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War Crimes Prosecution Watch is a bi-weekly e-newsletter that compiles official documents and articles from major news sources detailing and analyzing salient issues pertaining to the investigation and prosecution of war crimes throughout the world. To subscribe, please email warcrimewatch@pilpg.org and type "subscribe" in the subject line.

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AFRICA

NORTH AFRICA

Libya: Rival militias loyal to Haftar clash in Sirte (Daily Sabah)

April 15, 2021

Rival militias loyal to putschist Gen. Khalifa Haftar clashed on Thursday in the coastal city of Sirte for unknown reasons, military sources stated.

At least one person was killed and four others wounded during the clashes between militants from the Kaniyat Brigade, the 166th Brigade and the Versefane Brigade in Sirte, General Abdulhadi Dirah, the spokesperson for the Libyan army's Sirte-Jufra Joint Operations Unit, told Anadolu Agency (AA).

On Feb. 2 this year, a clash between pro-Haftar militias occurred in Sirte as the Tariq bin Ziyad Brigade launched an attack on the main headquarters of the Kaniyat Brigade.

The Kaniyat militia are known to have committed several war crimes and are reportedly behind the mass graves found in the Libyan Tarhouna province. Yet, the militia has still not been held accountable as people wait for justice.

The Kaniyat were a gang of six brothers who commanded a militia that traumatized the town of Tarhouna in war-ravaged Libya, systematically executing not only their opponents but slaughtering their entire families. Those they did not kill they cowed into submission. The brothers paraded through the town in a show of force – with a pair of leashed lions roaring at the crowd.

Now the brothers are gone, toppled from power, but their shadow still hangs over the town. After their ousting, digging began to exhume the corpses of the people they butchered. Multiple mass graves have been unearthed in the farming town some 80 kilometers (50 miles) southeast of the capital Tripoli. Some bodies were found blindfolded with their wrists tied.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) said at least 338 people were abducted or reported missing during the five-year rule of the Kaniyat before the city was freed from Haftar's forces.

The United States last year unilaterally blacklisted the Kaniyat militia and its leader. Haftar's forces launched an offensive in April 2019 to try and capture Tripoli but the campaign collapsed last June.

The warring sides reached a cease-fire in October that virtually ended the war and paved the way for U.N.-led political talks. Those talks then led to the appointment of an interim government in February, ahead of elections later this year.

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CENTRAL AFRICA

Central African Republic

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Cases: Central African Republic**

Thousands flee fresh clashes in Central African Republic: UN agency (UN News)

April 20, 2021

Recent fighting between government forces and rebels in northern Central African Republic (CAR) has forced more than 2,000 refugees into neighboring Chad over the past week, the UN refugee agency (UNHCR) said on Tuesday.

According to the agency, new arrivals in Chad reported having fled clashes, as well as pillaging, extortion and other acts of violence at the hands of rebel groups. Most of the displaced were from CAR's Kaga-Bandoro, Batangafo and Kabo regions.

UNHCR spokesperson Babar Baloch said that to reach Chad, people had to wade shoulder-deep through the Grande Sido river, which flows along the Chad-CAR border, with the some carrying their few belongings on their heads.

"The refugees are now settled in Gandaza village and the bordering town of Sido, although some are having to resort to crossing back into CAR to find food or salvage what little is left from their properties", he added.

Violence flared across CAR following last December's contested elections, with armed elements allied with former president François Bozizé attacking several towns and villages. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced within the country as well as into neighbouring ones.

Chad currently hosts close to 11,000 of the total 117,000 Central African refugees who also fled to Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the Republic of the Congo (ROC) in the wake of the post-electoral violence.

The influx slowed considerably since mid-March after government forces and their allies reclaimed most of the rebel strongholds, UNHCR said. The lull allowed some 37,000 formerly internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return to their areas of origin, who now need help to rebuild their lives, it added.

Roughly the size of France, CAR has been plagued by conflict and insecurity for years.

According to the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) about 2.8 million people in CAR – 57 per cent of the population – are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The situation has been further complicated by the coronavirus pandemic, with rising hunger, loss of livelihoods, closure of schools, and a reported increase in violence against women and children.

The Death of a Warlord in the Central African Republic (Human Rights Watch) By Lewis Mudge
April 16, 2021

The death of one of the most brutal warlords in the Central African Republic was confirmed earlier this month. Sidiki Abbas, the president and founder of Return, Reclamation, Rehabilitation, or 3R, leaves a legacy of ruthless violence and abuse in the northwestern Ouham Pendé province. Over the past six years, I interviewed scores of victims and survivors of 3R attacks who described being raped, seeing their loved ones shot down, or watching their homes destroyed.

The 3R group emerged in late 2015 asserting that they were needed to protect the minority Peuhl population from attacks by anti-balaka militia who were targeting Muslims. Despite his role in widespread atrocities, including war crimes and possible crimes against humanity, in March 2019 Abbas was named a special military adviser to the prime minister's office as a concession under a peace accord signed a month earlier in Khartoum, Sudan.

Yet attacks by his fighters continued. In May 2019, 3R fighters killed at least 46 civilians in Ouham-Pendé province. On May 20, the day before one of these attacks on Bohong town, Abbas warned local authorities, "You can't bring me war. I will bring it to you, and I will show you how to shoot. I will show you who I am." The next day his fighters killed at least 10 civilians and Abbas was later seen coordinating looted goods onto trucks.

Abbas later gave up his advisor post, and in late 2020, 3R joined a new rebel coalition that tried to advance on the capital, Bangui. According to the group's new president, Abbas was injured in fighting near Bossembele, Ombella M'Poko province, in November 2020, and succumbed to his wounds on March 25.

There were two constants with Abbas: disregard for civilians and disdain for accountability. When I met Abbas in February 2019, he told me that calls for justice were irrelevant and he warned of "problems" if national and international courts continued to investigate crimes committed during the conflict.

While Abbas himself will never be held to account, his death highlights the need for the many victims of 3R crimes to finally see justice delivered, including through investigations and prosecutions of other senior 3R commanders.

Russian mercenaries accused of rights violations in Central African Republic (Deutsche Welle) By

Antonio Cascais
April 14, 2021

Security in the Central African Republic (CAR) comes at a heavy price. The government is still fighting different militia groups in many parts of the country, and attacks on civilians have become routine.

As a result, hundreds of thousands have been displaced. Yet, around 12,000 UN blue helmet soldiers are supposed to stabilize the country and support the regular security forces, but the situation remains fragile.

It is no longer a secret that the government in the capital, Bangui, has solicited the services of Russian mercenaries to maintain security, albeit criticism.

UN experts recently reported "serious human rights violations" allegedly committed by Russian security companies — including mass shootings, arbitrary arrests, torture and attacks on civilian facilities.

Russia's Foreign Ministry replied with a statement when DW inquired about the report: "Military specialists from Russia are sent to the country as per the UN Security Council guidelines."

"Russian aid is being provided in line with the international community's general efforts to strengthen the Central African Republic's security structures," according to the statement.

The Kremlin officially gives the number of Russian military experts in CAR as 535. But according to press reports, the actual number is much higher. The Wagner Group alone, a private security company from Russia, employs over 1,000 people in CAR.

There are also other companies such as Sewa Security Services. They guard airports, ministries and are part of President Touadera's security detail.

Russia's Foreign Ministry has "no information on the total number of Russian citizens currently in the CAR." Citizens who "temporarily stay in the Central African Republic for business or tourist purposes" are not obliged to report to the Russian consulate.

"It is well known that the security companies are connected to the underworld and organized crime," Paul Stronski, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told DW. "They regard their use as a lucrative business, and their services are partly paid for with shares in gold and diamond mines."

"For Russia, the Central African Republic is part of its long-term strategy to expand its influence on the African continent. At the same time, the use of private mercenaries is seen as an inexpensive way of demonstrating Russia's global clout," Stronski said.

The elites in CAR are increasingly dependent on the Russian security companies. This partnership is not only about politics, but above all, also about economic interests. "CAR is not only rich in raw materials such as gold and diamonds, but it is also very interesting from a geostrategic point of view."

CAR's cooperation with Russia goes back to the 1960s and 1970s, during the time of the Soviet Union. It was renewed in October 2017 when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with President Touadera in Sochi, Russia.

Two months later, Russia received an exemption from the United Nations, despite an existing arms embargo, to deliver weapons to the CAR. The weapons included Kalashnikov rifles, pistols, rocket launchers, and surface-to-air missiles.

In May 2018, Touadera traveled to Russia again and met with Putin. During their meeting, the two leaders quickly agreed on granting mining licenses to Russian companies in exchange for pacifying regions with gold, diamonds, and uranium deposits.

In July 2018, Putin sent the first Russian military advisers and mercenaries from the Wagner company to Bangui to secure the activities of Russian companies, train Central African soldiers and protect top government officials.

Russia was never a colonial power in Africa, which gives it a comparative advantage in achieving its goals on the continent. In the case of CAR, "Putin is a reliable partner. He protects the politicians in power and is clearly against the opposition. His position pleases those in power," Nina Bachkatov, a Russia expert and author of the blog "Inside Russia and Eurasia", told DW.

The Kremlin is also positioning itself as an opponent of France, Stronski said. Again, the card of "anti-imperialist Russia" is often played, unlike the former colonial power France. The core message: Russia — unlike France — has the necessary clout

and credibility to solve CAR's problems. Step by step, Putin's Russia is preparing to challenge the former colonial power for political and economic supremacy in CAR.

To achieve this goal, Russian government officials do not seem to shy away from unusual rhetoric. A few days before the UN expert group's report was published, the Russian ambassador in Bangui, Vladimir Titorenko, publicly threatened the rebel leader Francois Bozize with death. He said, "the former president should renounce the armed struggle; otherwise, he would be neutralized by the armed forces."

Serge Simon Bozanga, a spokesman for the rebel group CPC, lamented the excessive interference by a foreign diplomat in the internal affairs of CAR. And the president of the Central African League for Human Rights, Joseph Bindoumi, told DW that "the Russian ambassador has clearly exceeded his competencies as a foreign diplom

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Sudan & South Sudan

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

In Darfur's rebel-held mountains, the war is far from over (The New Humanitarian) By Philip Kleinfeld and Mohammed Amin
April 21, 2021

Armed groups from Sudan's western region of Darfur – and other parts of the country – signed a peace deal in October with the transitional government, which took power following the revolution that ousted long-serving ruler Omar al-Bashir in 2019.

But after trekking to a rebel base in the far-flung Jebel Marra mountains in early March, The New Humanitarian found the conflict is far from over: The region's most powerful insurgent group is still recruiting and training fighters, and its leaders are rejecting the deal and denouncing the government that co-signed it.

"We are very clear," said Abdelgadir Abdelrahman Ibrahim, the military commander of the main faction of the Sudan Liberation Army, known as the SLA-AW. "This agreement does not meet the needs of our people."

Arriving alongside a group of new recruits during a three-day round trip to the SLA-AW's base at Torontonga – a village of stone houses tucked within sun-dried hills – The New Humanitarian became one of only a handful of international media outlets to access the remote rebel-held region in the past decade. Rebels offered rare insights into the mindset of the insurgent group as it navigates Sudan's political transition with deep distrust, but also a snapshot of the ongoing humanitarian crisis facing hundreds of thousands of mountain residents, who have endured some of the worst atrocities committed in the Darfur conflict.

Many residents still bore the scars of government airstrikes, gas attacks, and scorched-earth village raids by Khartoum-armed Arab militias deployed in the early 2000s to fight largely non-Arab rebel groups including the SLA-AW, which is led by Abdul Wahid al-Nur and is supported mostly by the Fur community. Though a ceasefire with the government is now in place, violence has continued in the mountains, with thousands fleeing attacks by Arab militias as well as clashes between rival SLA-AW factions in recent weeks alone. Residents say the December withdrawal of an UN-African Union peacekeeping mission has made a fragile situation worse.

Even in relatively peaceful parts of Jebel Marra, humanitarian needs are high following an aid blockade enforced by al-Bashir's regime during past military operations. Aid organisations are now increasing their support to mountain communities, but some residents told The New Humanitarian they have not received assistance in more than a decade.

"In 2003 and 2004 [aid groups] used to visit us frequently," said 65-year-old Yahia Khamis, the chief of Faluja, a conflict-affected village in eastern Jebel Marra. "But now there are none."

'If there is a war we are ready'

The Sudan Liberation Army emerged in 2001 as a mix of Darfur's main non-Arab groups – the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit. They were united in their opposition to Khartoum's neglectful elites, but personal rivalries and competing visions soon caused splits.

While some factions of the group – and other rebel outfits – lost ground over the years, the SLA-AW stayed ensconced in the hills of Jebel Marra – the ancestral homeland of the Fur, the largest ethnic group in Darfur.

Despite internal tensions over Abdul Wahid's leadership – he lives abroad and has refused to be part of peace talks since 2006 – the rebels retain significant support in the mountains, and among Darfur's more than 1.5 million remaining displaced people.

Young recruits – like the eight men who escorted *The New Humanitarian* – are still making their way to training camps in the fortress-like mountain range, referred to by the rebels as their “liberated areas”.

The recruits are drawn to the SLA-AW because so little has changed in Darfur, said Yousif Mohammed Ahmed, a 35-year-old who grew up in a displacement camp and now promotes the group's political vision in Zalingei, one of the main towns in the region.

Ahmed said past peace efforts have failed to reduce attacks by Arab militias in the region, or create employment opportunities for youth. “People talk about peace, but there is no peace on the ground,” he said. “There are daily attacks on civilians.”

Armed groups that signed the new peace deal say Sudan's current leaders are different from the last crop and more likely to see through the agreement, which promises compensation for victims of past conflicts and accountability for perpetrators of crimes.

But that view isn't shared by the rebel commander in Torontonga, who has little trust in the current power-sharing government, which includes several military generals linked to al-Bashir's regime.

Speaking from his spartan office, Ibrahim, known by his nickname Gaddura, described General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan – chairman of the transitional sovereign council, the body that runs Sudan – as an “assistant of al-Bashir” in reference to al-Burhan's involvement in military operations in Darfur in the early 2000s. Other rebel leaders sitting beside Gaddura singled out the sovereign council's vice president, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo – better known by his nickname Hemedti – who led the “Janjaweed” Arab militias responsible for much of the devastation here.

“People who committed crimes have graduated to the top,” said Gaddura, speaking in the local Fur language during an hour-long interview. “We won't negotiate with those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against our people.”

Distrust in the new administration has bred a bunker mentality among the rebels. One senior SLA-AW official blamed a series of recent attacks near Jebel Marra on “militias of the transitional government”, but did not provide details or evidence that such a thing exists.

Gaddura, meanwhile, made a string of provocative and seemingly xenophobic comments about rebel movements that signed the new peace agreement. He also claimed – without providing evidence – that they had begun preparations to fight the SLA-AW.

“We are expecting the transitional government may attack us at any moment,” the commander said, adding: “If there is a war, we are ready.”

Needy villages and new attacks

As peace prospects dwindle in Jebel Marra, aid groups say the long-unaddressed humanitarian crisis here needs more attention.

Compared to other villages in the mountains, Torontonga has at least some basic services: a school, a health clinic with a few supplies, and a market stocked with vegetables and flatbread. Sky News Arabia was even playing on television in a generator-powered room next to Gaddura's office.

Elsewhere though, logistical challenges and past constraints on the movement of aid workers have left countless villages with “almost zero access to health services, functioning schools, and any other service”, said Antony Spalton, the head of UNICEF's office in Darfur.

While aid groups have traditionally focused their activities on the dozens of sprawling displacement camps dotted across urban areas in Darfur, “more now needs to go to places that have no services at all”, Spalton said.

In recent months, aid groups including UNICEF have stepped up assessments and relief work in the mountains – reaching some villages for the first time in over a decade – but “there is masses to do”, Spalton added.

Though rain is reliable in Jebel Marra and residents can cultivate crops unavailable in the dry plains beneath, the UNICEF official said a lack of health services – and access to health education – means rates of malnutrition are high.

Travelling to villages, Spalton said he was also “shocked” by the number of people suffering from spina bifida, a spinal birth defect that could be significantly reduced if pregnant women had access to basic supplements.

Assistance is also needed for the thousands of Jebel Marra residents who continue to flee violence in the mountains – much of it caused by dissident SLA-AW commanders opposed to Abdul Wahid’s and Gaddura’s controversial leadership.

The recent fighting has centred on eastern Jebel Marra, where displaced people described to The New Humanitarian scenes reminiscent of Darfur’s past: village burnings, killings, and rebels sexually abusing women.

The chief of Faluja, Yahia Khamis, said a teacher and a community leader were among scores killed when an SLA-AW splinter group led by a commander called Zanoun Abdulshafi attacked his village alongside Arab militias in late February.

Khamis described Faluja residents as “simple people” with no involvement in internal rebel conflicts. “I will support the person who brings me my rights,” the village chief said from a displacement camp in Nyala, a town south of Jebel Marra. “I just want security.”

Days after fleeing their homes, Khamis and hundreds of other Jebel Marra residents were reliant on support given to them by existing members of the camp, which was set up in 2004 and is known as Otash.

Two cramped community centres with barely enough space to sit, let alone sleep, were accommodating the new arrivals. A few paltry bowls of millet – a local staple – were all that was sustaining them.

“Sometimes aid groups take two or three months to come,” said Mohamed Ali Bahar, an Otash resident coordinating efforts to help the arrivals. “These people cannot wait.”

What next for ‘Mr. No’?

Much of what happens next in Jebel Marra will depend on the polarising figure of Abdul Wahid – viewed as a visionary by his supporters and as an unstable contrarian by his detractors, some of whom have dubbed him “Mr. No”.

Some Sudanese analysts told The New Humanitarian the rebel leader enjoys life as an opposition figure too much to be part of the peace process. Others said he is good at diagnosing Darfur’s problems, but not necessarily at fixing them.

“He won’t sign today, or tomorrow, or in 10 years to come,” said Ahmed Tugod, chief negotiator of the Justice and Equality Movement, a major Darfuri rebel group that signed the peace deal.

Pressure on the SLA-AW to join the process, however, is increasing from within its own ranks, and from some displaced communities in camps that make up the core of its support base.

In recent months, Abdul Wahid has met with Sudan’s civilian prime minister, as well as officials from South Sudan – where the October deal was signed – raising hopes he may yet be tempted to add his name.

Any decision will be affected by how the peace process evolves on the ground, said Musa Bahar El Dein, an academic from the Center for Peace and Development Studies at the University of Zalingei, where Abdul Wahid was born in the 1960s.

“If the government implements the agreement, he will lose supporters,” said El Dein. “If it goes badly, it will increase his supporters.”

For the moment, peace seems far away in places like Torontonga, where the sound of rebels chanting war slogans at a military training centre floated through the hills one morning in March.

And it seems even further away in the displacement camps where Jebel Marra residents are fleeing to once again – some having not even heard that a peace agreement was signed.

“Nobody came to tell us anything,” said 22-year-old Zamzam Momen, split from her children after a militia group attacked her village in February. “This news is something unbelievable.”

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Democratic Republic of the Congo

Official Website of the International Criminal Court

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Violent attacks displace thousands in DR Congo's Kasai Region (Relief Web)

April 16, 2021

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is alarmed by a resurgence of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Great Kasai Region, that has already displaced thousands of civilians.

