as enemy intelligence sources and as military targets that will be attacked by the mujahideen. Journalists and media outlets will no longer be safe.”

The Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) released a statement strongly condemning the Taliban for its warning against the Afghan media and called on the Afghan government "to adopt comprehensive measures to ensure the safety of media outlets and journalists around the country."

“Attacks on media and journalists – as civilian targets – constitute war crimes, and the Taliban will be held to account for every attack of the group on journalists and the media,” the AFJC said.

Regarding the Taliban allegations of collusion between the US, Afghan government and Afghan media, the AFJC advocated dialogue over violence.

“If the Taliban has any objection about the context and content of the commercials and advertisements of the Afghan media, they are welcome to discuss their criticism, but nobody is allowed to threaten the media and to target them as military targets,” AFJC said.

The Taliban have targeted Afghan media in the past, but this recent message to the press is the first threat that highlights government-paid content. In January 2016, the Taliban made good on threats against TOLO news when the armed opposition group stalked and attacked a bus carrying employees of Afghanistan’s most popular private broadcaster, killing seven TOLO employees.

The Taliban called the suicide attack on TOLO “revenge” for a report which TOLO broadcasted from Kunduz after the Taliban captured the city where the news agency claimed the Taliban had “raped girls at a dormitory.”

The allegations were never proven “false,” but there was also no evidence that the Taliban harmed any women during the raid on Kunduz.

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF) fifteen media workers were killed in Afghanistan in 2018, making Afghanistan the deadliest country in the world for journalists last year.

This year is not looking any better. AFJC's reporting shows that attacks against journalists in 2019 are on pace to surpass last year.

According to the RSF, “there have been at least 45 cases of violence against journalists and the media in Afghanistan since the start of the year, including threats, physical violence and destruction of media outlets. AFJC data was even higher, with a total of "92 cases of violence, including 20 fatal cases against journalists and media workers (21 March 2018 – 20 March 2019)."

Afghanistan is ranked 121 out of 180 countries in RSF's 2019 World Press Freedom Index.

In light of the recent Taliban threats, Defense Ministry spokesman Rohullah Ahmadzai announced that the government would enhance security measures for media agencies operating in the country, but argued the ads should continue.

“It’s very clear that such advertisements have helped the government fight terrorism,” Ahmadzai said.

“If they weren’t useful we wouldn’t continue to use them.”

Although the Taliban pose a danger to journalists, the majority of targeted violence against journalists in recent years has come from ISKP (Daesh), Afghanistan’s main Islamic State affiliate.
In late April of 2018, Daesh launched a double bombing which first targeted guards outside an Afghan intelligence services headquarters in Kabul, and then another when first responders and journalists arrived, killing 25 people, including eight journalists.

Although threats of violence and attacks on media are unanimously condemned by everyone from Afghan media to human rights organisations, the claim that the Afghan media acts as an arm of the Afghan state are not entirely false.

Although Afghan media has rightfully won its categorisation as “the Gem of modern Afghanistan,” it is impossible not to recognise where Afghan and international media bodies have failed.

“We all condemn these threats by the Taliban, but by airing pro-government, or anti-Taliban propaganda, Afghan media is making itself clear it is not an independent press and worse, that it is not neutral. They (Afghan Media) are proving the Taliban correct,” Nangarhar based journalist Mohsin Khan tells TRT World.

Shershah Nawabi, CEO and founder of Pasbanan Media Group, told TRT World, “when I spoke with Taliban spokesperson Zabiullah Mujahid about four months ago, he told us that once the Taliban come to power again, they will enforce the media to follow their regulations. So, I guess that the media would be the main obstacle against the Taliban, and they will do whatever they can to stop media on reporting on their activities.”

Nawabi believes that the new Taliban threats against media are a sign that the government’s propaganda campaign was working.

“Afghan media has been working hard in forming a democratic government, and has played a tremendous vital role in the creation of today’s Afghanistan,” Nawabi says, "now with these new Taliban threats obviously come new roadblocks for media in Afghanistan.”

Khan agrees with Nawabi that Afghan media has played a pivotal role in normalising and reinforcing the nation-state of Afghanistan, but Khan worries that the country’s foundation is being built on lies.

“If we are really ‘the gem of Afghanistan’ then let’s shine with truth,” says Khan, “but instead report after report echoes local and national government claims without question. Sometimes they say 40 dead 'terrorists', sometimes 50, 60, 70 or more in single airstrikes. If we added these numbers up...more than a million Taliban members have been killed since the start of the war - and that's obviously laughable.”

Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC)

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

Khmer Rouge Court Concludes Case 004/02 (Khmer Times) By Cheang Sokha
June 21, 2019

The pre-trial chamber of the UN-backed Khmer Rouge tribunal has, on Friday, concluded an appeal hearing of case 004/02 against senior cadre Ao An.

The three days hearing which started on Wednesday and concluded today, Friday, were represented by the co-prosecutors, co-defense councils, except the accused as Ao An cited health reasons and was said to be unfit to travel long distance to attend the hearing. Mr An, a former Khmer Rouge’s member of central zone was charged in 2014 with premeditated homicide and crimes against humanity. In 2016, he was charged with additional crimes, including genocide. In August last year, the co-investigating judges issued separate closing orders against him. The national co-investigating judge issued a dismissal of the case, finding that Mr An did not fall within the personal jurisdiction of the court. The international co-investigating judge indicted him for genocide, crimes against humanity and violations of the 1956 Cambodian Penal Code. Tribunal spokesman,
Neth Pheaktra said that the Chambers is expected to issue its considerations on the appeals within the fourth quarter of 2019. “The Pre-Trial Chamber will determine if Ao An satisfies the criteria of the court’s jurisdiction and whether there are sufficient charges to indict him for the crimes alleged or the charges against him should be dismissed,” said the tribunal statement. “The Chamber will now adjourn to deliberate on its decision. The decision would be final with no further appeals.” So far three of the regime’s leaders have been sentenced to life imprisonment by the court; they are Kaing Guek Eav, alias Duch who commanded the S-21, former head of state Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea, former deputy secretary of the Communist Party of Kampuchea.

International Co-Investigating Judge Resigns from Khmer Rouge Tribunal (Khmer Times) By Cheang Sokha June 28, 2019

The international co-investigating judge of the UN-backed Khmer Rogue tribunal has resigned today after the conclusion of investigation of case 004.

According to a court statement, Judge Michael Bohlander from Germany had submitted his resignation today and will be returning to England to serve as the Chair in Comparative and International Criminal Law at Durham Law School. His resignation was made following a disagreement with his Cambodian co-investigating judge, You Bunleng on the case 004 whether a former Khmer Rouge senior cadre Yim Tith falls within its jurisdiction. Cambodian judge, You Bunleng claimed Yim Tith, a senior cadre in charge of southwest zone did not fall within the court’s jurisdiction while judge, Bohlander says evidence proof that Yim Tith’s accusations were within the court’s jurisdiction and could be indicted for punishment. Yim Tith was case 004 and charged with genocide of the Khmer Krom and crime against humanity during his role in the Democrat of Kampuchea. Three former top leaders have been convicted to life imprisonment for crimes they committed between 1975-79 in which some 1.7 million Cambodians were killed. They are Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch, Khieu Samphan and Nuon Chea.

Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

War crimes tribunal to deliver verdict on RP Saha killing Thursday (Bdnews24) June 26, 2019

The accused, Mahbubur Rahman, 70, is charged with genocide, abduction, and torture.

On Wednesday, a three-member bench of the International Crimes Tribunal led by Justice Md Shahinur Islam scheduled the announcement of the judgment for Thursday.

Earlier, the court kept the case pending for verdict after hearing the arguments of the two sides on Apr 24.

Prosecutor Rana Das Gupta represented the state while Gazi MH Tamim stood for the accused.

According to the prosecution, the accused was the president of Mirzapur Peace Committee, a unit formed to collaborate with the Pakistani forces during the war.

Mahbubur and his brother Abdul Mannan were members of the Razakar force.

The prosecution brought three charges against Mahbubur, Rana told bdnews24.com after the hearing, adding, "We believe we've been able to prove all three charges beyond any doubt. As many as 13 witnesses testified in the case."

The prosecution has sought maximum punishment, which is death penalty, of the accused.

"Everyone who testified in the case said RP Saha went missing. No witness has said he was killed. There was only one witness of the prosecution. He also said he had seen RP Saha being picked up. The witness did not even know RP Saha,” the defence lawyer Tamim told bdnews24.com.

"So it is proved that justice is being done through false testimony. I think the prosecution could not prove the charges against my client. I seek acquittal of my client,” he added.
Mahbubur, a Jamaat-e-Islami adherent, attacked the house of Saha with the help of local Razakars in Narayanganj on May 7, 1971, with 20-25 members of the Pakistani occupation force, according to the ICT’s investigation agency.

“They picked up seven people including Ranada Prasad Saha, his son Bhabant Prasad Saha, close aide Goura Gopal Saha, Rakhal Matlab and a guard, killed them and dumped their bodies in the Shitalakhya River. The bodies were never found.”

British government recognised Ranada with Rai Bahadur title for his philanthropic activities. Bangladesh government honoured him with posthumous Swadhinata Padak, the highest state award, in 1978.

“Attack on RP Saha and his son and others was not only to wipe them out but was intended to [halt] the noble activities of the institutions conducted under his vibrant guidance and also to destroy the Hindu community, either whole or in part,” the International Crimes Tribunal-1 said in a verdict on Thursday.

The tribunal sentenced to death Mahbubur Rahman, the president of Mirzapur Peace Committee, a unit formed to collaborate with the Pakistani forces during the war, for the killings of RP Saha and others.

It described the affiliation of Mahbubur, now 70 years old and behind bars, his father Wadud Moulana, and brother Abdul Mannan, both dead, in locally formed Razakar force to aid the Pakistani occupation, as “notorious”.

They assisted and substantially contributed to the actual accomplishment of barbaric killing of numerous Hindu civilians, the tribunal said.

“Besides, it has been proved that the accused physically participated in effecting selected Hindu civilians and causing death of some of victims by gun shot,” it added.

Referring to the Razakar force, the ICT said, “What was the objective of forming such para militia force in war time situation? Of course, intention was not to protect lives and properties of civilians. Rather, it is undeniable that the Razakar force had acted in furtherance of policy and plan of Pakistani occupation army and in so doing it had carried out recurrent atrocities committed in a systematic manner throughout the territory of Bangladesh in 1971.

The tribunal said it is convinced that Mahbubur is responsible for all the acts resulting from the “criminal plan and design of annihilating the Hindu community of village-Mirzapur, Baimhati Kanthalia, Andhara, Sarishadair and adjacent vicinities under Mirzapur police station of District Tangail”.

“On totality of evidence we arrive at unerring conclusion that ‘specific intent’ of the enterprise was to destroy the substantial part of Hindu community of the locality under Mirzapur of District Tangail,” it said.

Mahbubur, a Jamaat-e-Islami adherent, attacked the house of Saha with the help of local Razakars in Narayanganj on May 7, 1971, with 20-25 members of the Pakistani occupation force, according to the ICT’s investigation agency.

British government recognised Ranada with Rai Bahadur title for his philanthropic activities. Bangladesh government honoured him with posthumous Swadhinata Padak, the highest state award, in 1978.

Ranada, a native of Tangail’s Mirzapur, established a number of educational and charitable organisations.

Mahbubur carried out crimes near Bharateswari Homes, Kumudini Welfare Trust in Narayanganj, and Tangail Circuit House during the Liberation War, ICT investigators had said.

UN investigator reports possible new war crimes in Myanmar (AlJazeera) July 3, 2019

Myanmar security forces and rebels are committing human rights violations against civilians in restive western states that may amount to fresh war crimes, a United
More than 730,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh after an army crackdown in 2017 that UN investigators have said was executed with "genocidal intent" and included mass killings, gang rapes and widespread arson.

The Myanmar government has denied the allegations and says its military campaign across northern Rakhine was a response to attacks by Rohingya rebels.

Government troops are currently fighting the Arakan Army in Rakhine and neighbouring Chin state. The Arakan Army is a separatist group that is fighting for greater autonomy for Rakhine's ethnic Buddhists.

On June 22, authorities ordered telecom companies to shut down internet services in the two states. Telenor Group said the Ministry of Transport and Communications had cited "disturbances of peace and use of internet activities to coordinate illegal activities".

Yanghee Lee, the UN special rapporteur on Myanmar, said last week the army may be committing gross human rights violations under the cover of the mobile phone blackout, but on Tuesday she went further.

"The conflict with the Arakan Army in northern Rakhine state and parts of southern Chin state has continued over the past few months and the impact on civilians is devastating," Lee said.

"Many acts of the Tatmadaw (army) and the Arakan Army violate international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes, as well as violating human rights." Abductions, deaths

The Arakan Army had reportedly abducted civilians, including 12 construction workers in Paletwa and 52 villagers near the Bangladesh border, she told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Lee cited reports of civilians, mostly ethnic Rakhine men, being detained and interrogated by the military for suspected links to the Arakan Army and said several had died in custody. In April, a military helicopter opened fire on Rohingya men and boys collecting bamboo, she said. Some 35,000 people have fled the violence this year, Lee added.

Kyaw Moe Tun, permanent representative of Myanmar to the UN, said that the government had declared a ceasefire until August and was trying to bring about national reconciliation.

"The government of Myanmar is working tirelessly to end ethnic strife and end conflict and to achieve sustainable peace in Myanmar through a peace process," Kyaw Moe Tun told the forum.

"Freedom of expression and media is one of most visible areas of change in Myanmar," he said.

"No restriction is imposed on the use of internet and social media, but we need to strike a balance between security and freedom and rights and responsibility."

Lee said the blackout was endangering villagers, obstructing aid and shielding the military.
The panel, headed by diplomat Rosario Manalo from the Philippines, has been given one year to complete its task.

