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NATIONAL CRISIS
Venezuela is plagued by hyperinflation and a humanitarian emergency

INTERNATIONAL LAW
International Criminal Court investigates violence in Burundi

SUSTAINABILITY
China promotes green growth and supports UN goals

Military and political power

In German in E+Z
Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit.
Both language versions
at www.DandC.eu

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Tribune

Focus: Military and political power

Title: Members of the Indonesian Army Special Forces Commandos march during a parade.
Photo: Tatan Syuflana/picture alliance/AP Photo

FOCUS

Military and political power

Imperial reach

After the Arab spring, Egypt's military has gained unprecedented influence in politics and business. Ingy Salama, a journalist, assesses the armed forces' impact on daily life. PAGE 20

Democracy versus authoritarianism

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has a track record of enforcing democratic principles and promoting peace. Nonetheless, problems persist, according to scholar Vladimir Antwi-Danso. In Eritrea, the former liberation movement is in power and has established a totalitarian regime, as a refugee reports. PAGES 22, 24

A logic of its own

Violence has been haunting the DR Congo for decades. The regular army and various rebel militias are involved. Christoph Vogel, a researcher at a Swiss university, explains why peace is hard to bring about. As Dirk Bathe of World Vision elaborates, child soldiers are common in the DRC. PAGES 26, 29

Domestic power

Pakistan's military has far more political clout than its counterparts in India or Bangladesh. Christian Wagner of the SWP think tank told D+C the reasons in an interview. Journalist Edith Koesoemawiria discusses the military's current role in Indonesia, and scholars Siwach Sripokangkul and John Draper analyse the scenario in Thailand. PAGES 31, 30, 33

A paramilitary force?

Frontex is a highly controversial EU agency with the mandate to protect Europe's external borders. Some consider it a paramilitary institution. This perception is distorted, argues Oliver Harry Gerson, a jurist at Passau University. PAGE 34

Peace building by military means

Peace and development are interdependent issues. For this reason, Tinko Weibezahl of Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation wants Germany's Bundeswehr to cooperate closely with civilian development agencies. Julia Maria Egleder of Loyal, the magazine of the association of German reserve soldiers, assesses what role the five African countries' new G5 force will play in Mali – and how it will interact with the UN mission MINUSMA. PAGES 37, 39

OUR VIEW

By force or by consensus

Brute force can be the key to many things – power, money or influence. Those who can do so are often tempted to impose their views or will by violent means. By definition, armed forces are always in a position to exercise force.

In principle, a nation's military is supposed to protect it from foreign enemies. Since World War II, humankind has seen far more military coups than cross-border wars. Africa, Asia and Latin America were affected in particular.

Military dictatorships tend to be oppressive, traumatising citizens long term. Typically, however, they fail to fulfil their promises of progress and prosperity. Eventually, people dare to speak up against repression, and in the long run, political power cannot be enforced only by gun barrels.

Sometimes, armed forces are catalysts of change. During the two periods of military rule in Ghana under Jerry Rawlings, the fight against corruption was paramount, and Rawlings later handed power over to a civilian government voluntarily. In Venezuela, a military coup under Hugo Chávez initiated social reforms to benefit the poorest. However, his party's government failed to diversify the oil-dependent economy, and his successor is now acting in an increasingly despotic manner (see essay p. 13). Libya's first decades under Muammar Gaddafi's rule were marked by big infrastructure projects and investments in health and education. However, he is a good example of military rulers clinging to power for a long time and becoming just as cruel and corrupt as the presidents or kings they have ousted.

Sometimes the armed forces step in to get rid of a dictator and are hailed as saviours. A recent example is Zimbabwe, where the military toppled long-time autocrat Robert Mugabe. The problem is that the armed forces had helped him to stay in power for decades. It remains to be seen whether free and fair elections will now be held as promised.

In recent decades, international peacekeeping efforts have made a difference in many places, including South Sudan, Mali or the DR Congo. Troops from many different countries have been deployed as blue helmets by the UN. To some extent, such interventions shape the attitudes of the participating troops as they develop a deeper understanding of multilateral affairs and the relevance of good governance. In far too many countries, however, soldiers are still prone to acting like marauders who attack the very people they are supposed to protect.

Germany has had bad experiences with militarism and dictatorship. When West Germany set up a new army a decade after the end of the Hitler dictatorship, a new term was coined: soldiers were defined to be "citizens in uniform". This approach was new. It implied that soldiers not only had individual rights but also a duty to uphold the rule of law. German soldiers are not supposed to merely receive commands. If need be, they are expected to disobey orders that breach human rights and constitutional principles.

The German notion of "citizens in uniform" means that troops must not only be trained in the use of weapons. Their responsibilities as citizens matter at least as much. The concept changes the self-perception of armed forces. They do not see themselves as agents of war, but as protectors of peace. Once that is the case, citizens can embrace soldiers as equals and need not fear their guns.

You'll find all contributions of our focus section plus related ones on our website – they'll be compiled in next month's briefing section.

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Debate

Missing transparency

Presidential elections in November have plunged Honduras into a deep and worsening political crisis. Incumbent Juan Orlando Hernández ran once more even though the constitution rules out a second term, and he was confirmed in office in spite of procedural flaws. Human-rights activist Rita Trautmann reckons that people will not accept his claim to power. **PAGE 9**

Tribune

Venezuelan abyss

Last year, things have kept getting worse in Venezuela. Inflation has spun out of control, the regime is acting in an ever more despotic manner, and a severe humanitarian crisis is affecting ever more people. Francine Jácome of the Venezuelan Institute for Social and Political Studies provides an overview. **PAGE 13**

No path to impunity

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is investigating election-related violence in Burundi even though the country's regime has cancelled its ICC membership. As lawyer Darleen Seda elaborates, the essential point is that Burundi was ICC member when the crimes occurred, so quitting the ICC is no path to impunity. **SEITE 15**

Photos: Castillo/picture alliance/AP Photo, Llano/picture-alliance/AP Images

PREVENTIVE ACTION

Employers' strategic advantage

Non-communicable diseases kill 40 million people per year, and more than 80 % of those deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries. Interventions in the workplace can help to prevent such suffering, as the NCD Alliance argues in a recent publication.

By Hans Dembowski

Personal behaviour can have serious health impacts. The reason is that smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity are risk factors that increase the probability of the most important non-communicable diseases, including cardiovascular, respiratory and mental illnesses as well as cancers and diabetes.

A recent "call to action" urges employers in low- and middle-income countries to motivate staff to adopt healthy lifestyles. It was launched by the NCD Alliance in cooperation with the Novartis Foundation. The NCD Alliance is an international umbrella organisation of civil-society initiatives that deal with non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and the Novartis Foundation is the philanthropic offshoot of Novartis, the Swiss-based pharmaceutical giant. The booklet points out that reducing NCD risks serves a company's productivity. Merely offering employees fruit and vegetables or inviting them to physically exercise during brief breaks can make a difference.

According to the NCD Alliance, more than two thirds of all multinational corporations run some kind of workplace health programme. On the other hand, only nine percent of the world population are covered by workplace health programmes. The share is even smaller in developing countries, and a mere one percent in Africa.

The NCD Alliance wants more to happen. The study points out that even informal businesses can adopt sensible approaches and praises the International Labour Organization (ILO) for a programme called WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises). WISE has been adopted in over 20 countries. Its approach is participatory, convening owners of small businesses and addressing various health issues. The idea is not to prevent specific diseases, but to improve an enterprise's health situation in general.

In low- and middle-income countries, most existing workplace health programmes focus on HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis, according to the NCD Alliance. However, employers are said to be becoming increasingly aware of the relevance of NCDs. Mental health, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases are reported to range among their top seven health concerns.

The authors appreciate holistic approaches, and emphasise that reaching out to employees' families and communities is helpful. Ultimately, NCDs are a whole-of-society issue, they argue, so many stakeholders should assume responsibility. Employers, however, are in a strategic position to initiate behavioural change since people spend much time at work and are strongly influenced by their work environment. For obvious reasons, the NCD Alliance welcomes action taken by governments and non-governmental organisations. It also wants donor governments to pay more attention to NCDs.

The publication states that NCDs are not diseases of affluence, but rather "a fast-increasing burden". Obesity, for example, is a global issue, with 1,9 billion people being overweight. That number is twice as high as the number of undernourished people. According to the NCD Alliance, up to 30 % of Africans suffer from hypertension, a condition for heart attacks and strokes. As NCDs cause premature deaths – often after extended periods of illness – they compound problems of poverty and marginalisation.

Today, twice as many people around the world are overweight than are undernourished: Nicaraguan market vendors.

Photo: Ton Koene/Lineair

LINKS

ILO: WISE (Work Improvement in Small Enterprises).
http://www.ilo.org/travail/whatwedo/projects/WCMS_119287/lang--en/index.htm

NCD Alliance and Novartis Foundation: Tackling noncommunicable diseases in workplace settings in low- and middle-income countries.
https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/Tackling%20noncommunicable%20diseases%20in%20workplace%20settings%20in%20LMICs_WEB.pdf

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

Rising to a global health challenge

Civil-society organisations have a role to play in making societies handle non-communicable diseases (NCDs) appropriately. Their activism must contribute to raising awareness, improving access to health care, advocating for action and holding policymakers as well as health-care providers accountable. In low- and middle-income countries the NCD movement is young – and growing. The recently published NCD Civil Society Atlas gives an overview.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) make poor people suffer in particular. They normally do not understand their condition, only become aware of it late and then lack access to relevant services. At the same time, NCDs affect society as a whole and thus require a whole-of-society response. Patients deserve support for adopting lifestyles that reduce the impacts of hypertension or diabetes, for example. Preventive action in terms of healthy diets or physical exercise make sense too, as they make most NCDs less probable.

Various stakeholders from businesses (see main story) to faith-based organisations or government agencies should take interest in the matter. Vibrant civil-society activism helps to make that happen. Accordingly, coalition building is important, argues the NCD Alliance, an international umbrella organisation of more than 50 national and regional NGOs involved in NCD matters.

Late last year, the NCD Alliance published the NCD Civil Society Atlas. It takes stock of recent developments in all world regions, focusing in particular on Asia, Africa and Latin America. The four "As" (advocacy, accountability, awareness and access) are dealt with systematically.

- The section on advocacy includes chapters which discuss public mobilisation for healthy food regulations in Peru, support for national alcohol policy in Nepal and cooperation with state agencies to promote sensible diets in Zanzibar.
- In regard to accountability, benchmarking efforts to track and advance regional NCD action in East Africa, the monitoring of NCD commitments in the Caribbean and shadow reporting on anti-obesity programmes in Brazil are discussed.
- Examples of awareness raising include the creation of a journalists forum in Tanzania, a media campaign in support of Jordan's smoking ban and the training of children, who are affected by NCDs, as peer educators in India.
- Better-access initiatives are assessed in regard to cancer care across the Caribbean and health services in rural Malawi and vulnerable urban communities in Bangladesh.

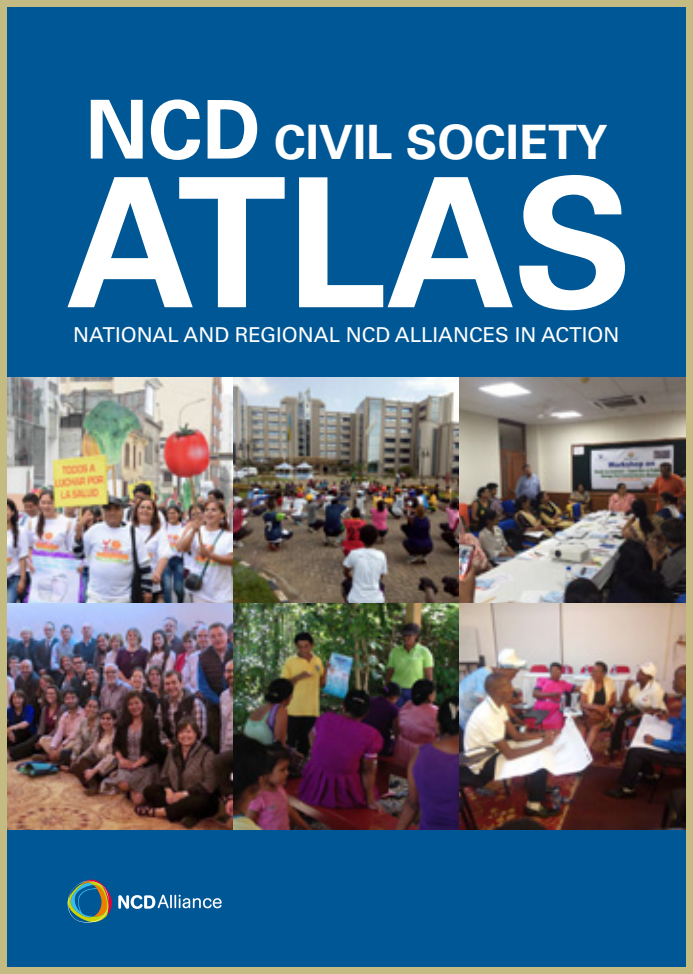
The chapter on advocacy is the longest with 18 chapters, while the shortest (access) has only the three chapters mentioned in the list above.

According to the NCD Alliance, key success factors include meaningful involvement of people with NCDs, sustainable fundraising strategies and joint interventions of several stakeholders. Media outreach is appreciated too.

The authors point out that the NCD movement is young in low- and middle-income countries, and that civil-society organisations there tend to be more active in the fields of advocacy, awareness and access to health care than their counterparts in rich nations, where the public health-care infrastructure is stronger. Activists in developing countries are particularly prone to address policymakers, for example in campaigns for the labelling and deterrent taxation of unhealthy food and beverages. (dem)

LINK

NCD Civil Society Atlas – National and regional NCD alliances in action.
https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/NCDAtlas_Web.pdf



NUTRITION

Big Food causes suffering

A handful of corporate giants like Nestlé, Unilever, Mars and Danone control the global food and drink market. In his latest book, Thomas Kruchem calls this kind of multinationals "Big Food" and argues that they are actually making people sick even though they claim to be promoting a healthy lifestyle.

By Dagmar Wolf

Big Food's core business and main source of income is junk food, industrially manufactured and processed food. The products include lots of "empty calories" from fat and sugar, excessive amounts of salt as well as artificial flavours and colours. With junk-food sales stagnating in industrialised countries, Kruchem says companies are now aggressively marketing their products in emerging and developing nations.

Kruchem accuses the corporate giants of deceiving consumers. Their beguilingly attractive packaging, misleading TV commercials and nutritional claims appeal to parents' desire to raise their children well, but actually encourages people to buy food that makes non-communicable diseases more likely. Advertising suggests processed foods are healthier than food prepared from fresh ingredients at home, which is plainly not true. Big Food also promotes processed food as better tasting, essential to a modern lifestyle and a convenient time-saver. It is often cheaper than fresh foods.

The substantial rise in junk food consumption has dramatic impacts on global health, as Kruchem explains in his book "Am Tropf von Big Food" (Addicted to Big Food). Obesity levels have risen alarmingly. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the number of overweight children has increased more than tenfold in the last 40 years; 124 million 5- to 19-year-olds are obese, and an additional 213 million are overweight. The share of overweight children will continue to rise with the expansion of Big Food.