According to local authorities, an estimated 21,000 Congolese – mainly women and children – have been displaced since 28 March by clashes between Luba and Kuba ethnic groups in Kasai's Bakwakenge locality.

There have also been reports of at least 13 people being killed, many left injured and 190 houses burnt to the ground.

The Kasai Region has been recovering from violence in 2017 that displaced 1.4 million people within the DRC and forced 35,000 refugees to seek safety in Angola.

UNHCR is calling for a renewed focus on restoring peace and defusing tensions in Kasai to prevent another wave of mass displacement in the country.

Tensions between two communities are reported to have been on the rise since August 2020 due to land disputes. Attacks and counter attacks last year displaced more than 13,000 families - approximately 40,000 people. Many of them have not been able return to their homes due to fears of reprisals. In September 2020 UNHCR assisted 43,000 people - including 40,000 displaced and 3,000 among the host community- affected by the crisis with cash and relief items.

Humanitarian agencies are currently visiting the affected areas to assess the situation. Most of the displaced left everything behind, having no time to take any belongings. People need shelter, food and access to medical services. The majority are being hosted by local communities already struggling to cope with limited resources. Others are sleeping in the open.

UNHCR is bringing in emergency supplies including plastic tarpaulins for shelter, mosquito nets, blankets, jerry cans and kitchen sets from the capital, Kinshasa, but the needs are outstripping supplies to help 5,000 families.

More resources are urgently needed to help displaced people in the region. UNHCR has received just 12 per cent of the US\$204.8 million needed for our operations in the DRC.

Overall, more than five million people remain displaced in the DRC.

DR Congo seeks over \$4bn in reparations from Uganda at ICJ (Al Jazeera)

April 20, 2021

Lawyers for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on Tuesday told the International Court of Justice that they are seeking \$4.3bn in reparations payments from neighbouring Uganda for its role in the conflicts in the country's mineral-rich Ituri province.

The UN court, known as the World Court, is holding hearings this week in the long-running dispute between the DRC and Uganda over damages caused from 1998-2003.

DRC's representative before the court, Paul-Crispin Kakhozi Bin-Bulongo, told the judges that the damage done to his country by Uganda during the over five-year conflict in Ituri was of "incommensurate magnitude" and said Uganda had not negotiated in good faith during reparations talks.

The case was first brought before the court in 1999 and in 2005 the ICJ ruled that Uganda had violated international law by occupying parts of Ituri with its own troops and supporting other armed groups in the area during the conflict. It also ruled that the DRC had violated international law with an attack on the Ugandan embassy in Kinshasa.

The court ordered the African neighbours to negotiate mutual reparations but in 2015 the DRC returned to the UN court saying the talks were not progressing. After setting up a commission of experts to help it assess damage amounts, the court is holding hearings on the issue this week.

Uganda will present its case and its reparation demands later in the week.

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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**

Cote d'Ivoire: Warlord Gets Life in Prison (Africa Freedom Network)

April 21, 2021

A court in Cote d'Ivoire has condemned former warlord, Amade Oueremi, to life in prison for his role in the massacres that followed the 2010 disputed presidential election in the west African nation.

No fewer than 300 people were killed in Duekoue, according to the most conservative estimates provided by the United Nations.

Rights groups say the death toll provided by the U.N. underestimates the victims of the five months of bloodletting in the country.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said more than 800 people were massacred on 29 March 2011 alone.

Forces already locked in a civil war at the time made matters worse when the then president, Laurent Ghagbo refused to step down after Alassane Ouattara was declared the winner of the 2010 presidential ballot.

The violence dragged on into 2012, with no fewer than 3,000 people believed to have been killed.

A militia led by Oueremi was notably accused of attacking, ransacking, looting and killing people in a camp for displaced people in Nahibly, in the vicinity of Duekoue, in July 2012.

Oueremi was arrested in May 2013 in a forest and arraigned on 24 charges, including murder, rape, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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

Chad President Idriss Deby killed on frontline, son to take over (Reuters)

April 20, 2021

Chad's President Idriss Deby, who ruled his country for more than 30 years and was an important Western ally in the fight against Islamist militants in Africa, has been killed on the frontline against rebels in the north.

Deby's son, Mahamat Kaka, was named interim president by a transitional council of military officers, spokesman Azem Bermendao Agouna said in a broadcast on state television.

Deby, 68, came to power in a rebellion in 1990 and was one of Africa's longest-ruling leaders, surviving numerous coup attempts and rebellions.

His death was announced the day after he was declared the winner of a presidential election that would have given him a sixth term in office. Most of the opposition, which had long complained of his repressive rule, boycotted the vote.

Deby - who often joined soldiers on the battlefield in his military fatigues - visited troops on the frontline on Monday after rebels based across the northern frontier in Libya advanced hundreds of km (miles) south toward the capital N'Djamena.

"Marshal Idriss Deby Itno, as he did each time that the institutions of the republic were gravely threatened, took control of operations during the heroic combat led against the terrorists from Libya. He was wounded during the fighting and died once repatriated to N'Djamena," Bermendao said.

The government and National Assembly have been dissolved and a nationwide curfew imposed from 6 p.m. to 5 a.m.

"The National Council of Transition reassures the Chadian people that all measures have been taken to guarantee peace, security and the republican order," Bermendao said.

Deby had pushed through a new constitution in 2018 that would have allowed him to stay in power until 2033 - even as it re-instated term limits.

He took the title of Marshal last year and said before last week's election: "I know in advance that I will win, as I have done for the last 30 years."

He was dealing with mounting public discontent over his management of Chad's oil wealth and crackdowns on opponents.

But in the election results announced on Monday, Deby claimed 79% of the vote. Western countries have counted on Deby as an ally in the fight against Islamist militant groups, including Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and groups linked to al Qaeda and Islamic State in the Sahel.

Former colonial power France had based its Sahel counter-terrorism operations in N'Djamena. Chad had announced in February the deployment of 1,200 troops to complement 5,100 French soldiers in the area.

Déby's death could mean tremendous uncertainty for Chad as the military is internally divided and because of the widespread domestic opposition, said Nathaniel Powell, author of a history of French military involvement in Chad.

"The swift announcement of the establishment of a military council and naming his son Mahamat as head of state however indicates regime continuity," Powell told Reuters.

"This probably aims to counter any coup-making efforts from within the security establishment and to reassure Chad's international partners - especially France but also the United States - that they can still count on the country for its continued contributions to international counter-terrorist efforts in the Sahel."

The latest rebel actions had already caused alarm in Washington and other Western capitals.

The rebel group Front for Change and Concord in Chad (FACT), which is based across the northern frontier with Libya, attacked a border post on election day and then advanced hundreds of kilometres (miles) south.

But the Chadian military appeared to have slowed its advance about 300 km (185 miles) from N'Djamena.

The rebels acknowledged on Monday that they suffered losses on Saturday but said they were back on the move on Sunday and Monday.

Déby had joined the army in the 1970s when Chad was going through a long-running civil war. He received military training in France and returned to Chad in 1978, throwing his support behind President Hissène Habré and eventually becoming commander in chief of the armed forces.

He seized power in 1990, leading a rebel army swathed in desert headgear in a three-week offensive launched from neighbouring Sudan to topple Habre, a man accused of instigating tens of thousands of political murders.

A senior regional diplomat told Reuters: "We understand from our sources that he was indeed on or near the frontline. He

loved going on the frontline."

The speaker of parliament should have taken power on his death, the diplomat said. "But it is not. That in itself is a coup," he said. "He has been grooming the son for some time. They will continue to face the rebellion. Deby had his hand in many things in the Sahel. His death disrupt things."

Warning Update: Crisis in Chad threatens West Africa counterterrorism efforts (Critical Threats)

By Rahma Kayrakdar

April 20, 2021

Domestic instability will likely disrupt Chadian involvement in regional counterterrorism efforts, benefiting Salafi-jihadi groups that are already on the offensive in the Sahel and Lake Chad Basin. Chad faces an unpredictable political and security crisis. The country's longtime president, Idris Deby, died on April 20 from wounds sustained during clashes with rebel groups north of the Chadian capital, N'Djamena. Rebels had crossed into Chad from Libya and advanced toward N'Djamena on April 18 after election results showed President Deby winning another term after 30 years in office. Chadian forces deployed internally in response and killed at least 300 rebels by April 19. Deby had reportedly traveled to the front line after election results were announced.

A council of military officers established a transitional government and named President Deby's son, Mahamat Kaka, interim president on April 20. The council promised to govern for the next 18 months. The coup d'état aims to maintain the military's power as in the Deby administration. It is not yet clear whether the Chadian military will suppress the rebellion and retain control over the country. The Chadian military will likely need to recall troops deployed throughout the Sahel and Lake Chad regions in either case. Chad's military is the most effective Sahelian force participating in regional counterterrorism efforts, and the withdrawal of Chadian troops will lift pressure from Salafi-jihadi groups in the Lake Chad and Sahel regions.

Instability in Chad will disrupt the UN counterterrorism mission in northern Mali to the benefit of al Qaeda's Sahel affiliate. President Deby reportedly called for the return of some Chadian troops operating in the Sahel to defend N'Djamena on April 18. Chad is one of the top ten contributors to the UN's Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), with a contingent of over 1,400 troops. Chad announced on February 16 it would contribute an additional 1,200 troops. Chadian MINUSMA soldiers have been active recently against al Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wa al Muslimeen (JNIM), including rebuffing a large JNIM attack on a MINUSMA base in northern Mali on April 2.

JNIM militants may conduct attacks in Chad or against remaining Chadian soldiers if Chadian forces return home. JNIM leader Iyad ag Ghaly identified Chad as a target in April 2017 because of Chad's close ties with France. The group claimed an attack killing 10 Chadian UN peacekeepers in northern Mali in January 2019 in response to Chad renewing ties with Israel. A troop withdrawal paired with security vacuums inside Chad may create opportunities for JNIM to target remaining Chadian soldiers in Mali or pursue a spectacular attack in Chad.

The withdrawal of Chadian forces will also undercut MINUSMA operations in Mali. Chadian forces are located in several areas where JNIM operates in northern and central Mali, including in the Kidal region, where the group conducted the April 2 attack. Their removal would reduce effective resistance to JNIM, which seeks to degrade and replace governance structures in these areas. The weakening of MINUSMA may also help JNIM pursue its broader goals; al Qaeda and JNIM leaders and media have stated their intent to expand into West African coastal states and have begun using Mali and Burkina Faso as launching pads for this effort.

Chad's stability is particularly important to France, including the French counterterrorism mission in the Sahel. The French Operation Barkhane is headquartered in N'Djamena. Operation Barkhane supports the G5 Sahel countries, including Chad, with a focus on defeating Salafi-jihadi groups in the region. The French mission also serves to support France's African partners and protect French economic interests. French forces have protected President Deby from armed challengers, notably conducting airstrikes against Chadian rebels plotting to overthrow Deby near the Libyan border in February 2019. Instability in Chad may affect Barkhane's operations in the Sahel, including counterterrorism efforts that have temporarily weakened Salafi-jihadi groups. Political instability in Chad may also disrupt US efforts. The US has provided military training and equipment to assist Chad's Special Anti-Terrorism Group.

Internal unrest also threatens Chad's border security and may benefit the Islamic State affiliate active on the country's border with Nigeria. The Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWA) and Boko Haram are active around Lake Chad. Boko Haram militants killed 92 Chadian soldiers in the country's deadliest attack in March 2020, causing Chadian security forces to intensify their counterterrorism efforts in the following months. ISWA recently accelerated attacks in Chad throughout March and April.[1] The Chadian presence along its Lake Chad border since 2015 has prevented sustained incursions by Boko Haram

or ISWA, but a domestic crisis that draws forces away from this region could cede terrain to either group and allow Salafijihadi militants to secure a foothold on Chadian terrain.

Aid organisations call on governments to give a single day's military spending to fight hunger (International Rescue Committee)

April 20, 2021

A year on since the UN warned of "famines of biblical proportions," rich donors have funded just 5 percent of the UN's \$7.8bn food security appeal for 2021.

More than 200 NGOs published an open letter today calling upon all governments to urgently increase aid to stop over 34 million people, from being pushed to the brink of starvation this year.

The \$5.5bn additional funding recently called for by the UN WFP and FAO is equivalent to less than 26 hours of the \$1.9 trillion that countries spend each year on the military. Yet, as more and more people go to bed hungry, conflict is increasing.

At the end of 2020 the UN estimated that 270 million people were either at high risk of, or already facing, acute levels of hunger. Already 174 million people in 58 countries have reached that level and are at risk of dying from malnutrition or lack of food, and this figure is only likely to rise in coming months if nothing is done immediately.

Globally, average food prices are now the highest in seven years.

Conflict is the biggest driver of global hunger, also exacerbated by climate change and the coronavirus pandemic. From Yemen, to Afghanistan, South Sudan and Northern Nigeria, conflicts and violence are forcing millions to the brink of starvation.

Many in conflict zones have shared horrifying stories of hunger. Fayda from Lahj governorate in Yemen, says: "When humanitarian workers came to my hut, they thought I had food because smoke was coming from my kitchen. But I was not cooking food for my children – instead I could only give them hot water and herbs, after which they went to sleep hungry. I thought about suicide several times but I did not do it because of my children."

At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the UN Secretary General called for a global ceasefire to address the pandemic but too few leaders have sought to implement it. Global leaders must support durable and sustainable solutions to conflict, and open pathways for humanitarians to access those in conflict zones to save lives.

Amb. Ahmed Shehu, Regional Coordinator for the Civil Society Network of Lake Chad Basin, said: "The situation here is really dire. Seventy percent of people in this region are farmers but they can't access their land because of violence, so they can't produce food. These farmers have been providing food for thousands for years – now they have become beggars themselves. Food production is lost, so jobs are lost, so income is lost, so people cannot buy the food. Then, we as aid workers cannot safely even get to people to help them. Some of our members risked the journey to reach starving communities and were abducted – we don't know where they are. This has a huge impact on those of us desperate to help."

In the first quarter of 2021, donors have provided just 6.1% of the total \$36 billion requested in the UN humanitarian appeals for the year. In the food security sector, donors met only 5.3% or \$415 million of the total \$7.8bn requested. (As of April 7, 2021)

The military spending figures are based on 2019 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute which estimated global military spending at \$1.9tn.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), world food prices stood at their highest level in seven years in February 2021 • The study by Development Initiatives of the impact of COVID-19 on aid levels, found substantial declines in aid commitments in 2020 for Canada, Germany, the UK and the US, and a small decline for EU institutions. No data are provided on France, Italy and Japan.

The latest figures on global hunger levels are as of March 2021 from FAO-WFP's Hunger Hotspots report In December the UN's Global Humanitarian Overview for 2021 warned the number of acutely food insecure people could rise to 270million by the end of 2020. FAO & WFP echoed this estimate in their call to action to avert famine in February 2021.

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Mali

Charges against journalist and co-defendants still detained after court freed them must be dropped, say UN experts (Mirage)

April 8, 2021

UN human rights experts said today they are alarmed by the continued detention of a journalist and four senior officials and urged authorities to immediately drop the charges against them in line with an order last month by the Bamako Court of Appeal which had dismissed the case for lack of evidence and ordered the release of the five men.

The Independent Expert on the human rights situation in Mali, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression and the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers said the arrests in December 2020 of journalist Mohamed Bathily, known as Ras Bath, as well as Vital Robert Diop, Souleymane Kansaye, Mahamadou Koné, and Aguibou Macky Tall — all working for public and parapublic institutions — were made without any judicial authority and outside of any legal framework.

“While in the custody of the General Directorate of State Security, which is not authorised to detain suspects, the five individuals were reportedly held incommunicado without access to their families, a doctor, or a lawyer,” the experts said.

“After their transfer to the judicial authorities, the five individuals were the subject of a judicial investigation for plotting against the government, criminal association, insulting the head of state, and complicity in these acts. Former Prime Minister Boubou Cissé was accused of the same facts, and he is reportedly in hiding, whereabouts unknown.”

After the Bamako Court of Appeal’s dismissal of the case on 2 March, Mali’s Attorney-General challenged the decision and appealed to the Supreme Court.

“There seems to be political motivations in the handling of this case, as illustrated by the alleged due process violations; the decision by the Minister of Justice on 23 February 2021, to transfer the judges in charge of the case to other positions a few days after the recommendation by the General Counsel of the Court of Appeal on 16 February 2021, to drop the case for lack of evidence; the dismissal of the case by the Bamako Court of Appeal, and the continued detentions of the five individuals. These are clear violations that point to the existence of arbitrary detention,” the experts said.

They said the prosecution of the journalist Bathily and his co-defendants and their continued detention could amount to judicial harassment. “This, particularly in a context where Malian authorities and the country’s justice system have not always shown the same diligence and determination to prosecute or punish alleged perpetrators of serious human rights violations and abuses, some of which could constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity as highlighted, for instance, in the June 2020 report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Mali,” the experts said.

“We urge the Malian authorities to drop the charges and insist on the scrupulous compliance with Mali’s relevant human rights obligations,” the experts said. The experts have also conveyed their concerns directly to the Government of Mali.

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Liberia

Finnish Judges Hear Massaquoi Tortured Man (Front Page Africa) By Gerald C. Koinyeneh

April 8, 2021

A witness has told the Finnish court conducting the trial of Gibril Massaquoi that the former rebel commander tortured him while he was imprisoned in 2002.

“They tortured me, [tied] me until the rope entered my flesh and electrocuted my penis,” the victim identified as “GJRP 1” told the court on Wednesday as he showed the scars on his elbow. “If I hadn’t taken treatment in the United States, I would have

been impotent.”

He said Massaquoi and men loyal to former President Charles Taylor had accused him and other people of planning a coup d'état to overthrow the Taylor regime.

The witness said unknown men had earlier arrested him on June 24, 2002 near his office on Benson Street while walking on the sidewalk with his one-and-the-half-year-old son. He said they took him to Taylor's residence in Cogon Town, leaving the toddler alone on the street.

There, the witness said he met Taylor and his top officials, including the head of the Special Security Guard Service (SSS) now Executive Protection Service. He added Taylor accused him of writing inciting articles in his newspaper and planning an insurrection. “He asked me to tell him the truth and that only the truth will set me free,” the man said.

The witness further told the court that Taylor grew impatient after he maintained that he was innocent and ordered Yeaten to break him. At Yeaten's order, Taylor's forces took him to several police stations in Monrovia, continued to torture him and handed him over to Massaquoi in Klay, he told the court.

He said Massaquoi allegedly tied his hands, kicked and demanded him to say the truth. Thereafter, a female came into the room and electrocuted him as Massaquoi watched, he said. Most of his jailers and torturers, he said, are still alive and currently working in the current government. He opted not to openly disclose their names in court for fear of retribution.

“I believe Massaquoi was present because it was in the same room the woman electrocuted me,” he said.

He said while in Klay, he and other men the government accused of plotting against it were placed in an underground cell filled with water, and were tortured every day.

A month later, he told the court he was flown to Foya, later brought back to Monrovia and released following pressure from the United States embassy and rights groups.

Massaquoi's trial is held in the District Court of Tampere in Finland for war crimes he allegedly committed during Liberia's second civil war between 1999 and 2003. He denies the charges. His trial was moved to Liberia on February 23 at a secret location to allow judges to hear directly from more than 80 Liberian witnesses. He faces a life sentence, 15 years under Finnish legal system.