However, ICOE has yet to enter Bangladesh’s Cox’s Bazar, where more than 750,000 Rohingya refugees are staying after fleeing violence in Rakhine State in August 2017, it told CNA.

“Extensive enquiry work is necessary before being able to make any concrete finding of facts,” an ICOE spokesperson said.

“In the event that Bangladesh does not respond to ICOE’s request to visit Cox’s Bazar, then Bangladesh deprives both the ICOE’s investigators and the witnesses in Cox’s Bazar to have an effective and completed work,” she said.

“Consequently, Myanmar’s national enquiry process to seek accountability is being frustrated by Bangladesh.”

However, the spokesperson added ICOE remains optimistic Bangladesh will respond.

On Jan 7, Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina appointed Dr AK Abdul Momen as the country’s new Foreign Affairs Minister.

ICOE said Ms Manalo wrote to Dr Momen on Jan 10, requesting a courtesy call.

“The latest follow-up letter dated May 28, 2019 was sent by the chairperson (Ms Manalo) of ICOE, addressed to the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh enclosing all the details required,” the ICOE spokesperson said.

“However, there has been no response,” she said.

ICOE said that it hopes to - with Bangladesh’s approval - conduct enquiries in Cox’s Bazar “for as long as allowed, depending on the ground situation and what can be observed”.

The commission aims to record statements, collect evidence and information from witnesses residing in Cox’s Bazar.

CNA has reached out to Dr Momen for a response.

In the meantime, ICOE told CNA, it has held dialogues with different communities in various villages in Northern Rakhine, including Rakhines, Muslims and Hindus living in mixed villages.

ICOE said it has also met a Muslim family who returned to Myanmar on their own volition.

“They had candid discussions on their experiences prior to and after their return,” the spokesperson said.

To date, not a single Rohingya refugee has returned from Bangladesh to Myanmar via the official channel despite the repatriation deal between both nations in November 2017.

Myanmar has come under immense international pressure over the Rohingya crisis, with many global partners calling for Myanmar to address allegations of human rights abuses.

In March 2017, the United Nations Human Rights Council set up a Fact-Finding Mission to establish facts and circumstances of alleged human rights violations in Myanmar by military and security forces.

Five months later, on Aug 25, 2017, violence broke out in Rakhine State.

This came after the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) – which Myanmar brands as terrorists – attacked Myanmar police posts and a military base in the early hours.

Myanmar troops responded by sweeping through villages, causing some 700,000 villagers to flee out of fear.


UNIIFFM – which spoke to Rohingya refugees in Cox’s Bazar – had not been allowed to enter Myanmar to conduct findings.

Myanmar has rejected UNIIFFM’s findings, adding that its government has serious questions about the mission’s objectivity, impartiality and sincerity.

In July 2018, State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi formed the ICOE, tasking the panel to conduct investigations in Rakhine State.
ICOE told CNA it has approached the UN’s fact-finding mission as “ICOE is an enquiry mechanism seeking to gather data, information and evidence”.

UNIIFFM member Chris Sidoti told CNA that it has had several exchanges of correspondence, a skype conference call, and a lengthy meeting with Ms Manalo in Geneva.

“We have discussed with her (Ms Manalo) the ICOE’s mandate, resources and working methodologies. The UNIIFFM and the ICOE chairperson agreed to cooperate,” Mr Sidoti said.

“The UNIIFFM has not received any specific request from the chairperson,” he said.

Mr Sidoti added: “The ICOE had the benefit of being able to visit Rakhine State for its work. The fact-finding mission did not, having been refused entry by the Government of Myanmar. But access is meaningless, and potentially harmful, if not carefully used. Rohingya refugees we’ve spoken to fear reprisals for speaking out against the Tatmadaw’s (Myanmar military’s) brutality in Rakhine.”

Mr Sidoti also raised concerns that ICOE’s relationship with the government could deter people, in particular the victims, from speaking honestly, thereby affecting the credibility of its findings.

“We would hope that the ICOE’s report contains extensive accounts of the evidence given to the ICOE by significant numbers of people in Rakhine State, from the various ethnic groups there, as well as reports on visits to the sites of alleged human rights violations,” said Mr Sidoti.

“We would also hope that the ICOE report analyses and evaluates the evidence gathered by the ICOE, according to internationally accepted standards for human rights investigations,” he added.

ICOE chairperson Ms Manalo has said the panel is independent and conducts its activities with transparency, integrity and professionalism, adding the panel will carry out its work guided by the laws of Myanmar.

ICOE said its work is still ongoing.

New documentary explores the roots of Myanmar’s persecution of the Rohingya community. The filmmaker had to surmount serious logistical challenges to be able to tell this story (Global Voices) By Mong Palatino
June 22, 2019

The film ‘Exiled’, directed by veteran war reporter Shahida Tulaganova, “explores the roots of increasing violence” in Myanmar’s Rakhine State from the perspectives of Rohingya refugees, former Burmese government officials and radical Buddhist monks. Also interviewed in the film is General Khin Nyunt, the former head of Burmese Military Intelligence accused of masterminding the policy of persecution of Rohingya.

Myanmar has a predominantly Buddhist population, but also has more than one hundred ethnic minority groups, including the Rohingya, whom the government refuses to recognize and considers ‘illegal migrants’ from Bangladesh and India.

In recent years, communal violence erupted in Rakhine between some Rohingya and radical Buddhist groups. Hate speech against the Rohingya, who are mostly Muslim, is also amplified online.

Since 2017, thousands of Rohingya were forced to flee their homes after the government army clashed with the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army.

Human rights groups have long reported on the deteriorating situation of the Rohingya in various refugee camps. They have also criticized the government which came to power in 2015 under Aung Sang Suu Kyi, for continuing the ‘genocidal’ policies of the previous military regime.

The film ‘Exiled’ gives the historical context for the violence inflicted on the Rohingya population.

Tulaganova, the film’s director, first learned about the situation in Rakhine in 2012, when riots led to the burning of Rohingya communities. She monitored and studied the issue in the succeeding years and was motivated to tell the story of the Rohingya in the context of the evolution of modern-day Myanmar, instead of merely highlighting sporadic events of ongoing violence and the humanitarian crisis. She told Global Voices that:

It was very important for me to show the whole story and talk to people who set up the system of extermination of Rohingya, like former chief of Burmese military intelligence, General Khin Nyut, and show that exodus of 2017 is not a sporadic, one off
outcome of violence. It has been happening as of 1978, but the world didn’t know about it.

Tulaganova had difficulties obtaining a journalist visa, which also restricted her work.

I had to sign several papers saying that I will not travel anywhere near Rakhine state and I had to sign those. However, I was desperate to get the point of view of people who live there, so I had to think of a Plan B. So, I have found a courageous and very talented Burmese film-director who was willing to travel to Rakhine state and interview people on my behalf. And it all worked out. Unfortunately, I was given visa for 10 days only and I was feeling like Cinderella, who has to manage to get access and film everyone I had to in such a short time. But I had fantastic and very experienced field producers in Burma who made it happen.

Tulaganova is aware that her film will never be screened in Myanmar, but she hopes more people inside and outside the country will come to better understand the systematic persecution against the Rohingya. She adds that ‘Exiled’ offers a universal story about the violence experienced by ethnic minorities.

I wish people in Myanmar see this film since it is not only about Rohingya, it is about all ethnic minorities, which face persecutions for years. I believe, that Myanmar audience can learn a lot from this film.

My target audience is the world. I tried to tell the story of genocide and this is a universal story. What happened to Rohingya echoes to what had happened to Jews during the Second World War, to Bosnians during Yugoslav war and etc- this is a story about state-organized and planned systematic extermination of an entire ethnic group. And when I talk about extermination, with Rohingya it is not only physical extermination. It is about denial of education, healthcare, childbirth – the system which is ultimately designed to kill them morally and physically. This is the most horrible part of their story for me.

Asked about what the international community can do to help the Rohingya, Tulaganova urged United Nation officials to take more decisive actions:

First and foremost, the UN and other agencies operating in the Rakhine state should recognize that they have failed both the Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims. UN was trying to play it safe and in many instances, refused to call Rohingya - Rohingya, because of the insistence of Burmese officials. So did many other foreign countries. This is wrong.

I think that serious sanctions have to be imposed on Burmese officials (military and political). I think that the world powers should recognize this is a genocide and put pressure on the government of Burma to get their act together and recognize Rohingya as nationals of Myanmar without any verification process, provide safe return of Rohingya to their villages and pay compensation for the loss of their property.

‘Nagas in Myanmar victims of worst human rights violations’ (Eastern Mirror) June 23, 2019

The Naga Students and Youth Federation (NSYF), an apex students and youth body of the Nagas in Myanmar, has said that the Nagas in Myanmar were subjected to the worst kind of human rights violations for years under the military rule of the country.

Sharing the ordeals of the Nagas from across the border, an executive member of NSYF told Eastern Mirror that the people (Nagas) suffered bitterly under military rule for many decades even after Myanmar’s independence.

“The military (junta) stationed in Naga-inhabited Sagaing region have been committing worst human rights violations, including raping minors, physically torturing innocent civilians, unwarranted raids, extrajudicial killings, systematic suppression to Nagas etc., which have been kept hidden from the outside world,” he said.

“NSYF wants to explicitly tell the Nagas in India and to the world that we the Nagas in Myanmar have lost our birthright as human beings. We call (upon everyone) to assist us while we work hard, leaving no stone unturned until we get back our birthright,” he added.

However, the source said that the situation started improving in 2011 after the then president of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, U Thein Sein announced during his “inaugural speech to both the Chambers of Parliament that an individual or organisation can stand for election based on the democratic principles.” With the government opening the door for peace, NSYF was formed in 2014, he added.

The NSYF embarked on a 13-day tour of Nagaland and Manipur states from June 9 to the 21st with an aim to build a healthy relationship with the Nagas across the “artificial borders.” The source informed Eastern Mirror that it was the first time that the federation had taken up such a tour as a team.

The team included Solomon Theibung Tangkhul – president, Pongngae Tangshang – general secretary, Thongtsihiu Jongs

The NSYF embarked on the tour “knowing the need of the hour” for Nagas on both sides of the border to work harder to become stronger and better, and to be “more successful and self-reliant,” said the source.

The federation also attended the 5th General Conference of the Eastern Naga Students’ Association (ENSA), its sub-ordinate body based in Nagaland, on June 15 during the visit.

**Insurgency In Rakhine: Need To Talk To Arakan Army – Analysis (Eurasia Review)** By Dr. S. Chandrasekharan 
June 23, 2019

> There was an unnoticed report in the media that said that the Arakan Army – its increasing strength, growing popular acceptance of its military role should be of national and international concern. National concern- because a new front is being opened in the West near Bangladesh and Indian border and second with the disturbed condition in the Rakhine the possibility of the seven hundred thousand Rohingyaas of retuning to Northern Rakhine becomes even more remote as the refugees would after all look for security besides anything else.

It was unfortunate that following the incident in the beginning of the year of the Arakan Army attacking four security posts, the Suu Kyi’ Government gave orders to go all out to crush the Arakan Army. Repeatedly statements from the Government side as also from Tatmadaw have said that they will not allow Arakan Army any space in Rakhine but they could go back to Laiza the Headquarters of the KIA where they were trained. (Brig Gen Zaw Min in a press conference on 28th May).

The Myanmar Army has taken some heavy casualties in the recent times. The Chief of Western Command has been replaced with another General Maj. Gen. Phone Myat. The Army has been authorized to use helicopter gunships and more civilian casualties can be expected.

The insurgency has also spread to Chin area in Paletwa. There was a major incident on 26th May. In another major incident five high ranking military officers including two Battalion commanders were killed when the boats in which they were travelling in the Kaladan river were ambushed. On 12th June, closer to Paletwa itself, fierce fighting took place, resulting in over 750 civilians fleeing the urban areas of the townships for fear of being trapped. The fighting is not getting restricted to Rakhine but spreading to Chin areas too.

With ceasefire in force in all other areas and with large reinforcements sent to Rakhine area-yet it has not been easy for Myanmar army to clear the area of the Insurgents of the Arakan Army. In fact, a military solution is already out of reach right now with the AA already well entrenched in Rakhine State.

It is said that the Arakan Army is well equipped and trained and many observers feel that they could carry on for three years without outside help. Thereafter they will have to find fresh supply lines all the way to Laiza and beyond.Therefore, their dream of attaining “Rakhita” by 2020 - that is the Arakan dream may be a long time goal but at any rate not by 2020. It is also to be noted that except for vocal support none of the members of the Northern alliance or the seven party FPNCC led by the UWSA group would come to the rescue of the AA in the near future. This will not be allowed by China too, their mentor and on whose support the entity is thriving. AA is also aware of this situation. While it can rapidly expand its territory in Rakhine and beyond to some extent in the Chin area, their objective of getting self-determination and greater autonomy on their own by 2020 appears doubtful.

Gen. Gun Maw of KIA when he spoke to the media during the Wa celebrations said that there is a need to negotiate by the Myanmar Government. Rather than insisting that the AA should not enter Rakhine State, the Myanmar Government according to him should negotiate with the Arakan Army. These are perhaps the sentiments of other members of the seven-party alliance too.

Since both the Myanmar Army and the Arakan Army cannot attain the objectives in the near term, the best way is to negotiate and go first for a cease fire.

It has come to light that the Myanmar Government has opened a channel with the Arakan Army for negotiations. This initiative must have been taken with full approval of Myanmar Army too. The Government has had a guarantee of the safety of the Arakan Army Representatives to meet the Government officials in Government controlled areas. It had proposed locations in Myitkyina, Lashio and Yangon while the Arakan Army in turn has suggested Pangshang, Muisse on the Chinese border or even in Kunming, Yunnan China. (Thus China will also get involved if it has not done so already with its Kyaukphyu project for an opening to the Indian Ocean!)
The Arakan Army is said to be concerned about the safety of its leaders because of the ongoing clashes. But the Director General of the President’s Office told the reporters in May end that the Tatmadaw will guarantee their safety. With total lack of trust between the Tatmadaw and the AA, may be a location outside Myanmar may suit both sides.