These children face a range of health risks, the author emphasises. Excess weight has a negative impact on skeletal and muscle development, and dramatically increases a child's susceptibility to diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease as an adult. Obese and overweight children also wrestle with psychological issues, such as low self-esteem, social exclusion and depression.

Big multinational corporations promote unhealthy eating and drinking habits in developing countries: sales stall in New Delhi.

Worldwide, the diabetes rate has nearly quadrupled between 1980 and 2016. Today one in eleven adults is diabetic. Eighty percent of those affected live in developing countries, and the incidence is especially high in emerging markets such as India, China, Mexico and South Africa. According to Kruchem, this pandemic is completely overwhelming society and health-care providers in the countries concerned. Countless people in developing and newly industrialising countries suffer from diabetes-related complications such as cardiovascular disease, strokes and amputations. Patients tend to lack access to medical treatment. Chronically underfunded governmental health systems scarcely have the resources merely to treat acute illnesses.

Kruchem denounces giant corporations for roping international aid organisations (NGOs) into their schemes. In desperate need of funding, many NGOs have agreed to problematic partnerships with the multinationals and end up facing serious conflicts of interest. Food giants seek to reap the benefits of the "good reputation" of organisations such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP), for example. Big Food is also systematically co-opting board seats at the WHO and the FAO in attempts to broaden its influence on global health and nutrition policy, the author says.

Kruchem identifies the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) as one of Big Food's most powerful confederates that has opened the door to promising markets in poor countries. Created in 2002 and funded in part by the Gates Foundation, its mission is to fight malnutrition by focusing on nutrient-enriched food products. This approach has given industry the green light to market junk food enriched with dietary supplements as "healthy".

Kruchem wants all kinds of stakeholders to contribute to a concerted effort to push back against Big food. He sees roles for consumers, civil-society organisations, governments, UN organisations, health-care providers, educational institutions and scientists.

BOOK

Kruchem, T., 2017: Am Tropf von Big Food – Wie die Lebensmittelkonzerne den Süden erobern und arme Menschen krank machen. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. (Addicted to Big Food – How food multinationals are conquering the Global South and making the poor sick.)

Photo: Stefan Mauer/picture-alliance/dpa

FOREIGN POLICY

Paradigm shift in the EU

The European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is currently undergoing a paradigm shift, argues a new research paper published by the German Institute for International and Security Studies (SWP). Instead of stabilising and transforming neighbouring countries and regions, the focus is now on building the EU's own resilience in the face of crises.

By Monika Hellstern

Observers are surprised by the increased attention the CFSP is getting, writes Annegret Bendiek, a researcher at SWP in Berlin, in a recently published research paper. Especially the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has seen major reforms and reform proposals. Internally, efforts to make EU institutions more efficient by gradually replacing the need for unanimity with qualified majority voting are underway.

Bendiek explains the CFSP revival with several political and legal dynamics. They include external factors like:

- the return of war to Europe as Russia annexed Crimea,
- the threat of terrorism and
- the looming US withdrawal from Europe.

The old paradigm was too ambitious, says Bendiek. Established in 1993 by the Maastricht Treaty, the CFSP was supposed to enable Europe to stabilise and transform its neighbours as well as defend its interests in European and global politics. However, the EU did not manage to settle and contain conflicts in its European, Near Eastern and African neighbourhood. In the meantime, observers claim that the CFSP has become an instrument of a few powerful member states.

Building up resilience against internal and external threats is now the overarching CFSP goal. That is spelled out in the EU's new Global Strategy of June 2016. The strategy interprets resilience as the ability to defend the EU against attacks, repair damages and build structures that are less vulnerable to threats. According to Bendiek, this focus on its own security is driving a more conservative approach to foreign and security issues.

Though many observers criticise the strategy's failure to define structures and instruments, efforts to implement the strategy are underway. Matters have been accelerated by the UK's decision to leave the EU. Indeed, the EU is working on boosting policy coherence, as Bendiek writes, in terms of:

- the Security Union,
- the Defence Union and
- EU-NATO cooperation.

While the Security Union and the Defence Union are formally separate, a "comprehensive approach" will be taken to issues that lie at the intersection of domestic and foreign policy. Relevant topics include migration and cyber security, for example. The aspiration is to use military, civilian as well as economic instruments.

The Security Union is mainly driven by the European Commission and aims to deepen European cooperation in security matters. Among other things, the EU has established a counter-terrorism centre at Europol, tightened gun laws and adopted a counter-terrorism directive.

The Defence Union is a project of foreign and defence ministers who want to coordinate member states' defence efforts more closely. For example, the creation of a European Defence Fund is supposed to enable joint investments in research and development.

Effective defence of EU territory has always depended on cooperation with NATO. As Bendiek shows, however, both institutions strive to stabilise other countries, so their actions should complement each other. Additionally, they plan to work together in the defence against cyber attacks.

According to Bendiek, the emerging Security and Defence Union will thus become increasingly powerful, tackling typical domestic issues such as migration, cyber security or counter-terrorism. For example, with its operation EUNAVFOR MED, also known as Sophia, the EU is taking military action against smugglers in order to stop human trafficking and illegal arms transports.

Bendiek recommends four areas for further reform:

1. The EU should adopt a "white book" on security and defence to define European interests and clarify strategic questions.
2. The president of the commission (currently Jean-Claude Juncker) should also be made the top policymaker for foreign policy and security affairs, so the office of the high representative (currently Federica Mogherini) would become redundant.
3. Decisions should be taken by majority voting rather than consensus.
4. The European Parliament should have oversight over the CSFP.

Federica Mogherini, the EU high representative for foreign policy and security affairs, with Jean-Claude Juncker, the commission president.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa

LINK

Bendiek, A., 2017: A paradigm shift in the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy: From transformation to Resilience.
https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2017RP11_bdk.pdf

Gaining from closeness to China

China has been accused of ripping Africa in general – and Malawi in particular – off its resources such as timber and minerals. But the Malawian government argues that the country has benefited a lot from the close ties with China.

Many people criticise that China only wants to exploit African countries' natural resources. But Rejoice Shumba, spokesperson of Malawi's Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintains that this is not true in the case of Malawi. "Natural resources are a source of income. We decide ourselves how much should be sold. Whenever Malawi decides to sell any of its natural resources, it sells to the highest bidder," Shumba says.

The Chinese embassy in Malawi says its interest lies not only in Malawi's natural wealth, but also in development. The embassy states that Malawi has benefited much from China, pointing at the construction of the parliament, Bingu National Stadium, the Karonga-Chitipa road in the northern region, the Bingu Conference Centre and Hotel, the University of Science and Technology and the presidential villas.

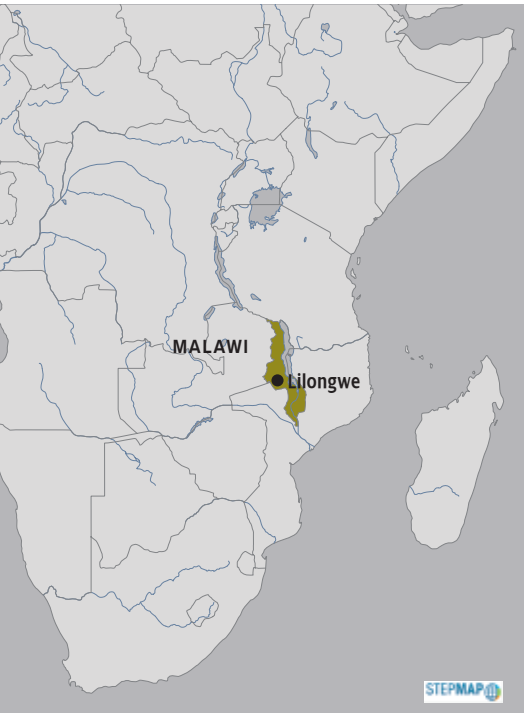
Following a China-Africa summit in South Africa last year, China said its commitment to Africa will be to "implement cooperation in the fields of industrialisation, agricultural modernisation, infrastructure, finance, green development, trade and investment facilitation, poverty reduction and people's welfare, public health, people-to-people exchanges as well as peace and security," with a total of $ 60 billion in financial support in the next three years.

But in Malawi, agriculture, health and education still lag behind despite China's promises. Shumba argues that "there are many variables which affect Malawi's economic development. For instance, Malawi relies heavily on agriculture, but we are hard-hit by climate-change effects."

According to official statistics, in September 2008 – just nine months after Malawi and China started their diplomatic relationship – trade between the two countries accounted for $ 59 million. That was a 120 % increase compared to 2007. The latest figures from the Ministry of Trade indicate that China's trade volume with Malawi has reached $ 500 million since diplomatic ties were established.

In 2016, Malawi imported goods and services worth $ 303 million from China while it exported goods and services worth $ 55 million. However, many Malawians say that importing low-quality products from China has rendered local traders jobless. Others argue that at least poor Malawians can afford to buy these cheap products.

China also gives out loans to Malawi. In 2016, the two states signed an agreement for project financing worth $ 1.79 billion. The projects include a power plant and the construction of a new international airport. They will be financed with loans from Exim Bank of China and implemented by China Gezhouba Group.



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ELECTIONS

No transparency

Honduras' crisis has been escalating after the controversial presidential election in November. Juan Orlando Hernández, the incumbent, was declared the victor even though the constitution does not permit a second term and the election was marred by serious flaws. Before a general strike was announced on 19 January, at least 31 protestors were killed according to Amnesty International.

By Rita Trautmann

The election was controversial even before it took place. The reason was that Hernández ran in spite of the constitution ruling out a second term (see my comment in D+C/E+Z/D+C e-Paper 2017/04, p. 15). He was able to do so because he managed to bring the Supreme Court and the election commission under his control. There no longer are separate branches of government in this Central American country.

In order to prevent Hernández' re-election, the centre-left PINU party and the LIBRE party of Manuel Zelaya, a former president, who was ousted by the military, joined forces. Salvador Nasralla, a former sports reporter, was the candidate of their "alliance against dictatorship".

During the campaign, opportunities were not equal. The oligarchy controls all major media, so even Hernández' critics expected him to win. To everyone's surprise, however, the first projection showed that Nasralla was leading by five percent. Nonetheless, Hernández declared that he had won that night. Nasralla claimed victory too.

The election commission was in a jam. Then its computer system failed, and no more results were announced. Three days later, with the system up and running again, data showed Hernández leading by a small margin. Public frustration was widespread, and rumours spread fast.

According to the ruling party, the votes in rural areas – in particular the region where Hernandez is from – could only be counted late. However, it hardly seems credible that rural votes made the difference. For Hernandez to overcome Nasralla, all citizens of the president's home department would have had to have cast their ballots for him. That was not the case. Forged documents were found soon.

People expressed their anger in peaceful protests, but there was occasional rioting too. The government declared a state of emergency and a curfew. The police and armed forces killed more than 30 persons.

Three weeks after the election, the election commission officially announced that Hernandez had won. The opposition contested the result, but the powerful elite – including the church, the military and business leaders – fast expressed support for Hernández.

Election observers from the EU and the OAS (Organization of American States) noted that the vote counting has been seriously flawed. The OAS proposed a rerun of the election, but Hernández stated that the OAS was interfering in domestic affairs.

The truth is that Honduras does not simply need a new election; the country's democracy needs a comprehensive reboot. Unfortunately, the OAS is unlikely to act in a stringent manner, and some members, including the USA, have actually accepted Hernandez' triumph.

On 27 January, Hernández was sworn in for a second term. The event was marred by huge protests. Opposition leaders had rallied people to express their anger. At the same time, the opposition leaders are considering to forge an alliance against Hernandez in the parliament.

The election and its aftermath have shown that Honduras is neither really independent nor a true democracy. The US administration wants the country to serve as strategically relevant partner in Central America, expecting it to support Washington unconditionally. In this context, it is of minor relevance that the Hernández government is evidently involved in illegal drug trade.

A new trend is that people have been becoming politically more aware in recent weeks. A large share is younger than 30 years, and this generation will keep fighting for a better future.

Juan Orlando Hernández is set to stay president of Honduras.

Photo: Castillo/picture alliance/AP Photo

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DEMOCRACY

The path is been cleared for Hun Sen

Ahead of general elections, the Cambodian government has dissolved the main opposition party CNRP (Cambodian National Rescue Party). The reason is that the opposition had been catching up with the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) under long-term Prime Minister Hun Sen. This is a big blow to democracy in a struggling country.

By Katja Dombrowski

Cambodian politics is quite straightforward: the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) is the ruling party, the prime minister is called Hun Sen, and the opposition is an ambitious but rather hopeless undertaking. It's been this way for decades. In power since 1985, Hun Sen is the world's longest serving prime minister – and he has no plans to give up this position that, apart from power, brought him huge wealth.

Nominally a democracy, Cambodia regularly holds general elections, and the next ones are due in July. "Irregularities" of all kinds are commonplace. This time, however, Hun Sen seemed to fear the opposition more than before. In 2013, the CNRP – a merger of the Sam Rainsy Party and the Human Rights Party – already was a serious competitor of CPP. It got 44.5% of the vote compared to the CPP's 48.8%. Municipal elections yielded a similar result in 2017.

To be on the safe side, Hun Sen's government made the Supreme Court dissolve the CNRP in November on the grounds of plotting a revolution. The main opposition party thus lost all of its elected representatives at the local and national level; 118 of its officials are banned from politics for five years. The party's seats in parliament were distributed to other parties. Senior CNRP members have filed a Supreme Court complaint against the decision, but that is probably just part of the party's death struggle.

Charles Santiago, the chairman of the ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights, called the dissolution of the CNRP "the final nail in the coffin for Cambodian democracy". The European Union considers the ruling to be arbitrary, and as a result, the election "cannot be seen as legitimate". The EU and the USA withdrew their support of the election. Cambodia does not depend on EU and US support however since it enjoys support from other powers as well, including the government's "best friend" and biggest foreign donor China. Beijing immediately pledged more money to fill the gap.

There is little reason for hope that true justice and democracy will prevail soon in the small Southeast Asian country. Kem Sokha, the head of the CNRP, was arrested in September on charges of treason for allegedly conspiring with the USA to overthrow the government (see my blog post of 6 September 2017). He faces up to 30 years in prison. In the aftermath, many senior party members fled the country in fear. After the CNRP dissolution, Kem Sokha said through his lawyer that he was unlikely to seek release from pre-trial detention because he had "no faith" in the country's court system. In a new year's address he called for free and fair elections, national unity and non-violence to solve the political crisis.

The authoritarian regime is cracking down on other critical voices too. Media outlets were shut, among them the English language Cambodia Daily. NGOs are being intimidated and threatened. One of them is the Cambodian Center for Human Rights (CCHR) that Kem Sokha had founded in 2002 "to promote and protect democracy and human rights in Cambodia".

It's been a long and uphill struggle. Even imprisonment is not a new experience for Kem Sokha: he was arrested in December 2005 ahead of senate elections in January 2006 and imprisoned for harming the government. After broad protests, at national and international levels, he was set free ahead of the visit of a high-ranking US diplomat.