Massaquoi's lead lawyer, Kaarle Gummerus, tried to find inconsistencies in the witness' testimony over the dates of his alleged torture and imprisonment.

The witness had said in a previous statement to Civitas Maxima, an organization that prosecutes alleged perpetrators of war crimes, he spent two months after his torture before he was taken to Foya but now told the court one month. The defense lawyer also raised concern about the witness' omission of the female who allegedly electrocuted him in his initial story.

But the witness responded that he was not sure of the date during his written testimony to Civitas but found the actual date of his ordeal after he talked with some of his former prison mates.

And on the female issue, the witness said he felt uncomfortable to mention that female electrocuted him in his statement to Civitas but decided to mention it because he was appearing before a court.

Wednesday's proceedings brought the hearings in Liberia to an end. The court heard 56 witnesses since it began work in Liberia. It will move to neighboring Sierra Leone at the end of this week to hear other witnesses.

Verdier: “There's No Lack of Money to Implement TRC Report” (Daily Observer) By David S. Menjor
April 13, 2021

Cllr. Jerome Verdier, former chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), has slammed comments from the Weah led government that Liberia lacks the money to implement the recommendations of the TRC which call in part for the establishment of a war and economic crimes court in the country.

Verdier, in a lengthy comment over the weekend when he appeared as a guest on the popular Spoon Talk, said the international community has invested so much to restore peace and as such, it has its arms opened to finance the establishment of war and economic crimes court.

“The implementation of the TRC report is for good governance, justice and rule of law to return to Liberia. The international community has the money to support Liberia in the quest to end impunity. All that is needed is for the President to commit

the government to implement the report,” he said.

Verdier’s claims came barely a little over two weeks since Information Minister, Ledgerhood J. Rennie, said on a local radio station in Monrovia that the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC) is interested in implementing the TRC recommendations, including the establishment of war and economic crimes court, but there is “No money.”

Rennie said there are even a lot more other factors, including Legislative approval and the general support of the entire country’s population to endorse the establishment of the war and economic crimes court in order to prosecute all those named in the TRC report.

When guns went silent and warring factions assembled in Ghana in August 2003 to find a political solution to restore peace to the country, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was negotiated and agreed upon and was subsequently enacted into law by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly of Liberia (NTLA).

The TRC was established to promote national peace, security, unity, reconciliation, and at the same time make it possible to hold war crimes perpetrators accountable for gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law that occurred in Liberia during the war.

And when former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was inaugurated in 2006, she inaugurated the TRC, thereby creating the hope for review and implementation, but unfortunately for the TRC commissioners and all others who wished to see war crimes perpetrators prosecuted, former President Sirleaf did not give much attention to the TRC report especially the aspect that has to do with justice for war victims.

The former President’s reluctance to implement the report is presumingly due to her involvement in the war one way or the other, where she appeared before the very TRC in Monrovia in 2008 and confessed giving US\$10,000 to former NPFL leader and President Charles Taylor accordingly for humanitarian purpose.

“We got credible facts that former President Sirleaf was the chief fundraiser and she raised millions of United States dollars to support Taylor. We found out also that she was the chief mobilizer of child soldiers across the country for Taylor’s warring faction that caused so much harm, including the destruction of lives and properties,” Verdier disclosed to his panel of online interviewers.

He said the TRC was not his making of him neither his colleagues, but the Liberian people whose opinions made it possible.

“There is no regret for the recommendations the TRC board gave. We didn’t do it because of a presidential tenure or term. Sirleaf lacked the courage to implement it because she was caught in the web, but there is President Weah. I understand that they are saying that there is no money, but that excuse is poor and unacceptable. President Weah just doesn’t have the interest in implementing the report.

“Weah does not even know what he wants to do. How can the government tell us that there is no money when, in fact, they have not even told us how much it will cost? Have they done an assessment? No, not at all, but there they are pretending that they want to implement the report but there is no money,” Verdier noted.

Ultimately, the TRC collected more than 20,000 statements from the Liberian people about human rights violations between 1979 and 2003. Statement-takers were deployed in all 15 counties in October 2006. After examining the statements, the TRC held public hearings, focusing on specific events, groups, or kinds of violations. Based on the statements and the hearings, the TRC compiled a final report at the end of its work.

About a few names of persons recommended by the TRC to be prosecuted, Verdier named Nimba County Senator, Prince Johnson as the most notorious war criminal who should have been prosecuted by now and should not have been allowed to hold a public office and benefit as he is doing now. He and others are enjoying tax payers’ money,” said Verdier.

“Prince Johnson showed no remorse all through the hearings and up to now he is still not remorseful for all of the atrocities he committed against the people and the country, but there he is today serving as a Senator. Sad for our country, but no matter what, the justice the Liberian people are seeking will come one day, in fact very soon,” he averred.

Senator Prince Johnson was the leader for the Independent Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), a breakaway warring faction from Charles Taylor’s NPFL that waged war on the Samuel Doe Administration on December 24, 1989.

Johnson’s rebel faction was the fastest moving warring faction that entered Monrovia from far away Nimba County and captured Doe on September 9, 1990.

Cllr. Verdier told his interviewers that Joshua Milton Blahyi, whose dour name in the war as “General Butt Naked,” has been

the only one to show remorse for the crimes he committed during the war.

“Butt Naked was even calling for the war crimes court. He regretted everything he did and he has since been opened to prosecution, unlike Prince Johnson who continues to put up a recalcitrant posture towards the process,” the International Justice Group boss said.

Jefferson Kojjee: crimes against humanity?

Cllr. Jerome Verdier clarified that at no point did he tell anyone or an organization that Jefferson Kojjee, City Mayor of Monrovia, was a soldier and he committed war crimes. However, Verdier claims he has enough evidence linking the Mayor to crimes against humanity.

“I have nothing personal against Jefferson Kojjee. In fact, when the TRC was at work, Kojjee was one of the youths who went out there to create awareness for people to repose confidence in the process to come out to testify.”

“My attention was recently drawn to him when I saw what happened to Jestina Taylor, a young lady who was kidnapped, abused and tortured. We have evidence that Jefferson Kojjee was the brain behind violations of Jestina Taylor’s human rights, and also some other different actions from him that led to the death of a few persons,” he alleged, adding, “The International Justice Group (IJG) has submitted Kojjee’s name to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to be prosecuted for crimes against humanity, not war crimes.”

Verdier’s claim that Kojjee should be held liable for crimes against humanity was taken with a different thought by two of his former workmates, Cllr. Pearl Browne Bull and John H. T. Stewart.

Both Bull and Stewart distanced the TRC report from any indictment of Kojjee for any crime, but Verdier, in his reaction, said the two former Commissioners of the TRC have their personal motives to promote.

“They have something to push with the Weah led government and so they went ahead and said what they said, but I did not say Kojjee was mentioned anywhere in the TRC report,” he clarified.

Meanwhile, a group of educated and young professionals under the banner “Childhood Friends of Mr. Jefferson T. Kojjee” have also vouched for Kojjee, describing as unfortunate the claims by Cllr. Verdier that Kojjee has committed crimes against humanity.

Joseph Sankaituah, Former President of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), Sheikh K. Dukuly, II (Ph.D), a Researcher and Nafesa Kanneh (MPH), Public Health Practitioner / Chief Executive Officer, Nasofehtravels said they have not known Kojjee for being involved in any war or criminal acts.

Also, Ibrahim Al-bakri Nyei (PhD), Former Chief Clerk and Sergeant-at-arms of the Mano River Union Youth Parliament, Jerry Tarbolo, former secretary general of the Federation of Liberian Youth, Urias S. Goll (Attorney-at-law) and a former Parliamentarian of the Mano River Union Youth Parliament were also signatories to the statement from Kojjee’s Childhood Friends taking exception to Cllr. Verdier’s accusation against Kojjee.

Others were Kula B.N. Fofana, Assistant Dean, David Straz College, University of Liberia / former co-chair, Vision 2030 Steering Committee, Augustine S. M. Tamba, former president of the Federation of Liberian Youth, Cianna Precious Smith, former member of the National High School Student Union of Liberia as well as Brezhnev David Paasewe, former first vice president of the Federation of Liberian Youth, Alfred P. K. Cassell, former member, Board of Advisors, Federation of Liberian Youth, and Pindarous W.T. Allison, former Secretary-General of the Federation of Liberian Youth.

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EAST AFRICA

Uganda

Reflections on downfall of a military dictator (Daily Monitor) By Harold Acemah

April 11, 2021

Today marks the 42nd anniversary of the downfall of a military dictator amid jubilation and great expectations in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. The downfall of Gen Idi Amin on April 11, 1979, was welcomed throughout the world.

For millions of Ugandans, here and in the diaspora, it marked the end of what many thought, albeit mistakenly, was the end of a dark era in the post-colonial history of Uganda. There was enormous goodwill for Uganda from the international community in 1979 and 1980, but it was squandered by the Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) regime.

The hallmarks of the Amin regime include breakdown of law and order, abolition of Parliament, declaration of life presidency, rampant abductions and disappearances of Ugandans, torture and killings, lawlessness, violence and impunity.

But unlike now, endemic and systemic corruption on a massive scale was unheard of during the Amin regime. According to reliable sources, one of Amin's ambitions and pet projects was to transform Uganda, with then Libyan president Muammar Gaddafi's support, into an Islamic Republic.

The tragedy of abductions, disappearances and killings of Ugandans prompted Sabalwanyi to issue a stern warning to security officers at a meeting held in Kampala in 1989. Below are excerpts of what he said.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I have called you here for two reasons. Reason number one is to tell all of you who are here, DA (district administrator), police officers and especially internal security officers, that it is your job to guarantee the security of all persons and of all properties in Uganda. That is your job.

"It will not do for you to be a DA in a district and people are murdered and you don't arrest the murderers. It will not do for you to be a District Police Commander and people are being killed in your district and you don't know who has killed them. This will simply not do, it will not work. I will not accept it. I will not preside over a country where a Ugandan is killed and the authorities do not know who has killed him."

What Sabalwanyi condemned publicly in 1989 is happening regularly now, under his watch, especially in Kampala and Wakiso districts.

Sabalwanyi appears helpless or unable or unwilling to stop and end the spate of abductions, disappearances, torture and killings of hundreds of Ugandans by security operatives driving numberless vehicles dubbed "drones" by wananchi.

Four decades since the downfall of the Amin regime, it looks increasingly like history is repeating itself, which is a tragedy of monumental proportions for Uganda. Aminism is alive and appears to be the de facto ideology of some Ugandan politicians.

For thousands of Ugandans who suffered under the Amin regime, it's a sad and painful story to tell bazukulu that what is happening today is similar to what happened in the 1970s. We thought Uganda would never descend into absurdity, mediocrity, moral decadence and become a laughingstock once again! Well, looks like we were wrong.

I believe Uganda's patriots and people of goodwill everywhere must speak up and condemn gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity committed routinely by agents of the NRM regime against innocent, peaceful and law-abiding Ugandans.

As fellow political scientist, Dr Moses Khisa, argued in Saturday Monitor of March 27, "Uganda has for long been at critical crossroads and the idea that a conscious citizen can sit on the fence and equivocate on what is happening is sheer abdication of the moral duty we owe to society."

Uganda deserves a lot better than a corrupt, decadent, dishonest, incompetent and shameless regime imposed upon wananchi for over three decades by force, deception and bribery. Remember the secret of liberty is courage.

Child soldier turned LRA commander says he was powerless to stop atrocities (Reuters) April 15, 2021

A former Ugandan child soldier who became one of the top commanders of the rebel Lord's Resistance Army told judges at the International Criminal Court on Thursday that he was not responsible for any atrocities and felt powerless to stop them.

In a defiant, sometimes meandering, unsworn statement to the court, Dominic Ongwen cast himself as a victim, saying he could not ask forgiveness for his alleged crimes because he was not responsible for them.

"I cannot ask everyone in northern Uganda for forgiveness when there were other people in northern Uganda who were corrupt, who were encouraging this (war)," he told judges.

Led by fugitive warlord Joseph Kony, the LRA terrorised Ugandans for nearly 20 years as it battled the government of President Yoweri Museveni from bases in northern Uganda and neighbouring countries. It has now largely been wiped out.

Ongwen, who was arrested in 2015, was convicted in February of dozens of crimes including rape, sexual enslavement, child abductions, torture and murder. Prosecutors have sought a prison sentence of at least 20 years for him. [nL8N2M72Fo]

"I did not have any capacity to stop the things that were happening," he said, adding that his time in the LRA haunts him to this day and makes it hard to sleep.

"Every time I have hallucinations, I hear gun shots, I hear people talking. I see dead bodies, people I killed, people I slaughtered," he told judges.

Ongwen was speaking in a special hearing to discuss his punishment. Ongwen and his defence are calling for a sentence of no more than 10 years.

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Kenya

**Official Website of the International Criminal Court
ICC Public Documents - Situation in the Republic of Kenya**

VIDEO: Kenyan, Ugandan Truckers On Strike After Series Of Brutal Attacks In South Sudan (The Tennessee Tribune) April 9, 2021

Brutal attacks on truck drivers ferrying goods to volatile South Sudan have stranded hundreds of cargo trucks at the Elegu border crossing in northern Uganda.

For more than a week, truck drivers from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania have staged a strike, protesting the lack of security along the border-crossing highway.

On April 4, two truckers were stoned, killed and burned beyond recognition along the Juba-Yei highway in a spate of attacks that killed nine drivers from Kenya and Uganda. Their trucks were vandalized and torched by unknown insurgents who emerged from the bush.

One truck driver, Wanyama Ngon, barely escaped death last week on his way from Juba.

"It was gruesome. I saw a new truck which was behind me being stoned. I had to speed off. It is so sad that my colleague died and was torched," Ngon said.

"I have been here since Thursday, my mileage allowance is depleted. The food sold in Elegu cannot sustain thousands of us stranded here. We have been forced to go without food," said trucker Juma Boy.

"This is the third time we are experiencing such attacks, but this time it is too much," said Boy, who has been ferrying petroleum from Kenya to Juba for the last 10 years "We have no interest in Juba land politics, why are they targeting us?"

Entry to South Sudan has been likened to crossing into hell after a series of attacks against foreign drivers ferrying cargo to Juba.

The Long Distance Drivers and Conductors Association of Kenya, known as LODDCA, and the Kenya Transport Association, known as KTA, have set down their tools and pitched camp at the Elegu border, demanding security before they will cross over.

Although the motives for the attacks are unknown, truckers claim that anti-government rebels and civilian officers who oppose South Sudan President Salva Kiir Mayardit are targeting truckers in a bid to sabotage services in the entire republic.

Foreign truckers have issued a notice demanding peace and insisting on security measures from the South Sudan government.

Antony Mutua, LODDCA chairman, has demanded the government of Kenya immediately suspend all activities with South Sudan until security is restored and an apology is made for the killings of drivers.

“We are annoyed by the killings, we are saddened as LODDCA, and we demand that our Kenyan government immediately suspends cross-border operations with South Sudan,” Mutua said.

The Koboko Member of Parliament Margaret Baba Diri has called on authorities to take action.

“The Sudanese are leading a peaceful life in Uganda. We don’t kill them. This issue is very painful. South Sudan should act immediately,” she said.

In South Sudan in 2016, pro-government troops who had won a battle against rebels in the capital, Juba, went on a four-hour rampage in an area of the city inhabited by foreigners. They killed a number of foreigners, particularly Americans, raped women and shot and killed a foreign journalist.

In the last 12 months, more than 1,000 civilians, government security officers and rebels have been killed, mostly in ambush attacks.

“Armed actors committed serious abuses, including indiscriminate attacks against civilians, including aid workers, unlawful killings, beatings, arbitrary detentions, torture, sexual violence, looting and destruction of property,” states a 2020 report by Human Rights Watch.

“Some abuses may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity. All sides restricted access to United Nations, ceasefire monitors, and aid workers. Since the conflict started in December 2013,” the report states, “more than 4 million people have fled their homes, with 2.1 million taking refuge in neighboring countries,” the report states.

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Rwanda (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda)

Official Website of the ICTR

Zimbabwe under renewed pressure to give up Rwanda genocide suspect (The Guardian) By Jason Burke
April 8, 2021

United Nations investigators tracking one of the most notorious killers in the Rwandan genocide believe he is hiding in Zimbabwe and are launching a new effort to convince authorities in Harare to allow the 60-year-old fugitive to face trial.

Protais Mpiranya, the former commander of the presidential guard of the Rwandan army, has been on the run for 27 years charged with war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity.

The ex-soldier is top of a list of remaining fugitives indicted by an international tribunal into the 1994 killings, which left 800,000 people dead in Rwanda, mostly from the Tutsi ethnic minority but also some Hutus.

Mpiranya had been second on the wanted list before the arrest of Félicien Kabuga, a former businessman alleged to have helped finance the genocide, on the outskirts of Paris in May. The US war crimes reward programme has offered a \$5m (£3.6m) reward for information leading to Mpiranya’s arrest.

Serge Brammertz, the prosecutor of the body charged with tracking down the fugitive alleged criminals, which is known as the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), said he was hoping to capitalise on the detention of Kabuga to corner Mpiranya.

Kabuga now faces charges of playing a key role in the genocide, and if convicted he is likely to spend the rest of his life in

prison.

“We hope that the arrest of Kabuga would generate momentum and we are hoping to use this to get Mpiranya,” Brammertz said.

Investigators have long suspected Mpiranya of hiding in Zimbabwe and have made repeated attempts to convince local authorities to hand over the suspect.

Officials from the IRMCT travelled to Zimbabwe months after President Robert Mugabe was forced from power in November 2017 in the hope that the new government would prove more helpful than the former regime. There has been no progress, however, and a new request for assistance is to be made this month.

Brammertz said hopes had been boosted by an agreement on legal cooperation on criminal matters signed last month by Zimbabwe and Rwanda.

“Because of his military background it is very possible that [Mpiranya] still enjoys protection from senior military officers,” Brammertz told the Guardian. “We think he ... is still quite active, still doing business and until recently has been moving around in east and central Africa, possibly between Zimbabwe, the DRC and South Africa.”

Relations between governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have improved recently, and this could limit options for the fugitive if Zimbabwe becomes unsafe. DRC may now offer a less secure haven for the fugitive, investigators said.

“As commander of the presidential guard we consider [Mpiranya] as being one of the main perpetrators of the genocide,” Brammertz said.

The genocide began after Rwanda’s Hutu president, Juvénal Habyarimana, was killed when his plane was shot down over Kigali on 6 April 1994.

On Wednesday France marked the 27th anniversary of the start of the slaughter by declassifying and making accessible to the public all documents mentioned in a report released in March that documented the country’s role in the events of 1994. The report concluded that France had been blinded by its colonial attitude towards Africa in the runup to the slaughter and must bear the burden of “heavy and damning responsibilities”, but cleared it of complicity in the genocide.

According to the indictment filed by the international tribunal, Mpiranya was among those who ordered the murder on 7 April 1994 of the prime minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana, 10 Belgian soldiers protecting her, and several other leading politicians and their families.

The killing of Uwilingiyimana, a moderate Hutu and Rwanda’s first female prime minister, was an essential step to extremists taking power and instigating the mass killing of Tutsis.