If Myanmar Government is sincere in starting a dialogue with the Arakan Representatives, it should first review the case of U Aye Maung, former chief of the ANP who has been sentenced to 20 years in prison for treason. With Rakhine State voting overwhelmingly for local ethnic candidates, the wisdom of posting an insider from NLD as Chief Minister will also have to be reviewed. It is believed that Representatives of the Army and its proxies the USDP are already moving for an amendment to empower the Regional and State Legislators to appoint State and regional Ministers!

First is the safety of the Indian multi modal Kaladan project from Sittwe through Paletwa to the border of Mizoram State. Twan Mrat Naing the Head of the Arakan Army in an interview during the Wa State (UWSA) celebrations, said that they welcomed investments in Rakhine area and that he does not oppose the Kaladan Project. This is contrary to an Indian report that there is a danger to the Indian Kaladan multi modal project. The Indian report made other claims that the Indian Army had jointly worked with Myanmar Army in operation Sunrise 1 and Sunrise 2. This has been quickly denied and dismissed by the Spokesman of Myanmar Army.

Second is that with the intensification of fighting between Myanmar Army and the AA and the fighting coming close to Paletwa township and the Chin area the border between India and Myanmar gets destabilized. A large number of refugees are said to have already moved into India. Civilians are bound to move wherever there is safety no matter where the borders are!

One offshoot of the situation in Rakhine is that the Myanmar Army has since dispersed most of the Indian insurgent groups operating from the Taga Area. It is interesting to note that the Hkmati District Court has sentenced on 15th May about 24 Assam and Meitei Rebels for two years from staging a rebellion against the Indian Government! Those sentenced belonged to various groups like MPA, KYKL, PLA Prepak. PRP of Kangleipak. Several senior leaders of NSCN of Khaplong groups are also in the custody of the Myanmar Army.

It has just come to light that the seven members of FPNCC met at Panshang on the 19th June and decided to seek cease fire individually with the Myanmar Army. This fits in with another move to delink political dialogue from the ceasefire. If both these initiatives happen, then there could be some peace and stability in the area paving the way for economic development and unhindered by insurgency.

**Villagers flee after Tatmadaw air strike (BNI Multimedia Group) June 24, 2019**

*More than 600 villagers from Shwe Kyan village in Minbya Township fled from their homes because of an air strike from one of the Tatmadaw’s helicopter gunships on Friday during the intensified clashes between the Tatmadaw and the AA near the village.*

Even though the village remained unscathed during the air strike villagers still fled from their homes with a growing sense of anxiety.

The fighting occurred on a hill in the east section of the village and there were gunshots and shelling, an administer of the village said.

“We heard gunshots and shelling from the hills east of our village. I heard the launching of heavy artillery, there were about 20 instances of heavy mortar fire from Mrauk-U. Then, two helicopter gunships flew over the hills for about 20 minutes. The air strike covered an area around the hills,” said U Nyo Maung Thein, administrator of Shwe Kyan village.

Displaced villagers include children, pregnant women and elderly people, he added.

A temporary camp of the AA was reportedly attacked by the Tatmadaw, but the AA’s spokesperson Khaing Thukha said that the AA was not positioned near the area where clashes occurred.

“There was a minor clash between our mobile column and a Myanmar Army troop that entered our area. The skirmish lasted for about 20 minutes. Then, the Myanmar Army came with two helicopters and dropped bombs, attacked with rockets and fired guns in the surrounding area. I heard that civilians were scared,” Khiang Thukha said.

“The information that they occupied our camp is not true. We did not have a camp there. There were trenches made by soldiers, that’s a sign that soldiers are in the area. The Tatmadaw thought that it was our camp, but in fact, there was no camp in that area.”

The DMG tried to get comment from the Tatmadaw, but the Tatmadaw True News Information Team could not be reached.
Myanmar blackout may be cover for gross human rights violations: U.N. investigator (Reuters) By Tom Miles
June 24, 2019

Myanmar’s army may be committing gross human rights violations under cover of a mobile phone blackout in parts of Myanmar’s Rakhine and Chin states, U.N. special rapporteur Yanghee Lee said on Monday.


Lee, an independent expert who reports to the U.N. Human Rights Council on human rights in Myanmar, said nine townships had been blacked out, with no media access and serious restrictions on humanitarian organizations.

“I fear for all civilians there,” Lee said in a statement.

“I am told that the Tatmadaw (Myanmar’s army) is now conducting a ‘clearance operation’, which we all know by now can be a cover for committing gross human rights violations against the civilian population.”

The statement said there were credible reports that the army helicopters carried out attacks in Minbya Township in central Rakhine on June 19, and the following day, the Arakan Army fired on a navy ship in Sittwe, killing and injuring several soldiers.

The Arakan Army is an insurgent group that recruits from the mainly Buddhist ethnic Rakhine population and is fighting for greater autonomy for the state.

The conflict has included use of heavy weaponry, airstrikes and helicopter gunships, with significant loss of life on all sides, U.N. human rights chief Michelle Bachelet told the U.N. Human Rights Council earlier on Monday.

Rakhine state came to global attention after about 730,000 Rohingya Muslims crossed into Bangladesh fleeing a military crackdown in response to militant attacks in 2017.

U.N. investigators have called for senior military officers to be prosecuted over allegations of mass killings, gang rapes and arson. The military denies widespread wrongdoing.

A leading telecoms operator, Telenor Group, said on Saturday that the Ministry of Transport and Communications had ordered a temporary shutdown of internet services in conflict-torn western Myanmar, where government troops are fighting ethnic rebels.

It said the ministry had cited “disturbances of peace and use of internet activities to coordinate illegal activities”, but a military spokesman said the army had no information about the shutdown and was not behind it.

Lee called on the government to end the mobile internet ban.

Lee’s statement said the conflict between the Arakan Army and the Tatmadaw has been going on since late 2018 and has displaced more than 35,000 civilians.

ICC prosecutor seeks full Myanmar atrocities probe (Yahoo News) June 26, 2019

The International Criminal Court’s prosecutor wants to open a full investigation into Myanmar’s alleged crimes against Rohingya Muslims, including killings and forced deportations, the court said Wednesday.

Fatou Bensouda’s move comes after she launched a preliminary examination in September into Myanmar’s 2017 military crackdown, which saw around 700,000 people flee into neighbouring Bangladesh.

The Ghanaian-born prosecutor will now "submit a request for an authorisation to open an investigation into this situation", the Hague-based ICC said in a statement.

Judges will then "decide whether or not to authorise" her request for a full-scale probe, the court said, without saying when that decision would be made.

In September, judges ruled that even though Myanmar has not signed up to the ICC, the court still has jurisdiction over crimes against the Rohingya because Bangladesh, where they are now refugees, is a member.

The probe would be "within the context of two waves of violence in Rakhine State on the territory of the Republic of the Union..."
of Myanmar”, and other crimes that were “sufficiently linked” Bensouda said in a letter to the court.

Officials from the ICC have since visited Bangladesh as part of the prosecutor's preliminary enquiries.

UN investigators have separately called for the prosecution of top Myanmar generals for "genocide".

Myanmar's army has denied nearly all wrongdoing, insisting its campaign was justified to root out Rohingya insurgents who staged deadly raids on border posts in August 2017.

It has also "resolutely" rejected the ICC’s assertion that it has jurisdiction over the crime, saying that the decision was in "manifest bad faith" and was of "dubious legal merit".

**ICC forms pre-trial chamber on atrocities against Rohingyas (The Daily Star) June 26, 2019**

In a step forward, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has constituted a pre-trial chamber and assigned it to the situation in Bangladesh and Myanmar in regard to the alleged crimes against the Rohingyas.

The Pre-Trial Chamber III is composed of Judge Robert Fremr, Judge Olga Herrera Carbuccia and Judge Geoffrey Henderson, according to a statement of the ICC today.

The decision came following a notice by ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, informing the ICC Presidency of her intention to submit a request for an authorisation to open an investigation into the crimes against the Rohingyas.

Some 740,000 Rohingyas fled atrocities in Rakhine State of Myanmar to Bangladesh since August 2017.

Bensouda notified the judges that she would seek an authorisation “to investigate alleged crimes within the Court’s jurisdiction in which at least one element occurred on the territory of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh -- a State Party to the Rome Statute since June 1, 2010 -- and within the context of two waves of violence in Rakhine State on the territory of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, as well as any other crimes which are sufficiently linked to these events”.

Once the prosecutor submits her request, it will then be for the judges of the Pre-Trial Chamber III to decide whether or not to authorise the prosecutor to open an investigation into the situation.

The judges will have to consider whether there is a reasonable basis to proceed with an investigation, upon examination of the prosecutor's request and the supporting material.

On September 6 last year, following a request submitted by the prosecutor, ICC Pre-Trial Chamber I decided by majority that the Court may exercise jurisdiction over the alleged deportation of the Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

Later, on September 18, the prosecutor announced the opening of a preliminary examination concerning the alleged deportation of the Rohingya people from Myanmar to Bangladesh.

**U.N. investigator reports possible fresh war crimes in Myanmar (Reuters) By Stephanie Nebehay July 3, 2019**

Myanmar security forces and insurgents are committing human rights violations against civilians in restive western states that may amount to fresh war crimes, a United Nations investigator said on Tuesday.

A 2017 military crackdown drove more than 730,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee to Bangladesh. U.N. investigators have said that Myanmar’s operation included mass killings, gang rapes and widespread arson and was executed with “genocidal intent”.

The government denies committing those atrocities and says its military campaign across northern Rakhine was in response to attacks by Rohingya militants.

Government troops are currently fighting ethnic rebels in conflict-torn Rakhine and Chin states. The Arakan Army is an insurgent group that is fighting for greater autonomy for the two states.

On June 22, authorities ordered telecoms companies to shut down internet services in the two states. Telenor Group said the ministry of transport and communications had cited “disturbances of peace and use of internet activities to coordinate illegal activities”.

Yanghee Lee, the U.N. independent expert on human rights in Myanmar, said last week the army may be committing gross
human rights violations under cover of a mobile phone blackout in Rakhine and Chan, but on Tuesday she went further.

“The conflict with the Arakan Army in northern Rakhine State and parts of southern Chin State has continued over the past few months and the impact on civilians is devastating. Many acts of the Tatmadaw (army) and the Arakan Army violate international humanitarian law and may amount to war crimes, as well as violating human rights,” Lee said.

The Arakan Army had reportedly abducted civilians, including 12 construction workers in Paletwa and 52 villagers near the Bangladesh border, she told the U.N. Human Rights Council.

Lee cited reports of civilians, mostly ethnic Rakhine men, being detained and interrogated by the Tatmadaw for suspected links to the Arakan Army and said several had died in custody. In April, a military helicopter opened fire on Rohingya men and boys collecting bamboo, she said.

Some 35,000 people have fled the violence this year, she said.

Myanmar’s Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun said that the government had declared a ceasefire through August and was trying to bring about national reconciliation.

“The government of Myanmar is working tirelessly to end ethnic strife and end conflict and to achieve sustainable peace in Myanmar through a peace process,” Tun told the forum.

“Freedom of expression and media is one of most visible areas of change in Myanmar,” he said. “No restriction is imposed on the use of internet and social media, but we need to strike a balance between security and freedom and rights and responsibility.”

Lee said the blackout was endangering villagers, obstructing aid and shielding the military.

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discussed the ruling in Achi, her first language. Many of the women speak little or no Spanish, and no interpretation had been provided by the court.

One of the women’s lawyers explained the outcome, as a mixture of grief, frustration and resignation settled in. Earlier in the day, they had expressed cautious optimism about the outcome of the hearing.

"What we want is justice," Ixpata told Al Jazeera following a ceremony on Friday morning outside the Guatemala City tribunal complex.

During the 1960-1996 civil war between the army and leftist guerrilla forces, an estimated 200,000 people were killed. Most were indigenous Maya civilians and the army was responsible for more than 90 percent of atrocities, according to a UN-backed truth commission.

The state carried out acts of genocide in four regions, including the Maya Achi region, the truth commission concluded. Indigenous women around the country have been increasingly pushing for justice for the use of rape as a weapon of war in the context of genocide.

"We experienced it first-hand," said Ixpata.

In 2010, Ixpata and other Maya Achi women from villages in the Rabinal municipality, 100km north of Guatemala City, began organising together and reached out to the Asociacion Bufete Juridico Popular, an indigenous-led human rights law firm in Rabinal. Together they presented the case the following year to the local public prosecutor’s office, but it was stalled.

"When it comes to crimes during the armed conflict, prosecutors are often scared and do not want them to move forward," Gloria Elvira Reyes, one of the lawyers representing the women, told Al Jazeera.

'This case is not over'

In the early 1980s, PAC members in the area operating under military command raped Maya Achi women and girls, according to survivors and prosecutors, who also said many were held for weeks and assaulted by multiple perpetrators within military facilities. Some were young girls under the age of 13.

Reyes and her colleagues eventually got the case transferred to the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Human Rights in Guatemala City. In 2015, prosecutors began gathering sworn testimonies and gradually advanced in their investigation.

In 2018, a judge issued 10 arrest warrants for 10 ex-PAC members. Six were apprehended in May 2018, a seventh was apprehended in August, but one died later that month. Another was arrested two months ago in the United States, and the other two remain fugitives.

"They killed our family members too," Ixpata said of the army and the PAC. "Many were massacred and disappeared."

In 1982, 12 of Ixpata's close relatives were killed in a massacre in a nearby municipality. The victims included three of her siblings, and six young nieces and nephews, including a nine-month-old baby. Ixpata was 18 years old at the time.