Today, Hun Sen's authoritarian rule is more consolidated than ever. He doesn't hide his will to run Cambodia for many more years. He is only 65 years old. That would give him 28 more years if he follows the example of former Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who was forced to hand over the baton at age 93 in November last year (see comment by Henning Melber in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/12, p. 12). For the time being, the path for Hun Sen has been cleared.

Kem Sokha after his release from prison in January 2006. This time, he faces up to 30 years in jail.

Photo: kd

BAD GOVERNANCE

Democratic procedures serve a purpose

In December, Republicans in the US Congress showed the world how not to make tax policy. Even the Financial Times and The Economist, which are not run by left-wing activists, disagreed with their tax-cutting frenzy.

By Hans Dembowski

Just like President Donald Trump himself often does, the tax reform reminds observers of bad governance in much poorer countries than the USA. This legislation will dramatically increase the national debt and exacerbate problems of inequality. Lawmakers did not assess options diligently, but avoided the regular process that would have involved the opposition party and various interest groups. Their secretive arrogance meant that no one could get a clear understanding of the reform impacts. Some tax cuts were temporary, others permanent, and various exemptions will disappear.

Republican leaders pledged absurd things. No, the tax cuts will not pay for themselves by triggering spectacular growth that leads to additional tax revenues. This promise neither worked out when the Reagan administration made it in the 1980s nor when the Bush administration did so 20 years later.

Republicans posed as deficit hawks when Barack Obama was president, but now they have decided to let the national debt grow by up to $ 1.5 trillion in ten years. When Obama took office, the economy was depressed, but they opposed fiscal stimuli. Now that the economy is close to full employment, they feel the need to boost growth.

Company profits are currently quite high, however, and most of that money is being invested in financial assets. There is no reason to believe that, as Republicans claim, yet higher profits due to tax cuts will be used for the job-creating expansion of production capacities. On the other hand, the USA needs public investment in infrastructure, but less tax money means even less scope for funding.

The doublespeak was amazing. During the election campaign last year, Trump claimed that high stock-market indices indicated a dangerous bubble, and that increasingly good employment data were fake news. The trends have not changed, but he and his Republican friends now claim that the data prove that they are doing wonderful work. They have a habit of shifting goalposts, but – apart from taxes – have failed to pass any major legislation.

Competent journalists have pointed out these and many other shortcomings. It is obvious that something is going seriously wrong when the pro-business Financial Times and the Economist disagree profoundly with tax cuts.

Among other things, the Economist bemoaned the Republicans' effort to rush through legislation without appropriate public deliberation: "A robust and factual debate is essential to good policymaking." This aspect cannot be over-emphasised. By its very nature, tax legislation is complex. Loopholes and unintended side effects must be avoided, so it is dangerous to draft reforms in haste. Inviting public responses to draft legislation is a good way to avoid mistakes. Democratic procedures serve a purpose, and using shortcuts and bypasses is an expression of arrogant hubris.

As the Economist also pointed out, "the whiff of self-enrichment does not help". President Trump has unprecedentedly kept his tax returns secret, so one cannot precisely say how the new tax regime will affect his billionaire's wealth. He says it will hurt him, but that is probably a lie. He owns the kind of businesses that benefit from the reform. Moreover, the reduction of the estated tax will one day substantially boost his children's inheritence.

By the way, the reform proposals flew in the face of Trump's campaign promises. The beneficiaries will not be the middle class and even less the people who are suffering the adverse impacts of globalisation.

More money for Barron, Eric, Tiffany and Ivanka Trump.

On the contrary, it is foreseeable that Republicans will now want to cut social-protection spending to rein in the debt.

All summed up, this is the kind of legislation one would expect from an arrogant autocrat in a poor country. The elite will become still more privileged, and personal benefits accrue to the president and his family. Republican legislators paid no attention to what resources the government needs to pay for the services it is supposed to deliver. Even before they passed the tax reform, conservative Senator Orrin Hatch began to argue that they had run out of money to spend on health care for poor children.

Photo: Theiler/picture-alliance/newscom

Letters to the editor

CREATIVE POLICYMAKING

Re.: Reinhard Woytek, letter: "Investment is key to decent work agenda", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/11, p. 12.

The Indian experience of the past three decades shows that market liberalisation indeed facilitates private investments, but that in itself does not stem the social plague of poverty. Innovative approaches are needed, as Reinhard Woytek's letter fails to acknowledge in suggesting that solidarity would only ever amount to subsidising state-owned corporate behemoths. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, ensuring 100 days of paid work at the legal minimum wage for jobless men and women is an example of creative policymaking that made a difference in some of the country's most backward agrarian areas. Also, conditional cash transfers proved useful in Latin America.

I feel compelled to add that one should always take into account all international dimensions in this era of globalisation. Rich nations are known to poach health professionals from the developing world, so would it not be only fair if they assumed responsibility in a spirit of global solidarity to plug gaps thus created? One such step may be to allow developing countries to use generic drugs rather than insisting on pharmaceutical corporations' patented drugs which are often priced at ten times the actual cost and are therefore unaffordable for the citizens of developing countries.

Dr. A.K. Ghosh, Kolkata

DISREGARDED IMPACTS

Re.: Ndongo Samba Sylla: "Why the western model does not work", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/10, p. 24, and Reinhard Woytek, letter: "Investment is key to decent work agenda", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/11, p. 12.

I found the focus section on formal and informal employment most interesting and generally consider the contributions to be inspiring, substantial and worth reading. In particular, I appreciate the elaborations of Ndongo Samba Sylla who managed to assess the economic situation concisely on two pages, spelling out both major labour market challenges as well as the outlines of an alternative development paradigm.

Accordingly, I found the letter to the editor shocking. It is frustrating to see so-called experts coming up again and again with judgments that are not based on much knowledge, if any knowledge at all. I won't deal with every misstatement, but only with the letter's favourable assessment of structural adjustment policies in 1980s and 1990s. The author completely disregards the devastating impacts of those policies.

Let me just quote one African voice on the matter. Moussa Tschangari, the human-rights activist from Niger, stated in the most recent newsletter of medico international: "The greatest challenge is to form a government that is able to stop the decline. (...) That can only be done if one understands how Niger got into this situation. The main reason is the misguided structural policies that destroyed public services in health care, education, food supply and ultimately all other sectors of fundamental relevance."

As for the statement, that foreign investors will create jobs once the free market reigns, his response is: "Don't forget the reforms that structural adjustment was about in the 1980s. Labour laws were changed, the labour market was deregulated, laws on mining, oil exploitation, investments and many other issues were reformed. The conditions were made ever more favourable to investors. Over decades, the country was opened and its market totally liberalised. All doors were opened to investors, but still they didn't come." Every single statement in the letter could be proven wrong like this, but I will stop here.

Eva-Maria Bruchhaus, Cologne

ORIENTAL SLAVE TRADE

Re.: Kehinde Andrews: "We're looking at really big numbers", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2016/11, p. 30, and Hans Dembowski: "An era of darkness", D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/10, p. 6.

I find it striking that debate on reparations only focuses on the western slave trade. The so-called oriental slave trade, which served to recruit troops for Indian sultanates and workers for Arab countries, is never mentioned, even though it is estimated that a large number of Africans were captured and sent east as slaves from the 8th century on. (One source is: Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, eds.: History of East Africa, Oxford: University Press 1963.)

Moreover, the facts in the review of Shashi Tharoor's book about British imperialism in India do seem quite familiar. I'm surprised that Karl Marx is not mentioned at all. He pointed out everything discussed in the article as early as 1853 in the New York Daily Tribune (June 5/issue 3804).

Klaus von Freyhold, Bremen

NATIONAL CRISIS

Venezuela on the brink

In the past year, the crisis in Venezuela has gotten worse across the board. Hyperinflation, trends towards a military dictatorship and a humanitarian emergency dominate the lives of the people – and that has international implications.

By Francine Jácome

Venezuela has been unable to meet all of its international payment obligations since hyperinflation began in October. Politically, it is moving closer and closer to a dictatorship, with the military becoming ever more powerful. The people are suffering a humanitarian crisis due to a shortage of food and medication. Other serious bottlenecks are evident in health care moreover (see my comment in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/07, p. 10).

The situation has international consequences. On the one hand, the number of migrants has risen sharply, and the impact is felt in particular in the border areas near Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil, as well as in other countries in the region. On the other hand, the international community is exerting increased pressure on the government of Nicolás Maduro, which it perceives as a dictatorship that is openly violating human rights. Because of such pressure, parts of the opposition are now negotiating with the government, though it is completely unclear where these talks will lead.

While inflation already stood at over 2,600 % in 2017, it is expected to hit anywhere between 5,000 % and 10,000 % in 2018 if no economic countermeasures are taken. Oil production has declined as a result of poorly maintained facilities and a lack of new investments. The entire sector has virtually collapsed. Since oil makes up about 95 % of the country's exports, the government has fewer and fewer resources at its disposal.

As of November, the government and the state-run oil company PDVSA have been unable to service their external debts on time, if at all. Important international financial institutions consider the situation in Venezuela a partial default and predict that things will get even worse this year.

The sanctions that the US and Canada imposed against public officials and certain transactions have provided the government with a perfect excuse. It calls the measures "economic warfare", painting itself as a victim. A first set of EU sanctions was introduced in January. Travel bans were imposed on seven members of the government, the National Electoral Council, the Supreme Court and the Constituent Assembly and their assets frozen.

The economic crisis has had enormous consequences for the lives of people all over the country. Due to the lack of food and pharmaceuticals, the quality of life has deteriorated dramatically. Then came inflation. The Encovi (Encuesta sobre Condiciones de Vida en Venezuela) survey, conducted by the leading independent universities in Venezuela, found that in 2016, 82 % of all households were poor and 52 % were extremely poor. The survey also revealed the extent of malnutrition: 72 % of respondents reported unwanted weight loss and 30 % claimed to eat merely twice a day or even less.

Moreover, social inequality has sharply increased. All relevant indicators show the extent to which the crisis worsened in 2017. Poverty and malnutrition, particularly among children, are on the rise, and deaths from starvation and medication are increasing.

Accusations of election fraud in all three of last year's elections provide the clearest illustration of the political decline the country has experienced in the past six months. Grave doubts were cast on the democratic legitimacy of those in power. The trouble began with the election of the members of the Constituent Assembly. The opposition did not take part in the election and therefore criticised it as unconstitutional.

MANIPULATED RESULTS

According to the top election authority, over 8 million people cast their ballots in the Constituent Assembly election, but the opposition thinks that number is much smaller. Voter turnout has never been that high, not even during the best days of Hugo Chávez, the previous president. Smartmatic, the company that provided the voting machines and software since 2004, confirmed that the results were manipulated.

The majority of opposition parties took part in the gubernatorial elections on 15 October. However, they complained of a number of irregularities, most of which have been accurately documented. The surprising result was that 18 governorships went to the ruling party and only five to the opposition.

Based on the accusations of election fraud, which also concerned the misuse of a specially issued pro-government ID – Carnet de la Patria – by the ruling Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV), the oppositional alliance Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (MUD) decided not to take part in the December mayoral elections. Consequently, the ruling party took power in the overwhelming majority of municipalities.

The dominance of the governing party, coupled with election fraud, have led to increasing political apathy among the opposition. The opposition leaders who founded the "Soy Venezuela" alliance in September have openly encouraged such disenchantment. However, it seems that the government is strategically trying to undermine trust in the electoral system and divide the opposition.

Latest developments

At the end of January, Venezuela's Constituent Assembly announced presidential elections will be held on 30 April. They were originally set to take place at the end of this year. The Supreme Court excluded the opposition coalition MUD from contesting in the elections. The negotiation process between government and opposition thus looks obsolete.

Another important factor is the conduct of the Constituent Assembly. It has declared itself to have full powers and has assumed important jurisdictions. It has also become an instrument of political persecution, starting with the unlawful removal of the attorney general, who was replaced by a functionary with close ties to the government.

As of the end of 2017, the Assembly's greatest achievement was charging the leaders of the state-run oil company with corruption. Venezuela's current government is indeed considered to be the most corrupt that the country has ever had. The recent allegations may however stem from an internal conflict within the ruling party rather than a genuine desire for justice.

Even though the Constituent Assembly does not officially have the power to legislate, it nevertheless passed "a constitutional law against hate and for peaceful coexistence and tolerance". This law opens the door to suppress opposition voices.

Another factor is the growing role that the military is playing in the most important areas of government. Over 30 % of the cabinet are either active or retired members of the military. The question has been raised whether Venezuela is becoming a new kind of military dictatorship.

The latest example of this trend is the appointment of a general from the Guardia Nacional Bolivariana – a branch of the armed forces – to head both the Ministry of Energy and the PDVSA. He has no knowledge of or experience in the oil business and is not qualified to lead the industry out of its current crisis. But in the power struggle among the ruling elite, he has paved the way for other members of the military to take over the country's most important sector.

Pressure from the international community has set in motion a negotiation process that the government calls a "dialogue". It is being moderated by José Rodríguez Zapatero, the former prime minister of Spain, and Danilo Medina, the president of the Dominican Republic. Upon request from the opposition, other participants include the foreign ministers of Chile and Mexico as well as representatives from Bolivia, Nicaragua and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. According to reports, the agenda will address, among other things, political rights, political prisoners, the economic and social situation, the Constituent Assembly and the Truth Commission.

By mid January, several meetings had taken place, but the negotiating parties were unable to reach an agreement. It seemed extremely doubtful that the parties would agree on economic and political reforms that might lead to a reorganisation of the governing bodies and restore democracy to the country – especially given the humanitarian crisis.

The fundamental question is whether the main cause of the current situation can be traced back to divisions within Venezuelan society between those loyal to the government versus the opposition, or to a small elite that has abused its institutional and military power to keep its hands on the reins, despite the fact that the majority of the people want change.

Children receiving a free meal at a soup kitchen in Caracas funded by the opposition.

Photo: Llano/picture-alliance/AP Images

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INTERNATIONAL LAW

Don't let them off the hook

The International Criminal Court (ICC) has asserted its jurisdiction over crimes committed in member states. It has started investigations of election-related violence in Burundi even though that country hastily cancelled its membership after the crisis when leaders understood they were going to be prosecuted.

By Darleen Seda

On 9 November 2017, a pre-trial chamber of the ICC formally authorised Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda to initiate war-crimes investigations into the situation in Burundi. This is a response to ongoing violence resulting from a constitutional crisis in the small Central-African country. The decision has put the ICC in an unprecedented situation.

Located south of Rwanda with a population of about 10 million, Burundi has been experiencing severe violence since April 2015. The crisis was triggered when President Pierre Nkurunziza announced that he would run for a third term in office in spite of constitutional term limits. Burundi saw widespread demonstrations, and the government's response was a brutal crackdown. According to human-rights groups, government forces killed more that 1,000 people and displaced over 400,000. Masses fled to neighbouring countries.

Allegations of murder, torture, rape, enforced disappearances and persecution caught the attention of the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC. The crimes were allegedly committed by state agents and other groups who were implementing state policies. Apart from the Burundian National Police, some units of the Burundian army and the national intelligence service as well as members of the ruling party's youth wing were also involved in committing these crimes. The youth wing is known as the "Imbonerakure".