When the military victory of rebel forces led by present-day Rwandan president, Paul Kagame, ended the genocide, Mpiranya fled to neighbouring DRC, where he is thought to have fought alongside Congolese forces against Rwandan troops in the bloody war that broke out across the vast central African state.

Investigators believe Mpiranya was later sent to Zimbabwe as a representative of the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), a militia partly composed of former Hutus implicated in the genocide, and accused of exploiting the mineral wealth of eastern DRC.

Mpiranya is believed to have become close to senior officers in the powerful Zimbabwean military when Mugabe deployed his army to DRC, setting up joint venture companies that allowed hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of precious natural resources including diamonds to be mined in DRC and then sold to the benefit of senior soldiers.

The fugitive soldier is also thought to have been involved in lucrative arms procurement and trafficking involving the rebels and Zimbabwean forces. As early as December 2010, UN investigators reported to the UN security council that Mpiranya had connections with Zimbabwe and lived there for long periods.

In 2012, under pressure from Kigali, Zimbabwean authorities admitted that the fugitive could be on their territory and pledged to find him “dead or alive”. His alleged presence in Zimbabwe was discussed in parliament, and local media listed possible aliases and addresses associated with him.

However, last year Brammertz informed the UN security council that despite “credible evidence” of the whereabouts of key fugitives, the lack of cooperation from governments remained a challenge, particularly in east and southern Africa.

One problem faced by investigators is that fugitives often use genuine travel documents issued in false names. A team from the tribunal has worked to establish the motives of those who provided the more than 20 different passports used by Kabuga during his years on the run. These may have been obtained through bribery or given on the orders of powerful individuals who wanted the accused man to stay hidden and silent.

US deports woman who lied about role in Rwandan genocide (AP News) By Kathy McCormack
April 17, 2021

A woman who served a 10-year sentence in U.S. prison for lying about her role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide to obtain American citizenship, and then lost her bid for a new trial, has been deported to the East African nation and is likely to face prosecution there.

Beatrice Munyenyezi, who a U.S. judge said “was actively involved” in the killing of Tutsis in Rwanda, was convicted and sentenced in 2013 in New Hampshire. It was her second trial; the first jury could not reach a verdict. Munyenyezi served a 10-year sentence in Alabama and had faced deportation.

She lost her latest court battle in March, when the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a federal district judge’s rejection of her petition challenging how the jury was instructed during her trial in federal court in New Hampshire.

Her lawyer, Richard Guerriero, confirmed in an email Saturday that Munyenyezi had been deported to Rwanda. She arrived Friday and was handed over to Rwandan authorities, according to state-run media there.

“Her deportation means a lot in terms of justice delivery to genocide victims,” said Thierry Murangira, spokesperson for the Rwanda Investigation Bureau, according to The New Times.

Munyenyenzi is accused of seven crimes connected to the genocide, including murder and complicity in rape, according to Rwandan investigators. She will be detained as investigations continue and her case sent to prosecutors, the newspaper reported.

In the United States, Munyenyezi was convicted of lying about her role as a commander of one of the notorious roadblocks where Tutsis were singled out for slaughter. She denied affiliation with any political party, despite the leadership role of her husband, Arsene Shalom Ntahobali, in the extremist Hutu militia party.

She requested a new trial based on a U.S. Supreme Court decision that came in 2017, well after her sentencing, and limited the government’s ability to strip citizenship from immigrants who lied during the naturalization process.

Munyenyenzi alleged that the jury was given inaccurate instructions on her criminal liability. A judge denied her request, saying that even if the instruction fell short, the error was harmless.

As part of her appeal, Munyenyezi’s trial lawyers, who are now New Hampshire superior court judges, said in court documents that they would have presented Munyenyezi’s case differently if the U.S. Supreme Court decision had been law during her trial.

They added that they believe if the jury had been instructed based on the court decision, “the verdict may have been different.”

“Having served her sentence and lost her appeal, she was removed from the country,” Guerriero said in a statement. “It is possible a further challenge to her conviction may be filed despite her removal.”

Munyenyenzi fled to Nairobi, Kenya, with a young daughter in July 1994 in the waning days of the genocide. She gave birth to twin girls there four months later. She entered the United States as a refugee and settled in Manchester, New Hampshire’s largest city.

She got a \$13-an-hour job working for the city housing authority and earned an associate’s degree in college. She financed a comfortable lifestyle through mortgages, loans and credit cards, but filed for bankruptcy in 2008 and had about \$400,000 in debt discharged.

Ntahobali and his mother were convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes of violence and are serving life sentences. Both were deemed to be high-ranking members of the Hutu militia party, which orchestrated the attacks on Tutsis.

U.S. District Judge Steven McAuliffe, who sentenced her, said Munyenyezi “was not a mere spectator.”

He added, “I find this defendant was actively involved, actively participated, in the mass killing of men, women and children simply because they were Tutsis.”

McAuliffe acknowledged that Munyenyezi led a crime-free and productive life since her arrival in New Hampshire, but said it was a life lived under false pretenses.

Rwanda report blames France for 'enabling' the 1994 genocide (AP News) By Sylvie Corbet
April 19, 2021

The French government bears "significant" responsibility for "enabling a foreseeable genocide," a report commissioned by the Rwandan government concludes about France's role before and during the horror in which an estimated 800,000 people were slaughtered in 1994.

The report, which The Associated Press has read, comes amid efforts by Rwanda to document the role of French authorities before, during, and after the genocide, part of the steps taken by France's President Emmanuel Macron to improve relations with the central African country.

The 600-page report says that France "did nothing to stop" the massacres, in April and May 1994, and in the years after the genocide tried to cover up its role and even offered protection to some perpetrators.

It was made on Monday after its formal presentation to Rwanda's Cabinet.

It concludes that in years leading up to the genocide, former French President Francois Mitterrand and his administration had knowledge of preparations for the massacres — yet kept supporting the government of then-Rwandan President Juvénal Habyarimana despite the "warning signs."

"The French government was neither blind nor unconscious about the foreseeable genocide," the authors stress.

The Rwandan report comes less than a month after a French report, commissioned by Macron, concluded that French authorities had been "blind" to the preparations for genocide and then reacted too slowly to appreciate the extent of the killings and to respond to them. It concluded that France had "heavy and overwhelming responsibilities" by not responding to the drift that led to the slaughter that killed mainly ethnic Tutsis and the moderate Hutus who tried to protect them. Groups of extremist Hutus carried out the killings.

The two reports, with their extensive even if different details, could mark a turning point in relations between the two countries.

Rwanda, a small but strategic country of 13 million people, is "ready" for a "new relationship" with France, Rwanda's Foreign Affairs Minister Vincent Biruta told AP.

"Maybe the most important thing in this process is that those two commissions have analyzed the historical facts, have analyzed the archives which were made available to them and have come to a common understanding of that past," he said. "From there we can build this strong relationship."

A top official in Macron's office on Monday welcomed the report as a "decisive step" which showed "the willingness expressed by Rwandan authorities to write a shared history and, above all, to look to a common future."

He also noted "unprecedented political trust" reached between Paris and Kigali as Rwandan officials have shown signs that they agree with the "irreversible rapprochement approach" taken by France.

Macron is considering traveling to Rwanda in the coming months, said the official, who spoke anonymously in accordance with the French presidency's policies.

The Rwandan report, commissioned in 2017 from the Washington law firm of Levy Firestone Muse, is based on a wide range of documentary sources from governments, non-governmental organizations and academics including diplomatic cables, documentaries, videos, and news articles. The authors also said they interviewed more than 250 witnesses.

In the years before the genocide, "French officials armed, advised, trained, equipped, and protected the Rwandan government, heedless of the Habyarimana regime's commitment to the dehumanization and, ultimately, the destruction and death of Tutsi in Rwanda," the report charges.

French authorities at the time pursued "France's own interests, in particular the reinforcement and expansion of France's power and influence in Africa."

In April and May 1994, at the height of the genocide, French officials "did nothing to stop" the massacres, says the report.

Operation Turquoise, a French-led military intervention backed by the U.N. which started on June 22, “came too late to save many Tutsi,” the report says.

Authors say they found “no evidence that French officials or personnel participated directly in the killing of Tutsi during that period.”

This finding echoes the conclusion of the French report that cleared France of complicity in the massacres, saying that “nothing in the archives” demonstrates a “willingness to join a genocidal operation.”

The Rwandan report also addressed the attitude of French authorities after the genocide.

Over the past 27 years, “the French government has covered up its role, distorted the truth, and protected” those who committed the genocide, it says.

The report suggests that French authorities made “little efforts” to send to trial those who committed the genocide. Three Rwandan nationals have been convicted of genocide so far in France.

It also strongly criticizes the French government for not making public documents about the genocide. The government of Rwanda notably submitted three requests for documents in 2019, 2020 and this year that the French government “ignored,” according to the report.

Under French law, documents regarding military and foreign policies can remain classified for decades.

But things may be changing, the Rwandan report says, mentioning “hopeful signs.”

On April 7, the day of commemoration of the genocide, Macron announced the decision to declassify and make accessible to the public the archives from 1990 to 1994 that belong to the French president and prime minister’s offices.

“Recent disclosures of documents in connection with the (French) report ... may signal a move toward transparency,” authors of the Rwandan report said.

President Paul Kagame of Rwanda praised the report commissioned by Macron as “a good thing,” welcoming efforts in Paris to “move forward with a good understanding of what happened.”

Félicien Kabuga, a Rwandan long wanted for his alleged role in supplying machetes to the killers, was arrested outside Paris last May.

And in July an appeals court in Paris upheld a decision to end a years-long investigation into the plane crash that killed Habyarimana and set off the genocide. That probe aggravated Rwanda’s government because it targeted several people close to Kagame for their alleged role, charges they denied.

Last week, a Rwandan priest was arrested in France for his alleged role in the genocide, which he denied.

Macron’s office said the French government is committed to provide the “necessary means” to allow the “intensification” of legal proceedings against alleged perpetrators of the genocide. Activists estimate more than 100 of them are believed to live on French territory.

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Somalia

Explosions in two Somalia cities kill at least 5 (Washington Post) By Hassan Barise
April 10, 2021

A suicide bomber detonated his explosives outside a cafe in Somalia’s city of Baidoa on Saturday, killing at least four people and wounding more than six others, police said.

The bomber was targeting the Bay region governor, Ali Wardhere, who was outside the Suez Cafeteria, officials reported. The governor escaped the explosion unharmed, according to the official government news agency, SONNA, which reported that at least two of his bodyguards, who were also policemen, were among the wounded.

"The explosion which was heard all around the town of Baidoa has terrorized the people and had created a momentary confusion," said Amin Maddey, who witnessed the explosion and spoke to The Associated Press by telephone.

The al-Qaida linked group al-Shabab has claimed the responsibility through a report they published on their website and radio Andalus which advocates for their jihadist campaigns.

"The target was a convoy accompanying Mr. Ali Wardhere, the governor of Bay region, which was hit hard," the al-Shabab statement said, "three of Ali Wardhere's bodyguards have died in the attack and the target which was Ali Wardhere himself got wounded," added the statement.

The police have cordoned off the area for investigation as many bystanders gathered around to check whether their family members or friends are among the victims.

Meanwhile, another explosion went off in the Huriwa district of Mogadishu Saturday, killing one government soldier and wounding a bystander, police said.

It is not known whether the two explosions in Baidoa and Mogadishu are related. No one has yet claimed responsibility for the bombing in Mogadishu.

The people of Somalia are seeing major security lapses as leaders remain in deadlock over the political situation after elections were delayed earlier this year.

"The meeting between the federal government and the federal member states has ended in total failure," said the Minister of Information, Osman Abokor Dubbe, who blamed the two leaders of Puntland and Jubbaland for that failure.

However, both leaders of Puntland and Jubbaland have denied reports of a failed meeting.

There have been fears that the al-Qaida-linked group would be emboldened by Somalia's current political crisis as President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed is under pressure to step aside.

15 killed as minibus hits landmine in Somalia: Official (Arab News) April 14, 2021

Fifteen people died and four others were wounded Wednesday when the minibus they were travelling in ran over a landmine on the outskirts of Somalia's capital Mogadishu, the government spokesman said.

"A heinous incident ... 15 innocent people were killed. This act is an indication (of) how ruthless terrorists are," government spokesman Mohamed Ibrahim Moalimuu wrote on Twitter, blaming the attack on Al-Shabaab.

He said the attack took place about 50 kilometres (31) miles north of Mogadishu. Earlier Andikarim Mohamed, a government official from the south-central Hirshabelle region, said 14 had died and four were wounded "after a minibus travelling along the road between Mogadishu and Balcad ran over a landmine."

Somali military commander Abshir Mohamed, who works in the area, also blamed the incident on the Al-Qaeda-linked Al Shabaab militants who carry out regular attacks in the country. "The terrorists are indiscriminately targeting everybody. They planted the mine that had killed those innocent civilians who were going about their business," he told state media. Witness Mohamud Adan told AFP he saw the "dead bodies of ten people" taken from the scene of the explosion.

Al-Shabaab controlled the capital until 2011 when it was pushed out by African Union troops, but still holds parts of the countryside and carries out regular attacks against government, military and civilian targets.

Somalia: Mortar attack kills 3 in Mogadishu (Anadolu Agency) By Mohammed Dhaysane April 21, 2021

At least three people were killed and four others wounded when a mortar attack targeted Somalia's presidential palace in the capital Mogadishu on Wednesday, local media reported.

"At least three civilians were killed and four others injured in the attack, targeting the presidential palace in Mogadishu. The victims are members of the same family living near the palace," local radio broadcast Garowe Online reported.

The presidential compound in Mogadishu houses the president, the prime minister and the speaker of the parliament.

Talking to Anadolu Agency, police officials confirmed the attack without elaborating on casualties.

Adan Abdirahman Hussein, a resident in Mogadishu's Boondhere district, told Anadolu Agency over the phone that he saw several children wounded in Wednesday's mortar attack.

"I heard more than five explosions. One of the mortar shells landed in a residential area near an IDP camp," Hussein said.

Somali-based al-Qaeda affiliated group al-Shabaab claimed responsibility for the mortar attack, saying it had targeted Villa Somalia, official presidential residence and workplace. It is the second mortar attack in less than a month in Mogadishu.

Al-Shabaab has carried out numerous attacks in Somalia over the years, including a 2017 truck bomb blast in Mogadishu which killed at least 300 people.

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EUROPE

The Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, War Crimes Chamber

Official Court Website [English translation]

Bosnian Croat Ex-Fighter's Prisoner Abuse Conviction Upheld (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Haris Rovcanin
April 15, 2021

The appeals chamber of the Bosnian state court announced on Thursday that it has upheld the first-instance verdict sentencing Mile Pazin to one-and-a-half years in prison for the inhumane treatment of a Bosniak civilian in the Stolac area during wartime in July 1993.

The court said it was "dismissing defendant Mile Pazin's appeal as unfounded".

Under the original verdict in September 2020, Pazin was convicted of inhumanely treating civilian Admir Kaplan in the village of Kaplan Mahala on July 14, 1993, when he was a member of the Croatian Defence Council, the Bosnian Croat wartime force, and commander of the local Civil Defence force in Stolac.

The verdict said that Pazin assaulted Kaplan with a bayonet and a rifle butt, and cut his ear.

Another defendant, Vide Kresic, was acquitted at the original trial.

Three further men were indicted, Mirko Raguz, Ivica Markovic and Josip Kresic, but the proceedings against them were halted due to their deaths.

Bosnian Serb Parliament to Mull Revoking Honours for War Criminals (Balkan Transitional Justice)
By Danijel Kovacevic
April 16, 2021

The Bosnian Serb parliament will discuss a request from Bosnia's international overseer, the Office of the High Representative, OHR, to revoke decorations given to convicted war criminals.

In February, High Representative Valentin Inzko sent a letter to the Republika Srpska National Assembly requesting that any decorations it issued to people convicted of war crimes be annulled within three months.

“Among those awarded were all former National Assembly speakers and members of the RS First Presidency, including Radovan Karadzic, Momcilo Krajisnik and Biljana Plavsic, whose actions shocked the world during the [1992-5] armed conflict and caused unimaginable human suffering. As you know, Karadzic, Krajisnik and Plavsic were convicted of war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia,” the letter, which BIRN has seen, reads.

The deadline expires at the end of April but Inzko didn't specify what will happen if it is not met.

In their initial reactions, Bosnian Serb politicians rejected the letter and vowed not to comply. However, as the deadline approaches, and under the threat of sanctions, they agreed to at least discuss the issue.

The assembly should take a unified position on the High Representative's demands, the ruling coalition led by the Alliance of the Independent Social Democrats, SNSD, said on Friday.

“There is no legal document that could address the High Representative's letter. Lawyers believe the only way to revoke honours is through the courts. We will see what position parliament will take,” Nedeljko Cubrilovic, speaker of the RS parliament, said on Friday.

Unlike the ruling majority, the opposition said it does not support the revocation of decorations, or the discussion of Inzko's letter at a parliamentary session.

“We will not support revocation of decorations. If they do that, the ruling majority will suffer a great loss,” Miladin Stanic, from the Serb Democratic Party, SDS, said on Friday.

The ruling majority in parliament, led by Milorad Dodik's SNSD, is waiting on him to decide, a source from the parliament told BIRN.

In his first reactions, Dodik also rejected Inzko's request, but the Serbian member of the Bosnian state presidency at a press conference earlier this week said the RS might revoke decorations – temporarily.

“If we... do something, Inzko and whoever succeeds him must know that those decorations will be returned to those people at a first occasion,” Dodik told the press conference on Monday.

Political analyst Tanja Topic said that whatever the RS parliament does, it will be a triumph of form over essence.

“If they do something, they will do it under pressure and not as a result of their maturity and awareness. Their decision will not open a key issue, and that is relations towards people with dirty war pasts,” Topic told BIRN.

Radovan Karadzic, the wartime president of the RS, was sentenced to life in prison by the UN war crimes court in The Hague, ITCY, in March 2019, for the 1995 Srebrenica genocide, persecution of Bosniaks and Croats throughout Bosnia, for terrorising the population of Sarajevo and for taking UN peacekeepers hostage.

Biljana Plavsic, another former RS President, plea-bargained with the ICTY in 2003 and was sentenced to 11 years for war crimes. She was released after serving two-thirds of her sentence in 2009.

Former speaker of the RS parliament Momcilo Krajisnik, who died in September 2020 from complications caused by COVID-19, was sentenced to 20 years in prison in March 2009. He was released in 2013 and given a hero's welcome on his return to the RS.

Bosnian Serb War Crimes Convict Charged with Killing Prisoners (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Haris Rovcanin
April 20, 2021

The Bosnian state prosecution filed an indictment on Tuesday charging Goran Viskovic, alias Vjetar (Wind), with committing crimes against humanity at the Susica detention facility in Vlasenica from April 1992 to the end of 1993.

Viskovic is already serving an 18-year prison sentence for crimes against humanity at the Susica detention facility.

The new indictment alleges that he personally participated in the killings of eight Bosniak civilians, who were detained at Susica.

“On several occasions, uniformed and armed, together with soldiers known to him, he participated in the illegal deprivation of physical liberty of the Bosniak civilian population and their removal to the premises of the Vlasenica Public Security Station, the municipal court and the Susica prison facility, and committed other inhumane acts with the intention of inflicting serious physical or mental injury or impairment of health on a large number of non-Serb civilians,” the prosecution said in a statement.