The year before, in 1981, Ixpata's brother Tereso was detained and disappeared by security forces on his way from the village to work in nearby farmland.

"We have done so much searching and given DNA samples," said Ixpata. "But he has never been found."

The hearing on Friday coincided with Guatemala's National Day of Forced Disappearance. An estimated 45,000 men, women and children were disappeared during the conflict. Investigations and exhumations continue.

The Maya Achi women’s search for justice will also continue. Plans are already in the works to appeal the judge's rulings, Reyes told Al Jazeera outside the court.

"I am frustrated and I am angry. But getting angry doesn't really get us anywhere," Reyes said.

"I told the women not to be too sad. This case is not over," she added.

Palestinians slam US ‘war crimes’ after envoys open East Jerusalem tunnel (Times of Israel) By Jacob Magid
July 1, 2019

The Palestine Liberation Organization on Sunday slammed the participation of senior US officials at a ceremony opening an ancient Jewish pilgrimage road excavated in
the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem as participation in a "war crime," and said the Trump administration was fanning the flames of the conflict.

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman joined other Israeli and American bigwigs in symbolically breaking down a wall, which led to the “Pilgrimage Road,” a now-subterranean stairway that was said to have served as a main artery for Jews to the Temple Mount thousands of years ago.

Archaeologists have been excavating at the City of David National Park in the Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan for the past eight years. The area has several tiny Jewish enclaves.

The PLO condemned the construction of the tunnel and lambasted the US for the envoys’ involvement.

“We consider the participation of (US Mideast Envoy) Jason Greenblatt and David Friedman to be criminal collusion in the commission of a war crime that must be condemned as well as universally and unequivocally confronted,” the statement said.

“The US administration has partnered with the fundamentalist settler organizations to provoke religious tensions and fan the flames of conflict,” the PLO said. “Together, they present a threat to international peace and security.”

The Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism where the biblical Jewish temples stood, and which today houses the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque, Islam’s third holiest site, has been one of the biggest flash-points in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent years.

Earlier, the Palestinian Authority’s chief negotiator, Saeb Erekat, tweeted that Friedman, who before becoming the ambassador was a contributor to settlement causes, was himself “an extremist Israeli settler.”

The ceremonial event angered the Palestinian Authority, as well as several left-wing Israeli NGOs, which claimed the opening of the site would further entrench an Israeli presence in eastern parts of the city that Palestinians hope will one day serve as their capital.

While Trump said his decision in late 2017 to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital did not relate to the borders of the city, which would be determined in a final peace agreement, Sunday’s ceremony appeared to indicate some American recognition of Israeli sovereignty in East Jerusalem.

“Whether there was ever any doubt about the accuracy, the wisdom, the propriety of [US] President [Donald] Trump recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, I certainly think this lays all doubts to rest,” said Friedman as before bashing through the wall with a sledge-hammer.

“It confirms with evidence, with science, with archaeological studies that which many of us already new, certainly in our heart: the centrality of Jerusalem to the Jewish people,” Friedman told the crowd of nearly 100, among whom were Sara Netanyahu; Israel’s Ambassador to the US Ron Dermer; former Jerusalem mayor and current Likud MK Nir Barkat; Republican Senator Lindsey Graham; mega-donors Miriam and Sheldon Adelson; and the US ambassadors to Portugal, France and Denmark.

Friedman explained that his decision to attend the excavation event as a US ambassador stemmed from the deep significance Israel’s capital had vis-a-vis American history. “The spiritual underpinnings of our society, the bedrock of our principles in which we honor the dignity of every human life came from Jerusalem,” he said. “This place is as much a heritage of the US as it is a heritage of Israel.”

Speaking shortly after Friedman, Barkat declared — to applause from the US envoy and other members of the crowd — that the latest archaeological find will “hopefully [allow] the world [to] understand why we will never, never divide the city of Jerusalem.”

Several dozen activists from the Peace Now settlement watchdog protested outside the East Jerusalem event. The left-wing NGO has branded the Pilgrimage Road “the controversy tunnel,” adding that it had “caused the evacuation of Palestinian homes in the neighborhood and increased tensions between Palestinian residents and Jewish settlers, who have been acting more intensively than ever in recent years to Judaize the neighborhood, as part of an effort to sabotage the two-state solution.”

Footage from the Peace Now protest showed one activist being detained by police.

I hope all The world, including Americans can see this. That is not a US Ambassador that is an extremist Israeli settler, with Greenblatt, also there, digging underneath Silwan a palestinian town. We should show this to all who participated in Manama.

The PA’s foreign ministry released a statement earlier Sunday condemning the “imperialistic Judaization plans,” which it charged were aimed at changing the status quo in the city. It slammed the Trump’s administration for “fully supporting the imperialistic settlement enterprise led by the far-right in the occupation state” over the officials’ participation.
Greenblatt dismissed the criticism as “ludicrous,” adding on Twitter that “we can’t ‘Judaize’ what history/archaeology show. We can acknowledge it; you can stop pretending it isn’t true! Peace can only be built on truth.”

The Pilgrimage Road, which ascends from the Pool of Siloam to the Jewish Temple, dates to no earlier than 30-31 CE, during the time of the notorious Roman governor Pontius Pilate. That was the period when Jesus was sentenced to death, City of David archaeologist Nahshon Szanton said in a 2017 video tour of the site.

“Unlike most archaeological digs which begin from the ground down, this excavation was done subterraneously, beneath the hustle and bustle of modern Jerusalem,” Doron Spielman, vice president of the City of David Foundation, wrote in a Times of Israel op-ed on Sunday. “Dozens of fiber optic cable cameras were used to decipher where to excavate, while maps and diagrams made by archaeologists over the last century and a half paved the way forward,” he wrote.

However, Emek Shaveh, a left-wing organization committed to protecting archaeological sites as the shared heritage of all cultures and faiths in the country, disagreed with the City of David findings, saying that although the street is presented as part of the pilgrimage route, “the horizontal excavation method, and the paucity of scientific publication, do not allow us to know for sure when the street was built and how it was integrated into the urban layout of Jerusalem.”

US Navy seal not guilty of all but one charge in Iraq war crimes case (Mirror) By Marty Graham
July 3, 2019

A US Navy SEAL platoon leader was acquitted of multiple war crime charges - but convicted of unlawfully posing with the corpse of a captive ISIS fighter.

A seven-member military jury deliberated for about nine hours before delivering its verdict in the court-martial of Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher.

The decorated career combat veteran was found to have posed with the remains of an Iraqi that he was also acquitted of killing.

The crime he is guilty of carries a maximum sentence of four months imprisonment.

He and fellow SEAL team members took the photo with the dead Islamic State fighter, who was badly wounded in an air strike.

Navy authorities said Gallagher has credit for nearly seven months of time already served in pre-trial custody, so it is presumed he will remain a free man.

A sentencing proceeding was due to start later in the day to determine whether Gallagher faces any other punishment, such as a demotion in rank.

The case went to the jury of five US Marines and two Navy personnel - all but one a combat veteran - as the trial phase of the court-martial entered its third week.

A potential life sentence was hanging over Gallagher for the most serious charge against him, premeditated murder.

Several fellow SEAL team members had testified that he fatally stabbed the captured Iraqi prisoner in the neck with a custom-made knife after the teenage fighter was brought to Gallagher’s outpost for medical treatment.

Some of the same witnesses also said they saw Gallagher, who was originally trained as a medic, perform a number of emergency procedures on the detainee before he died.

Special Operator Corey Scott, a medic like Gallagher, gave a key testimony.

He told the court that he saw the chief stab the Islamic State militant in the neck, only to then claim he was the one who ultimately killed the prisoner by plugging his breathing tube with his thumb as an act of mercy.

Scott had been granted immunity from criminal charges as a lead prosecution witness in the case against Gallagher.

Seven SEALs said Gallagher unexpectedly stabbed the prisoner moments after he and the other medics treated the detainee.

Gallagher was also charged with attempted murder in the wounding of two noncombatants - a schoolgirl and an elderly man shot from a sniper’s perch, as well as with obstruction of justice and other offenses.
Aside from the one charge relating to the photo, he was found not guilty on all counts. The 39-year-old platoon leader had remained steadfast about his innocence, insisting that disgruntled subordinates with no prior battlefield experience fabricated allegations against him over grievances with his leadership style and tactics.

Trump intervened in Gallagher’s case months ago, ordering he be moved from pretrial detention in a military brig to confinement at a Navy base.

The presiding judge later released Gallagher from custody altogether.

The chief petty officer was arrested in 2018, more than a year after returning from his eighth overseas deployment in Mosul, in northern Iraq.

South America

Colombia’s war crimes tribunal receives testimonies of former child soldiers (Colombia Reports) By Adam Veitch
June 27, 2019

Colombia’s war crimes tribunal received a report on child soldiers on Wednesday, detailing abuses children suffered at the hand of guerrillas and the armed forces.

The report was complied with the help of youth advocacy group Benposta Nacion de Muchachas and the European Union, as part of the War Crimes tribunal’s ‘Case 7’ whose remit is to investigate the “recruitment and use of boys and girls in the armed conflict.”

The witnesses, who asked that the handover of the report take place behind closed doors, explained why they wanted to produce it: “we don’t want what we lived through to be repeated. The FARC as much as the military committed atrocities, so we want to reopen the case and be recognized as victims.”

Child recruitment

Despite the FARC previous denials that it ever supported the practice, the Prosecutor General’s office puts the number of minors recruited by the guerrillas during the war at 5,200.

“The FARC said they didn’t use child soldiers in the conflict, but I am living proof that they did,” said an unnamed male recruited at the age of 13.

Children often played an active role in combat, to the extent of being asked to carry and deploy antipersonnel mines, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

While the majority of child recruits were male, the report also details abuses suffered by girls. One female recruit told of how “abortion was a necessary thing”, carried out by the fighters themselves.

“They had their own medicines and tools but it was cruel and left a lot of girls scarred” the unnamed ex-soldier recounted in her harrowing testimony.

Furthermore, according to the UN, FARC sent child recruits home en masse as the peace process began in December 2016, causing the minors to miss out on support programs provided in the peace deal and leaving them vulnerable to recruitment by other armed groups.

Sending them home also allowed FARC commanders to evade justice for their recruitment, which constitutes a war crime.

Military abuses
The report also went into considerable detail on ‘Operation Berlin’, an armed forces operation carried out in 2000 against a FARC cell comprised mainly of child soldiers, leaving “an unknown number of fatalities” and allegedly involving unspeakable atrocities.

Under orders from FARC, the Arturo Ruiz division had moved from a demilitarized zone to the municipality of Surata, Santander, northern Colombia, to fight paramilitary groups and the army.

Victims told of abuses they suffered at the hands of the armed forces in the “many days of conflict” that followed.

In one particularly chilling account, an ex-child soldier recalled witnessing armed forces personnel execute a group of child soldiers after they had surrendered.

Over the coming years, the court will seek “to investigate this crime against humanity. Not just will the cases of boys and girls who have been obligated to bear arms, but also those who have carried out any kind of duty for any legal or illegal armed group, be it as cooks, carriers, messengers or for spying and sabotage activities.”

**Two social leaders reported murdered in one day, four demobilized rebels in a week (Colombia Reports)** By Adam Veitch
June 26, 2019

**Two community leaders were killed in just 24 hours in southwest Colombia while the FARC said four of its demobilized rebels have been murdered over the past week.**

The violence adds to pressure on President Ivan Duque about failures in the implementation of a peace process that was agreed by the government of former President Juan Manuel Santos and the demobilized FARC guerrillas in 2016.

Two social leaders killed

Indigenous community leaders Carlos Alberto Bisque and Jhordan Pequi were murdered in Caloto, a rural area in the north of Colombia’s southwestern Cauca department.

The two men were out with their families when unidentified men approached them and shot indiscriminately, killing both.

The UN Human Rights watchdog put the number of social leaders assassinated at 51 in the first 4 months of the year.

Four former guerrillas reported dead in a week

The murder of another ex-guerrilla in the southwest Colombian department of Nariño has taken the total number of murders for demobilized fighters up to 134 in the 31 months since the ratification of the peace deal, the FARC said Tuesday.

The latest murder took place in Ricaurte, a municipality in the central Cundinamarca province where unidentified assailants shot FARC member Servio Delio Guanga.

The former rebel is the fourth FARC member to be murdered this week. According to FARC, the victim was enrolled in a reintegration program at the time of his death.

FARC politicians pointed the finger squarely at the government, with FARC senator and ex-guerrilla Pablo Catatumbo tweeting a tribute to Guanga, and lamenting that “the systematic nature [of these murders] and the lack of security for the signatories to the peace deal are obvious.”

FARC representative Sergio Marin echoed these sentiments, simply tweeting: “If this isn’t systematic, what is?”

The Government Secretary of the southwestern Nariño province, Mario Viteri, joined FARC in lamenting the murder, and called on the authorities to launch an investigation and bring those responsible to justice.

On Saturday, FARC released a statement claiming that in addition to the (then) 133 deaths, violence against demobilized guerrillas since the peace deal had claimed the lives of 34 family members and was responsible for 11 disappearances.

One in hundred demobilized rebels murdered during process

The 134 deaths represent about 1% of the roughly 13,000 who demobilized back in 2016. Concerns for personal security were a big factor in convincing many to join the organization back when it was an armed group, and the mortality rate seems to be driving armed FARC dissidence.
According to the Prosecutor General’s office, there are currently 1,600 armed FARC dissidents still operating in the country, many of whom originally demobilized. A military report obtained by news agency Reuters put this at 2,300 last week.

The importance of personal security for demobilized fighters should be obvious to the Colombian government, as failure to guarantee personal security has led to rearmament before.

Since 2006, multiple dissident groups of paramilitary organization the AUC took up arms again after 2000 former paramilitary fighters “died” after their demobilization between 2003 and 2006.