ICC Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda issued a first statement on 8 May 2015 and then ran a so-called preliminary examination. In order to formally investigate and charge suspects, the prosecutor needs the ICC's approval, which was issued in the recent decision.

Nkurunziza, who stayed in power after controversial elections, wanted to avoid an ICC case. Therefore, Burundi declared its withdrawal from the Rome Statute, which is the legal basis of the ICC, on 26 October 2016. The withdrawal came to effect a year later. The big question thus is whether the ICC has the authority to investigate and prosecute crimes committed in Burundi.

The Court has jurisdiction over war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. More recently, crimes of aggression have been added. According to the principle of territoriality, this jurisdiction is limited to the territory of its member states. Burundi's government argues that the ICC has lost its authority to investigate and refuses to cooperate with the ICC.

The ICC, which is based in The Hague, disagrees however. It argues that it has juris-

diction over all crimes allegedly committed while Burundi was a member state to the Rome Statute. The ICC view is that, once a state has accepted its jurisdiction, it remains bound for as long as it continues to be a member. Essentially, this jurisdiction runs from the time a state ratifies the Rome Statute to at least one year after a withdrawal notification. The acceptance of such jurisdiction thus remains unaffected even when a state withdraws.

Consequently, the ICC retains authority to investigate and prosecute crimes committed up to and including 26 October 2017 when Burundi officially stopped being a member state. Moreover, the Court stated explicitly that Burundi remains obliged to comply with its decisions and cooperate fully with its investigations.

The decision of the ICC is much welcome. Given the catastrophic political and humanitarian situation in Burundi, the international community cannot stand back and watch the suffering continue. The victims deserve an institution that will – regardless of political implications or special national interests – uphold the ideals of international justice. After all, the ICC was founded with the explicit mandate to end impunity.

That said, the hopes that the investigations alone will be effective are slim. This is probably the reason that the Court emphasised Burundi's obligation to cooperate. It

will certainly be very difficult for Prosecutor Bensouda and her team to gather evidence unless Burundi's government cooperates.

The ICC's Kenyan experience exemplifies the difficulties of non-cooperation. After the post-election violence in 2007/08, current President Uhuru Kenyatta and his deputy William Ruto were both charged with crimes against humanity before the ICC. During the election campaign, both promised to cooperate with the court, but after assuming office, they took a different approach. They started agitating against the ICC. Witnesses were intimidated and withdrew their testimony in later stages. The prosecutor became unable to collect reliable evidence, and both cases collapsed.

Burundi's neighbours are not supporting the ICC. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and his Tanzanian counterpart John Magufuli have condemned the decision by the ICC to commence investigations into Burundi. According to them, the ICC is thus undermining regional peace initiatives. Museveni's statement matters in particular since he chairs the East African Community (EAC), a regional community with six members (Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, South Sudan, Rwanda and Burundi).

Earlier, the African Union (AU) had adopted a non-binding strategy calling for its members to collectively withdraw from the ICC, accusing it of unfairly targeting African leaders. The drive for the collective withdrawal from the Rome Statute waned soon, but the decision to open investigations in Burundi could restore these calls. While some African leaders have personal reasons to fear the court, the vast majority of African people not only appreciate that it has an important role to play, but actually want impunity to end.

In view of such expectations, the ICC has made the right choice. To allow states and their leaders to escape responsibility for past crimes simply by withdrawing from the statute would have been the wrong signal.

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Burundian refugees in Rwanda in 2015.

Photo: Kagire/picture-alliance/AP Photo

SDGS

China's efforts

After the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA, China has seized several opportunities to reaffirm its support to global agreements on sustainable development and climate change. Mainstreaming of green-transition policies into various policy areas is under way in China. Which domestic and global factors explain China's commitment to the sustainable development agenda?

By Berthold Kuhn

China has made significant contributions to the process of advancing the 2030 Agenda and the agreement on the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs). It has overcome its image as a "hardliner in international negotiations" which was attributed to China in the context of the UN climate-change conference in Copenhagen and its staunch support to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. It means that developed countries should take the lead in emission reduction and provide support in terms of finance and technology to developing countries, while developing countries should apply this financial and technological support to mitigate or adapt to climate change. The G20 summit in Hangzhou in 2016 was a landmark event for China's engagement and leadership role with regard to sustainable development.

DOMESTIC FACTORS

The concept of sustainable development intertwines with many concepts and terms that are frequently used in the People's Republic of China, including "ecological civilisation", "green development" and "eco-marxism". The policy of ecological civilisation has been incorporated into the Communist Party of China's (CPC) Charter at the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012. It serves as a reference framework to develop visions of modern ecological socialism and also highlights specific Chinese characteristics of green development. The term green development has been elevated to the rank of a top policy priority in the context of the 13th Five Year Plan (13 FYP) 2016 to 2020. It has been chosen as one of five themes to describe policy priorities, reforms and targets in the field of environmental and climate policies.

China's ecological crisis and growing social disparities have led to a proliferation of concepts addressing the need for redirecting economic policies towards more sustainable production and consumption. The exposure to extreme air pollution and growing knowledge on resource degradation has advanced new visions of growth in China focusing more on sustainable development. Chinese citizens have become increasingly sensitive about health threats from pollution. Journalists covered pollution issues and produced investigative stories about "cancer villages". Environmental issues have made headlines, particularly after January 2013, when air pollution reached record highs in Beijing. Media with international outreach and global index projects, such as the Yale University's Environmental Performance Index, covered China's air, water and soil pollution and its degradation of natural resources.

The widening social gap is another driving factor for China's commitment to the SDGs according to many experts. Chinese provinces display significant disparities in terms of economic performance and social services. Large income disparities exist in particular between the urban and rural residents, between different regions and among the urban and rural residents themselves. Income gaps narrowed after 2000 but the trend has recently stopped.

In China, intergenerational justice is a crucial element of sustainable development. China is facing challenges in the era of population ageing. According to the UN, China is ageing more rapidly than almost any country in recent history. China's de-

Young men enjoying a bicycle ride on the beach in the low-carbon city of Xiamen in South-West China. China is recently experiencing a bicycle and outdoor activity boom.

Photo: Kuhn

pendency ratio for retirees could rise as high as 44 % by 2050.

Migration continues to be a major social challenge. China has gradually introduced a series of insurances and social-protection schemes of which the main pillars are a pension system, a medical-care system and social-assistance schemes targeting elderly and poor people. A large number of migrant workers cannot access social services near their workplace in the cities.

China's aspiration in the field of innovation and technology is another driving factor for its commitment to sustainable development. China aims at avoiding the middle-income trap by moving away from an economy that is based on high polluting industries to more technology-intensive and service-oriented growth. Green growth driven by innovations is a leading theme of China's 13 FYP. Sustainable development is seen as a trend stimulating innovations in the fields of renewable energy, radical resource productivity, green chemistry, industrial ecology, green nanotechnology and others.

China's pro-active urbanisation strategy and the promotion of smart-city development is embedded into government policies but also driven by a dynamic private sector. The smart-city concept is based on technological innovation, in particular in the field of connectivity. In China, smart cities are core elements of digital modernisation strategy. The Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development all have smart-city programmes.

China's engagement in international environmental politics dates back to its first participation in a UN summit in 1972. After the country regained its seat as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the Stockholm conference on the human environment provided an opportunity for the People's Republic to substantiate its claim for a leading role within the UN.

GLOBAL FACTORS

China's success in achieving specific millennium development goals (MDGs) and performing well overall can be seen as an enabling factor for its commitment to the Agenda 2030. The UN's process-oriented approach to the sustainable-development agenda and the elaboration of 169 targets and 232 indicators correspond well with China's own policymaking approach based on target- and indicator-oriented Five Year Plans at central and provincial level. The process-oriented approach of the SDG framework provides China with sufficient time and dialogue opportunities to subsequently integrate international initiatives and commitments into national policy frameworks.

China's south-south cooperation is also an important aspect in its promotion of the SDGs and climate policies. China has traditionally played a leading role in south-south cooperation, mainly in the context of the Group 77, the largest intergovernmental organisation of developing countries in the UN. More recently, China has deployed multilateral initiatives as member of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) group and a regional powerhouse in Asia, including the establishment of the BRICS Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, two new multilateral development banks. China also greatly extended its cooperation with Africa through the Forum for Africa Cooperation. Moreover, it has contributed to integrating perspectives and interests of developing countries into various global agreements.

China's most outstanding foreign-policy initiative is currently the Belt and Road Initiative (see D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2018/01, p. 6). The strategy proposed by President Xi Jinping focuses on China's contribution to connectivity and cooperation with Eurasian countries. The Joint Communique released after the Belt and Road Forum in May 2017 noted that the parties involved are determined to prevent the degradation of the planet, to manage natural resources in an equitable and sustainable manner and to achieve comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development of economy, society and environment.

Finally, China's new outstanding role in promoting sustainable development and climate policies has to be seen in the context of its wider foreign and security policy objectives. The support to agreements on sustainable development and climate policies are opportunities for China to highlight its engagement in global affairs. Such commitments help China to divert attention from sensitive issues, such as protest movements in Hong Kong, the conflict in the South China Sea, the North Korea issue and trade conflicts with other nations.

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LINK
Environmental Performance Index, 2016:
http://epi.yale.edu/

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

At the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015, world leaders adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which includes a set of 17 SDGs to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change by 2030.
Targets and indicators have been set to further define and monitor these universal goals. From a legal perspective, the goals represent soft international norms. However, they still offer a powerful reference framework for national and local policies as well as international cooperation. Some of the SDGs correspond well with climate policy frameworks, in particular goal 13 on "climate action". (bk)

Photo: Dai Kurokawa/picture alliance/dpa

A Mai Mai militiaman in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Currently there are about 120 rebel groups in the country.

Military and political power

A nation's army is a tool of state authority. Its duty is to protect the country from foreign enemies. In many countries, troops can also be deployed as reinforcement of the police to guarantee internal security. Many authoritarian regimes rely on military force to stay in power, suppressing members of the opposition as well as people regarded as criminals. In some countries, the military itself or one of its former leaders runs the government. In many places, the national military is more dangerous than foreign enemies, and in civil wars, regular troops tend to cause similar harm as insurgent militias do. Since World War II, humankind has seen more military coups than cross-border wars. Africa, Asia and Latin America were affected in particular.

Military empire

After the Arab spring, the Egyptian military has gained unprecedented influence. It enjoys the support of many citizens who view the military as a saviour that restored stability and security. The armed forces maintain tight control of politics and the economy, benefiting from financial assistance from Gulf monarchies.

By Ingy Salama

President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's asserts that the share of military-owned enterprises does not exceed two percent of the Egyptian GDP today, but the figure seems too low if one considers the military's many privileges. Precise figures, however, are hard to come by. The military is a "black box", with little information given about its hierarchy, budget and impacts on public life. According to "Law 313", any news about the armed forces can only be published after authorisation granted by the director of the military intelligence.

Traditionally, the armed forces in Egypt are a source of national pride among Egyptians: In 1952, a group of military officers under the leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser – known as the "Free Officers" – overthrew the king and established the republic. Ever since, the armed forces have seen themselves as guardians and leaders of national development (see my essay in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2017/02, p. 23). During his presidency, Nasser (1956-1970) nationalised several enterprises and laid the ground for industrialisation under the custody of the military. The construction of the High Dam at Assuan and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal were vivid examples of the emerging role of the military in domestic politics and economy.

Nasser was succeeded by Anwar el-Sadat (1970-1981), who invited foreign investors in an open-door policy. He reduced the number of military officers in key positions, but nonetheless ensured that the armed forces kept a privileged role in economic affairs. More military-controlled enterprises were established. The idea was that they would provide the armed forces as well as domestic markets with affordable goods.

After Sadat's assassination in 1981, Hosni Mubarak became president. He too was a general, and he preserved the military's role as a leading institution in political and economic life. Mubarak liked to appoint retired military generals in key administrative positions. In 1986, his government exempted the imports of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of State for Military Production from taxation. And in 1997, Mubarak issued a decree that gave the military the right to manage all undeveloped agricultural land.

As before, expanding the military's role in business was considered to be socially responsible because markets would be provided with goods at reasonable prices. Indeed, the military sometimes interfered to alleviate people's suffering. In 2008, for instance, when there was a bread shortage, Mubarak called on the armed forces to increase production in military bakeries.

The upheaval of 2011 initiated another phase in the militarisation of Egypt. Huge demonstrations demanded "bread, freedom and social justice". President Mubarak resigned, and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), a group of top military leaders, took power. The police withdrew from the streets, and people welcomed the soldiers who were deployed visibly in Cairo and other places. While the police were considered to be corrupt servants of the discredited regime, the armed forces were celebrated as guardians of stability. The media, moreover, reported that the military was lending the government substan-

Control of the Suez Canal gives Egypt's armed forces political influence and financial clout.

Photo: picture-alliance/piranhadestination

tial amounts of money in order to sustain the economy.

At the same time, the military refuted any criticism of its business empire. General Mahmoud Nasr, speaking on behalf of the defence ministry, declared in 2012 that the military would "never surrender the military-controlled projects to any other authority". In his view, the projects were not state-owned assets but resulted "from the sweat of the Ministry of Defence and its own special projects".

During the Arab spring, labour unrest rocked Egypt. Sit-ins and strikes were common. The SCAF quelled these strikes. Protesters were dispersed, and many were arrested.

In 2012, Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brothers, who had long been suppressed, was elected president. Nasser had outlawed them, claiming they were involved in an assassination attempt in 1954. The stance of Sadat and Mubarak was the same. Many Muslims Brothers were imprisoned.

In attempted co-optation, the new constitution granted the military legal immunity and protected it from public scrutiny. Morsi's relationship with the military soon became strained, however, when he announced plans to develop the Suez Canal corridor with the intention of turning it into a lucrative industrial area in partnership with India without consultation with the Ministry of Defence. For Egypt's military, the Suez Canal was always of major business interest. It controls the Canal and, as a result, enjoys considerable political influence and financial clout. Accordingly, the armed forces rejected Morsi's plans.

EL-SISI'S RISE TO POWER

In 2013, Morsi was toppled in a bloody military coup, and General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi rose to power as the head of a military junta. Hundreds of Muslim Brothers were killed. In 2014, el-Sisi wore his uniform when he announced he would run for president, and later resigned from the military to campaign as civilian. He won the subsequent election, but the Muslim Brothers, who had won previous Egyptian elections, were barred. On the other hand, Morsi had become increasingly unpopular because he did not alleviate the hardships people were facing, but was seen to subordinate the state to his faith-based organisation. Massive protests had demanded his downfall, and many Egyptians thus appreciate el-Sisi's tough stance towards the Muslim Brothers. The media frames it as the military siding with the people.

Today, el-Sisi's government depends on financial assistance from Gulf countries. The influence of the military has kept growing under his rule. For example, el-Sisi champions two mega-projects with direct military involvement: the expansion of the Suez Canal and the construction of the new capital city. In 2015, his government allowed officers from the military, police and intelligence service to start private security agencies. At the same time, military-owned enterprises remain active in all economic sectors.