The prosecution alleged that Viskovic participated in crimes while he was a member of the Bosnian Serb Army military police, as part of a widespread and systematic attack on the Bosniak civilian population in the municipalities of Vlasenica and Milici.

In 2011, the Bosnian state court found Viskovic guilty of taking part in a widespread and systematic attack against the non-Serb civilian population of Vlasenica from April to September 1992 as a member of the Bosnian Serb Army.

He was convicted of committing two rapes and of capturing a Bosniak man in June 1992, who was taken from the Susica camp and has since disappeared.

The new indictment has been sent to the state court for confirmation.

Former Bosnian Serb reservist policeman Predrag Bastah, who was convicted in the same trial, was also indicted again last year for alleged involvement in the killings of 37 Bosniak civilians near Vlasenica.

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International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Official Website of the ICTY

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Domestic Prosecutions In The Former Yugoslavia

Croatian War Crime Trials Stalled Again in 2020. Report Warns (Balkan Transitional Justice) By Anja Vladislavljevic
April 15, 2021

Human Rights House Zagreb said in its annual report published on Thursday that there has been “no significant progress in the prosecution of war crimes in 2020” in Croatia.

“Hearings in numerous criminal proceedings for war crimes were not scheduled,” the NGO’s report said, adding that there are still problems with the lengthy duration of court proceedings, which go on for two years or more.

However, the report said that a “shift” in the culture of remembrance at commemorations of 1991-95 war events, which were previously exclusively focused on Croats.

The report noted that the draft of a law that will set out the rights of civilian victims of the 1990s conflict was submitted to parliament at the end of 2020, but that “civilian victims of the war still face many problems and challenges in exercising their human rights”.

“The biggest challenge in determining the status of a civilian victim of war is medical documentation. Specifically, in most

cases, medical documentation, which civilian victims of war have from the time they were injured, is not sufficient to exercise the right to the status of a civilian victim because the medical documentation often does not state the exact cause of injury," it explained.

The report also highlighted the difficult situation of the Serb ethnic minority in Croatia.

"Many Serb [post-war] returnees live in underdeveloped rural areas, traffic-isolated and in poor living conditions, and are still unable to exercise their property rights, and their property remains exposed to usurpation and destruction," it said.

A devastating earthquake in December in central Croatia and the Banija region "further aggravated the already difficult socio-economic situation" of all residents from "one of the poorest parts of Croatia, where [also] a significant number of members of the Serb ethnic minority live".

According to the report, physical attacks, hate speech, verbal threats and the destruction of property of Croatian Serbs were also recorded last year.

One well-known incident happened in July when members of a Dinamo Zagreb football fan group put up a banner in the city's Kustosija district that bore the words "We'll f*** Serbian women and children" and the 'U' symbol of the World War II fascist Ustasa movement.

However, the report also noted "a shift in the field of culture of remembrance and the creation of a more favourable atmosphere for building trust in a society based on mutual respect and tolerance".

In September last year, Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, leader of the conservative Croatian Democratic Union, HDZ, and representatives of the country's Serb minority commemorated the 25th anniversary of the killings of Serbs in the village of Varivode – one of several incidents that happened in the wake of the Croatian Army's Operation Storm, which saw the Croatian Army defeat rebel Serb forces and take back large amounts of territory.

In August, Plenkovic told a ceremony to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Croatia's victory in Operation Storm that the operation was Croatia's "greatest victory", but also expressed sympathy for all the victims, "not only Croats but also Serbs".

Another development that hinted at steps towards reconciliation was the attendance of Deputy Prime Minister Boris Milosevic from the Independent Democratic Serb Party, which represents Croatia's Serb minority, at the state celebration of Operation Storm.

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Turkey

Turkey: Call to hold accountable those responsible for Syria chemical attacks (Middle East Monitor) April 15, 2021

The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has reiterated its call to hold accountable those responsible for the chemical attack launched by the Syrian regime forces on the city of Saraqib, northwestern Syria, in 2018.

The Turkish ministry was commenting on the second report by the International Investigation and Identification Team of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on chemical weapons attacks in Syria.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry announced in a statement that the report, published on 12 April, 2021, concluded that the regime is the perpetrator of the chlorine gas attack that took place in Saraqib on 4 February, 2018. The report added: "The Investigation and Identification Team has thus confirmed the responsibility of the regime for yet another chemical weapons attack."

"Apart from being a flagrant breach of the Chemical Weapons Convention, the use of chemical weapons is a crime against humanity and a war crime," it stated.

"We reiterate our call that the perpetrators of these attacks, which constitute a blatant violation of international law, must not be left unpunished," it asserted, adding that Turkey will continue to support all efforts, first and foremost by the United

Nations and the OPCW, aiming to ensure accountability in Syria.

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Kosovo Specialist Chambers

Kosovo Ex-Guerrilla Sent to Face Charges at Hague War Court (BIRN) By Perparim Isufi

April 16, 2021

Pjeter Shala, a former Kosovo Liberation Army fighter, was transferred to a detention centre in The Hague on Thursday evening after the Kosovo Specialist Chambers confirmed a four-count indictment charging him with war crimes.

Shala, 57, who was arrested in Belgium last month, is to make an initial appearance before a pre-trial judge on Monday.

He is charged with arbitrary detention, cruel treatment, torture and murder in the northern Albania town of Kukes, at a metal factory which indictment claims was used by the KLA as a detention centre.

“The alleged crimes with which Mr Shala is charged took place between approximately 17 May 1999 and 5 June 1999 against persons detained at the Kukes Metal Factory (Albania) allegedly used by the Kosovo Liberation Army,” the Kosovo Specialist Chambers said in a statement.

The indictment names two other KLA ex-fighters, Sabit Geci and Xhemshit Krasniqi, as members of a “joint criminal enterprise” along with Shala.

“Each member of the joint criminal enterprise, by their acts or omissions, contributed to achieving their common purpose. Alternatively, some or all of these individuals were not members of the JCE, but were used by members of the JCE [joint criminal enterprise] to carry out crimes committed in furtherance of the common purpose,” the redacted indictment says.

It also alleges that between approximately May 17, 1999 and June 1999, Shala and other KLA members including Geci and Krasniqi detained several people “without due process of law” at the Kukes Metal Factory.

“They were held under armed guard in makeshift cells, handcuffed and tied, relieved of travel documents and money, and subjected to acts of cruel treatment and torture,” the indictment claims.

Shala was arrested last month in Belgium, where he was living, on an arrest warrant issued by the Specialist Chambers.

Media in Kosovo have reported that Shala was known during the war under the nom de guerre Komandant Ujku (Commander Wolf) and operated in the KLA’s Dukagjin Zone in western Kosovo during the 1998-99 conflict with Serbian forces.

In February 2019, he was interviewed by Hague prosecutors as a suspect.

The Hague-based Kosovo Specialist Chambers will try former KLA guerrillas for crimes committed during and after the war from 1998 to 2000, including murder, torture and illegal detentions.

Among those already arrested and transferred to The Hague to face charges are former Kosovo President Hashim Thaci former parliamentary speakers Kadri Veseli and Jakup Krasniqi as well as former MP Rexhep Selimi, who were senior KLA figures during wartime. All of them have pleaded not guilty to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Kosovo Specialist Chambers and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office are part of Kosovo’s justice system but are located in the Netherlands and staffed by internationals.

They were set up under pressure from Kosovo’s Western allies, who feared that Kosovo’s justice system was not robust enough to try KLA cases and protect witnesses from interference.

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Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan: Armenia hit Shusha with 'deadly' missiles (Andalou Agency) By Jeyhun Aliyev
April 12, 2021

Azerbaijan claimed Monday that the Armenian army used "deadly weapons" to target Shusha, the country's cultural capital.

President Ilham Aliyev was informed about the military equipment seized from the Armenian army during the recent war in Karabakh at a ceremony held to inaugurate the Military Trophy Park in the capital Baku.

"Look, these Iskander-M missiles were fired by Armenians at Shusha. Where do these missiles come from in the Armenian army? This is already visual evidence. It is evidence of Armenia's war crime and we want an answer," Aliyev said, while examining the pieces of the missile displayed in the park spread over 5 hectares (12.3 acres).

The liberation of Shusha -- known as the pearl of Karabakh -- on Nov. 8, 2020 led to the recognition of defeat by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, as well as the cessation of the hostilities between Baku and Yerevan.

"How did this deadly weapon fall into the hands of Armenia? We have not received an answer yet. But we will get it. Let everyone come and see that Armenia was trying to destroy Shusha, our ancient city, with Iskander-M missiles. They used it after we liberated Shusha," he said.

Russian-made Iskander-M road-mobile and surface-to-surface short-range ballistic missile has a range of 400-500 kilometers (250-310 miles).

After touring the park, Aliyev met with servicemen.

In 1991, the Armenian military illegally occupied Nagorno-Karabakh, also known as Upper Karabakh, internationally recognized as Azerbaijani territory, and seven adjacent regions.

When new clashes erupted on Sept. 27, 2020, the Armenian army launched attacks on civilians and Azerbaijani forces and violated several humanitarian cease-fire agreements.

During a six-week conflict, Azerbaijan liberated several cities and nearly 300 settlements and villages, while at least 2,802 of its soldiers were martyred.

On Nov. 10, 2020, the two countries signed a Russian-brokered agreement to end the fighting and work toward a comprehensive resolution.

On Jan. 11, the leaders of Russia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia signed a pact to develop economic ties and infrastructure to benefit the entire region. It included the establishment of a trilateral working group on Karabakh.

The cease-fire is seen as a victory for Azerbaijan and a defeat for Armenia, whose armed forces withdrew in line with the agreement.

Prior to this victory, about 20% of Azerbaijan's territory had been under illegal occupation for nearly three decades.

Armenia breaches int'l law by refusing to provide maps of minefields (AzerNews) By Aisha Jabbarova
April 16, 2021

Chair of Azerbaijan's Parliament Sahiba Gavarova has said that Armenia is violating the international law by refusing to provide maps of mines planted in Azerbaijan's formerly-occupied territories.

Addressing an international conference 'Global Challenges and Threats in the COVID-19 Pandemic Environment; Terrorism and Violent Extremism' held in St Petersburg, Russia, Gavarova said that Armenian mines have killed military servicemen and civilians after the end of the war.

"Those are the post-war casualties that could have been avoided had Armenia issued the minefield maps -- and Armenia had to do so by the international law. Azerbaijan has approached the international organisations on the subject, according to Mrs Gavarova who remarked that those organisations should put influence on Armenia," Gavarova said.

Some 20 Azerbaijani citizens, including 14 civilians were killed and 87 citizens, including 16 civilians were injured in mine explosions since the signing of the Karabakh peace deal by the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Russian leaders on November 10, 2020.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev on February 26 described Armenia's failure to provide the maps of mined areas in liberated lands as the main difficulty for Azerbaijani IPDs to return to their homes. He said that this can also be considered to be a war crime as several servicemen and civilians were killed in mine blasts on liberated territories after the war.

Gafarova reminded that Armenia staged a provocation against Azerbaijan on September 27 in an attempt to capture new territories, subjecting Azerbaijani towns, villages and military positions to artillery fire and ballistic missiles and causing casualties among civilians and military personnel. She said that terrorists of Armenian background coming from the very different parts of the Planet including Syria, Lebanon and even European countries were flocking to Armenia then and were moved by Armenia to the conflict zone subsequently.

Azerbaijan to sue Armenia for damages during occupation (AzerNews) By Aisha Jabbarova
April 21, 2021

President Ilham Aliyev has said that Azerbaijan has launched legal procedures to take Armenia to international courts for damages inflicted on its formerly-occupied territories.

Aliyev made the remarks in an interview to the Azerbaijan Television on April 20.

"The process of calculating the damage caused continues. Foreign specialists are involved. As you know, our plans are to take Armenia to international courts. Naturally, we will do this and foreign experts will help us," Aliyev said.

As to the illegal exploitation of Azerbaijan's natural resources, Aliyev said that "Armenia and its foreign partners which illegally exploited our natural resources will face an international court because the plundering of our gold, copper and other natural resources, as well as their illegal exploitation by Armenia, are considered an international crime."

Armenia looted Azerbaijan's minerals during three decades of occupation with 155 precious metal deposits, including five gold deposits having been recklessly exploited without considering ecological ramifications.

Zangazur corridor

Speaking about the Zangazur corridor that will connect Azerbaijan proper with its Nakhchivan exclave through the Armenian territory, Aliyev said that it is being implemented whether Armenia wants it or not.

The opening of Zangazur corridor is stipulated by Clause 9 of the November 10 trilateral statement signed between Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia. Under the Clause Armenia must oversee the safety of the corridor. The November statement calls for reopening of the region's economic and transport communications that had been blocked during the three-decades-long conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. In a meeting in January 2020 in Moscow, the two countries' leaders agreed to set up a working group to help open transport communications.

The president said that any potential threat from Armenia will be eliminated immediately, saying that it's a matter of national security for his country.

Furthermore, the president stressed that Azerbaijan is ready for cooperation with Armenia despite the fact that Armenia has destroyed Azerbaijan's historical and religious sites in formerly-occupied territories and committed genocide against Azerbaijani people.

"We must look to the future," Aliyev said.

Infrastructure projects

Commenting on the reconstruction process in Azerbaijan's newly-liberated territories, Aliyev said that master plans of all cities are being prepared and Aghdam will be the first city to be covered under this plan.

He reminded that the construction of the Fuzuli international airport is proceeding at a high pace with two other airports to be built in Zangilan and Lachin districts.

He stressed that the key infrastructure projects have already been launched and the supply of electricity to the liberated territories will be completed by the end of 2021.

"Power lines are being extended and new substations are being built. The city of Shusha is fully supplied with electricity today, and new power lines are now being laid from Dashkasan to Kalbajar... This is very hard work because this infrastructure project passes through the Murov mountains. The height of the mountains there reaches 3,500 meters and the weather conditions are not yet favorable enough, the snow has not melted yet," he added.

Mines in liberated lands

Aliyev described as “the biggest difficulty” Armenia’s refusal to provide mining maps.

“The refusal to provide these maps is yet another war crime on the part of Armenia. Due to its failure to provide mining maps after the end of the war, more than 100 civilians have been killed and injured. Work in this direction will be continued.”

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MIDDLE-EAST

Iraq

Grotian Moment: The International War Crimes Trial Blog

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Syria

Victims of chemical attacks in Syria file complaint with Swedish police (Reuters)

April 19, 2021

Lawyers representing victims of chemical weapons attacks in Syria filed a criminal complaint with Swedish police on Monday, calling for an investigation into the role of officials in President Bashar al-Assad's government.

Allegations of war crimes can be investigated by Swedish police regardless of where they were committed.

Similar legal actions, taken by groups such as Civil Rights Defenders, the Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression, Syrian Archive, and the Open Society Justice Initiative on behalf of victims have already been launched in Germany and France.

"The groups call on Swedish judicial authorities to open an investigation into these attacks, so that Syrian officials responsible for these war crimes can be put on trial under the principle of universal jurisdiction," the groups behind the legal action said in a statement.

The Syrian government denies ever using chemical weapons against its own civilians in the course of conflict with rebel forces. The conflict, which began in 2011, has largely subsided with Assad having regained control of most key territory with Russian and Iranian military support.

According to the complaint, the Syrian government used chemical weapons in attacks on the opposition-held towns of Ghouta in 2013 and Khan Sheikhoun in 2017. Hundreds of civilians, including children, were killed.

"In the ten years since the first assaults on pro-democracy protesters in Syria, the government has used chemical weapons more than 300 times to terrorize the civilian population," said Steve Kostas, a lawyer at the Justice Initiative.

"Swedish authorities can join their counterparts in France and Germany to jointly investigate the use of chemical weapons in Syria and demonstrate that there will be no impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes," he said in a statement.

A U.N.-commissioned investigation to identify those behind chemical attacks in Syria concluded in 2017 that Syrian government forces had used chlorine and sarin gas.

The first trial of suspected members of Assad's security services for crimes against humanity, including torture and sexual assault, began in a German court in April 2020.

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Yemen

South Africa is putting profit before Yemeni lives (Aljazeera) By Zen Mathe and Michael Marchant
April 16, 2021

Democratic South Africa's commitment to human rights has never been solely inward-looking. Its constitutional order was crafted with a deep awareness of the South African apartheid state's complicity in human rights violations in other countries, as well as a recognition that the crime of apartheid itself was enabled and supported by the regime's corporate and state allies around the world. In this context, Democratic South Africa committed itself to fulfilling the human rights of people in the country, while also "championing the values of human rights [and] democracy" around the world. Yet, faced with the world's worst contemporary humanitarian crisis in Yemen, the South African state has abandoned this commitment to human rights in exchange for the chance to profit from weapons deals. In so doing, it has become complicit in war crimes in Yemen.

Since 2015, Yemen has been the epicentre of a complex and regionalised civil war. Thousands of combatants have been killed and, according to United Nations reports, civilians have also been deliberately targeted in the brutal conflict, in violation of international law. The aerial and ground bombing of vital infrastructure, as well as endless blockades of goods and aid, has resulted in up to 16 million Yemenis having inadequate access to food and up to 18 million having no access to safe water. This suffering is now being exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While all parties to the conflict are implicated in numerous violations of international humanitarian law, the evidence suggests that Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have repeatedly targeted civilians with both air and ground attacks. The UN has also expressed concern that the Saudi Arabia-led coalition is using starvation as a tactic in the war, in violation of international law.

Corporations cash in on the war South Africa has repeatedly expressed concern about the humanitarian suffering in Yemen. At international forums, South African officials have urged all parties to respect international law and to find a solution to the conflict. Yet, at the same time, the South African state has hypocritically given the green light to arms companies to sell weapons to both Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two of the main parties accused of committing war crimes in Yemen.

Open Secrets' new investigative report, Profiting from misery – South Africa's complicity in war crimes in Yemen, reveals that since the war in Yemen began, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have become the key market for South African weapons. In 2013, a little more than 3 percent of South African weapons exports went to these two states. In 2015 and 2016, this was up to 42.1 and 48.9 percent, respectively. Since the war in Yemen broke out, South African weapons worth more than 8 billion rands (\$550m) have been sold to Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The United Nations Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen and Amnesty International have identified many of these South African weapons in Yemen. These include drones, surveillance equipment, armoured vehicles, and most notoriously, 120mm mortar bombs, whose remnants were discovered at the site of an attack on civilians in the Yemeni city of Hodeidah. Two independent investigations, one of them by the UN experts group on Yemen, found it most likely that these mortars were manufactured by South African arms firm Rheinmetall Denel Munitions (RDM). RDM is a joint venture between German arms company Rheinmetall Waffe Munition GmbH (which holds a 51 percent stake) and South African state-owned arms company Denel (with 49 percent). RDM not only sells weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, but has also established a

munitions factory in Saudi Arabia in 2016. The factory specialises in, among other things, the production of 120mm mortar bombs.

All of this has occurred in apparent contravention of South Africa's legal requirement to prohibit exports to countries that may use them to commit human rights violations or exacerbate conflicts. All indications are that South Africa's arms trade regulator, the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC), continues to approve permits to export weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, despite the extensive public evidence of war crimes committed by those states.