Chile Facing Human Trafficking Influx from China (Insight Crime) By Chris Dalby
June 26, 2019

Chilean officials conspired to bring hundreds of Chinese migrants into the country illegally, leaving the country to face its largest-ever human trafficking ring and scrambling for a response.

In late May, Chile charged 11 people for bringing at least 381 Chinese citizens into the country illegally. These charges revealed the existence of a sophisticated human trafficking ring in place since 2016. Government officials implicated in the ring included Alex Brito, an official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Patricio Trigo, former governor of Choapa state; and Mauricio Navarro, ex-mayor of the city of Los Andes, near Valparaíso.

Along with a number of associates in China, this ring sent fraudulent invitation letters, complete with fake signatures from Chilean mayors and governors, to the Asian country. These were then used to pass off migrants as tourists or businesspeople, allowing them to enter Chile freely.

The operation to bring down this ring had been in place since mid-2018. It found that the Chilean officials involved received $4,900 for each migrant, with the total amount sent from China totaling over $1.1 million.

While the officials involved have been arrested, the Chinese migrants have received fair treatment. Chile has legalized or is in the process of legalizing the resident status of 203 of the migrants, while 178 have crossed into Argentina legally. Some have reportedly already found work among the Chinese community in Chile.

In recent years, Chile has been a destination of choice for migrants from around the world, especially Venezuela and Haiti, with 1 percent of the Caribbean nation’s population now reportedly in Chile.

In April 2018, President Sebastian Piñera launched a campaign to legalize 300,000 migrants in the country. Since this campaign finished, however, deportations have begun in earnest.

InSight Crime Analysis

Being one of Latin America’s wealthier and more peaceful countries, coupled with its traditional welcoming of migrants, has made Chile a prime target for human traffickers.

Reports from across the region show that the Chinese migrants are fleeing extreme poverty. Despite China’s much-touted record at reducing poverty, rising unemployment and worsening economic prospects are forcing some to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

In recent years, Chile has also become one of China’s foremost partners in the region. As the first South American country to sign a free-trade deal with China, it has become a major port of entry for Chinese goods and numerous Chinese companies have presence there. This makes it a natural destination for Chinese migrants.

In recent years, however, Chile has made significant progress in combatting human trafficking. The overwhelming majority of illegal migrants in Chile come from Latin America but the country has strengthened anti-trafficking measures overall, rating it a Tier One ranking in the US Trafficking in Persons Report.

But the trafficking of Chinese citizens into Latin America is nothing new. A 2016 report estimated that 80 percent of Argentina’s Chinese population had entered the country illegally, often through land borders with Brazil, Chile and Bolivia.

And a two-year investigation which ended in November 2018 saw the dismantling of a human trafficking ring which took Chinese citizens to Costa Rica and Panama through South America, where they were either smuggled to the United States or Canada or “sold” into cheap labor jobs.

The US government’s Trafficking in Persons 2018 Report estimates that Chinese people are subjected to forced labor in at least 57 countries worldwide.
Venezuela

Venezuelan Navy Captain Accused of Rebellion Dies After Signs of Torture (The New York Times) By Anatoly Kurmanaev
June 29, 2019

A Venezuelan Navy captain accused by the government of plotting a rebellion has died in custody a week after his arrest, underlining President Nicolás Maduro’s increasingly ferocious repression campaign amid a spiraling economic crisis.

The captain, Rafael Acosta, is the first of more than 100 active and retired Venezuelan officers jailed by the government on treason charges to die in custody after allegations of torture.

A military judge told Captain Acosta’s legal team on Saturday that the officer had died in a military hospital the previous night, said his lawyer, Alonso Medina Roa. Captain Acosta was detained on June 21 and charged with treason and conspiring to rebel. He denied the charges.

Mr. Medina Roa said the captain had been detained in good health but was in a wheelchair when he was brought into a courthouse on Friday. The lawyer said his client was struggling to speak or move, showed visible signs of beatings, and kept repeating the word “help” to his legal team.

He was taken to a hospital from the courthouse and died hours later, the lawyer said.

Venezuela’s information minister, Jorge Rodríguez, a close adviser to Mr. Maduro, confirmed Captain Acosta’s death on Saturday night and asked the country’s attorney general to investigate the “unfortunate event,” without providing details.

The head of the Organization of American States, Luis Almagro, condemned the captain’s death, adding in a message on Twitter that “the crimes of Nicolás Maduro won’t be left unpunished.”

Captain Acosta was one of half a dozen former and active officers who have been detained in the past week over allegations of plotting to overthrow Mr. Maduro. On Wednesday, Mr. Rodríguez presented a video purporting to show Captain Acosta discussing coup plans on a conference call. The video could not be independently confirmed.

Mr. Maduro has survived one coup and one assassination attempt in the past two years, as the country’s economic collapse has weakened his grip on power. His government, however, has also repeatedly used unconfirmed coup accusations to jail and repress political opponents and instill fear in the armed forces.

Last year, a detained opposition City Council member in Caracas, Fernando Albán Salazar, fell to his death from a window during his interrogation by intelligence officers. The government claimed it was a suicide.

Mr. Acosta was detained on the day that Mr. Maduro met with Michelle Bachelet, the United Nations human rights commissioner, in Caracas. After the meeting, Ms. Bachelet said she had agreed with the government to evaluate its anti-torture policies.

Her office did not immediately respond to a request for comment following news of Captain Acosta’s death.

His wife, Waleswka Pérez, told local reporters that her husband had done nothing beyond discussing in family circles Venezuela’s economic crisis and chronic corruption. She said she had not seen or heard from her husband since his detention.

Special Report: Why the military still stands by Venezuela's beleaguered president (Reuters) By Brian Ellsworth and Mayela Armas
June 28, 2019
One of the central mysteries of Venezuela’s slow-motion collapse: Why does the military continue to support Nicolas Maduro, the president who has led the once-prosperous South American country into poverty and chaos?

The answer, according to people familiar with Venezuela’s military structure, starts with Maduro’s late predecessor, Hugo Chavez, the charismatic caudillo who cemented strongman socialist rule in the nation of about 30 million people.

In a series of actions that began in 1999, the former lieutenant colonel and one-time coup leader began taming the military by bloating it, buying it off, politicizing it, intimidating the rank and file, and fragmenting the overall command.

Once he took office in 2013, Maduro handed key segments of the country’s increasingly ravaged economy to the armed forces. Select military officers took control of the distribution of food and key raw materials. A National Guard general and military deputies now manage the all-important national oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela SA, or PDVSA [PDVSA.UL].

The two leaders also embedded intelligence agents, with the help of Cuba’s security services, within barracks, former officers say, instilling paranoia and defusing most dissent before it happens. Intelligence agents have arrested and jailed scores of perceived troublemakers, including several high-profile officers, even for minor infractions.

The overhaul, former military officials say, created a jumbled and partisan chain of command. Top officers, grateful for perks and fearful of retribution, are often more preoccupied with pleasing Socialist Party chiefs than with national defense. Instead of drills and war games, some generals find themselves fielding calls to plant vegetables or clear garbage.

Many lower-ranking soldiers, destitute and desperate like most of Venezuela’s working class, have deserted the military in recent years, joining at least 4 million other fellow emigres seeking a better life elsewhere. But few senior officers have heeded the opposition’s call for rebellion, leaving the armed forces top-heavy, unwieldy and still standing by Maduro.

“The chain of command has been lost,” said Cliver Alcala, a former general who retired in 2013 and now supports the opposition from Colombia. “There is no way to know who is in charge of operations, who is in charge of administration and who is in charge of policy.”

Some commanders, like Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino, a four-star general, are nearly as much a face of the administration as Maduro. Padrino is sanctioned by the United States for ensuring Maduro’s “hold on the military and the government while the Venezuelan people suffer,” according to the U.S. Treasury Department.

Reuters was unable to reach Padrino or other senior officers mentioned in this article. Venezuela’s defense ministry didn’t reply to email or telephone inquiries. The country’s information ministry, responsible for government communications including those of the president, didn’t reply to Reuters either.

Padrino is hardly alone.

Consider the sheer number of officers awarded flag rank in Venezuela.

The country’s roughly 150,000 Army, Navy, Air Force and National Guard troops are a fraction of the more than 1 million who make up the U.S. armed forces. Yet Venezuela, with as many as 2,000 admirals and generals, now boasts as much as twice the top brass as the U.S. military – more than 10 times as many flag officers as existed when Chavez became president.

The estimate is according to calculations by former Venezuelan officers and the U.S. military.

The result, government opponents say, is a bureaucratic and operational mess, even at the very top.

Padrino, for instance, is both a general and defense minister. But he can’t officially mobilize troops without the consent of Remigio Ceballos, an admiral who also reports directly to Maduro and heads the Strategic Operations Command, an agency created by Chavez to oversee deployments.

“You have a general in chief and an admiral in chief,” said Hebert Garcia, a retired general who once served under Maduro but now supports the opposition from Washington. “Which one are you supposed to obey?”

The armed forces could still turn on Maduro, particularly if popular outrage boils over and makes military support for the president untenable. Still, calls by opposition leader Juan Guaido, who in late April unsuccessfully sought to rally the troops against Maduro, thus far remain unheeded.

Guaido in May told reporters his efforts to convert troops are thwarted by the military’s fragmented structure and intimidation within its ranks. “What is preventing the break?” he asked. “The ability to speak openly, directly with each of the sectors. It has to do with the persecution inside the Socialist Party, inside the armed forces.”
To better understand the pressures and policies keeping the troops in Maduro’s camp, Reuters interviewed dozens of current and former officers, soldiers, military scholars and people familiar with Venezuelan security. In their assessment, the military has evolved into a torpid bureaucracy with few leaders capable of engineering the type of mass mutiny that Maduro’s opponents long for.

“REAL POWER”

Venezuela’s “Bolivarian Revolution,” as Chavez dubbed his remaking of the country, itself has roots in military rebellion. Six years before he was elected president in 1998, Chavez led a failed coup against Carlos Andres Perez, a deeply unpopular president who Congress eventually forced from office.

Once in power, Chavez immediately took steps to enlist the military in his vision for a paternalistic, state-led economy that would share abundant oil wealth with long-neglected segments of Venezuela’s population.

With a new constitution in December 1999, Chavez stripped Congress of its oversight of promotion of senior officers. That gave the president ultimate authority to assign flag ranks and empower allied officers.

Because many state and local governments at the time were still controlled by rivals, Chavez also saw the military as a tool that could show his administration hard at work. A new program, “Plan Bolivar 2000,” ordered troops to fill potholes, clean highways, refurbish schools and carry out other public works.

The $114 million effort put sizeable sums at the discretion of commanders, giving officers a taste for a new kind of influence. “What Plan Bolivar 2000 taught officers was that real power doesn’t lie in commanding troops, but rather in controlling money,” said one retired general. The general, who served under Chavez and Maduro, spoke on condition of anonymity.

Soon, some of the funds began to disappear.

Miguel Morffe, a retired major, once worked as a captain in the remote northwestern region of La Guajira. He recalls receiving a request from superiors to provide materials for an unspecified schoolhouse. When Morffe told a lieutenant colonel that he didn’t understand where the supplies would be going, the superior told him: “I need those materials for something else.”

The school didn’t exist,” Morffe concluded.

Military officials didn’t reply to questions about the alleged incident.

By 2001, a raft of corruption allegations plagued the Plan Bolivar program.

Chavez fired General Victor Cruz, the Army’s commander in charge of the program. Cruz denied wrongdoing and wasn’t charged with any crime at the time. Venezuelan authorities arrested him last year when press reports linked him to funds in an offshore account. A Caracas court in May ordered him to stand trial on charges of illicit enrichment.

Reuters couldn’t reach Cruz for comment or identify his legal counsel.


Regional elections, he told Chilean sociologist and political activist Marta Harnecker in an interview, had put more allies in mayoral and state offices, where they could now work in unison with the national government. The military, he said, would return to its normal business.

That April, however, a small group of top officers emboldened Chavez to further remake the armed forces. Encouraged by conservative leaders and wealthy elites unhappy with his leftist agenda, the officers staged a coup and briefly arrested Chavez.

But the coup unraveled. Within two days, Chavez was back in power.

He purged the top ranks. More importantly, he reined in several powerful offices, including the Defense Ministry. Henceforth, the ministry would manage military budgets and weapons procurement, but no longer control troops themselves. Chavez created the Strategic Operations Command, the agency that manages deployments.

The move, former officers say, jumbled the chain of command.

He also rethought overall strategy.

Increasingly concerned that Venezuela’s oil wealth and leftist policies would make it a target for invasion, particularly by the United States, Chavez pushed for the military to integrate further with the government and society itself.
“We’re transforming the armed forces for a war of resistance, for the anti-imperialist popular war, for the integral defense of the nation,” he said at a 2004 National Guard ceremony.

Military leaders soon had to pledge their allegiance to Chavez and his Bolivarian project, not just the nation itself. Despite resistance from some commanders, the ruling party slogan, “Fatherland, Socialism or Death,” began echoing through barracks and across parade grounds.

As of 2005, another factor helped Chavez tighten his hold on power. Oil prices, years before fracking would boost global supply, soared along with the notion the planet’s reserves were dwindling. For most of the rest of his time in power, the windfall would enable Chavez to accelerate spending and ensure popular support.

Oil money also helped him strengthen relationships with like-minded countries, especially those seeking to counterbalance the United States. Venezuela purchased billions of dollars in arms and equipment from Russia and China. It secured medical and educational support through doctors, teachers and other advisors arriving from Cuba, the closest ally of all.

Cubans came with military know-how, too.

A “cooperation agreement” forged between Chavez and Fidel Castro years earlier had by now blossomed into an alliance on security matters, according to two former officers. Around 2008, Venezuelan officers say they began noticing Cuban officials working within various parts of the armed forces.