Despite the regime's apparent tight control of the country, there seem to be clashes in the deep state. El-Sisi has been purging the intelligence service, so more than 100 officers have been expelled from it. In mid-January, El Sisi dismissed the head of the intelligence service and made his chief of staff, Major Genreal Abbas Kamel, its interim leader.

In the meantime, discontent is growing in other state bodies. El-Sisi has been criticised in public by several military leaders for handing over two islands in the Red Sea to Saudi Arabia and renouncing Egypt's claim to them. Lieutenant General Ahmad Shafik, moreover, has tweeted a strongly worded statement against el-Sisi when Egypt failed to stop Ethiopia's Renaissance Dam upstream on the river Nile. Generally speaking, however, public criticism of the regime has become rare. Egypt's media are not free (see box below).

The el-Sisi regime has built a system of restrictive laws and coercive means, crushing its opponents. Its huge economic empire is exempted from taxes and dominates the public and private sectors at a time of rampant economic crisis. The human-rights situation has kept deteriorating, and the freedoms of speech and expression are restricted.

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Controlled media

Since the ousting of President Mohamed Morsi in Egypt in 2013, the regime of Abdel Fatah el-Sisi has dealt with the media in two ways. On one hand, it formed "media arms" inside the media system by building alliances with the news outlets in Egypt. On the other hand, the regime crushed the critical media by blocking websites and banning programmes that expressed critical views. Many journalists were arrested. The influence of the regime on the media expanded sharply thanks to businessmen with links to the military. For instance, the private TV channel Al-Hayat was taken over by a security company called "Falcon". Falcon's CEO is a former senior military intelligence officer and a former head of the radio and TV regulatory body. That, at least, is what the state-owned Ahram newspaper reported.

ONTV, a popular private TV channel which used to air critical comments against the regime of former President Hosni Mubarak in the 2011 uprising, has been taken over by the billionaire businessman Ahmad Abu-Hashima who is closely connected to President el-Sisi. Abu-Hashima also owned 50 % of a media production company called "Egypt for cinema", producing pro-military films. Then, in a sudden move late December 2017, a newly established company called "Eagle Capital" acquired all his shares. "Eagle Capital" is a private equity fund owned by the General Intelligence Service. According to the World Press Freedom Index 2017, which was compiled by Reporters without Borders, Egypt is one of the countries that give journalists the least scope for independent coverage. Of 180 countries assessed, Egypt ranks 161st. It is marked black on the map of the international non-governmental organisation – just like China, Iran and Saudi Arabia. (isa)

A mixed bag

In West Africa, regional cooperation on military matters has helped to enforce democratic principles and reduce civil strife. In this sense, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is setting examples that are relevant for the entire continent. According to Vladimir Antwi-Danso of the Ghana Armed Forces Command & Staff College, serious challenges persist nonetheless.

Vladimir Antwi-Danso interviewed by Hans Dembowski

ECOWAS was formed as a regional economic organisation, but it became internationally best-known because of its interventions in civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. How did that happen?

Yes, ECOWAS was established in 1975 with the formal aim of promoting economic cooperation among its 15 members, which shared similar socio-economic conditions. The historic trajectories of colonial rule, administrative cultures and language were different, however, so there were hiccups. The regional body was soon confronted with many political crises, ranging from civil war to various military or constitutional coups d'état. This forced ECOWAS to fully embrace the security agenda as a core business. Economic integration cannot thrive amidst instability. In 1989, ECOWAS signed a defence pact and established the regional force ECOMOG – the ECOWAS Monitoring Group – to deal with insurgencies in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The ECOMOG was instrumental in peace enforcement and peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

What were the long term impacts?

Well, the ECOMOG helped in post-conflict reconstruction, contributing to efforts for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). They were also active in both Guinea Bissau and the Republic of Guinea. Collective force was similarly used to restore democracy in cooperation with French troops in Mali after the military coup of 2012. Last year, Gambia's long-serving president Yahya Jammeh finally accepted electoral defeat shortly after ECOWAS started a military intervention. In 2009, ECOWAS had threatened to use the brigade to forcibly remove from power Laurent Gbagbo, who refused to acknowledge that he had lost the presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire in 2009. There too, French troops intervened, and ECOWAS would have supported them had Gbagbo not been apprehended fast.

Democratic norms seem to be more deeply entrenched today in West Africa than in any other African region. Why has ECOWAS been more assertive in this respect than other regional organisations in Africa?

It is true that the democratic credentials are more pronounced in West Africa than in any other part of Africa. This is due, in large part, to a new elite that emerged at the turn of the millennium. These leaders included Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal, John Kufuor in Ghana, Olusegun Obasanjo in Nigeria and Mamadou Tandja in Niger. They carried the torch of democracy high in West Africa, and they cooperated well among one another. To some extent, the West African experience with autocracy and civil strife may have played a role. Obasanjo himself was a former military dictator. There can be no doubt that approaches they took reflected debate in multilateral settings at that time. Unfortunately these leaders did not have the same impact at the pan-African level, where they basically served as reference points.

What is being done to instil a democratic culture within the armed forces of the ECOWAS countries?

Civil-military relations in almost all the ECOWAS countries have been realigned to conform to the norm of civil oversight of the military. The immediate post-independence era saw a situation where civil-military relations was one of co-optation. The military was virtually an adjunct of the ruling parties. Today, the military is subjected to parliamentary oversight. In Ghana, for instance, the military budget is subjected to parliamentary debate and approval. The parliament may summon the minister of defence who must then answer legislators' questions. Public audits are made of defence management and procurement. Gen-

In December 2016, four elected presidents (on the left: Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, on the right: Ernest Bai Koroma of Sierra Leone and John Dramani Mahama of Ghana) told Gambia's autocratic leader Yahya Jammeh (centre) that his time was over. Due to elections, Johnson Sirleaf and Mahama are no longer in office today.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa

erally speaking, the military is designed to be an institution of democratic governance.

Has the mindset of the military top brass changed accordingly?

In West Africa today, the top brass is generally oriented towards the consolidation of democracy. I think that the absence of coup mentality among them has to do with three interlinked forces:

- In international arena, coups are unpopular. Coups used to have patronage from either the East or the West blocs of the Cold War divide. Today, the UN condemns coups. Besides, several of the regional bodies have protocols that prohibit the unlawful change of government. The African Union adopted one in 2001, and ECOWAS did so in 2004.
- Many of the top brass are now highly educated, so their appreciation of the global order has grown, and they understand the need for the consolidation of democracy.
- The military is more engaged in domestic roles such as ensuring security and non-conventional assignments including peacekeeping and engagements in low-intensity conflicts. Their training and orientation reflect that focus.

International organisations emphasise good governance and their peacekeeping missions can be career opportunities – does that mean that the top brass has personal incentives to not topple their own governments?

It is true that peacekeeping has become a source of wealth both for the soldiers and for the participating countries. But I do not see that as the main reason why there is no coup mentality among the top brass of the West African armed forces. After all, troops from authoritarian-rule countries do service as international peacekeepers, so national governance is not a pre-condition for becoming involved in missions.

Would you say that West Africa has learned the lessons of military dictatorship and civil strife?

That would be over-optimistic. It is a mixed bag. The top-brass may have learned some lessons, but I doubt that their insights have taken deep root in society in general. Global dynamics were what drove democratisation in the first place. Under pressure from within and from the international community, especially after the end of the cold war and the demise of communism – and with it, monolithic types of governance – there was a return to civil rule all over Africa. But we are back to square one. Bad governance and corruption are common. The abuse of state resources and institutions is the order of the day. We still witness cronyism, clientelism, exclusivism, vengeance politics, profligacy, vote-rigging et cetera. These are the things that triggered coups in the past.

But the military dictators never solved the problems.

No, the military leaders were soon deeply implicated themselves. The fact is they did not understand Africa's set of problems and did not diagnose them well. They fell victims to the imperatives of the inequitable global division of labour. They were captives to the very ills – corruption especially – which were the basic accusation against civilian rule and which they vowed to uproot.

Is the era of military coups over in West Africa?

It is actually difficult to say emphatically that it is over, since the ingredients for coup-making are all still prevalent – basically the question of bad governance. The big issues are corruption and profligacy, cronyism and imprudence in economic governance. Moreover, conspiratorial coups tend to emanate from middle-level officers and below, not the top brass. So coups are still possible. But I agree that ECOWAS has certainly made it more difficult to stage them – and to prevail in power afterwards. The coup in Mali in 2012 was reversed fast.

To what extent are the armed forces of ECOWAS nations involved in pan-African peacekeeping?

The armed forces of ECOWAS have cooperated on tackling and reducing tensions within their own region, but they are not involved collectively outside West Africa. The African Union (AU) has two overarching mechanisms that were established to strengthen democratic governance and attain peace and security; namely, the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA). ECOWAS has heeded to the call by the AU, as part of the APSA, to establish a Standby Force. True, it was to have been established by 2010. The date was shifted to 2015. It is still yet to be fully established. Some collective exercises have been held by the joint forces of ECOWAS in Nigeria, Benin and Mali, all in preparation towards the full realisation of the AU Standby Force brigade.

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Thousands flee every month

When armed insurgents win a civil war, they tend to establish authoritarian regimes. Eritrea is a depressing example. The military mindset that was shaped in the conflict is still prevalent.

By Diglel Fadi

Eritrea has been a one-party state ever since the liberation forces attained independence 26 years ago. It has never held a presidential election. All the governors, mayors and other political leaders are members of both the military and the party. The regime relies on brute force as well as a vast spying network. It pays supporters inside the country and beyond its borders to surveil dissidents – and anyone who might become a dissident.

Human Rights Watch, the international NGO, reports: "Eritreans are subject to arbitrary arrest and harsh treatment in detention. Eritrea has had no national elections, no legislature, no independent media and no independent non-governmental organisations since 2001. Religious freedom remains severely curtailed."

In 1993, after 30 years of violent conflict (see box, p. 25), Eritrea achieved its independence from neighbouring Ethiopia. Until 1942, Eritrea had been an Italian colony and was run by Britain after the Italian forces were beaten in the 2nd World War. In 1952, it was annexed by Ethiopia, officially as part of a UN-sanctioned federation. Ethiopian governments – whether under emperor Haile Selassie or later under the communist dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam – did their best to suppress the independence movement.

Mengistu was overthrown in 1991. At the time, Isaias Afewerki, the leader of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), was an ally of Meles Zenawi, the leader of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, an alliance of rebel movements that were based in various regions and accepted the idea of Eritrean sovereignty. Eritrea thus became a sovereign state in 1993. Afewerki became its president, and the EPLF became the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ), the nation's only political party.

Meles went on to become Ethiopia's prime minister. Afewerki and Meles later fell out, and a brutal war was waged along the border in the late 1990s. Both sides lost thousands of soldiers. According to estimates, the monetary costs of war amounted to about $ 1 million per day for both countries. Of course, the bloodshed did nothing to reduce poverty, but the related propaganda helped the governments to bolster their power domestically.

Afewerki has declared that the liberation war claimed 65,000 lives of Eritreans and that 16,000 died in the border conflict of the late 1990s. International observers reckon that there were many more Eritrean casualties in both conflicts.

Under Afewerki, a constitution was drafted, but it was never implemented. His regime runs the country as if it were an army. The commanders' mindset was shaped in war. The leaders have done well, but their troops have kept living in poverty.

In 1994, the Afewerki government introduced a compulsory "national service". Its training camp Sawa is an army camp. Every year, 10,000 to 25,000 high-school students are recruited, and they undergo military training in Sawa for a period of six months. For all youngsters, the 12th year of school takes place here. The service has no time limit, however, and the women and men drafted do not know for how long they must serve. Some are not set free before their 50th birthday. Human Rights Watch reckons that "several thousand people" flee from Eritrea every month to escape the national service.

The programme was initially based on the idea that the country needs cheap manpower to build infrastructure. The trainees are forced to build roads, for example. It has long become clear, however, that the service reflects the regime's military ideology. Many Eritreans think that the national service is simply a means to protect the current leaders.

The regime does not tolerate criticism even among its ranks. After the turn of the millennium, a group of 15 politically active

Eritrean refugees rally in Addis Ababa at the AU head office, demanding that President Isaias Afewerki face justice.

Photo: Minasse Wondimu Hailu/picture-alliance/AA

EPLF members expressed their frustration with how the nation was developing. They called for free elections. They are known as the G15, and 11 of them are still in prison. Three have fled to the USA, and one has recanted and rejoined the regime.

The freedom fighters won independence thanks to their determination, unity and patriotism. However, that spirit has long since died, and the regime has lost its credibility. The current Eritrean military includes former freedom fighters as well as Sawa camp trainees. For obvious demographic reasons, the youth trained in Sawa are now the majority. The military no longer has a distinct ideology apart from the desire to stay in power. The youth in its ranks see no hope in the future.

Most Eritreans feel that the victory in the war for freedom has been robbed by the current dictatorial regime. Former freedom fighters feel they have been betrayed by the government which is unwilling to acknowledge their sacrifice and lets them suffer in poverty.

Depressingly, things are not really better in neighbouring Ethiopia, where the human-rights record is bleak and elections have become a joke. In 2015, the ruling party won every single seat in the Ethiopian parliament. The sad truth is that the rebel movements that toppled Mengistu did not liberate the people, but basically empowered their top leaders.

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30 years of guerrilla warfare

Eritrea's independence struggle began as a clandestine movement in the 1950s. The full-blown liberation war officially started in 1961.

A small number of Eritrean students who were living in exile in Cairo created first the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). The main architects of this movement were Woldeab Woldemariam, Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan and Mohamed Adem. Some 300 Eritrean students joined them to launch an armed struggle. The movement was largely a creation by Muslim men who resented the Ethiopian presence in Eritrea. Radio broadcasting from Cairo was designed to reach out to all Eritrean people and to attract the attention of the international community.

The ELF used guerrilla tactics to attack Ethiopian troops. The freedom fighters were based in the bushes and mountains. They had to move constantly to escape the enemy. The ELF neither had advanced military equipment nor proper training.

The freedom fighters resented Ethiopia's emperor Haile Selassie. However, things did not improve when he was overthrown by the Marxist revolutionary Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1974. Mengistu never accepted the Eritrean people's quest for independence. He brutalised Eritrean people and built one of the most feared military forces in Africa. In his eyes, Eritrea would always be a part of Ethiopia.

The Mengistu regime dismantled local factories across Eritrea and ferried the parts to Addis Ababa. Eritrean men and women joined the liberation movement in large numbers. The Soviet Union gave the communist regime military assistance, but its heavy military equipment would sometimes fall in the hands of the freedom fighters. By 1978, the liberation movement was believed to have some 100,000 fighters.

In the late 1970s, however, ideological differences caused trouble within the ELF. Two factions engaged in a bitter struggle. This conflict became known as the "war of siblings". The infighting was traumatic since loyalty is an issue of survival for any clandestine movement. Rebel commanders expect unquestioning obedience from their underlings and are fast to "eliminate" those they suspect to be traitors. In the end, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) split from the ELF in 1981. It proved to be the stronger force in the long run.