In poor company South Africa is one of the numerous states profiting from the conflict in Yemen. In this, it finds itself in the same camp as powerful countries that have long foregone any genuine commitment to human rights in favour of a powerful military industrial complex. Embarrassingly, South Africa now risks falling behind even these states in ending the supply of weapons to this conflict.

The United States and the United Kingdom have been comfortably the largest suppliers of weapons to the conflict in Yemen. Between 2015 and 2018, the US topped the list – delivering about \$10bn and \$3bn worth of weapons to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, respectively. These deliveries constitute only about 10 percent of the weapon offers made to Saudi Arabia and the UAE during this period. In May 2019, the Trump administration vetoed three bipartisan bills that would have blocked the sale of US arms to Saudi Arabia. Invoking a provision of American arms control laws that is hardly ever used, it bypassed Congress and authorised “billions of dollars in weapons sales to Middle East allies”.

The UK, for its part, has nearly single-handedly kept the Saudi Air Force in the air and able to carry out a relentless six-year aerial bombing campaign that has included more than 22,000 individual air attacks. British company BAE Systems alone received 15 billion pounds (\$20.5bn) in revenue from Saudi Arabia between 2015 and 2019.

Despite this, there are efforts in both countries to limit or end this supply, precisely because of the overwhelming evidence of war crimes and humanitarian disaster in Yemen. In January 2021, the US imposed a temporary freeze on the sale of US weapons to Saudi Arabia and is inspecting UAE purchases as it reviews “billions of dollars in weapons transactions approved by former President Donald Trump”.

This is a welcome development, though it is unlikely to lead to a permanent ban at this stage. In the UK, upholding an application by the CAAT (Campaign Against Arms Trade), the Supreme Court set aside export permits for weapons to Saudi Arabia in June 2019, citing the failure to take into account the evidence of war crimes in Yemen. While the temporary freeze on exports was short-lived, the matter is again before the UK courts.

Sadly, when Open Secrets asked the NCACC whether it had taken evidence of war crimes in Yemen into account, or the presence of South African weapons in Yemen, it only said these issues had not been brought to it through formal channels. It thus currently continues to approve export permits.

Is South Africa also a backdoor for weapons to Yemen? Germany, another top supplier of weapons to the conflict in Yemen, was among the first to put a ban in place. In March 2018, a new coalition government in Germany imposed a ban on the export of any weapons from Germany to Saudi Arabia and other countries “directly involved” in the Yemen civil war. The ban has been strengthened and extended several times since and remains in effect.

Despite the ban, Rheinmetall subsidiaries around the world including RDM in South Africa, have continued to supply weapons to Saudi Arabia. Activists have raised concerns that this is part of a pattern of “offshoring”, whereby Rheinmetall and other European arms companies use subsidiaries in other parts of the world to sidestep domestic bans. By 2019, Rheinmetall had direct or indirect holdings in a staggering 156 companies and offices or production facilities in 129 locations across 32 countries. This places Rheinmetall in a prime position to do precisely this.

In addition to the 120mm mortar remnants found at the site of an attack in Hodeidah, that have been identified as likely produced by South Africa's RDM, Rheinmetall's Italian subsidiary has also been implicated in supplying weapons used in civilian attacks in Yemen. Remnants of bombs used in an air attack by the Saudi-UAE coalition on Deir al-Hajari in northwest Yemen in 2016 were identified as being manufactured by RWM Italia – a Rheinmetall subsidiary in Italy. That attack killed a family of six, including a pregnant woman and her four young children.

The year 2021 brought the welcome news that Italy had followed the US and halted arms exports to the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The Italian ban on weapons exports to Saudi Arabia and the UAE has been termed a “historic” decision by campaign groups, as it is not a suspension but rather a permanent and complete block on the sale of weapons to the Gulf countries. According to Amnesty International, the cancelling of this licence alone would stop the supply of more than 12,700 bombs to the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Time to end South Africa's complicity in the war in Yemen The Italian ban and others like it make South Africa's next move even more important. With countries around the world finally starting to take the necessary steps to slow or halt the export of

weapons to countries that are using them in Yemen, South Africa has a choice to make. Will it continue to ignore the evidence of war crimes and attacks on civilians in Yemen? If it chooses to do so, companies like Rheinmetall will continue to use South Africa for exports despite domestic restrictions on sales to countries with dubious human rights records.

Instead, South Africa should choose to recommit to a human rights-based approach to foreign policy and acknowledge its domestic and international legal obligations and stop the flow of weapons to Yemen's conflict with immediate effect. For the suffering in Yemen to end, corporations in South Africa too must stop profiteering from this unjust war.

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Special Tribunal for Lebanon

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

UN-backed court: Hezbollah fugitive can't appeal sentence in absentia (Middle East Monitor)

April 8, 2021

The UN-backed Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) ruled on Tuesday that a fugitive Hezbollah suspect, Salim Ayyash, convicted of the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri cannot appeal the verdict until he turns himself in.

Last year, the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in the Netherlands found Ayyash guilty in absentia and handed him five life terms over the killing of Hariri in a suicide bombing in Beirut in 2005.

Ayyash, 57, remains in hiding while Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah refuses to hand him over or to recognise the court's authority.

Last January, Ayyash's defence lawyers appealed the verdict, but a majority of the court's judges on Tuesday decided to reject the appeal.

The court said in a statement that "the legal framework for in absentia proceedings at the STL does not contemplate a defense appeal in absentia," adding that "counsel for Mr. Ayyash have not been appointed nor accepted by Mr. Ayyash, who absconded and has not been found. An arrest warrant against Mr. Ayyash is outstanding."

The court said Ayyash maintains "the right to appeal the judgments if he appears, or request a retrial" in accordance with international human rights standards.

Hariri was killed along with 22 other people in a huge truck bombing that also injured 226 others.

Ayyash faces a separate case at the tribunal for three attacks on politicians in Lebanon that is due to open in June.

In March, the United States offered a reward of \$10 million for information leading to the location or identification of Ayyash.

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Israel and Palestine

Palestine condemns Boris Johnson for opposing ICC Israel investigation (The Guardian) By Oliver Holmes

April 15, 2021

Palestine has said relations with Britain have reached a “low point” after Boris Johnson announced that he opposed an international criminal court investigation into alleged war crimes in the Israeli-occupied territories.

The prime minister’s comments, made in a letter to the Conservative Friends of Israel lobby group in the UK, said that while his government had “respect [for] the independence” of the court, it opposed this particular inquiry into Israel.

“This investigation gives the impression of being a partial and prejudicial attack on a friend and ally of the UK’s,” he wrote.

In a statement posted on the website of its diplomatic mission to the UK, Palestine said the letter was a “deeply regrettable” contradiction of international law and previous British policy.

“It marks a low point in UK-Palestine relations and undermines the UK’s credibility on the international stage,” it said. “It is clear that the UK now believes Israel is above the law. There is no other interpretation of a statement that gives carte blanche to Israel.”

It added: “On the one hand, Prime Minister Johnson claims to support the mission of the ICC. On the other, he seems to argue that its mission cannot extend to Israel because it is a ‘friend and an ally’ of the UK.”

The formal inquiry into alleged atrocities in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip was launched last month and is expected to cover the 2014 Gaza war, the 2018 Gaza border clashes and Israeli settlement building in the West Bank.

It places hundreds of Israelis – including soldiers and senior political figures – at risk of prosecution. Israel’s prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has rejected the case as “undiluted antisemitism and the height of hypocrisy”.

Palestinian armed groups, including the Gaza-based Hamas faction, which has been accused of intentionally attacking civilians with indiscriminate rocket fire, will come under scrutiny. Still, the West Bank-based Palestinian Authority, an internationally recognised representative for Palestinians, wants to pursue the case.

In his letter, Johnson backed Israel’s claims that the court has no jurisdiction to investigate because “Israel is not a party to the statute of Rome [that established the court] and Palestine is not a sovereign state”.

The court rejects this, pointing to Palestine’s status as a UN “non-member observer state” and prosecutors’ abilities to investigate people from states that are not signatories.

In its statement, Palestine said that when it joined the court the UK raised no objection, and it had every right to pursue claims on behalf of victims.

“If Mr Johnson disputes this, he disputes the legitimacy of the court. Moreover, he contradicts stated British policy, which is clear that settlements are a violation of international law and therefore a war crime,” it said.

“If Israel is not held responsible for its actions, it has no incentive to comply with international law. If ‘friends and allies’ are exempt from international law, there is no foundation for the rules-based global order.”

Several pro-Palestinian UK charities joined the condemnation of Johnson’s letter. In a joint statement, they accused the prime minister of “political interference” in the court’s work.

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Gulf Region

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ASIA

Afghanistan

UK government setback in bid to limit accountability for soldiers' war crimes (Middle East Monitor)

April 15, 2021

The British government has suffered a major setback in its attempt to safeguard British soldiers from being prosecuted for crimes against humanity, genocide, torture and war crimes. The House of Lords — Britain's upper chamber — submitted an amendment to the proposed Overseas Operations Bill.

Peers voted earlier this week by 333 to 228 to halt plans by the government to restrict prosecutions for torture and war crimes alleged to have been committed by British soldiers serving abroad. The amendment in the Lords rejects government efforts to protect British soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan from what it calls "vexatious" claims.

The amendment passed by the upper house says crimes against humanity, genocide, torture and war crimes should not be given such protection. A group led by former NATO secretary general George Robertson, and supported by some former military chiefs, told peers that they wanted torture and war crimes to be excluded from a five-year limit on prosecutions proposed in the bill, which won parliamentary approval last September.

The bill was introduced after operations in Iraq and Afghanistan gave rise to an unprecedented number of legal claims. Nearly 1,000 compensation claims are said to have been made against the Ministry of Defence for unlawful detention, injury and death. A further 1,400 judicial review claims seeking investigations and compensation for human rights violations were also made against the ministry.

A key aim of the bill is to limit false and historical allegations against service personnel and veterans in relation to overseas operations. However, opponents of the proposed legislation have warned that the bill in its current form could breach Britain's international legal obligations.

Rejecting the inclusion of serious human rights violations in the Overseas Protection Bill, Robertson said that the government plan "undermines some of the most basic legal standards for which this nation was renowned."

The amendment is expected to be put back to the House of Commons towards the end of the month, alongside other changes called for by peers.

Probe troops for war crimes in Afghanistan: China to UK (Anadolu Agency) By Riyaz ul Khaliq

April 15, 2021

Urging a political solution in Afghanistan, China on Thursday asked the UK to investigate its soldiers for war crimes in Afghanistan and other countries.

"We urge the UK to conduct thorough investigations into its atrocities including abusing and killing innocent civilians during wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, hold those guilty of international crimes accountable and give a responsible response to the international community," Lijian Zhao, spokesman for Chinese Foreign Ministry, told a news conference in Beijing.

The statement came after the US officially declared on Wednesday to exit Afghanistan by September after 20 years of war.

Also, the British lawmakers in the House of Commons will vote on April 22 whether to declare a genocide is underway in China's Xinjiang province which is dominated by ethnic Uyghurs who are mostly Muslims.

Lijian said some western countries, including the UK, have long "been politicizing human rights issues and applying double standard," according to state broadcaster CGTN.

“Styling themselves as lecturers, they interfere and pressure other countries while turning a blind eye to their own grave human rights conditions,” he added.

“China calls for resolution of Afghanistan issue through political means,” Lijian said, adding Beijing will continue to “maintain communication and cooperation in this regard and play a constructive role in ensuring long-term peace and stability in the war-torn country.”

He said Afghan security situation “remains grim and complex.”

“The problem of terrorism is far from being resolved,” he added.

“China’s position is always consistent and clear that foreign troops should be withdrawn from Afghanistan appropriately to ensure the situation there remains stable and orderly and to prevent a regrouping of terrorist forces,” the Chinese official was quoted as saying.

Urging the US to respect Afghanistan’s sovereign independence and territorial integrity, Lijian said linking the US withdrawal plan with the “so-called response to China’s challenge” reflects the “dark psychology of some people and deep-seated Cold War mindset and zero-sum game mentality.”

These remarks could undermine the mutual trust between China and the US, he warned, adding they are “not conducive to the coordination and cooperation between the two countries on international and regional issues.”

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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**

ECCC’s split decision leaves Case 003 in limbo (Khmer Times)

April 8, 2021

The National and International Co-Investigating Judges of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) yesterday issued a split conclusion today in Case 003 of former Khmer Rouge navy commander Meas Muth, leaving the case in limbo.

The Pre-Trial Chamber issued its considerations on the appeals against the conflicting co-investigating judges’ closing orders in Case 003, as on November 28, 2018, the international co-investigating judge issued his closing order (indictment) sending Muth for trial, while on the same day, the national co-investigating judge issued his order dismissing the case against Muth.

After a review of the case file, the pre-trial chamber found the appeals of the national and international co-prosecutors admissible while the appeal of the co-lawyers for Muth was declared inadmissible pursuant to internal rules.

As a preliminary issue, the Pre-Trial Chamber considered that the co-investigating judges’ simultaneous issuance of the two conflicting Closing Orders was illegal, in violation of the ECCC legal framework.

Regarding this, spokesman of ECCC Neth Pheaktra said yesterday that the Pre-Trial Chamber declared two important points regarding Muth’s case.

The Pre-Trial Chamber declared that the co-investigating judge’s issuance of the two conflicting closing orders was illegal, violating the legal framework of ECCC, and at the same time also declared that it had not assembled an affirmative vote of at least four judges for a decision based on common reasoning on the merits, he said.

Pheaktra declined to comment further on the status of Case 003, but said the Pre-Trial Chamber stated that in accordance

with Internal Rule of ECCC, the present decision is not subject to appeal.

Muth and a co-accused Sou Met had initially been indicted in Case 003.

The judicial investigation against Met was terminated on June 2, 2015, following his death. Muth was charged in absentia by the international co-investigating judge in March 2015 and appeared voluntarily before the judge in December 2015, where he was notified of additional charges.

Muth was a member of the Khmer Rouge movement from the 1960s. He served as the secretary of division 164 of the central area of Cambodia.

The international co-investigating judge charged Muth with the following alleged crimes, committed during the Khmer Rouge era, 1975 to 1979, including genocide; crimes against humanity, namely murder; extermination; enslavement; imprisonment; torture; persecution; and other inhumane acts (inhumane treatment, enforced disappearances, forced labour, forced marriage, rape and attacks on human dignity due to conditions of detention).

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Bangladesh International Crimes Tribunal

Bangladesh's Islamist Challenge Intensifies (The Diplomat) By Subir Bhaumik

April 15, 2021

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has promised the "strongest possible action" against Islamist radicals responsible for violent protests over Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country.

Fourteen supporters of the radical Hefazat-e-Islam group were killed in police shootings across the country as Hasina's government stood by its decision to invite Modi as guest of honor for celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on March 26.

"We invited the Indian prime minister to express our gratitude to Indian people for their unstinted support during the 1971 Liberation War," Hasina told the media.

She warned Hefazat radicals would face "dire consequences" if they continued their violence over Modi's visit.

The protesters accuse Modi and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party of anti-Muslim policies in India, ranging from a controversial citizenship law that excludes Muslim migrants to alleged incitement of violence against Indian Muslims by BJP politicians.

The Hefazat controls the thousands of Qaumi Madrassas (Islamic schools) in the country and government spokespeople have accused Hefazat leaders of mobilizing them in their vicious anti-Modi campaign.

"Your students go to India's Deoband seminary for higher religious studies. Has India denied them visas? So why are you making such an issue out of Modi's visit? India is our trusted friend," said Hasina in a press conference this week.

Critics have denounced the police's use of rubber bullets, tear gas, and even live ammunition to break up the anti-Modi protests. The government, however, scoffed at allegations of police overkill in countering the protests and justified the dozens of arrests of Hefazat leaders and activists.

"For those who lament the Hefazat arrests, let this be known: that they have given an open call to topple the Hasina government by force and violence. So should we offer them Bengali sweets and just step down?" said Awami League youth leader Sufi Farooq.

He said other Islamist opposition parties have backed this call.

Farooq said Hefazat supporters are targeting secular institutions like the Music Academy in the Brahmanbaria district, home of classical music legend Allaudin Khan, which was set ablaze along with an old public library in the area.

“The Islamist radicals, be the pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami or the Hefazat or Khelafat, are determined to create a Taliban type Islamic state, which goes against the secular values of our 1971 Liberation War. We will not allow our country to become Pakistan. We are moderate Muslims and our state is committed to protect our minorities,” said former junior Information and Telecom Minister Tarana Halim.

Stressing the importance of both Bengali identity and Islam in Bangladesh, Halim said: “We are now observing this week both the Bengali New Year and Holy Ramadan with equal enthusiasm. We are a Bengali nation with equal place for all religions and our tribal brothers of Chittagong Hill Tracts.”

Barrister Tureen Afroz was lead prosecutor in the pointed to the 1971 War Crimes Trials, designed to punish local Islamists who joined the Pakistan Army in perpetrating “unspeakable atrocities” during the Liberation War.

“The charges against these Islamist radicals range from rape, murder and forcible conversion of non-Muslims. In today’s Bangladesh, forcible conversion to Islam is an offense,” Afroz said. “For those in the West who criticize our police crackdown, let me say these are not peaceful protesters and if Guantanamo Bay waterboardings of Arab and Afghan jihadis are acceptable, our police crackdown should not raise hackles.”

Hefazat followers have also attacked mosques and forced devotees to join their violent protests aimed at toppling the Hasina government, she said.

The upsurge in radicalism comes at a time when Hasina is basking in global applause for the country’s economic and human development, which is symbolized by the U.N. upgrading Bangladesh from “Least Developed Country” to “Developing Nation.”

Bangladesh and Indian intelligence reports indicate a surge in the Hefazat’s cadre base, drawn essentially from Qaumi madrassas it controls. The use of weapons during the recent violence suggests the group may resort to increasing armed action in the future.

Following some intelligence inputs that Hefazat activists might launch armed attacks on police stations in the next stage of their movement, machine guns have been placed in police pickets in key urban locations across the country.

The ruling Awami League, which has restrained its activists from hitting the streets to confront the Hefazat, has unleashed a furious social media campaign to “expose” and discredit the Islamist group.

Some of these social media postings blame Hefazat’s anti-Modi violence on “secret Pakistani funding.” Others focus on Hefazat leader Mamunul Huq being caught with a massage girl from a resort, whom he tried to project as his second wife.

A Facebook post by Awami Women League leader Ayesha Zaman Shimu purports to show pictures of Islamist clergymen in Hefazat-controlled madrassas in acts of child sex abuse.

“Is this the Islam you want us to practice?” asked Shimu.

Modi’s visit sparked the latest in a line of Hefazat-organized violent public protests since the Awami League won a landslide victory in the 2018 elections, which were marred by violence and allegations of vote rigging.

The first wave of the protests was directed against the installation of statues of the country’s founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, in his birth centenary year. Hasina is Rahman’s daughter.

Then came the Hefazat encirclement of the French embassy in Dhaka, where they burned effigies of President Emmanuel Macron to protest the French government’s refusal to ban caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad after the beheadings in France. Their street protests raged alongside a furious social media campaign by anti-India and anti-Awami League netizens against Indian vaccines.