General Antonio Rivero, who the previous five years had managed Venezuela’s civil protection authority, says he returned to military activities that year to find Cuban advisors leading training of soldiers and suggesting operational and administrative changes.

The Cubans, he told Reuters, advised Chavez to rework the ranks, once built around strategic centers, into more of a territorial system, spreading the military’s presence further around the country. Rivero was stunned at one training session on military engineering. A Cuban colonel leading the session told attendees the meeting and its contents should be considered a state secret.

“What’s happening here?” Rivero said he asked himself. “How is a foreign military force going to possess a state secret?”

Rivero left Venezuela for the United States in 2014.

Cuban officials didn’t respond to requests from Reuters for comment.

The island’s influence soon would become apparent in day-to-day operations.

In Cuba, the military is involved in everything from public works to telecommunications to tourism. In Venezuela, too, ruling party officials increasingly began ordering officers to take part in activities that had little to do with military preparedness. Soldiers increasingly became cheap labor for governors and mayors.

In 2010, a former general working in the Andes, a western region on the Colombian border, was overseeing a complex mobilization of 5,000 troops for a month of combat training. The general spoke on condition that he not be named.

Another general, from a nearby command, called and asked him to halt the exercises. The state governor, the other officer told the general, wanted to reroute the troops - to install energy-efficient light bulbs in homes.

When the general refused, Army Commander Euclides Campos issued a formal order to scrap the training. “This would sound shocking to any military professional, but it’s exactly how the Venezuelan armed forces work,” the former general said.

Reuters was unable to reach Campos for comment.

Chavez, stricken by cancer, died in 2013. Maduro, his vice president and hand-picked replacement as the Socialist party candidate for president, won the election to succeed him.

The new president continued naming new flag officers and appointed even more military officials to helm agencies. By 2017, active and former military figures had held as many as half of Maduro’s 32 cabinet posts, according to Citizen Control, a Venezuelan non-profit that studies the armed forces.

In 2014, just as a collapse in oil prices torpedoed Venezuela’s economy, Maduro further fragmented the military structure.

Following the advice of the Cubans, former military officers say, Maduro created new command centers nationwide. He
appointed senior officers to run new commands in each of the 23 states and Caracas, the capital, as well as eight regional commands above those. His public speeches are now increasingly peppered with terms like ZODI and REDI, acronyms for the new commands.

Near military facilities, new brass abounded.

“Before, seeing a general was like seeing a bishop or an archbishop, he was an important figure,” recalls Morffe, the retired major. “Not long ago, I saw one in an airport. He walked past a group of soldiers and they didn’t even salute.”

Flag officers now oversee some areas that were once slivers of larger commands, in areas so remote that they have few human inhabitants. The largest landmass in the Western Maritime and Insular Command, overseen by an admiral, is a rocky archipelago with little vegetation and no permanent residents.

The officer, Vice Admiral Rodolfo Sanchez, didn’t respond to a Reuters phone call to his office.

The lopsided, partisan structure has led to mission creep, former officers say.

In the Andes command, which oversees three states, six generals once oversaw roughly 13,000 troops, according to officers familiar with the region. Today, at least 20 generals are now managing ranks that have dwindled to as few as 3,000 soldiers, according to officers familiar with the region.

Last August, three of the generals, including the regional commander, met with municipal officials in the state of Tachira, a hotbed of protests against Maduro in recent years. Days earlier, the government had said explosives used in a drone attack on a military parade in Caracas had been smuggled through Tachira from Colombia.

“All of us together can solve this problem,” Major General Manuel Bernal told the assembled officers and a group of onlookers, including a Reuters reporter.

Bernal wasn’t talking about the drones, however. Or even national security, once a major issue in the Andean region, where Colombia’s guerrilla war long posed a threat. Instead, the generals had gathered to talk about trash overflowing at a landfill. They deployed soldiers to clear garbage and put out a fire there.

A communications official for the Andes command didn’t respond to a Reuters request to speak with Bernal about the episode.

Military bosses show few signs of shying away from such directives. In the weeks since Guaido’s failed call to arms, senior officers have reiterated their commitment to Maduro.

“We will continue fulfilling our constitutional duties, fulfilling duties under your command,” Defense Minister Padrino told Maduro alongside troops gathered in Caracas in early May.

“Loyal always!” Padrino shouted.

The troops responded in unison: “Traitors never!”

**Massacre on Colombia-Venezuela Border Reveals Rastrojos Civil War**

**Insight Crime**

July 2, 2019

A massacre on the Colombia-Venezuela border has been attributed to warring factions of the Rastrojos gang, revealing a bloody leadership dispute that threatens to further destabilize the volatile border region.

Twelve people are reported to have died in the confrontation on June 18, which took place in Boca de Grita, in the Guaramito region of Venezuela’s Táchira state.

Police in Puerto Santander, Colombia, reported hearing gunfire in the early morning from the Venezuelan side of the Grita River. Shortly after, they intercepted a raft carrying two men attempting to cross from Venezuela.

The men were captured and given medical attention for bullet wounds. One man was identified as Rastrojos leader Jhon Jairo Durán Contreras, alias “El Menor,” who was accompanied by a bodyguard. Both were dressed in military uniforms and carried heavy weaponry.

Residents of Boca de Grita assert that the massacre resulted from a shootout between rival factions of the Rastrojos: one loyal to Wilfredo de Jesús Torres Gómez, alias “Neco,” a former Rastrojos leader who was captured in March by Venezuelan security forces; and one led by alias “El Menor,” who had taken control of the gang’s illegal businesses following the arrest.
In the aftermath of the massacre, Venezuelan authorities released no official death toll and claimed not to know anything about it.

Franklyn Duarte, representative of the opposition-led National Assembly, stated on Twitter: “We have a total of 12 murdered, the result of a confrontation between armed groups. There are more than 20 injured by bullets. We’re concerned that the security forces do not act as the constitution and the laws demand.”

InSight Crime Analysis

Although the silence of the Venezuelan authorities makes the details of the massacre difficult to establish, it could also cover deeper complicity.

Sources told InSight Crime that the shootout was started by Neco himself, having struck a deal with authorities to secure his early release from prison. He then allegedly returned to Táchira to reclaim his territories from El Menor, backed by Venezuelan security forces.

This account would imply a divide-and-conquer strategy by the Venezuelan military, enabling them to reestablish influence over the Guaramito region and its criminal economies through a new pact with Neco’s faction of the Rastrojos.

While gang conflict in recent months has centered on the disputed drug trafficking and contraband routes in the Ureña province, the area to the north known as Guaramito has been dominated by a fragile alliance between the Rastrojos and the Popular Liberation Army (Ejército Popular de Liberación — EPL).

A key transit point for migrants and illegal goods, Guaramito is a hub for the gasoline smuggling that represents one of the border region’s most lucrative criminal economies. The Rastrojos have maintained a base of operations in Boca de Grita since at least 2018, from which they coordinate their gasoline smuggling operations in collaboration with elements of the Bolivarian National Guard (Guardia Nacional Bolivariana — GNB).

Tensions have risen steadily over recent months, as the Rastrojos have pushed back against attempts by Venezuelan security forces to undermine the gang’s control of these smuggling routes. Such was the Rastrojos’ command of the region that an attempt by the Special Action Forces (Fuerzas de Acciones Especiales – FAES) of the national police (Policía Nacional Bolivariana — PNB) to enter nearby Orope was ambushed and repelled by gunfire from gang members.

The military’s operations against the Rastrojos have been overseen by embattled President Nicolás Maduro’s appointed “protector” of Táchira, Freddy Bernal. Following the recent massacre, Bernal announced his intention to give a press conference in Boca de Grita, stoking speculation regarding a possible alliance with Neco. Political attendance at the scenes of recent gang massacres is not common practice in Venezuela, and such a bold promise by Bernal seemed calculated to assert dominance over previously hostile territory. The press conference never happened.

Any reconfiguration of forces threatens to further destabilize this volatile area. Violence has spiraled in Táchira’s border towns since the partial demobilization of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia — FARC) and the intensification of the Venezuelan crisis started to reshape criminal economies in the region.

The days following the massacre saw an unprecedented exodus of at least 1,000 Venezuelans from Boca de Grita into Puerto Santander, fearful of the consequences of this latest gang war. In a cruel irony for a country that used to be seen as refuge for Colombians escaping armed conflict, it is now Venezuelans forced to flee the violence that is wracking the border towns.

An Explosive Venezuelan Diaspora Threatens Latin America

By Juan Carlos Gabaldon
July 2, 2019

From June 26th to the 28th, representatives from 35 governments that form the Organization of American States (OAS) met in Medellín, Colombia, for the organization’s 49th General Assembly, an event that revolved around the Venezuelan crisis, just as it did the two previous years. Representatives of Juan Guaidó’s government attended, as they are the legitimate, recognized representatives of Venezuela before the organization, something that prompted the Uruguayan delegation to leave the meeting in protest, highlighting growing tensions in the region after months of demonstrations and international pressure failed to oust Nicolás Maduro from Miraflores Palace.

But the real protagonist of the assembly was the human aspect of the crisis: Venezuelan refugees are a problem for Latin America, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.
The United Nations estimates that a little over 4 million Venezuelans have already left the country. According to David Smolansky, the exiled former mayor of El Hatillo municipality in Caracas, and part of the OAS’ taskforce on the Venezuelan crisis, almost 70% of these migrants are currently residing in just four countries: Colombia (1,3 million), Peru (850,000), Chile (288,000) and Ecuador (263,000), creating an extremely complex social crisis for the whole region.

Venezuelan refugees are a problem for Latin America, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future.

It’ll only get worse in the near future, unless a political change takes place in Venezuela. According to the report presented by Smolanky’s team in the General Assembly, the organization expects that, by the end of 2020, the number of refugees will double to 8 million people, surpassing the number of Syrians displaced by war and becoming the largest migration crisis in the world.

It would represent 25% of all Venezuelans, and more than the entire population of countries like Paraguay or El Salvador.

“There’s no doubt that 8 million Venezuelan migrants in the region would be unsustainable for the recipient countries,” said Ivan Briscoe, Latin America director for the International Crisis Group in an interview with Al Jazeera.

Some argue that larger numbers of refugees will push regional governments to adopt a more forceful stance to bring Maduro’s government down, but it seems more likely that they will simply make it harder for Venezuelans to settle in their own countries. In fact, places like Peru or Chile have already restricted the entry of Venezuelans implementing visas, leaving thousands trapped in transit countries like Ecuador, Colombia or Brazil. Similar measures are expected to be approved by other nations in the following months, but visas and restrictions probably won’t be enough to stop an ever-growing flux of desperate people, like the experience of the United States in its Southern border has shown the region.

Desperate Venezuelans will simply find illegal, more dangerous ways to flee. According to Smolansky, 101 Venezuelans have died in the last year trying to leave their country, most of them drowned in the Caribbean while trying to reach Trinidad, Curaçao and Aruba.

This situation has also created international tension, as expressed by Felipe Muñoz, Colombia’s border manager, who used the assembly to express that “Little by little we (Colombia) are becoming the only country free of restrictions.”

His worries are well-founded. Things in Colombia, which shares a 2,200 km border with Venezuela, are particularly bad. The continuous flow of people across the border is allegedly being capitalized by the Colombian guerilla, which according to Smolansky can make up to $10,000 daily, from charging Venezuelan migrants to let them through unwatched areas.

International funding has also been insufficient. The report presented in the OAS General Assembly indicates that the average Venezuelan refugee only receives $100 worth of aid, while a Syrian refugee can receive up to $5,000. Furthermore, as reported by Reuters, Colombian Foreign Minister Carlos Holmes Trujillo also reminded the OAS that only 21% of the $728 million pledged by the international community to help Venezuelan migrants has been received, adding that Colombia has received only 66 of the promised $315 million. “The answer to this global call is weaker and slower each time.”

The organization expects that, by the end of 2020, the number of refugees will double to 8 million people, surpassing the number of Syrians displaced by war.

Smolansky also reminded the OAS countries that the Venezuelan migration isn’t voluntary, but forced by the economic collapse of the country, and its political persecution and violence, problems directly caused by Chávez’s and Maduro’s governments. He asked Latin American countries to refrain from deporting vulnerable Venezuelans as long as they don’t commit any crimes or don’t have criminal records, while proposing the creation of a regional ID card that allows Venezuelans to travel across the region without the need for passports, making it easier for receiving countries to register and monitor their activities.

At the end of the meeting, the only thing clear is that the Venezuelan crisis will continue to severely threaten Latin America’s social stability until a political transition is achieved with chavismo, a transition that after hundreds of demonstrations, a failed coup attempt and an apparently fruitless dialogue process, seems as unlikely as always.

US Navy Seal acquitted of murder in war crimes trial (France24)  
July 3, 2019

The military jury also cleared Special Operations Chief Edward Gallagher of attempted murder in the shootings of two civilians and all other charges except for posing for photos with the body of the dead captive.

The case exposed a generational conflict within the ranks of the elite special operations forces and the outcome dealt a major
blow to the prosecution of one of the Navy’s most high-profile war crimes cases.

After the verdict was read, the defense attorneys jumped up from their seats as Gallagher turned and embraced his wife over the bar of the gallery.

Gallagher, dressed in a Navy white uniform and sporting a chest full of medals, told reporters outside court that he was happy and thankful.

“I thank God, and my legal team and my wife,” he said.

He declined to address questions about his SEAL team. His lawyers said he might talk after the jury decides his sentence, which could happen as early as Wednesday.

Defense lawyers said Gallagher was framed by junior disgruntled platoon members who fabricated the allegations to oust their chief and the lead investigator built the probe around their stories instead of seeking the truth. They said there was no physical evidence to support the allegations because no corpse was ever recovered and examined by a pathologist.