During 30 years of armed conflict, the Eritrean women played a key role. Women from various backgrounds had joined the struggle for independence. Some had joined willingly while others had been recruited forcefully from their villages. They became part of the liberation movement by engaging in the battle field. Some were assigned to be trainers, teachers or doctors; some reached key military positions.

Music was of strategic significance for the Eritrean Liberation movement. The EPLF recruited talented musicians who could boost the fighters' morale with patriotic songs and dancing. The EPLF even managed to set up a radio station in the mountains which broadcast information and music.

As the number of fighters increased over the years, the EPLF set up temporary military camps. The training programme lasted from one month to six months, and it included the hard physical work of building trenches while being attacked by the enemies. EPLF fighters still had to move constantly, and they relied heavily on camels. (df)

"The state functions according to its entirely own logic"

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo ("Congo"), military violence has been part of everyday life for years. Apart from the army, there are many other violent actors causing suffering among the people. The presidential election could spark a new conflict. According to the constitution, the election ought to have been held at the end of 2016, but it still has not taken place because the incumbent president, Joseph Kabila, does not want to be voted out. A peaceful solution looks very difficult. Christoph Vogel, who specialises in Congo studies at the University of Zurich, explains current dynamics.

Christoph Vogel interviewed by Sabine Balk

What does the general situation look like at the moment with regard to the military and the rebels in the Congo?

Aside from the specific problems in eastern Congo, which have been smouldering for a long time, the situation in the entire country is very critical at the moment because of the looming presidential election. It is a source of great political tension. Everyone is affected by the uncertainty it is causing. The relevant actors include politicians from both the government and the opposition, as well as others like citizen movements and the Catholic Church, which have always played an important role in the Congo. No one knows what will happen in the next six to 12 months. People keep organising rallies, some of which have been violently suppressed, and there has been no shortage of political intrigue behind the scenes. The result is more and more restlessness among political and military actors at the provincial levels – especially in the historically unstable eastern part of the country.

What is the role of the regular army in the Congo?

From a bird's eye view, it can be described as ambiguous. It's like a chameleon that changes colour to match its environment. There are actually very large differences within the army, partly because of its size, but also because of its heterogeneous composition. Some units and commanders are doing a fantastic job. They have integrity, are patriotic and do not commit any human-rights violations. Then there is the exact opposite. There is also a great deal in between, so it is very difficult to make a general assessment. In statistical terms, it is true that the army is the actor committing the most human-rights violations in the Congo, but it also has more fighters than all armed groups taken together. It is hard to determine the precise number because official rosters are not up to date. Generally speaking, both the army and the police have a large presence in public life in the Congo. As they are usually not paid on time, it is actually quite common to see soldiers moonlighting on the streets. They may be selling vegetables or other goods. They recoup missing or delayed wages in other ways too, for instance by levying real or fake taxes on the streets. Such survival strategies are tolerated by civilians to a certain extent, as long as things remain balanced.

Why are there so many rebel groups in the Congo?

Like in every conflict zone, a lot of factors converge in the Congo. There are a few basic issues. The country is unbelievably large, the largest country by area in sub-Saharan Africa, and the infrastructure is extremely poor, which makes it difficult to access large portions of remote territory. In spite of much talk, the state has not collapsed, however. Its presence in daily life is visible and tangible. Even the smallest villages normally have a police officer, a soldier or some other kind of state official. But the state functions according to its entirely own logic. That is part of the problems that have emerged after decades of misrule and violence. The collapse of the Mobutu regime and external events like the Rwandan genocide and the flight of its perpetrators over the border sowed the seeds of the current situation. Ever since, there has been a cycle of violent mobilisation and moments when the brewing conflict boiled over. For example, the security situation usually deteriorates after elections, such as in 2006 and 2011. In both cases, strong rebel groups emerged that had the power to move beyond local conflicts and also exert pressure on the state. There have been other waves of violence following a similar pattern throughout the past 25 years.

Why has the UN mission, MONUSCO, had so little success thus far?

The UN mission and the broader 'international community' have not found the right answers to the crisis. For instance, most of the demobilisation programmes were well-meant, but they ultimately failed. Sometimes mistakes were made, and sometimes there was a lack of political will. Demobilisation programmes are unbelievably difficult to carry out. Moreover, the government has hastily integrated former rebels into the army, thus creating parallel structures within the military. Some former rebel leaders were made generals, but there was nowhere near enough room for everyone, which meant that many unsatisfied combatants were left behind. The result was great fragmentation of the rebel groups, especially in the past four or five years. Ten years ago, one could identify 20 or 30 groups, today there are about 120.

What do the rebel groups want?

Many of the armed groups are thinking more and more politically, even if their ambitions do not extend beyond the local level. Many are fighting for "customary power", the power of traditional kings

Many armed fighters do not wear standardised uniforms, but they all have weapons: child soldiers in Goma.

and leaders. Ethnic tensions matter too. Local elites often stir them up in political machinations. Generally speaking, politics and the economy are closely interwoven. A narrative has emerged that the rebels in the eastern Congo are primarily interested in the region's commodities. Unfortunately, this fallacy renders it more difficult to understand what is really going on. Advocacy campaigns tend to emphasise the issue of "conflict minerals". The truth is that various generations of combatants have had to finance their wars, and without a doubt they relied in part on mineral resources. But in regions without such resources, the rebels unlocked other sources of revenue, like marihuana cultivation or illegal taxes. The groups have always been pragmatic when it comes to finding ways to finance their operations. Warlords have definitely enriched themselves with raw materials, but Congolese and international entrepreneurs have done so to a far greater extent. Finally, the wars did not start because of minerals in the first place.

How difficult is it to identify the armed groups in the Congo?

Every act of violence and every clash has to be investigated case-by-case. Some occur for very opaque reasons. It is often very difficult to determine which group is responsible. Over the course of more than 25 years, many rebels have learned to operate skilfully behind the scenes. Political puppetmasters have also learned how to pull the strings in these conflicts without always being seen. For 16 years, there have been panels of experts at the UN who do nothing but carefully research who is behind what action, including massacres and illegal operations. I worked on such a panel from 2016 to 2017. Since last year, another project, called the Kivu Security Tracker, is compiling inventories of violence in the eastern Congo and tries to analyse who the drivers are. The project is being led by the New York University-based Congo Research Group.

You have identified 120 rebel groups. How did you go about it?

Because of the large number of groups, it takes a long time to identify them. Nevertheless, it is still easier to say who these groups and their leaders are, and in what regions they operate, than it is to research each group's political ties and goals in great detail. Our latest version of the map for the first time includes brief biographies of every armed group. Unfortunately, the information is still rather superficial. You could conduct an in-depth research project for each of those groups. Still, we review all of our data multiple times and cross-reference it with other sources. The raw data was collected by a team of Congolese researchers operating across North and South Kivu.

Do local people know who is attacking them?

Combatants often cannot be identified by their uniforms, as numerous militias wear the same uniforms as the regular army. The reasons are the various phases of rebel integration into the army, the creation of new groups and the sale of individual uniforms. Of course, if a large group uses relatively new army uniforms and they all look the same, one could assume it is probably an official army unit. Many armed fighters, however, have only an army jacket or pants and otherwise wear civilian clothing. The language that the attackers speak often offers clues as to who they are, given that around 250 different languages are spoken throughout the Congo, not counting dialects. Moreover, there is a variety of factors, including behaviour and organisational structure, that might reveal the combatants' identity. Generally speaking, victims and

Photo: George Mulala/Lineair

witnesses have a pretty good broader sense of who their attackers are – whether, for example, they are a Congolese Mai-Mai militia or Rwandan rebels.

Why are these horrific massacres of civilians taking place?

The worst thing, at this point, is the normalisation of violence. After some 25 years of cyclical civil war, there is at least one entire generation that knows little else besides conflict and violence. That presents an enormous problem for the future. With regard to the massacres, it is important to precisely determine who the victims and the perpetrators are, because there are various motives and dynamics. I have the sense that the number of violent incidents has increased in recent years, but the number of victims has declined in comparison with the larger clashes of the 2000s. At that time, there were large massacres that sometimes claimed the lives of hundreds of civilians. There are fewer such incidents today.

How can the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with help from the international community, get a grip on the situation?

I am convinced that serious demobilisation has to take place. International partners could play an important role in such an operation. A credible reform of the security sector is needed too, though its success would entirely depend on the attitude of the government. It is also very important to demilitarise the conflict, even though illegal imports of weaponry have decreased over the years. However, as of now there are simply too many arms in the country. We need a plan to confiscate and destroy them. Another important issue is the streamlining of reliable land rights and mining concessions et cetera in order to reduce related conflicts. There must also be a way to have a constructive influence on the current political impasse. Unfortunately, the opposition currently does not present a promising alternative to the government either. The diplomatic toolkit has not helped much either – US and EU sanctions, for instance, have had insignificant effects so far. A key question is whether the elections that were recently set for December 2018 will actually take place. Even if it will not be that easy to properly organise them from a technical standpoint, doing so is definitely in the range of the possible. The current political climate, however, does not inspire much overall optimism.

LINK

Kivu Security Tracker:
https://kivusecurity.org

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Camp Bolengo in the Goma region: recurring violence has displaced thousands of people.

Photo: Hartmut Schwarzbach/argus/Lineair

Jobs instead of arms

We must put an end to the exploitation of children as soldiers. First good steps include banning small arms, prosecuting those who conscript children and improving reintegration.

By Dirk Bathe

In the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, World Vision, the international NGO, runs a reintegration programme called "rebound". Each year, the programme supports 80 child soldiers and girls who had been forced into prostitution to join everyday, civilian society again. They receive psycho-social support, attend classes and learn basic vocational skills. At the end, each teenager is given a small sum so they can get started as shoemakers, seamstresses or mechanics. The programme is proving successful and so far no participant has rejoined a militia.

Rehabilitating 80 out of the thousands of child soldiers and sex slaves is only a very small start. And in many areas torn by war and conflict, the number of children conscripted by local militias is actually rising. The international community can help stem the tide by taking some key first steps:

1. Ban the export of small arms. A study co-published by World Vision clearly showed that arms, such as pistols, machine guns and even anti-tank guns and mortars, which are all exported by German companies, find their way to crisis areas via third countries. In 2016, sales of small arms amounted to € 47 million. This is a trifling amount compared to the overall German arms exports totalling around € 7 billion euros. But since child soldiers are generally outfitted with – and trained to use – small arms, a national export ban would be an important statement and could serve as an example for other countries.

2. Prosecute militia leaders. In 2012, Thomas Lubanga, the infamous militia boss from the DR Congo, was sentenced to 14 years in prison. He had been brought before the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague and charged with war crimes, including the use of child soldiers. Unfortunately, trials of this kind – especially those that result in a guilty verdict – are still the exception. They must become the rule. If militia bosses feared prosecution, they would at least reduce the number of child soldiers in their ranks. In December 2017, the ICC ordered millions in reparation payments to the young victims. Compensation is to come from a victims' trust fund and be invested in psychological support and job training to promote rehabilitation.

3. Improve reintegration. Projects like rebound are much too rare, and that is not only true of the DR Congo. While reintegration programmes cannot guarantee children won't be recruited as child soldiers or unskilled workers, they at least help them escape the vicious cycle of poverty and abuse. Children also learn how to talk about their experience, which they can then share with other youngsters toying with the idea of escaping the hunger pangs of daily life by "volunteering" for a militia. They are generally unaware of what awaits them there.

It will take much more than the steps detailed above to stop the insanity of using minors in armed conflict. It would be impossible to simply train all former child soldiers as seamstresses, shoemakers and mechanics. Even if we had the capacity, there would not be enough labour demand in local markets.

Investment in infrastructure and private sector initiatives are desperately needed. Children can only hope for a productive future if they have job opportunities. And any effort at reintegration that cannot offer a positive outlook is doomed to failure.

The exploitation of children as soldiers is big business. The militias use them to plunder villages. Governments in conflict-torn regions save money because they don't have to train and pay as many legitimate solders, so they have little interest in effectively countering the use of child soldiers. Arms exporters and private military organisations also profit from the use of child soldiers.

Insidiously, private "security firms" often recruit former child soldiers to serve as mercenaries. European and US companies actively recruit unemployed ex-child soldiers because they are cheap, come fully trained and have nothing left to lose. They are then deployed in places like Iraq. A comprehensive ban on this type of recruitment would be a good start, but it is still not enough. We need to censure those who exploit child soldiers around the world. We have to ramp up pressure on the governments of the countries these security firms operate in, including the UK and the US. Exporting arms to Africa promotes the export of child soldiers from Africa – and from many other regions torn apart by war.

In the reintegration programme "rebound" of World Vision, former child soldiers receive training to become carpenters.

Photo: World Vision

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High-risk balancing act

The military has always played an important role in Indonesia. It was born in the people's revolt against colonialism, but after independence a coup ushered in three decades of authoritarian rule. Nonetheless, the current government is now involving the armed forces in development-relevant sectors, including agriculture.

By Edith Koesoemawiria

In 1965, General Suharto toppled President Sukarno, the leader of the independence movement, and launched an anti-communist campaign that probably claimed more than 1 million lives and traumatised millions. Human rights were not respected.

A popular uprising led to Suharto's downfall in 1998, and successive governments adopted a "back to the barracks" policy. Unlike the dictator, they did not want to involve the military in domestic affairs. More recently, however, President Joko Widodo – commonly called "Jokowi" – has been taking a different approach. He sees scope for troops contributing to civic activities, including agriculture.

In 2014, soon after his inauguration, Jokowi promised to raise the military budget from one percent to 1.5 % percent of GDP if economic growth was strong enough. Last year, the military budget amounted to about 1.2 % or the equivalent of $ 8.2 billion. However, more money is at the armed forces' disposal since they own many private-sector businesses.

Many Indonesians appreciate Jokowi's new approach to the military. Indeed, restoring self-sufficiency in food production looks like a worthy goal. Others are uncomfortable however. They recall that some in the military and the "babinsa" (non-commissioned officers in villages) served as the long arm of the Suharto regime across the country and carried out orders over-zealously.

The core mandate of the armed forces is to protect the country from external forces. According to Nur Kholis, who heads the national Human Rights Commission, the government can also call on them if it considers internal security to be severely threatened. It is obvious, however, that Indonesia's military personnel are only human and thus prone to mistakes. Put in positions of authority or forced to act under stress, they are just as likely to become abusive as any other persons around the world.

Agriculture is a sensitive economic sector. On some of Indonesia's densely populated islands, the farms are quite small. Moreover, masses of landless rural labourers depend on farm employment. In most agricultural areas, only two harvests per year are possible. Nonetheless, Jokowi's government is pushing for three harvests in the hope of fulfilling his target.

Two years ago, Jokowi gave the military a mandate to oversee agricultural production. This policy could easily backfire. Indeed, tensions were reported from some areas, including Aceh, a province with a history of unrest. In most cases, however, the frictions seem to have been resolved amicably. In some regions, a form of camaraderie was noted between the troops and farmers.