“Elements in Bangladesh’s pro-Western civil society and activists from the country’s Islamist eco-system appear to be on same page on the regime change and anti-Indian agenda,” said Awami Women League leader Ayesha Zaman Shimu.

Hefazat leaders accuse Hasina of being “propped up by India.”

“How can she invite Modi who has butchered thousands of Muslims in his home state Gujarat? Why should she go for statues and not construct minarets in memory of her father Mujibur Rahman?” said Hefazat supremo Junaid Babunagari.

“Bangladesh must strictly follow the tenets of Islam in letter and spirit,” he told journalists. “Statues are anti-Islam, no matter whose it is.”

Babunagari wants Hasina to declare Ahmadiyyas as non-Muslims, stop the activities of Hindu sects like ISKCON in Bangladesh, stop the installation of statues, and not organize visits of leaders from India’s ruling Hindu nationalist BJP to Bangladesh.

Bangladesh’s Islamist political eco-system ranges from the opposition and rabidly pro-Pakistan Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e- Islami to the openly active Islamist radical groups like Hefazat-e-Islam and Khilafat-e-Majlis to the underground jihadi terror groups like Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and Ansarullah Bangla.

“The Hefazat now has come to occupy a central position in this ecosystem, which is sworn to create an Islamist Bangladesh by undermining the secularist values of the 1971 Liberation War,” said Bangladesh watcher Sukhoranjan Dasgupta, author of “Midnight Massacre” on the 1975 military coup in the country. “The Awami League’s tactical mistake of trying to cultivate the Hefazat to counter the pro-Pakistan Jamaat-e-Islami ahead of the 2019 parliament has helped the clergy-driven Islamist group to bounce back as a political force.”

But after the Modi visit violence, Hasina has made it clear the Hefazat will be crushed if it tried to instigate mob violence.

Her government has also hit at the BJP, which blamed Bangladesh for being a source of illegal migration into India during the election campaign in the border states of West Bengal and Assam.

“These allegations are baseless,” Bangladesh’s Foreign Minister A.K. Abdul Momen said after Indian Home Minister Amit Shah pointed to illegal migration from Bangladesh as a huge problem in bordering Indian states.

“If India wants a friendly Bangladesh, such baseless tirades must stop, if even they fetch the BJP some votes,” said Dasgupta.

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War Crimes Investigation in Myanmar

Myanmar’s ruling junta issues fresh charges for Suu Kyi (The Buffalo News)

April 12, 2021

Myanmar’s ruling military squared off against its opponents in the courts, the streets and the countryside Monday, showing no sign of relenting in its crackdown against those opposed to February’s coup.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who led the elected government toppled in the military takeover, was accused of a fresh criminal charge when she appeared by video link before a judge in the capital Naypyitaw on Monday, according to her lawyers.

Suu Kyi was accused of breaching a law intended to control the spread of the coronavirus, the second such charge against her under the same law. She is already facing charges of illegally importing walkie-talkies, unlicensed use of them, inciting public unrest and breaking the official secrets act.

The junta also has accused Suu Kyi of corruption and presented on state television what it said was evidence that she took bribes.

Suu Kyi’s supporters say the prosecutions are politically motivated tactics to try to legitimize the Feb. 1 coup and discredit her. The generals overthrew Suu Kyi’s government less than three months after she won a landslide victory in a general election and any conviction could see her banned from a future election.

The coup put a halt to the progress Myanmar had made toward greater democratization after five decades of military rule. The takeover and the bloody crackdown on opposition that has followed has led to calls for an arms embargo on the country and other international sanctions that could pressure the military into a return to more democratic rule.

As of Sunday, 706 protesters and bystanders have been verified as killed in the post-coup crackdown, said the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which tracks casualties and arrests.

U.N. officials in Myanmar said they are "appalled by the violence since Friday in which some 93 protesters were reportedly killed, many of them in the city of Bago, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said, adding that the U.N. team "is particularly concerned over reports of the use of heavy artillery against protesters."

Despite the lethal threat protesters returned to the streets and rural by-ways of southern Myanmar on Monday, determined to keep public demonstrations going.

In Launglone Township near the city of Dawei, a large group mounted motorbikes and rode through the villages of Pandale and Nyin Maw, red banners snapping in the breeze as they sang and chanted slogans of resistance.

In Dawei itself, students, teachers and engineers carried their message of defiance through the city on foot.

Marches took place in other cities and towns as well, and a few carried on a trend of assigning a quirky theme to their protests.

Demonstrators in Mandalay, the country's second-biggest city, held a "Watermelon Strike," marching with big slices and making anti-coup displays featuring slogans painted on the melons or attached to them.

In Yangon, five public city buses caught fire before dawn, with no indications of who might have set them alight. Such mysterious attacks have mounted in recent weeks, with the junta blaming protesters and protesters blaming the junta.

More intense violence took place in the northern state of Kachin, where two Myanmar military fighter jets attacked a base belonging to the Kachin Independence Organization, which is the main political group representing the Kachin ethnic group in the area. The organization, which seeks autonomy for the Kachin, maintains its own military force, and said its base has also been under artillery attack, reported the Kachin News Group,

Their report also said Kachin forces on Monday staged a successful attack to drive away a Myanmar military force guarding a bridge on a major road.

The Kachin are one of more than a dozen ethnic minority groups who have been seeking autonomy for decades. Another, the Karen in eastern Myanmar, have also been facing attacks from the army since the coup, including air strikes.

The Free Burma Rangers, which offers humanitarian medical assistance to ethnic minority villagers in Myanmar's border regions, says more than 20,000 villagers have been displaced by the government's offensive, which was continuing Monday with the use of artillery.

The Kachin and the Karen have declared their solidarity with the protests against the coup and vowed to protect demonstrations in the territory they control.

Also appearing in court Monday by video link with Suu Kyi were former President Win Myint and the former mayor of Naypyitaw, Myo Aung, who also face charges.

According to the head of her legal team, Khin Maung Zaw, the three defendants appeared in good health, but the lawyer who was in court was not allowed to speak to them about any matters other than the immediate cases against them.

On the diplomatic front, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called the latest reports of violence and killings by security forces "appalling" and encouraged the 192 other U.N. member nations "to use their influence to impress on the parties the need to stop this escalation and to take steps that will facilitate the return to civilian rule," U.N. spokesman Dujarric said.

"He emphasizes the key role that the region can and must play in advising the national actors to take steps towards the return of peace and stability in Myanmar," Dujarric said.

U.N. Special Envoy for Myanmar Christine Schraner Burgener is in the region meeting key players "in order to promote an effective international response based on a unified regional effort," Dujarric said, adding that despite the military turning down her request to visit she remains ready to go "at the earliest opportunity."

UN Rights Chief Warns Myanmar Heading Toward Syria-like Civil War (Voice of America) By Lisa Schlein
April 13, 2021

The U.N. high commissioner for human rights, Michele Bachelet, warns Myanmar could be headed toward a bloody civil war like Syria unless the violence is brought under control.

Bachelet is calling on all states with influence, especially Myanmar's neighbors, to apply concerted pressure on the ruling military junta to end its campaign of repression and slaughter of its people.

She said many of the grave human rights violations being committed by Myanmar's military might amount to crimes against humanity and must be stopped. Bachelet's spokeswoman, Ravina Shamdasani, said the high commissioner fears a continuation of these crimes could tear the country apart and lead to a civil war.

"The high commissioner states that there are clear echoes of Syria in 2011," Shamdasani said. "There too, we saw peaceful protests met with unnecessary and clearly disproportionate force. The state's brutal, persistent repression of its own people led to some individuals taking up arms, followed by a downward and rapidly expanding spiral of violence all across the country."

Syria's decadelong civil war has had disastrous consequences. The United Nations estimates 400,000 people have died, 11.7 million are displaced both within Syria and as refugees, and more than 11 million people need international aid to survive.

Shamdasani said credible reports indicate the past weekend in Myanmar was particularly deadly. She said the country's armed forces, known as the Tatmadaw, attacked civilians with rocket-propelled grenades and mortar fire, killing at least 82 people.

Some people are using makeshift or primitive weapons in self-defense, she said, and clashes between the military and ethnic armed groups in Kachin, Shan and Kayn states are intensifying.

"As arrests continue, with at least 3,080 people currently detained, there are reports that 23 people have been sentenced to death following secret trials — including four protesters and 19 others who were accused of political and criminal offenses. The mass arrests have forced hundreds of people to go into hiding," Shamdasani said.

She added that the country's economic, education and health infrastructure are at the point of collapse. Millions of people have lost their livelihoods and COVID-19 measures have been brought to a standstill, she said.

Bachelet has called the situation untenable. She said nations must cut off the supply of arms and finances to the military leadership that allow it to kill and seriously violate its people's human rights.

Myanmar protesters throw red paint in the streets as death toll mounts (France24)

April 14, 2021

Anti-coup protesters in Myanmar sloshed red paint in the streets on Wednesday to symbolise the blood spilled and more than 700 lives lost in a brutal military crackdown.

The country is barely functioning and the economy has stalled since the military seized power from civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1.

The military junta has sought to quell mass protests with lethal force and a local monitoring group has verified at least 714 civilian deaths but warns the toll is likely to be even higher.

This week is Myanmar's New Year festival of Thingyan holiday but normal festivities such as public water fights have been cancelled.

Instead, protesters have been using Thingyan as a rallying point -- as bus shelters and pavements were sprayed red on Wednesday in cities and towns nationwide.

"The purpose of the 'bleeding strike' is to remember the martyrs who died in the struggle for democracy," a protest participant from Yangon told AFP.

"We should not be happy during this festival time. We have to feel sadness for the martyrs who are bleeding and we must continue to fight this battle in any way we can."

In Mandalay, red paint was also spilled on the streets amid signs saying: "hope our military dictatorship fails," "overthrow the era of fear" and "blood has not dried on the streets".

Protesters spray-painted a pavement red in a Yangon suburb and left a note that read: "Dear UN, How are you? I hope you are well. As for Myanmar, we are dying."

- 'Echoes of Syria' –

The United Nations human rights chief warned Tuesday that Myanmar could be spiralling towards a "full-blown" Syrian-style conflict.

Flagging of possible crimes against humanity, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet urged countries to take immediate action to push Myanmar's military to stop its "campaign of repression and slaughter of its people."

"I fear the situation in Myanmar is heading towards a full-blown conflict," Bachelet said in a statement.

"There are clear echoes of Syria in 2011," she warned, referring to the start of a civil war that over the past decade has killed around 400,000 people and forced more than six million to flee the country.

The bloody crackdown has brought widespread international condemnation and calls for restraint -- as well as sanctions from some countries on the Myanmar armed forces and their extensive business interests.

But diplomatic bickering has stalled concrete action, with the EU's top diplomat blaming Moscow and Beijing for blocking tough measures, such as a UN arms embargo.

Elsewhere on Wednesday activists in Monywa, Sagaing and Dawei cities and small towns in the Mandalay region rallied on motorbikes carrying red flags of Suu Kyi's political party.

At a military tribunal in Yangon, seven protesters accused over the murder of a suspected informer were sentenced to death, state media said Tuesday. Three of the demonstrators were tried in absentia.

The junta also announced Tuesday that dozens more people had been added to an arrest warrant list of 260 celebrities, doctors and ordinary citizens.

Many are accused of spreading dissent against the military, while medical professionals are wanted over their work at private clinics, which have taken in injured protesters, according to state media.

Meanwhile, in northwestern Sagaing region, a couple were shot dead while delivering milk after junta troops stormed the town of Tamu, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a local monitoring organisation.

Casualties reported as Myanmar forces fire at Mandalay protestors (AlJazeera)

April 15, 2021

At least one person has been reported killed and several injured after Myanmar security forces opened fire on a pro-democracy protest by medical workers in the city of Mandalay, according to local media on Thursday, with reports of many young demonstrators arrested.

An image posted on social media showed a monk carrying a severely injured man, with two other people assisting him. The person later died, according to a social media post quoting the Mandalay-based Friday Times Journal.

Several photos on social media also showed the military rounding up people on Thursday morning before they could join the protest in the country's second-largest city.

Medical workers, some of whom have been at the forefront of the campaign against the coup, have gathered early in Mandalay but troops soon arrived to disperse them, opening fire and detaining some people, the Mizzima news agency added.

Mizzima said it did not have details of the number of casualties or arrests.

But among those who were reportedly nabbed by authorities were journalists identified as Ajax and Christopher from Myitkyina News Journal.

Ko Wai Moe Naing, an organiser of anti-military protests in the city of Monywa in Sagaing region was also detained on Thursday, according to the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

Images were also posted of several damaged vehicles allegedly destroyed by security forces in Mandalay.

Opponents of the military's February 1 coup that removed an elected government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi have kept up their campaign against the military this traditional New Year week with a series of actions and marches.

A spokesman for the military government could not be reached for comment by news agencies.

New Year protest

The coup has plunged Myanmar into crisis after 10 years of tentative steps towards democracy, with daily protests and campaigns of defiance, including strikes by workers in many sectors that have brought the economy to a standstill.

The five-day New Year holiday, known as Thingyan, began on Tuesday but pro-democracy activists cancelled the usual festivities to focus on their opposition to the generals who seized power. The military says the demonstrations are dwindling but there were reports of flash protests in Sagaing Region as well as in Hpakant township in Kachin State and Kyondoe in Karen State.

In Phayuso township in Kayah State, hundreds of people were seen carrying anti-military government banners, defying warnings by security forces.

Before the latest security crackdown on Thursday in Mandalay, the activist group, Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, had already reported at least 715 protesters killed since the military seized power.

The United Nations human rights office warned on Tuesday that the military clampdown on the protests risked escalating into a civil war, such as Syria's.

Flagging possible crimes against humanity, the High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet urged countries to take immediate action to push the military to stop its "campaign of repression and slaughter of its people".

"I fear the situation in Myanmar is heading towards a full-blown conflict," Bachelet said in a statement.

"There are clear echoes of Syria in 2011," she warned, referring to the start of a civil war that over the past 10 years has killed about 400,000 people and forced more than six million to flee the country.

The military government's bloody crackdown has brought widespread international condemnation and calls for restraint – as well as sanctions from some countries on the Myanmar armed forces and their extensive business interests.

But diplomatic bickering has stalled concrete action, with the European Union's top diplomat blaming Moscow and Beijing for blocking tougher measures, such as a United Nations arms embargo.

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AMERICAS

TOPICS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Momentum for Justice in Liberia (Front Page Africa) By Lennart Dodoo
April 20, 2021

On Wednesday April 7, 2021, a Finnish court concluded the Gibril Massaquoi case hearings in Monrovia, Liberia, which began on February 23. 21 days of hearings, during which 55 witnesses were heard and interrogated by Finnish prosecutors and

defense lawyers. Gibril Massaquoi, former RUF (Revolutionary United Front) spokesman and commander, has been charged with murders, aggravated rapes, aggravated war crime and aggravated crime against humanity, which he allegedly committed and incited during Liberia's Second Civil War.

The trial started in Finland on February 3, 2021. From April 28, hearings will also be held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and are expected to last a few weeks. The Court will then return to Finland to conclude the hearings and render a verdict.

The Liberian Minister of Justice, Hon Frank Musah Dean Jr, as well as the Head of Delegation of the European Union in Liberia, Laurent Delahousse, attended the hearings in Monrovia on April 5. The trial has been extensively covered by Liberian and international press present at the venue. Civitas Maxima, alongside several partners, has been providing a detailed legal monitoring of this landmark trial, available here.

Civitas Maxima and the Global Justice and Research Project warmly congratulate the Liberian authorities for allowing and facilitating these weeks of hearings held in Monrovia. The collaboration provided by Liberia to national foreign authorities – notably since 2019, with a mission undertaken by French authorities with Liberian police in the provinces – has been remarkable, and this commitment to justice should be commended.

In parallel to the Gibril Massaquoi trial, on March 19-20 2021, commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), legislators, traditional Chiefs, youth leaders, political parties' representatives, members of the Liberia National Bar Association, Liberian civil society, academics and international stakeholders assembled in Monrovia to discuss ways to overcome the barriers to accountability for past crimes committed in Liberia during the two civil wars. The Conference was organized as a collaboration between the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom and the Global Justice and Research Project (GJRP) with the assistance of Civitas Maxima.

The conference was a follow up to a national consultation conducted by GJRP throughout February in five Liberian counties (Monrovia, Bomi, Lofa, Bong, and Grand Bassa). Each focus group consultation involved traditional community, youth and women leaders. The two-days gathering in Monrovia was an opportunity to define strategies and concrete actions to be taken to overcome the barriers to justice identified by the focus groups. During the event, participants expressed their strong support for the creation of an accountability mechanism in Liberia "If the TRC report is not implemented to its fullest, reconciliation will continue to hang up in the air" stated Dede Dolopei, TRC's Vice Chairperson.

The Liberia National Bar Association also announced the finalization of an amended draft Act for the establishment of a War and Economic Crimes Court which should be presented to the legislators in due course. The event concluded with the adoption of a roadmap and a pledge of commitment.

The momentum for justice – both inside and outside Liberia – has never been stronger: a verdict is also expected soon in the historical trial of former ULIMO commander Alieu Kosiah in Switzerland, and a French court recently sent to trial Kunti K., also former ULIMO commander.

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Terrorism

Terrorism In Europe – Analysis (Eurasia Review) By Congressional Review Service
April 16, 2021

European governments and the European Union (EU) have grappled with domestic and foreign terrorist groups for decades, but numerous attacks since 2014 have renewed concerns about terrorism and violent extremism in Europe. Despite variances in how terrorist events are defined and tracked, studies indicate that terrorism poses a security threat in many European countries (see data from Europol, the EU's agency for police cooperation, in Figure 1).

European countries and the EU are key U.S. partners in the fight against terrorism, and Members of Congress may be interested in European counterterrorism efforts.

Of primary concern to Europe is "violent Islamist" terrorism. Such attacks, classified by Europol as "religious" or "jihadist" in

motivation, have been much more lethal than other types of terrorism, accounting for nearly all recent fatalities and casualties (see Figure 2).

Most jihadist attacks in Europe since 2014 have been linked to or motivated by the Islamic State organization (IS, also known as ISIS or ISIL). Despite the group's territorial defeat in Syria and Iraq, it maintains a low-level insurgency in both countries and continues to inspire followers in Europe. Concerns also persist about Al Qaeda and its affiliates, which remain committed to carrying out or inspiring attacks on European and other Western targets. Arrests connected to jihadist terrorism typically account for the largest number of terrorism-related arrests; 436 out of 1,004 terrorism arrests reported to Europol in 2019 were jihadist related.

Other types of terrorists also are active in Europe. Nationalist/separatist attacks consistently represent the largest proportion of all terrorist incidents. In 2019, all nationalist/separatist attacks except one were related to dissident republican groups in Northern Ireland. Most left-wing/anarchist attacks occur in Italy, Greece, and Spain. Security services warn about right-wing extremism amid what some view as heightened anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments throughout Europe. Some attacks by right-wing extremists may be classified as hate crimes or other offenses rather than terrorism. In 2016, a far-right, anti-immigrant extremist killed a member of the UK Parliament. In Germany in 2019, a right-wing extremist murdered a local politician in June and another killed two people in an October incident that included an attempted attack on a synagogue during Yom Kippur. In France and Germany, authorities have disrupted several far-right plots against Muslims or foreigners over the last few years.