‘Got him with my hunting knife’

The prosecution said Gallagher was incriminated by his own text messages and photos, including one of him holding the dead militant up by the hair and clutching a knife in his other hand.

“Got him with my hunting knife,” Gallagher wrote in a text with the photo.

The defense said it was just gallows humor and pointed out that almost all platoon members who testified against him also posed with the corpse.

Gallagher’s family championed a “Free Eddie” campaign that won the support of dozens of congressional Republicans who brought the case to the attention of President Donald Trump.

Trump had Gallagher moved from the brig to more favorable confinement at a Navy hospital this spring and was reportedly considering a pardon for him.

Gallagher could face up to four months imprisonment for the one conviction along with a reduction in rank, forfeiture of two-thirds of his pay and a reprimand.

Having already served nearly seven months in jail awaiting trial, defense lawyers said they expected the same jury would free him. In the military justice system, the jury decides the sentence.

The case provided a rare glimpse of a deep division in the insular and respected SEAL community. The group of men who spoke up about Gallagher referred to themselves in a chat group as “The Sewing Circle” and saw themselves as a counter to an old guard that would adhere to a code of silence even in the face of war crimes.

‘Witnesses lied’

Both sides told jurors that witnesses had lied on the stand.

Gallagher, 40, a 19-year veteran who deployed eight times, did not testify.

The panel of five Marines and two sailors, including a SEAL, were mostly seasoned combat veterans who served in Iraq and several had lost friends in war. They deliberated fewer than eight hours over two days.

Gallagher was also charged with attempted murder in the shootings of two civilians an old man and young girl and four other charges that included the unlawful discharge of his firearm by shooting at noncombatants, impeding an investigation by discouraging platoon members from reporting his criminal actions, retaliating against those who did and wrongfully posing with a casualty.

The two-week trial included testimony from nearly a dozen SEALs, including Special Operator Corey Scott, a medic like Gallagher, who told the court that he saw the chief stab the militant in the neck but stunned the court when he said he was the one who ultimately killed the prisoner by plugging his breathing tube with his thumb as an act of mercy.

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Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Canada Should Back Up Words With Action on Indigenous Rights (Human Rights Watch) By Insiya Mankani June 21, 2019

Today is National Indigenous Peoples Day in Canada, a day to reflect on progress made but also the work still needed to address past and present abuses faced by Indigenous communities in Canada.

Earlier this month, a nation-wide inquiry into the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls over the past decades issued its final report, including 231 recommendations aimed at stemming the epidemic of violence against this vulnerable population. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has agreed to implement them all, but this is not the first time that promises have been made to address the concerns of Indigenous people.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the residential school system, a system that forcibly removed Indigenous children and youth from their communities, made 94 calls to action. Four years later, monitoring indicates that only 10 of these recommendations have been completed.

Meanwhile, Indigenous communities continue to suffer systemic discrimination and violence. Indigenous women and girls are far more likely to be victims of abuse and homicide – including at the hands of law enforcement. Indigenous peoples are significantly overrepresented in the prison system and many communities don’t have access to clean drinking water in one of the most water-rich countries in the world.

Canada is often put on a pedestal when it comes to upholding human rights, but it needs to do much more to protect and fulfill the rights of Indigenous populations – and to provide redress. The government has issued numerous apologies, but actions speak louder than words.

The most recent inquiry echoed a key call made in 2015: to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). A proposed law - Bill C-262 – seeks to ensure the objectives of UNDRIP are achieved in Canada and is in its third and final reading on the Senate floor.

Successive governments have been hesitant to bring Canadian legislation in line with the UNDRIP, in part because of the requirement of free, prior, and informed consent from Indigenous communities in regard to any policies or decisions that would impact their lands, resources, or rights. There is no accepted definition of this clause, which has raised the issue of whether or not it provides Indigenous communities a veto over government projects.

At the end of this month, the Senate will adjourn. By passing Bill C-262, lawmakers can demonstrate that they are ready to turn words into action and provide Indigenous communities the respect and support they deserve.

Beauty Pageant Winner Accuses Former Gambia President Yahya Jammeh of Rape (Time) By Krista Larson June 26, 2019

A Gambian beauty pageant winner has accused the country’s former dictator Yahya Jammeh of raping her four years ago, the latest allegation of human rights abuses committed by the ex-president now living in exile in Equatorial Guinea. Fatou “Toufah” Jallow, now 23, made an announcement to journalists Tuesday and said she plans to testify later this year before Gambia’s truth and reconciliation commission, which is investigating abuses committed under the Jammeh regime.

The dictator of 22 years is accused of ordering opponents tortured, jailed and killed. The sexual abuse allegations raised by Jallow and others directly implicate him in personally committing violence against Gambians.
Jallow and other young women interviewed by Human Rights Watch say the president was a sexual predator who coerced young women into sexual relationships by promising scholarships and even putting some on the state payroll.

Jammeh is reportedly living a lavish but reclusive life in exile in Equatorial Guinea, where he is protected from extradition by the dictator in charge of the oil-rich country.

Jallow, who wanted to come forward publicly, said the president began lavishing gifts on her and her family after meeting her when she was crowned queen of the Miss July 22 Pageant as an 18-year-old back in 2014. Jammeh took a special interest in her, she said, ordering the utility company to install running water at her mother’s home, and having his cousin purchase the family expensive furniture.

While initially he expressed interest in funding her charity project, she said that Jammeh, a married man that she considered a mentor, asked for her hand in marriage. After she declined, he told her that as the pageant winner she had to attend an event at his official residence, State House, ahead of the holy month of Ramadan.

Once there, she said she was locked in a room and drugged by the president himself. “He told me, ‘No woman has ever rejected me. And who do you think you are?’” she said. “His face changed, his eyes were so red, different from the man before. He said, ‘No woman rejects me. You think you can get away with it?’”

As she tried to leave, Jallow said the president told her: “If you make any move, I will kill you with my own hands.”

The president shoved his genitals in her face and raped her before she blacked out, she said. Several days later she told her family she was going to the market to shop, and then fled to neighboring Senegal.

Jammeh later lost the 2016 election to now President Adama Barrow. After initially refusing to accept his defeat, Jammeh succumbed to international pressure, stepped down from office and fled to Equatorial Guinea. Gambia’s new administration has estimated that Jammeh and his associates fled with up to $1 billion in funds from the state coffers.

The truth and reconciliation commission does not have the powers to prosecute but will make recommendations for the Attorney General Chambers to act on a number of cases that may be taken up with the court. Jammeh for now remains untouchable in exile.

“It’s going to take a lot of heavy political lifting to pry him out of Equatorial Guinea,” said Reed Brody, counsel at Human Rights Watch who led the investigation into the allegations of sexual abuse.

Jallow, who later received asylum in Canada, says she is undergoing therapy and hopes other young women victimized by Jammeh will come forward. “Nobody discusses rape and yes, I am scared,” she said. “I am scared. But I want the next person after me to be a little less scared than me.”

**There’s a new way to understand vigilantism in South Africa (The Washington Post)** By Kim Yi Dionne
June 28, 2019

*After the transition to democracy in South Africa and transformation of its legal system, why do citizen vigilantes regularly take justice into their own hands? This week’s African Politics Summer Reading Spectacular review is of “Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa” by Nicholas Rush Smith, a professor of political science at the City University of New York — City College.*

The broader goal of “Contradictions of Democracy” is to understand why citizens turn to other forces — beyond the government — to protect themselves. Smith’s book studies in particular the sources of vigilantism or extrajudicial punishment. Vigilantism is a serious issue in South Africa. Smith cites statistics that suggest over 800 people in South Africa die in a given year as a result of vigilantism.

Smith draws on 20 months of research in South Africa, mostly spent in two townships: KwaMashu, which is 15 kilometers (about 10 miles) outside Durban, South Africa’s third-largest city and manufacturing hub; and Sebokeng, which is 60 kilometers (37 miles) outside Johannesburg, South Africa’s largest city.

While existing scholarship points to government failure or civic failure as sources of vigilantism, Smith argues that vigilantism in South Africa is “a response to processes of democratic state formation fostered by dense civic networks.” In other words, Smith’s book makes two counter- conventional claims: that state formation (not decay) is a source of vigilantism; and that social capital can facilitate (not reduce) violence.
How is state formation a source of vigilantism? Smith points to South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), often celebrated — and replicated — as a model for moving forward from violence and conflict. In chapter 3, he shows how the TRC failed to anticipate citizens’ suspicions of a neutral arbiter such as the TRC that gave strong procedural rights to suspects. Examining one case in detail, Smith conveys a community’s dissatisfaction with the TRC as it treated the mother of a known criminal as a victim of violence (her house was burned in reprisal of her son’s violence).

A common understanding of vigilantism is that it emerges as a result of a breakdown in trusting communal bonds — but Smith argues that close-knit relationships in township communities may actually facilitate vigilantism, not suppress it. Citizens who fight crime — even if sometimes using force — felt that doing so meant they were “being a good community member.”

Uncharacteristic of most academic work, Smith's book presents his analysis using compelling narratives. Whether he means to be and without detracting from the rigor of his analysis, Smith is an effective storyteller.

For example, chapter 1 of “Contradictions of Democracy,” which lays bare the puzzle of vigilantism in a transformed South Africa, opens with the famous case against Paralympian Oscar Pistorius (convicted of the 2013 murder of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp). Not widely reported during the trial, but relevant to Smith’s book, the prosecution in the Pistorius case invoked the threat of vigilantism before sentencing as a reason the judge should give Pistorius a harsh sentence. The prosecution argued that without sufficient punishment from the government, citizens could take matters into their own hands.

Smith’s ability to transform his analysis into readable nonfiction is probably successful because of how he did much of his research — through ethnographic fieldwork. Smith learned to speak IsiZulu, the predominant language in the townships where he conducted research. Working with three research assistants, he participated in activities in both KwaMashu and Sebokeng. In addition to engaging in everyday activities in the townships such as sharing meals and attending celebrations and funerals, Smith also “patrolled with anti-crime groups, attended anti-crime protests, and observed community justice initiatives.” His interview subjects included community policing officials, traditional healers, former police officers and small business owners.

“Contradictions of Democracy” is an accessible, compelling book about an important subject that offers readers new arguments about what drives vigilantism in South Africa. Smith’s book will appeal to readers who follow South African politics and society. It will also appeal to readers more broadly interested in understanding the implications of declining citizen trust in the police and the judicial system to keep communities safe.

Leading Grand Gedeh Civil Society Groups Support War Crimes Court (Front Page Africa) By Tacee Boley
July 1, 2019

Few places would likely feel the impact of a war crimes court more than Grand Gedeh, the home of slain Liberian president Samuel Kanyon Doe. Bordering Nimba County, where the civil war began, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report found that there were 12 different massacres committed in the county alone, putting the Grand Gedeh amongst the places here human rights violations and killings were prevalent during the conflict.

Tribal solidarity has been one of the most talked about hindrances to the establishment of a war crimes court in the future. But in spite of their tribal connections, heads of leading civil society organizations in Grand Gedeh are calling for full implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations, including the prosecution of alleged perpetrators of violations during the conflict.

“My kinsmen can go before a court of competent jurisdiction. It is not that the war crimes court is coming as a blanket, that everyone that goes there will be bundled up and thrown in prison,”said GarleyMarh, the head of the Civil Society Community in Grand Gedeh in an interview with FrontPageAfrica earlier this year.

“It is about saying what lead you to take part in the conflict. If you are a Krahn man and you fought justifiably, you can get a lawyer defend you. People should not fear for the war crimes court,”he said.

Marh said the issue of whether a war crimes court should be established has become a “household debate” across the county. Members of the younger generation are also weighing in on the debate.

“We are discussing the future of our unborn generation. If they see that people were prosecuted because of what they did in the past, then crimes will be minimized in their days,”said DeKonteeTenty-Zweh, a youth leader in Grand Gedeh.

“There are people who joined the war to help people. But if you join instead of helping, you harmed people then you should be judged. People will have the opportunity to clear their name,” said Tenty-Zweh.
While prominent sons of the county claim they took up arms to defend their Krahn kinsmen and women, the TRC report lists many of them among the “Most Notorious Perpetrators” of human rights violations and war crimes and recommends they be prosecuted. The most prominent of those listed are: George Boley, a representative in the legislature, who led the Liberia Peace Council (LPC) and was deported from the United States in 2012 for his alleged recruitment of child soldiers during the conflict; Thomas Yaya Nimley, who headed the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL); and the late Roosevelt Johnson, who led the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO).

The Commission’s Report found ULIMO and MODEL responsible for 7 percent of the crimes reported to it, respectively and the LPC was found to be responsible for about 10 percent.

In other quarters, growing calls for the establishment of a war crimes court have faced strong resistance. Former warlords such as Prince Johnson, who led the rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and is now serving his second term as a senior senator of Nimba county, often reminds the people of Nimbathat he protected them during the war. “My people believe I am a hero while others think I am a devil. When they were being killed, I stood for them,” Johnson said on a recent trip to Nimba.

Grand Gedeh is not the only county with prominent sons on the TRC’s list and where people are calling for the establishment of the war crimes court. FrontPageAfrica found earlier this year some of Nimba’s prominent sons were in favor of a war crimes court.

President of the Liberia Bar Association and human rights lawyer Tiawon Gongloe and human rights advocate, Hassan Bility, have both been backing the establishment of the court, regardless of the number of their kinsmen who have been accused of committing war crimes.

But they have had their own share of threats coming from their kinsmen. Human Rights lawyer, Tiawon Gongloe, who is a Mano from Nimba County, an ethnic group that shares ties to Johnson’s Gio ethnic group, is still defiant despite receiving threats from Johnson, the most notorious perpetrators according to the TRC.

“When I faced Prince Johnson I told him ‘you are a killer,’” Gongloe said. “I don’t feel threatened by Prince Johnson. I hear he threatens me or he says words that sound threatening but I don’t feel threatened by them. I am not afraid to do the right thing.”