On the upside, Indonesia has not had to import rice for two years, and wheat imports have been reduced considerably. The government is promoting digitalisation and staple crop diversification. Both steps make sense. It would be wrong, however, to insist that farmers grow monocultures, rely on massive fertiliser inputs or buy genetically engineered seed from the US-based corporation Monsanto. It must not be forgotten that Suharto promoted a "green revolution" in the course of which many farmers got ensnared in debt and poverty.

Jokowi's priority is to improve Indonesia's economic outlook. Building infrastructure and food security are essential issues. It is reassuring that the president appears to have a grip on the military. He recently replaced top commander General Gatot Nurmantyo, who had shown political ambitions with air force chief Hadi Tjahjanto. The Air Marshal is known to be reform-oriented. He has spoken out on fighting corruption and making the military more professional.

The new top commander's words must be followed up with action. Rogue soldiers have been known to work illegally for big private-sector companies and sometimes exert violence on behalf of those paymasters. Reports of such misdeeds show that Jokowi is doing a high-risk balancing act.

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President Joko Widodo (centre) wants the military to do more than protect Indonesia from external threats.

Photo: picture-alliance/dpa

"If they are not told to shoot one another, they get along well"

Since 1947, Pakistan has lost four wars against India. Three wars concerned Kashmir and one the independence of Bangladesh. In spite of losing so often, Pakistan's military wields considerable political influence. Christian Wagner of the think tank SWP explains the reasons.

Christian Wagner interviewed by Hans Dembowski

In early January, US President Donald Trump announced his administration would cut military aid for Pakistan, accusing Islamabad of supporting terrorists and duplicity. Was his step wise?

The president's tweet was deeply offensive and has worsened the bilateral relations. His accusation is not new, and it has been straining the US-Pakistani relations for quite some time. It is not clear, however, whether Trump is backing off from Pakistan or whether he is trying to put more pressure on this ally to cooperate more closely with Washington. In turn, Pakistan has announced it will stop sharing intelligence with the USA. Moreover, it may yet block supply routes that US troops in Afghanistan use. Pakistan is also involved in a close partnership with China, and its diplomats have excelled in pitting the two superpowers against one another in the past. If the relations with the USA deteriorate further, however, Pakistan's dependence on China is reducing the government's foreign policy options.

Is it true that Pakistan's military and secret service form a deep state which supports Islamist groups?

I don't think anyone in Pakistan would deny that the military and secret service play a major role in national politics. To what extent the military is still supporting Islamisation is less clear. Since 1947, the military has run the government several times and for several decades. It is a state within the state that sets limits to what policymakers may do. Pakistan is what I would call a "garrison democracy". It lacks civilian control of the armed forces. The parliament does not exercise any oversight. The military's many private-sector companies are Pakistan's biggest business empire. For many years, the armed forces promoted the Islamisation of Pakistan. That was especially true under Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator of the 1970s and 1980s. On the other hand, more Pakistani troops have died fighting the Pakistani Taliban and other insurgent groups than Western nations have lost in Afghanistan. Today, Pakistan's military too considers Islamist terrorism to be the nation's greatest problem.

The armed forces of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh have identical historical roots in Britain's colonial army. However, only in Pakistan does the military constitute a state within the state. Why is this country different?

When India became independent in 1947, the Congress party formed a strong government under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The new constitution was adopted fast and took effect in 1950. Nehru paid attention to only letting civilians serve as ministers of defence, so the principles of civilian leadership and democratic legitimacy was firmly entrenched. Pakistan did not have a strong party like the Congress, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, its independence leader, died soon, in 1948. Pakistan's parties did not manage to agree on a constitution. Controversial issues included how the different ethnic groups would be represented and what the role of the Muslim faith would be in state and so-

Pakistani soldiers parading in front of the tomb of independence leader Mohammed Ali Jinnah in Karachi.

Photo: bscholtterbeck/picture-alliance/AP Foto

ciety. The military took advantage of the confusion, and General Ayub Khan grabbed power in the first coup in 1958.

Immediately after independence, and once more in the 1960s, the Indian Army beat the Pakistani one in Kashmir. In 1971, the country's "eastern wing", which was more than 2000 kilometres away from the western one, became Bangladesh in a bloody civil war. Why was the political influence of Pakistan's military not reduced by those defeats?

In 1947, Islam was the founding principle of Pakistan. However, the founding fathers' vision failed because of the ethnic divergence between the Bengalis in East Pakistan which formed the majority of the population and West Pakistan's political, business and military elite. The first democratic elections were held in 1970, civil war erupted a few months later, and Bangladesh became a new sovereign nation at the end of 1971. From the perspective of West Pakistani leadership, the country had split in two because Islam had not been sufficiently emphasised. Accordingly, the Pakistani government promoted the Muslim faith in the following years. However, ethnic tensions still mark the country. The Punjabis are the largest ethnic group, and the Sindhis, Pashtuns and Balochs compete with them. After the military coup of 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq accelerated Islamisation. In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan turned Pakistan into a front-line state of US foreign policy. Washington and the Gulf monarchies supported the military training of Islamist groups in Pakistan who fought the Red Army in Afghanistan.

Bangladesh too has seen several military coups, and Muhammad Hussain Ershad managed to stay in power for seven years. Nonetheless, Bangladesh's military does not have the kind of entrenched political clout that Pakistan's has. Why is that so?

In Pakistan, the military almost always managed to co-opt one of the major political parties, so it never faced a united civilian opposition. Ershad's rule ended when the two major parties formed an alliance against him. In 1990/91, they rallied and ultimately toppled his military regime. It also matters that Bangladesh is very homogeneous in ethnic terms. More than 90 % of the people speak Bengali. The country – with the exception of the Chittagong Hill Tracts – does not have the kind of ethnic tensions that haunt Pakistan. Moreover, Bangladesh's first constitution emphasised a secular state. Islam was included in the constitution only under the military regimes after 1975. Finally, Bangladesh's relations with India are much better, not least because the Indian invasion helped the Bengali insurgents to defeat the Pakistan Army in December 1972.

In 2014, Mohammed Humayun Kabir wrote in D+C/E+Z (January edition, p. 20) that the many peacekeeping missions that Bangladeshi troops take part in are relevant too. He mentioned several reasons. One was that troops adopt international ideas of good governance on those missions. Another one was that peace missions mean money and career opportunities, so the generals don't want domestic problems to get in their way. However, troops from Pakistan also participate in peacekeeping missions, and that does not seem to have an impact on their leaders' political attitudes.

That is correct. Pakistan's military, unlike its Bangladeshi counterpart, sees itself as a crucial political player. Accordingly, the incentives of peacekeeping missions do not change the officers' mindset. It is actually quite striking that India commits troops to peace missions too, and the blue helmets from all three countries normally cooperate very well when they are deployed together. If they're not told to shoot one another, they get along perfectly well in foreign countries.

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Decades of military rule

Since 1947, Pakistan has been run by military dictators three times. All three served as president for many years. Sometimes they used flimsy elections or bizarre constitutional clauses to hide the autocratic nature of their rule.

Muhammed Ayub Khan rose to power in 1958. He suspended the constitution which had been adopted two years earlier and ensured that the new one gave him ample powers. He was confirmed in office as president by an electoral college of 80,000 members who were merely asked whether they trusted him. He made Pakistan a military ally of the USA. In the mid-1960s, however, the Soviet Union brokered a ceasefire in the short war he had waged against India. Khan had to resign in 1969 because of protests in West Pakistan as well as the growing independence movement in what was then East Pakistan and would soon become Bangladesh.

In 1977, Muhamed Zia-ul-Haq grabbed power in a coup. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the ousted prime minister, was sentenced to death and executed in 1979. Zia-ul-Haq promoted Islamisation, turned against Muslim minorities such as the Ahmadis or the Shias, and supported the Mujaheddin who were fighting Soviet troops in Afghanistan. He aligned the country more closely to Washington, but also pursued a nuclear programme. Pakistan detonated nuclear test devices in 1998, ten years after Zia-ul-Haq had died in a plane crash.

Pervez Musharraf toppled Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1999 just when Sharif had decided to fire him as top army leader after a failed military campaign in the Kargil region of Kashmir. Musharraf held onto power until 2008. US President George W. Bush initially considered him a close ally in the fight against the Taliban, but later the US administration became more skeptical because Pakistan's military secret service was obviously still in touch with some Islamist militant outfits.

Today, Pakistan has fallen behind Bangladesh in terms of human-development indicators. Its military, however, is much stronger – both in terms of equipment and political influence. (D+C/E+Z)

The monarchy's bodyguard

Since its transformation from an absolute into a constitutional monarchy in 1932, Thailand has witnessed 13 successful coups. The latest was in May 2014 and has severely limited Thais' freedoms and liberties. The army sees itself as the guardian of the monarchy. It lacks civilian control – and its rule is not set to end any time soon.

By Siwach Sripokangkul and John Draper

Two and a half years ago, the Thai army overthrew the elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra in an unbloody coup (see comment by Katja Dombrowski in D+C/E+Z e-Paper 2015/05, p. 40). Since then, military dictator General Prayut Chan-ocha has been clinging to power. Under his rule, hundreds of civilians have been tried in military courts. The junta has steamrollered any opposition, recently ratified a constitution that creates a majority-appointed senate and is working on a 20-year plan involving permanent military oversight.

Just like the militaries of countries such as Pakistan and Egypt, the Thai army regards itself as the guardian of sovereignty and guide for the implementation of what it calls democracy. The difference, however, is that the Thai military is also the bodyguard of the Thai monarchy. The Royal Thai Army was established in the 1890s under the absolute monarch King Chulalongkorn to protect the throne which, at the time, was synonymous with the state.

In addition, the monarch is by definition Buddhist. He is considered to be a "chakravartin", a Buddhist world conqueror. This is symbolised by the palanquin of the Emerald Buddha, which resides in the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

The absolute monarch was overthrown in 1932. The same year saw the adoption of Thailand's first constitution, according to which the military served the state. The sovereign now was a constitutional monarch who symbolised rather than ruled the country. However, the feudal ideology of the military directly serving the monarch re-emerged under Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat (1957-1963), a military dictator. To combat communism, he linked the ideologies of statism and of the sovereign-as-deity. The notions of the nation, the monarchy and religion as interwoven parts of a trinity define contemporary Thailand.

Thailand's King Maha Vajiralongkorn (center) and honour guard march at a ceremony for late King Bhumibol Adulyadej in October 2017.

Photo: picture alliance/ZUMA Press

The Thai military academy system emphasises that the King's Guard and the Queen's Guard are the elite units from which Thailand's top commanders are drawn. Members of these units rise to important positions in the country and assume they are exclusively the King's and Queen's soldiers. Consequently, they believe that they are not subject to civilian control. Indeed, Lieutenant Colonel Sanyalak Tangsiri, who was involved in the 2006 putsch, later said: "We are ready to do what the King asks. We are soldiers who belong to His Majesty."

This attitude means that Thai military-civil relations are essentially paternalistic. The military retains the option to overthrow civilian rule for reasons of national security. It sees itself as a political force in its own right, and that view was institutionalised in the 2008 Internal Security Act. The military has oversight over the National Anti-Corruption Commission, the Department of Special Investigation and the Anti-Money Laundering Office (AMLO). General Prayut wrote its "Twelve Core Values of Thai People", which now pervade the education system. Indeed, soldiers now train primary school children – in military uniforms – with the goal of instilling discipline and obedience.

Ultimately, the Thai military operates as a feudal empire within a quasi-imperial state according to its own ideology. Well-funded and capable of ample patronage, it grants itself a higher budget following every coup, manages its own financial affairs, and even runs businesses, all without civilian oversight. It retains its own television channels and radio stations, serving as propaganda outlets. At present, ultra-nationalists want the military to start its own political party. Thailand's perpetual military deep state is unlikely to exit the stage any time soon.

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Coast guard or paramilitary force?

Today, global trouble spots are close to the "safe haven" of Europe. Migratory pressures have grown with masses of people arriving from war zones and disaster areas. The irregular immigrants take tortuous routes, either through Mediterranean countries or across the EU's continental borders. These routes cannot be effectively policed, so an agency was created in 2005 for the management of operational cooperation at the external borders of the EU. It is called Frontex and is most controversial.

By Oliver Harry Gerson

Frontex was not originally intended to operate as a border police force; it was established as an "Agency of the European Union", a body governed by European public law. Its primary task is to coordinate the operations of EU member states' security agencies on the EU's external borders. Frontex operates "on water, on land and in the air". It forms task forces and organises large-scale joint operations. It also helps member states return irregular immigrants.

In September 2015, the EU heads of state and government wanted the external borders to be policed more intensively. Accordingly, Frontex was given more operational powers, and, despite stagnating refugee numbers, its budget was steadily increased, rising from € 86 million in 2013 to € 254 million in 2016. Another consequence of member-state solidarity was the adoption of Regulation (EU) 2016/1624 of 14.09.2016. It established a "European Border and Coast Guard Agency" with the same short name as the agency it superseded: Frontex.

Many refugees reach Europe from Africa by crossing the Mediterranean. One of Frontex's tasks is to prevent them from doing so.

Photo: Amoruso/picture alliance/Pacific Press Agency

The "old" Frontex often came under fire from critics. Human-rights and aid organisations accused it of violating human rights with its push-back operations, some of which were said to breach international refugee law. There is a serious conflict of interests – refugee protection versus border protection. This tragic tension is evident on the Mediterranean Sea.

As early as 2013, the Council of Europe spoke of human-rights violations by Frontex and noted problems of transparency regarding operations and activities. It also found a lack of democratic oversight, for example, with regard to the agreements concerning border controls, interceptions and returns that Frontex negotiates with third countries.

Some civil-society groups even refer to Frontex as "Europe's paramilitary arm" against migration from Africa.

That last criticism in particular is hardly accurate. First of all, it is linguistically inappropriate. The negative connotations of the word "paramilitary" make it a term that should be used only with extreme care: "paramilitary" does not automatically mean "illegal". Second, it ignores the agency's institutional incorporation in EU law and international standards. Frontex only rudimentarily resembles a European border police force and certainly does not create a serious European military force. This is the case, because the EU is not a nation state with an integrated and fully harmonised policy on security and defence.

Member states still have the responsibility to secure their own borders, so Frontex is merely a kind of law enforcement agency that is implementing the EU's limited powers in the field of border policy. Moreover, the agency's incorporation in the institutional and legal structure of the EU runs counter to the presumptuous claim to irregular power that the word "paramilitary" suggests. It is true, nonetheless, that Frontex has undergone considerable change in recent years (see box, p. 35).

GREATER OPERATIONAL POWERS

Frontex's operational powers have been steadily increased. The agency now carries out substantive police duties and has its own physical resources – including boats,

Securing EU borders

The full name of the agency tasked with securing the external borders of the European Union is "European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union". It is commonly referred to as Frontex (from the French "frontières extérieurs" = external borders). The agency carries out multinational control and surveillance missions at sea, on land and at major airports. In recent years, a major focus of its work has been conducting sea patrols in the Mediterranean. The tasks performed by Frontex have changed since the agency was created in 2005. In particular, its powers and capabilities have been extended.

OLD MODEL: ANALYSIS, COORDINATION, SUPPORT

Originally, the agency's activities were almost entirely confined to analysis, coordination and support. With regard to illegal migration and cross-border crime, Frontex's mandate was to gather information, evaluate data, assess risks and help prevent anticipated offences.