European officials also remain alert to threats from anti-Israel groups, such as Hezbollah. No attacks in Europe have been attributed to Hezbollah since a 2012 bombing in Bulgaria, but the group reportedly uses Europe as a support and fund raising base. Some European authorities express alarm about alleged state-sponsored Iranian terrorist acts, including a thwarted 2018 bombing plot in France and two murders in the Netherlands in 2015 and 2017.

The Islamic State and Europe

Following the Islamic State's expansion to Syria in 2013, concerns grew about the group's ties to Europe. From 2011 to 2015, roughly 5,000 European citizens traveled to Syria or Iraq to become "foreign fighters."

Several perpetrators of the November 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, France (which killed 130 people) and the March 2016 bombings in Brussels, Belgium (in which 32 died) were European citizens who had trained and/or fought with the Islamic State in Syria and/or Iraq. In these and other terrorist incidents in 2015 and 2016, the Islamic State may have provided remote support and guidance.

The majority of IS-linked attacks in Europe, however, have been committed by individuals inspired by IS propaganda and radicalized in small like-minded groups, online, or in European prisons. In many instances, the Islamic State claims that those responsible for attacks are its "soldiers" and some assailants use methods promoted by the group to carry out attacks (including the use of large vehicles as weapons), but there is often little to suggest a direct connection.

Despite the Islamic State's diminished outreach capabilities amid its territorial losses since 2017, authorities remain alarmed by the group's continued ideological influence in Europe. Some recent attacks in Europe have elevated concerns that migrants and refugees (especially youths) could be more vulnerable to Islamist radicalization and recruitment due to feeling marginalized or dislocated.

Selected Terrorism Incidents

Several incidents over the last few years highlight ongoing concerns about Islamist terrorism in Europe. The selected events below are drawn from media reports.

2018

March 23, France: A French-Moroccan man killed a police officer and three other people in southern France in a series of attacks (which included taking hostages at a market). The Islamic State subsequently took responsibility. The attacker was on a French extremist watch list.

May 12, France: A French citizen (of Chechen origin), on a French terrorist watchlist, killed one person and injured four in Paris. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.

May 29, Belgium: A Belgian convert to Islam, on leave from prison, killed three people in Liège (including two police officers) and attempted to take hostages at a school. The Islamic State claimed the assailant was its "soldier." Authorities believe he was radicalized in prison.

August 31, Netherlands: A 19-year old Afghan national, living in Germany, injured two American tourists at an Amsterdam train station with a knife. Authorities assert the suspect had a “terrorist motive” linked to a belief that Islam was “repeatedly insulted” in the Netherlands.

December 11, France: A French citizen (of Algerian descent) attacked a Christmas market with guns and knives in Strasbourg, near the European Parliament. Five people died and 11 were injured. The Islamic State claimed the assailant was its “soldier.” He was reportedly on France’s terrorist watchlist and may have been radicalized in prison.

2019

March 18, Netherlands: A Turkish-born man, raised in the Netherlands, killed four people and severely injured two in a shooting attack on a tram in Utrecht. The attacker appeared to want to avenge the death of Muslims. The Islamic State noted the attack in its weekly newsletter.

May 24, France: An Algerian national detonated a bomb outside a bakery in Lyon, injuring 13 people. The suspect reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State.

October 3, France: A French convert to Islam employed by a police intelligence unit in Paris stabbed six colleagues, killing four (including three police officers). Co-workers previously reported concerns about the assailant’s extremist views. The Islamic State took note of the attack.

November 29, UK: A UK citizen (of Pakistani descent), with previous terrorism convictions, killed two people and wounded three in a knife attack near London Bridge. The Islamic State claimed responsibility.

2020

June 20, UK: A Libyan asylum-seeker killed three people (including a U.S. citizen) and injured three in a stabbing attack in Reading. Known to UK security services, the attacker may have had ties to an Al Qaeda-linked group in Libya. Authorities also found IS material on his cellphone.

September 25, France: A Pakistani national wounded two people with a meat cleaver in Paris, outside the former office of the Charlie Hebdo satirical magazine, the target of a deadly 2015 Islamist terrorist attack. The suspect in the 2020 incident appeared motivated by the magazine’s decision to republish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad.

October 4, Germany: A 20-year-old rejected asylum seeker from Syria killed one person and injured another with a knife in Dresden. The attacker had ties to the Islamic State and previous terrorism-related convictions.

October 16, France: An 18-year old refugee of Chechen origin beheaded a middle school teacher outside of Paris, after the teacher showed students cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad during a lesson on freedom of expression.

October 20, France: A young Tunisian national stabbed and killed three people at a church in Nice. French officials consider the incident to be an Islamist terrorist attack.

November 2, Austria: A dual Austrian-North Macedonian citizen, convicted previously for attempting to join the Islamic State in Syria, killed 4 people and injured 13 in a gun attack in Vienna. The Islamic State subsequently claimed responsibility.

European Responses and Challenges

For two decades, European countries and the EU have worked to bolster capabilities to combat terrorism and violent Islamist extremism. In recent years, European governments have prohibited travel to conflict zones, increased surveillance, and attempted to improve counter-radicalization efforts, especially online and in prisons. The EU has sought to enhance intelligence sharing among national and EU authorities, strengthen external border controls, and encourage social media companies to curb terrorist incitement on line.

European leaders and the EU also emphasize the importance of close cooperation with the United States. Nevertheless, challenges persist. At times, national sovereignty concerns or civil liberty protections have slowed certain EU anti-terrorism initiatives, while different data protection regimes have complicated the conclusion of U.S.-EU information-sharing accords. Many European governments are struggling with whether to repatriate captured European IS fighters and family members from Syria and Iraq, an issue that generated tensions with the former Trump Administration.

‘Sharp Uptick’ in Domestic Terror Prosecutions Will Continue in 2021: Report (The Crime Report) By Nancy Bilyeau
April 16, 2021

Federal prosecutions arising from the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol are on track to push the number of domestic terrorism cases to a new record high this year, says the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University.

A total of 144 charges of domestic terrorism were filed in just the first five months of fiscal year 2021—continuing the “sharp uptick” that began last year, when prosecutors filed what was then a record number of 183 charges.

The previous high point occurred in 2002, in the immediate aftermath of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City, when some 160 domestic terror charges were filed, according to figures obtained by TRAC.

TRAC noted that analyses suggesting that domestic terror threats had only recently overshadowed the danger of international terrorism were misplaced.

“Government internal case-by-case records indicate that except for three years following the [9-11] attack on the Twin Towers, domestic terrorism prosecutions have outpaced those for international terrorism since federal prosecutors began systematically tracking terrorism cases 25 years ago, TRAC said in its analysis Thursday.

“Over this span of time there have been over 1,000 more domestic terrorism prosecutions than those for international terrorism.”

Concerns over domestic terrorism, however, have grown since 2016 and the election of President Donald Trump, who never rejected—and sometimes appeared to welcome—the fervent support of violent right-wing extremist groups.

The concerns culminated with the storming of the U.S. Capitol by pro-Trump mobs on Jan. 6, leading TRAC to predict that 2021 may “exceed record numbers of domestic terrorism prosecutions in FY 2020 as filings arising out of the Capitol breach continue to climb.”

In February 2021, according to federal internal case-by-case records on prosecutions obtained after successful court litigation by TRAC, there were 57 prosecutions for domestic terrorism filed in the federal district courts.

The majority of these prosecutions—54—were filed in the District of Columbia following the January 6 riot, when somewhere between 800 and 1,000 people fought with police or breached the Capitol. More than 400 people have been charged with at least one crime so far.

In February 2021, “by far the most common lead charge in domestic terrorism cases” was for “knowingly entering or remaining in any restricted building or grounds” at 34 cases, followed by civil disorders with 10 cases, and tampering with a witness, victim or an informant with six cases, according to TRAC.

Researcher Austin Kocher, a faculty fellow with TRAC, says the data “show growing numbers of domestic terrorism prosecutions over the past two years, in particular cases in Washington, D.C., stemming from the Jan. 6 insurrection.

“...Federal prosecutors and judges have their hands full with an unprecedented influx of terrorism cases that may be complex and are, at the same, also highly political and controversial.”

While the number of domestic terror cases is showing a dramatic increase, the number of international terror cases in the U.S. is at “the lowest [point] since before 9/11,” according to the same TRAC report.

Kocher said the increase “challenges us all to rethink where terrorism is really coming from.”

“When it comes to terrorism, the threat is internal, not external,” he said.

Last year, in a report titled *Domestic Terrorism Prosecutions Reach All-Time High in FY 2020*, TRAC found that in the wake of protests surrounding the death of George Floyd at the hands of police, there has been a large jump in federal prosecutions classified as domestic terrorism.

The largest single cohort of cases—78—in FY 2020 were filed in Oregon, in contrast to more recent charges that have been concentrated in Washington, D.C.

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Three Singapore Strait armed robbery incidents in four days (Seatrade Maritime News) By Gary Howard
April 12, 2021

ReCAAP reported that the first incident took place on bulk carrier Trina Oldendorff in the early hours of April 8. Four robbers armed with knives were found in the engine room and struck a crewmember on the head to prevent him calling for assistance. The perpetrators fled, the alarm was raised and crew mustered, with all crew safe and accounted for and no items reported stolen.

The second incident was later in the morning of April 8 at 0550 hrs on the chemical tanker Harrisburg. Two unauthorised persons boarded the ship, but after the alarm was raised and crew mustered, a search found neither the would-be robbers nor any items missing.

The third incident aboard Pantazis L occurred around 0115 hrs on April 11 when four people were seen in the engine room. The alarm was raised a crew mustered, and a search of the ship found that some engine spares had been stolen. The crew were safe and accounted for.

“The ReCAAP ISC is concerned with the continued occurrence of incidents in the Singapore Strait in 2021. A total of 10 incidents were reported during January-April 2021, comprising nine incidents in the eastbound lane of the TSS and one incident in the westbound lane. In 2020, a total of 34 incidents were reported in the Singapore Strait,” said ReCAAP.

The continuation of attacks after the arrest of five perpetrators in the Singapore Strait in February 2021 suggests there are other criminal groups working in the area, said ReCAAP.

“As the perpetrators of these incidents are not arrested, there is a possibility of further incidents in the Singapore Strait. All ships are advised to exercise enhanced vigilance, adopt extra precautionary measures and report all incidents immediately to the nearest coastal State,” said ReCAAP.

Kidnapped Seafarers Released After Month in Captivity in West Africa (The Maritime Executive) April 15, 2021

The fifteen officers and crew kidnapped last month from a chemical tanker sailing in the Gulf of Guinea have been released unharmed. Nine pirates armed with AK47 assault weapons had boarded the Maltese-flagged Davide B on March 11 and taken the Romanian and Philippine nationals from the vessel.

“All crew members are in a relatively good condition given the difficult circumstances they have been under in the last four weeks. They will be receiving medical checks and are being repatriated to their home countries as soon as possible,” said De Poli Shipmanagement owners of the vessel. De Poli declined to discuss the terms of the release only saying in its statement that they “are grateful to the professional advisors, authorities and all those who have helped to resolve this situation for their support throughout this difficult time.”

The 19,800 dwt chemical tanker departed Northern Europe in February and was approximately 220 nautical miles south of Cotonou, Benin inbound at a speed of 10 knots when it reported being approached by a speedboat. The nine armed individuals successfully boarded the vessel and when a Nigerian navy patrol vessel reached the tanker several hours later it reported that only six crew members remained aboard.

They were unharmed and the vessel was escorted to safety. The Dutch news source de Volkskrant reported that the vessel had been scheduled to receive armed guards when it reached 200 miles from the coast. The incident was notable as it was the furthest at sea recorded by the ICC International Maritime Bureau, which tracks security at sea. In its quarterly report issued yesterday, the IMB noted that the incident showed that the pirates operating in the area are well-armed but that they were focusing on the crew whereas in the past they had also hijacked vessels stealing a portion of the cargo.

The Gulf of Guinea accounted for nearly half (43 percent) of all reported piracy incidents in the first three months of 2021, according to the figures from the IMB. Significantly, they also noted that all 40 crew that have been kidnapped in 2021 were taken in the Gulf of Guinea and that the number of kidnappings had nearly doubled from the 22 crew abducted in the first three months of 2020.

“The past weeks have been an extremely difficult period for everyone, in particular for our 15 seafarers and their families,” said Chiara de Poli, CEO of De Poli Shipmanagement. “We admire our crew members for their courage during this period and like to thank their families for their patience and resilience during a time of great uncertainty.”

She noted that since their release the crew had been in contact with their families and that Di Poli was working with local authorities to arrange for their repatriation.

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Gender Based Violence

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Commentary and Perspectives

With sanctions lifted, here's how the Biden administration must go further to engage with ICC (International Federation for Human Rights) April 9, 2021

Facing two lawsuits in the US and many calls by human rights groups, legal experts, bar associations, UN officials and ICC Member States from around the world, the Biden administration lifted Trump's sanctions against the International Criminal Court (ICC) last Friday. FIDH and 28 of its member organisations urge the US to constructively engage with the ICC and demonstrate its commitment to accountability for serious international crimes, including those committed by the most powerful.

The April 2nd reversal of Trump's executive order has been widely welcomed by international civil society and allies - including the EU, the UN Secretary General, and states such as France, Germany and the UK - but this move should be the first of several steps to turn the page on the United States' troubled relationship with the Court. While the US regrettably maintains its opposition to the ICC's jurisdiction over personnel of non-States Parties, our organisations urge the Biden administration to constructively engage with the ICC.

We remind the Biden administration that justice for victims of core international crimes should not be politicised. The ICC is a court of last resort, and if the US desires to resist the investigation into the situation of Afghanistan, they should do so in court, on the basis of its merits—instead of through arm-twisting tactics that promote US exceptionalism. The United States has had twenty years to address the harms caused by its global torture program, but impunity for the crimes suffered by detainees in Afghanistan and CIA blacksites remains unaddressed, the prison-camp at Guantanamo is still open, and the US continues to hold men who have been subjected to torture without charge.

The Court is investigating core international crimes in other situations, most of which are backed by the US as part of their overarching support for international justice and human rights. In the months ahead, we press the US to allow the Prosecutor to continue its investigations without further interference—even when it may affect US allies—resume cooperation with the ICC, and move towards affirmative support for the work of the Court. This will send an unequivocal signal to other states and the World that no one is above the law.

Background

On Friday, 2 April, US President Joe Biden rescinded Executive Order 13928, which imposed economic sanctions and civil and criminal penalties for those who support ICC investigations and prosecutions. The order, enacted by the Trump administration in June 2020, had designated two international civil servants from the ICC, Fatou Bensouda and Phakiso Mochochoko. This action was challenged in a federal court in the Southern District of New York by Open Society Justice Initiative and four law professors, arguing that the executive order violated the plaintiffs' constitutional rights and prevented them from carrying out work in support of international justice. The judge found that the order likely violates the First Amendment, and issued a preliminary injunction. A second lawsuit was filed earlier this year in a federal court in the Northern District of California by four plaintiffs represented by the American Civil Liberties Union.

UK armed forces bill would limit war crimes accountability: UN rights chief (UN News Service) April 12, 2021

In a statement, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, urged Parliament to heed warnings that the proposed new Overseas Operations Bill risks undermining key human rights obligations that lawmakers have previously agreed to.

“As currently drafted, the Bill would make it substantially less likely that UK service members on overseas operations would be held accountable for serious human rights violations amounting to international crimes”, the High Commissioner said.

Shielded from probes The Bill could shield military personnel operating abroad “from due accountability for acts of torture or other serious international crimes”, she maintained.

In its present form, the UN rights chief also said that the legislation potentially put it at odds with the 1949 Geneva Conventions and the Convention against Torture.

And quoting from the UK Government’s background to the Bill, Ms. Bachelet highlighted that the purpose of the Bill was “to provide greater certainty for Service personnel and veterans in relation to claims and potential prosecution for historical events that occurred in the complex environment of armed conflict overseas”.

Raising the bar

In future, prosecutors would have to “have proper regard to the challenging context...in relation to alleged historical incidents that occurred on overseas operations”, the UN High Commissioner continued, while noting that the Government had been in contact with her office, OHCHR, over the issue.

“I appreciate the Government’s engagement with my Office on these issues. I also note that similar concerns have been raised by numerous politicians, NGOs, lawyers and former senior British military officers, as well as by the UN Committee against Torture and a group of UN Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on Torture,” Ms. Bachelet said.

The Bill is now reaching its final stages in the legislative process and will shortly be debated for a third and final time by the House of Lords, the UK’s upper house, where amendments may still be made.

It was sponsored by the Ministry of Defence and was introduced in the House of Commons, the lower house of Parliament.

US Resuming Arms Sales to UAE is Disastrous (Human Rights Watch) By Afrah Nasser
April 15, 2021

United States President Joe Biden called in early February for “ending all American support for offensive operations in Yemen, including relevant arms sales.” At the time, I, like many human rights advocates who have been documenting abuses committed during the armed conflict in Yemen, thought we were finally moving in the right direction after years of work. But now, after a review of arms sales to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Biden administration has backed out of its pledge, announcing it will resume the proposed arms deal with the UAE, a party to the conflict in Yemen.

Despite announcing the withdrawal of most of its ground troops in mid-2019, the UAE has continued its air operations and support for abusive local Yemeni ground forces, according to United Nations investigators. The UAE’s huge influence inside Yemen remains clear. I am regularly overwhelmed by messages from people in southern Yemen telling me about egregious abuses regularly committed by UAE-backed local forces.

In February, Human Rights Watch reported on the agonizing detention of a Yemeni journalist who was first threatened by an official from the UAE and detained and mistreated by UAE-backed forces.

Any re-examination of US arms sales to the UAE should have determined that the risk they could be used to commit laws-of-war violations is high, especially given the evidence that the Saudi and UAE-led coalition have already used US weapons in bombings unlawfully harming civilians and civilian sites in Yemen since the beginning of the war in 2015. Many of those attacks may amount to war crimes.

The UAE’s violations extend beyond Yemen. In Libya, the UAE has conducted unlawful strikes and provided military support to abusive local forces. Human Rights Watch identified an apparently unlawful UAE drone attack that hit a biscuit factory in November 2019, killing 8 civilians and wounding 27.

Resuming arms sales without first ensuring that the UAE is taking meaningful steps towards accountability for previous unlawful attacks just creates a situation in which those violations could happen again, with no one being held responsible. In

resuming these arms sales, the US government once again risks complicity in future violations.

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WORTH READING

Angola, War Crimes and Transitional Justice (The Oxford Handbook on Atrocity Crimes, 2019)

By Joris Wijk

April 15, 2021

After a war of independence against the Portuguese colonizer, Angola has known a civil war from 1975-2002. What could be characterized as a 'proxy cold-war' in the 1970s and 1980s, in the 1990s turned into a 'greed' based war over the control of natural resources. During the war numerous war crimes and arguably also crimes against humanity were committed; an estimated 500.000 to 1 million people died as a consequence of the war, the country was infected with landmines. When a peace agreement was signed in 2002, it included a blanket amnesty for all former warring parties. Based on a literature review and original empirical fieldwork, this chapter describes in particular why and how – in the absence of any accountability mechanisms – alternative strategies to truth seeking, reconciliation, commemoration or memorialization have only to a limited extent been adopted.

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