Hassan Bility, of the Global Justice and Research Project, a Liberian organization that documents war crimes in Liberia, and helps build legal cases against alleged perpetrators, has also received threats from within the Mandingo community. These threats have extended to his 14-year-old daughter.

“A lot of people threaten me. People from the same county and same ethnic group threatened to kidnap my daughter — that was my worst fear,” said Bility. “I received a call on my phone that they were going to do so. I ran on her campus to be sure she was okay. The teacher kept asking if everything was okay. When I saw her, I said it was. They feel that we should be loyal to our tribes first.”

Back in Grand Gedeh William B. Quiwea, a civil society advocate and Project Officer, for ARKONDEH, a word that means ‘our heritage’ in Krahn said the court will expose those who committed atrocities under the guise of defending their people. It will also be a way to hold those who committed atrocities against Grand Gedeans accountable.

“People came from other parts of Liberia to come and harm us here,” said Quiwea. “Let all of them face the full weight of the law. All of them! You say you came to overthrow Samuel Doe, but he was not in our town and villages. He was in Monrovia. You left [Monrovia] and came here to kill people. Let all of them go!”

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An attack on a Libyan detention center that killed at least 44 people may constitute a war crime, a United Nations envoy said, adding to international pressure to end a battle for the capital that’s threatening to tear apart the North African OPEC member.

Libya’s UN-backed government accused eastern commander Khalifa Haftar of ordering an overnight airstrike that hit the compound for undocumented migrants in the suburbs of the capital, Tripoli. Haftar’s Libyan National Army denied the charge and said the Tripoli-based government was to blame, the pan-Arab TV channel Al-Hadath reported.

“This attack clearly could constitute a war crime, as it killed by surprise innocent people whose dire conditions forced them to be in that shelter,” the head of the UN’s support mission in Libya, Ghassan Salame, said Wednesday in a statement.

The center in Tajoura held at least 600 refugees and migrants, including women and children, many of them Africans who’d attempted to travel to Europe. The UN Refugee Agency called for an immediate independent probe into who was responsible for the raid that left 130 other people severely injured.

If proven, the nature of the target and the death toll will likely increase calls for Haftar and his backers to return to the UN-sponsored peace process.

The raid followed a warning by Haftar’s forces that they would launch airstrikes on Tripoli targets after losing the strategic city of Gharyan to the government. That loss had dealt a blow to his months-long campaign to seize the capital and take control of the war-torn country.

Libya is divided between two rival governments and militias vying to control a country that holds Africa’s largest proven oil reserves. The conflict is rapidly turning into the latest proxy war in the Middle East, pitting rivals Egypt and the United Arab Emirates against Turkey.

The U.A.E., which supports Haftar, denied that it “owned” U.S.-made missiles found in Gharyan. In a statement late Tuesday, the Foreign Ministry said it was committed to the UN arms embargo on Libya and called on the country’s warring parties to ease tensions.

The top Democrat on the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee warned Secretary of State Michael Pompeo that if the U.A.E. had violated an arms sales agreement with the U.S., the Trump administration would be required to terminate all weapons sales to its Gulf Arab ally.

“I understand that the State Department may have begun an investigation; if not, I demand that a full investigation be done immediately,” New Jersey Senator Bob Menendez wrote in a letter posted on his website.

Hours later, State Department spokesman Morgan Ortagus said in a statement that “the United States strongly condemns the abhorrent attack” and called for all parties in Libya to “return to the political process.” But she didn’t indicate an investigation was underway or attribute blame to Haftar, who has been praised in the past by President Donald Trump.

A White House statement in April said Trump “recognized Field Marshal Haftar’s significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya’s oil resources.”
The Gulf of Guinea, on west Africa’s southern coast, is the world’s most pirate-infested sea. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) reports 72 attacks last year on vessels at sea between Ivory Coast and Cameroon—up from 28 in 2014. This year so far it has recorded 30. Although some of the rise may reflect more complete reporting, Max Williams of Africa Risk Compliance (arc), a security consultancy, says piracy remains chronically under-recorded. Ship-owners fear their vessels will be held up at port during an investigation. His firm estimates the real number of attacks last year was double the IMB’s figure.

**Five Indian Sailors Abducted by Nigerian Pirates Released (Sea News)** By: Baibhav Mishra  
July 2, 2019

*Five Indian sailors, who were recently released from the captivity of Nigerian pirates, reached Mumbai on Monday. The seafarers who were abducted and released were Putcha Sai Avinash and Moogu Ravi from Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh, Jadhav Chirag Deepak of Maharashtra, Sudeep Kumar Choudhury of Odisha, and Anikit Hooda of Rohtak in Haryana.*

“Good news! Our seafarers on MT Apecus — Sudeep, Chirag, Avinash, Ankit and Ravi, who have been released from captivity in Nigeria, are returning to Mumbai tomorrow. I thank Petronav Carriers LLC, Nigerian maritime authorities and Indian High Commission in Nigeria for their efforts,” TS Tirumurti, Secretary Economic Relations of Ministry of External Affairs said in a tweet.

These Indian sailors were kidnapped from their vessel MT Apecus on April 19, 2019 and taken ashore off Bonny Island in Nigeria. They were rescued on June 27 and are now in safe custody of Indian authorities in Abuja. There were celebrations at the Mumbai airport as the families of seafarers distributed sweets.

The High Commission of India in Nigeria had sought the assistance from the Nigerian Navy and other security agencies to track these abducted Indian sailors.

**The Mounting Cost of Piracy off Coast of West Africa: Opinion (Insurance Journal)** By: Tobin Harshaw  
July 3, 2019

*Remember those Somali pirates? Earlier this decade, they brazenly hijacked giant oil tankers, demanded ransoms in the millions of dollars, and gave Tom Hanks yet another chance to play the everyman overcoming a life-defining crisis. Now, thanks to a multinational naval crackdown and tighter security measures by shippers, they’ve been forced back to dry land.*

But as often happens with crime waves, the problem wasn’t really eliminated; it just popped up in a more vulnerable location. And for pirates, the treasure hunt now takes place in the Gulf of Guinea, which stretches off West Africa from Senegal to Angola, nearly 4,000 miles of shoreline.

Last year, 40 percent the world’s reported incidents of seaborne attacks occurred there, including every ship hijacking and 78 of the 83 crew members taken for ransom. In reality, things are probably much worse: The International Maritime Bureau, which tallies these statistics, also estimates that half of incidents go unreported. The waters off Somalia, meanwhile, had two attacks total reported.

No ship has been unluckier than the fuel tanker MT Maximus, which was taken by pirates in the gulf three times between 2011 and 2016. At least the final group of modern-day buccaneers had a sense of humor: They painted over the ship’s name on the hull and renamed it the Elvis 3.

The background causes for this West African crime spree are largely the same as what spurred the Somali pirates off East Africa – lack of jobs, food shortages, armed conflict, corrupt or failed governance – but the crimes themselves are very different. While the Somalis often asked for millions of dollars to release their hostages or hijacked ships, the Gulf of Guinea culprits more typically seek only a few thousand, which many oil and shipping companies simply pay and write off as a cost of doing business.

And while the Somalis made daring attacks in wooden fishing boats on huge oil tankers or luxury yachts in deep sea, the West Africans more typically use inflatables towed by trawlers and attack softer targets. These include the ships that ferry men and equipment to and from the gulf’s offshore oil rigs, as well as slow-moving tankers and cargo ships as they enter and leave major ports such as Cotonou in Benin, Abidjan in Ivory Coast and the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

But even these smaller-scale crimes add up: According to the nonprofit Oceans Beyond Piracy, the economic cost of seaborne
crime off West Africa — including such things as lost goods, contracted security, insurance and “captivity pay” to crew members held hostage — totaled $818 million in 2017. (It’s suspected that in many cases the ships’ crews are in cahoots with the pirates, in exchange for a cut of the loot.)

And, as my Bloomberg Opinion colleague Admiral James Stavridis likes to say, the oceans are “the world’s largest crime scene,” in large part because many gangs involved in hijacking and kidnapping are often engaged in other illicit activities: illegal fishing, human trafficking, and smuggling of arms, precious gems and drugs. Two-thirds of South American cocaine that ends up in Europe transits through West Africa, according to the 2017 United Nations World Drug Report.

Given the importance of maritime commerce to these nations — oil accounts for about 10 percent of Nigeria’s economy and 90 percent of its foreign exchange — one would think they would clamp down harder. But there are a number of catches, including that each of the roughly 15 nations on the coast has its own claim to sovereignty or a sphere of influence over the waters of its shores, many of which overlap. The nations also have varying legal systems based on the traditions of the European colonial powers that once controlled them. The result is a logistical and law-enforcement mess.

The best effort to overcome these hurdles was the Yaounde Code of Conduct, a 2013 pact that introduced a common code for fighting piracy and established a regional coordination center for maritime safety in Yaounde, Cameroon. Another big step has been a series of naval exercises involving the gulf’s nations, European countries and, most importantly, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard. The biggest, held annually since 2010, is called Obangame Express. This year’s, co-hosted by U.S. Naval Forces Africa and the Nigerian navy, involved 33 nations, 2,500 personnel, 95 ships and 12 aircraft.

“Comparing the exercise from 2010 to now is night and day,” said Admiral James G. Foggo III, commander of all U.S. naval forces in Europe and Africa. In his words, those nations had suffered from “sea blindness.”

“When we began the exercise in 2010, many African countries lacked the facilities, capacity, ships or maritime operation centers to monitor what was occurring within their coastal domains,” Foggo told me in a recent telephone call. “Today, the West African nations have a series of facilities and radars that enable them to coordinate and collaborate.”

Foggo also emphasized that while ending the attacks is vital, it needs to be a “proportionate response”: This isn’t about Navy SEAL sharpshooters picking off pirates like the Somalia effort, but calm negotiation, capture and prevention. One goal should be no deaths.

Still, given the vast size of the gulf and relative poverty of many of the countries on it, all these efforts can go only so far. What more could be done?

Many of the gulf countries are game to take on the pirates — the tiny, impoverished island nation of Sao Tome and Principe is a prime example — but don’t have the money for ships, sailors or even gasoline. Nigeria is the only state with a powerful military, but it can’t be expected to shoulder the burden alone. In May the navy of Togo showed its stuff, quickly recovering the hijacked petroleum tanker Djetona 1 and apprehending eight pirates who had boarded from a rented canoe.

The European Union has helped out, most recently allotting $10 million on a project to improve port security and $7 million to improve cooperation in combating drug smuggling, among other long-term initiatives. Some Western nations have donated decommissioned military vessels, but this isn’t effective unless they can provide continuing training for crews, money for fuel and a supply chain for replacement parts. It would also help if the oil, shipping and fishing companies would report all incidents so antipiracy groups could have an accurate picture of the scope of the problem.

But in the end, as with so many of Africa’s ills, there will be no end to it without economic development. Nine of the Gulf of Guinea’s countries rank among the poorest 30 in the world, according to the World Bank. If you want to get the pirates off the high seas, you’ll have to get them jobs on the dry land.

**Gender-Based Violence**

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Legitimacy in War and Punishment the Security Council and the ICC
Tom Dannenbaum
Oxford University Press, Forthcoming
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When the ICC acts pursuant to Security Council authority, its dependence on the acquiescence of the United States, Russia, and China (call them the “non-party permanent members”) undermines its moral standing to condemn. Indeed, the ICC may be worse off in this respect than were the ad hoc tribunals and possibly even than were the post-World-War-II tribunals in Nuremberg and Tokyo. In contrast to those earlier tribunals, the ICC’s institutional permanence affords states the opportunity to affirm or reject its authority over their territories or nationals in a presumptively permanent way. The rejection of that authority by the non-party permanent members is uniquely harmful to the Court’s standing to condemn in Council-referred cases. As such, when it acts pursuant to Council referrals, the ICC acts with clear legal authority, but little moral legitimacy.

If that thesis is right, it flips on its head the reverse divergence invoked so frequently since NATO’s 1999 military action in Kosovo, whereby unauthorized humanitarian interventions have been described as “illegal but [morally] legitimate.” Indeed, the thesis advanced here might seem to be in deep tension with a closely related post-Kosovo development — the notion that the Security Council has a responsibility to authorize the use of force to stop atrocity, and that the Council loses legitimacy when it fails to do so, even though such inaction falls clearly within the bounds of its legal discretion.

Is the view that there is a legitimacy imperative for the Security Council to authorize force in response to atrocity compatible with the view that there is a legitimacy imperative against the Council’s referral of precisely such situations to the ICC?

The reason to respond affirmatively is that the different roles of force and punishment in international law implicate different normative stakes, and thus distinct standards of legitimacy. International criminal punishment is about expressive condemnation; the use of force is about preventing certain kinds of wrongful harm. Standing is essential to an institution’s moral capacity to issue condemnation, including in the form of criminal punishment. When that is the institution’s core function, diminished standing entails diminished legitimacy. However, in the context of wrong prevention through force, standing plays a weaker role.

If this is right, the ICC’s legitimacy could be enhanced in one of two ways. If it were endowed with universal jurisdiction regarding international crimes, it could claim credibly to stand as an impartial supranational authority channeling universal values in a way that it cannot currently. Alternatively, if it were endowed exclusively with territorial and nationality jurisdiction, it could claim credibly to express the values of the community of States Parties in contexts in which their values are implicated and their authority to determine normative boundaries is unambiguous. Of the two, the universal posture may better match the aspirations of international criminal justice. However, such a change to the structure of ICC jurisdiction is difficult to imagine in the short run. In the meantime, the Court’s legitimacy would benefit from a de facto move to the other alternative, whether through the Council refraining from ICC referrals, or the Prosecutor declining to pursue such referrals “in the interests of justice.”
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