Frontex was not a police force in an institutional sense as it was not part of the executive arm of government. The agency's role was confined to coordinating the activities of member states' border guards. The creation of rapidly deployable border force units (Rapid Border Intervention Teams – RABITs) enabled operations to be carried out swiftly. From that point onwards, Frontex was not only active at sea but also involved in surveillance work at airports and along internal borders. It was additionally given the task of supporting EU member states' return operations for irregular immigrants.

NEW MODEL: EUROPEAN BORDER AND COAST GUARD

At the end of 2015, the EU member states agreed to strengthen the agency both financially and in terms of staff. That agreement was followed by the new "Frontex Regulation", which formally established the updated agency. A rapid reaction pool was created, enabling Frontex to deploy as many as 1,500 border guards. The new "European Border and Coast Guard Agency" includes the "old" Frontex plus the national authorities responsible for border management, including coast guards to the extent that they carry out border control tasks. The new Frontex remains the same legal person as the old one, with full continuity in all its activities and procedures.

The agency's main tasks continue to be:

- the development of technical and operational strategies for implementing integrated border management,
- intervention in situations where urgent action is required at external borders,
- technical and operational assistance with search and rescue operations at sea and
- organising return operations.

In emergency situations, it can require member states to cooperate. In exceptional cases, it can take action without a member state's request. The tasks also include carrying out vulnerability assessments for external borders and optimising risk analysis. In this context, it is independent in terms of technical and operational matters. It enjoys legal, administrative and financial autonomy. However, the European Commission and the EU member states exercise supervision on the agency through representatives on a management board that administers Frontex's affairs. (ohg)

The British coast guard vessel HMC Protector – pictured in the port of Catania in Sicily – supported Frontex operations in 2017.

Photo: Nietfeld/picture-alliance/dpa

helicopters and staff – to support national border patrols. But the criticism of paramilitarism would only be fair if the agency conducted operations without sufficient authorisation. That perception is misleading. The new Frontex Regulation instead gives the agency a very broad mandate.

Frontex has been legally mandated to support border management. But even with the new Frontex, the main responsibility for guarding the EU's external borders continues to reside with the member states. At the same time, the agency is accountable to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. Thus, it does not operate in a legal vacuum. On the contrary, multiple legislation applies in both geographical and legal terms to border management and the associated task of picking up refugees and other irregular migrants.

People from third countries have no fundamental "claim" to enter the EU. However, this does not mean that immigrating nationals of third countries have no rights at all. Border guards are required to observe minimum standards and must comply with international law. The situation at sea is covered by various regimes of international law (for example, the International Law of the Sea and the Geneva Convention) as well as European law (EU legislation, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and secondary legislation such as Regulation [EU] No. 656/2014 [External Sea Border Regulation]). Moreover, European fundamental rights and the European Convention on Human Rights apply in full. Because of the acknowledged extraterritorial effects of human-rights law, operational units cannot offload their responsibilities even outside EU territory.

That Frontex has a clear legal mandate, however, has not solved all problems – far from it. The main problem is that the EU only really addresses the symptoms and not the causes of migration. For good reason, Amnesty International highlights the "humanitarian catastrophe" in the Mediterranean, where thousands of people a year drown in the attempt to reach an EU country in unseaworthy boats from North Africa or Turkey. Frontex is neither the cause of this tragedy, nor is it the cure.

OUTLOOK

It must remain possible for people to flee to Europe and find asylum there. But because a united Europe is possible only if the security of its citizens is guaranteed, the EU's external borders also need to be managed and secured in line with the rule of law.

The continent's image is suffering, either way. Is it a "Europe without borders" or a "Fortress Europe"? For a long time, Frontex's opaque public relations helped to shape that awkward latter impression. At the same time, the old problem still persists for the new Frontex: a coast guard service – whether paramilitary or not – ultimately addresses only the symptoms, not the cause of refugee movements. In any case, furnishing Frontex with even more operational powers should be viewed with scepticism. Concentrating too much power in an agency's hands without mechanisms of oversight risks opening doors to self-authorisation.

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Joint efforts lead to success

Security and development are the two, mutually interdependent foundations of lasting peace. Security requires successful development, and development is impossible without security. This relationship should be reflected in the coordination of civilian and military approaches to solving international crises.

By Tinko Weibezahl

In Germany, there is a notable lack of trust between the Bundeswehr and civilian development actors. That is partly due to German history. After the Nazi dictatorship, it was impossible to view German military involvement abroad in a positive light. Public perceptions were shaped by Nazi militarism and the atrocities committed in Germany's name. Furthermore, during the Cold War, the Bundeswehr's responsibilities were limited to national defence.

For many decades, moreover, international-development agencies paid little attention to security issues. There were rather few points of contact between the military and aid organisations. To some extent, both sides are still working alongside one another, rather than with one another. The problem is exacerbated by mutual resentment, which does not originate in the target country, but is rooted in the competition of Germany's Federal Ministry for Defence on the one side and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development on the other. Both sides tend to disparage the expertise of the other, especially when it comes to the federal budget. This tension is currently on display in discussions concerning the NATO goal of each country devoting two percent of its gross domestic product to defence and the UN target of committing 0.7 % of gross national income to official development assistance.

The Bundeswehr is a model case of a democratically controlled military. The Federal Government is a civilian administration. It commands the armed forces. Any military operation abroad must be authorised by the Parliament and justified to the public on a case-by-case basis. The military is a tool at policymakers' disposal, not a constituency that the government caters to. At the same time, German policymakers who deal with foreign, security and defence affairs appreciate the Bundeswehr's expertise and advice.

Since the end of the Cold War, Germany has been assuming more responsibility for maintaining international security. Public discourse is increasingly shaped by the rising numbers of refugees (particularly from Africa), the USA's partial retreat from global interventions and the perception of the number of armed conflicts increasing internationally. Two decades have passed since the Bundeswehr carried out its first foreign mission in Kosovo. Nonetheless, Germans still seem unaware of the need for their country to take on a new role on the world stage.

INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Shortly after taking office in December 2013, Ursula von der Leyen, the federal defence minister, spoke out in favour of a stronger German military presence in Africa. The reasons were primarily altruistic. She said in an interview: "From a purely humanitarian perspective, we can't look away when murder and rape occur daily." Almost simultaneously, at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, Joachim Gauck, then federal president, argued forcefully that Germany must assume more military responsibility in conflict regions. His views were endorsed by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who was foreign minister at the time and has since succeeded Gauck as head of state.

Their stance earned praise from international partners, but the reaction at home was mixed. Politicians and scholars responded positively, but the majority of the people are opposed to additional Bundeswehr missions. In a survey of January 2014, 45 % of respondents said that the German military was already doing too much and 30 % thought that the current level of engagement was "just right". At the time of the survey, some 5,000 German soldiers were deployed abroad, the overwhelming majority of them in Afghanistan. The current number is slightly over 3,500.

Justifying military operations as being in the nation's own security or economic self-interest is not well received in Germany. Former Federal President Horst Köhler had to resign after saying on a flight back from Afghanistan that, in emergencies, "military deployments are necessary to protect our interests – for example with regard to trade routes". This statement unleashed a storm of protest.

CRISES ARE THREATENING EUROPE

To an ever growing extent, European security is indirectly being threatened by the civil wars and crises that haunt Africa, for example. Refugee movements lead to illegal migration. Terrorism and organised crime find safe havens in areas where states have failed. It is in Europe's self-interest to protecting Africa's natural resources and the livelihoods of the people there. The multifaceted challenges cannot be tackled in isolated measures and the response cannot be primarily of a military nature. Developmental, diplomatic and military efforts must be designed and implemented in a coherent and coordinated fashion.

This is the lesson of the past ten years, and it has shaped Germany's responses to recent international crises to a considerable extent. In Mali, for instance, development measures are being used to supplement the EU's military training mission (EUTM Mali), in which German soldiers are playing a significant role (please note comment by Julia Egleder, p. 39). The UN stabilisation mission MINUSMA combines the services of soldiers, police and civilians. While the Bundeswehr is contributing to the stabilisation of the country and building capacity in the armed forces, Germany's development agencies are providing support for state structures all the way down to the municipal level. Moreover, they are helping to improve the people's prospects. In Berlin, the relevant ministries are continuously coordinating their activities.

The role of the military in up-to-date security policy must not be limited to deploying soldiers for stabilisation or intervention missions. It must extend beyond military capabilities. The expertise and relationships that the Bundeswehr has built over decades of collaboration with security

Soldiers of Niger attend a seminar held by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Niamey.

forces in developing countries should inform policymaking in foreign, security and development affairs. An interdisciplinary approach is needed. We need long-term cooperation instead of the silo-mentality that is still all too prevalent in Germany's military, government agencies and non-governmental organisations.

DESTABILISING SECURITY FORCES

In many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the security sector is not fulfilling its duties. As a result, states can neither enforce the rule of law nor guarantee security. The lack of fully operational and democratically-controlled state power is painfully obvious. Accordingly, people often do not trust their country's security forces, perceiving them as a threat, rather than a stabilising factor. Depending on country and region, crimes committed by the armed forces range from corruption and plundering to the abuse of human rights and even outright acts of terror. All too often, the political elite uses the security forces to further personal or political goals. Such behaviour thwarts economic development.

For a long time, German organisations considered development cooperation with security forces virtually impossible. The truth, however, is that well-considered institutional cooperation can contribute to significantly improving matters – both with regard to the security forces themselves and their relationship with the general public. This is especially so when cooperation is not limited to strictly military issues. Therefore, the Bundeswehr and civilian German agencies have been involved in actively supporting security-sector reforms in various countries.

Instruments of choice include advice on the wording of laws concerning military matters and training for soldiers, police and officers for example. It is necessary to raise awareness of the role of security forces within a democracy and the role of women in the army and police. Members of the security forces must become "citizens in uniform", with an emphasis on the first term. Everyone benefits when Germany's Bundeswehr, government agencies, foundations and non-governmental organisations cooperate closely on these matters.

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Photo: Weibezahl

Pulling together

Last year, five African countries – Burkina Faso, Niger, Mauretania, Mali and Chad – partnered to form the G5 Sahel Joint Force. It is designed to join the other military missions operating in Mali to promote regional peace and stability. Coordination among various stakeholders and a shared strategy are needed.

By Julia Maria Egleder

In November 2017, the G5 Sahel Joint Force sent out its first deployment of soldiers to patrol the borders of Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Up to 5,000 G5 Force soldiers will ultimately counter the spread of Islamic terror in hard-to-control desert areas.

In itself, the new peacekeeping force is actually a good idea. More than a dozen Islamist organisations, including Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Ansar Dine, are active in Mali and neighbouring countries. Group affiliations tend to be fluid, and the Sahara desert offers extremists the unlimited freedom of a vast and uncontrolled space. Compounding problems, the Islamist extremists often join forces with criminal networks of human traffickers and drug smugglers in the desert.

The security situation became more complicated five years ago when Islamist-backed nomadic Tuareg rebels from northern Mali seized large swaths of the country. The French military intervened, halting the rebels before they could capture Mali's capital city, Bamako. A tentative peace accord has since been reached between the Mali government and the powerful Tuareg groups, but the situation remains unstable. Militant groups are splintering, with members joining terrorist outfits or crime organisations.

Numerous international forces are involved in rising to the region's security challenges. With the help of drones, fighter planes, helicopters and cargo planes, roughly 4,000 French soldiers have taken part in the "Barkhane" counter-terrorism mission. France strongly backs the G5 Joint Force. Whether the two counter-terrorism missions will really take the coordinated approach that success depends on, however, remains to be seen.

The track record of military cooperation is not reassuring. Along with French troops, UN blue helmets are on the ground as part of the MINUSMA peacekeeping mission. The 11,299 police officers and soldiers from 53 countries are supposed to:

- monitor the peace between the government and the rebels,
- prevent a resurgence of the violence and
- protect civilians.

Germany's Bundeswehr is contributing some 900 soldiers to the mission, primarily to provide surveillance in the Gao region of northern Mali. But even inside MINUSMA, communication is erratic and flawed at best. Reports from the Bundeswehr's fact-finding mission are often late to reach the field camps of troops from Bangladesh, China or Burkina Faso, if they arrive at all. Such failure can generally be attributed to incompatible systems of military leadership and communication. German forces share a camp with their Dutch counterparts, and a fence separates them from other nations' blue helmets, even though all are part of the same UN peacekeeping mission. This scenario illustrates how slow and difficult the flow of information can be inside a single, unified military mission. National idiosyncrasies and safety regulations often hinder coordination.

The flow of information between MINUSMA and Barkhane has also been limited. There are few – if any – signs of coordination or even concerted action. This is in part by design: Germany's Federal Government has clearly stated its soldiers must not be involved in active combat. The German public is more willing to accept peacekeeping efforts like MINUSMA than anti-terrorist campaigns in the course of which German soldiers might be killed.

The people of Mali are growing frustrated, however. They see little of the peace that has been declared. In the turbulent north and increasingly in central Mali too, deadly Islamist attacks on villages are the order of the day, and so are forced conscription and bribery at illegal checkpoints. The public's fury is increasingly directed at the international troops who always seem to be absent when they are needed most. All in all, there are very few indications that involving another military stakeholder like the G5 will improve the situation on the ground.

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Camp Castor in Northern Mali: German and Dutch soldiers are stationed apart from other troops.

Photo: picture alliance/Britta Pedersen/dpa

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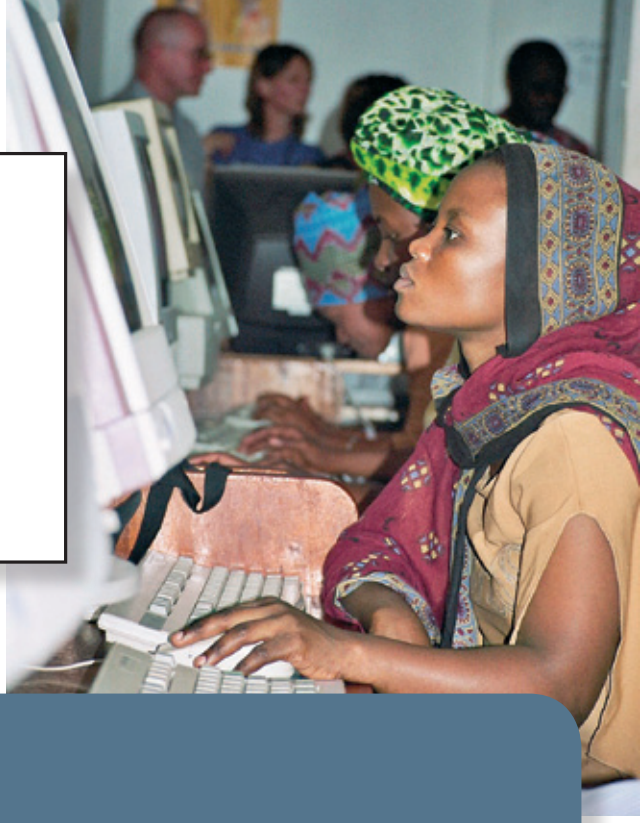

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