



[John Ging says situation in violence-torn Central African nation can be reversed with swift intervention. A senior UN official has given warning of the risk of genocide in the Central African Republic without a more robust international response to communal bloodshed in which at least eight more people have died. John Ging, director of operations for the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said on Thursday that the crisis was foreseeable and stemmed from many years of international neglect.]

BURUNDI :

RWANDA :

In South Sudan, Some Lessons of Rwanda Learned, Others Revisited

By SOMINI SENGUPTAJAN/nytimes.com/16/01/2014

UNITED NATIONS — Twenty years after Rwanda, is the United Nations any better at preventing mass atrocities?

The question hangs over many of the United Nations' peacekeeping missions, none more starkly than the one in South Sudan. Roméo Dallaire, the peacekeeping force commander in Rwanda in 1994, alluded to it this week in events marking the 20-year anniversary of the genocide there. Back then, his warnings about looming atrocities — the so-called Jan. 11 genocide fax to the United Nations Secretariat — went unheeded. United Nations peacekeepers pulled back. Nearly a million people, mostly Tutsis, were massacred.

The violence in South Sudan follows a very different trajectory. When simmering political rivalries

burst into widespread attacks on civilians in mid-December and tens of thousands of people ran to United Nations bases for protection, the Security Council swiftly authorized a near-doubling of troops. Hilde Johnson, the special representative for the secretary general in South Sudan, said reinforcements of “people and equipment” would be on the way in 48 hours. The Security Council got plaudits: Mr. Dallaire called it “an extraordinary step forward.”

Three weeks later, South Sudan is still waiting. Of the promised 5,500 troops and 423 police officers that the Security Council authorized, the police are expected to be fully deployed by Friday, according to a United Nations spokesperson in South Sudan. But the troops have not arrived, only an advance team of 25 Nepali soldiers to prepare for a full battalion due later. As for equipment, the mission has received three utility helicopters and one transport helicopter, but none of the attack helicopters it had urgently requested to guard against attacks on civilians.

The United Nations Mission in South Sudan, or Unmiss, has been credited for sheltering vulnerable civilians on a scale never done before, though not for figuring out how to stop the fighting. Government forces and their rivals continue to battle over important oil regions. Peace talks are going nowhere. Peacekeepers can do little more than guard the civilians taking refuge in their bases — around 65,000 people. Fighting near one base in Malakal killed a 14-year-old child sheltering inside and wounded an unspecified number, the United Nations said Wednesday. Before that, civilians hunkering inside were wounded by stray bullets when the town last changed hands between rival factions.

And so what was once supposed to be a model United Nations exercise in a hopeful new nation, with a relatively small contingent of 7,000 peacekeepers and close cooperation with the country’s leaders, has turned into a defining crisis for the United Nations. The light footprint has not worked. Efforts to reinforce the mission have been bogged down. And the peacekeepers now find themselves with a tough mission of protecting civilians with no end to the fighting in sight.

The gravest risk for the United Nations now is the prospect of South Sudan’s conflict turning regional like the one in the Democratic Republic of Congo next door, which has over the years drawn an array of African countries into proxy battles for control of the country’s rich mineral resources. South Sudan has oil to fight over. Ugandan troops are already in the country, and on Wednesday their president, Yoweri Museveni, declared that Ugandan soldiers were fighting alongside troops loyal to the South Sudanese president, Salva Kiir.

“Unmiss deserves credit for defending so many civilians, but it has looked politically irrelevant as the war has intensified,” said Richard Gowan, an analyst at New York University. “In essence, Unmiss is now the custodian of tens of thousands of hostages. If there is no cease-fire or political settlement, every citizen who has fled to a U.N. base remains vulnerable to future violence.”

To restore its credibility, he said, the United Nations will need to step up its military and political investment in the country, which will not be easy. With a record 70,000-plus blue-helmeted troops in Africa today, committing more peacekeepers and a stronger mandate will certainly face difficulties on the Security Council.

A Western diplomat on the Security Council praised what he called “a more robust strategy” to protect civilians by committing more troops. But the diplomat acknowledged that the Security Council had failed to recognize that Mr. Kiir’s decision to summarily fire his entire cabinet last summer — including the former vice president, Riek Machar, who is now leading the fight against the government — would lead to such a violent outburst.

“There was a failure of recognizing risks,” he said.

Jean-Marie Guéhenno, a former under secretary general for peacekeeping operations for the United Nations, said preventing the escalation of violence required political muscle from the United Nations, not just military might. “Momentum is everything,” Mr. Guéhenno said. “If the thugs smell weakness, they push further, and it can lead to a debacle, while a strong posture, even with a bit of bluff, can go a long way in stopping escalation.”

It was not supposed to be this way. South Sudan was to be a model mission. The United Nations oversaw the creation of the country by supervising the independence referendum that led to South Sudan’s creation in 2011. The United Nations special representative, Ms. Johnson, was seen as being close to the country’s new leaders. The mission was tasked with helping the new government get the country up and running.

But the mission has not had an easy time, as its reports to the Security Council have warned. Its helicopter was shot down, its convoys were attacked, one of its senior human-rights investigators was thrown out of the country by the government.

Nor was the Security Council entirely uninformed about the unrest. Just months after South Sudan declared independence, about 8,000 fighters from the Lou Nuer ethnic group razed huts, burned granaries, stole tens of thousands of cattle and killed hundreds of people. The United Nations came under heavy criticism at the time because its 3,000 combat-ready peacekeepers, saying they were outnumbered and outgunned, remained in their bases.

Last April, armed men killed seven United Nations employees and five Indian peacekeepers in an ambush in Jonglei State. In December came the turning point, when a force of 2,000 fighters overran the United Nations base in the town of Akobo, killing 11 civilians and two peacekeepers and prompting the Security Council to approve temporary reinforcements.

Fighting this week surrounded the base in Malakal. Peacekeepers fired at the combatants in an effort to deter them from coming closer. Bullets flew into the compound, killing the teenager.

Human Rights Watch on Thursday called on the United Nations to “accelerate the deployment of these reinforcements and take other urgent steps to improve the protection of civilians, including better security around Unmiss compounds.”

At the moment, it seems the Security Council has exercised little to no leverage. Its call for a cessation of hostilities last week fell on deaf ears. Neither Mr. Kiir nor his rival, Mr. Machar, is budging in negotiations underway in Ethiopia. The death toll in South Sudan remains a mystery, with the International Crisis Group saying last week that it could be as high as 10,000.

On Wednesday, Mr. Dallaire reminded that even when he finally received the green light from the Security Council to protect civilians from mass atrocities in Rwanda, it took an additional two months for troops to arrive. Now, as then, there are the usual difficulties: persuading countries to send their soldiers and others to help get them there. The United Nations does not have heavy-lift aircraft to transport things like armed personnel carriers.

Seated at the same table here on Wednesday morning at an event to mark the Rwanda genocide, the United Nations deputy secretary general Jan Eliasson told the audience that the United Nations had taken the lessons of Rwanda to heart. It had pledged to speak out earlier about human-rights violations and in South Sudan, at least, had opened its gates to anyone who sought protection.

“Thousands of civilians are alive today because they’ve sought shelter in U.N. facilities,” he said.

He then issued an important caveat: "For the moment, people are largely safe."

RDC CONGO :

UGANDA :

Uganda Admits Helping South Sudan Fight Rebels

VOA News/January 16, 2014

Uganda has acknowledged its forces are helping South Sudan's army battle rebels, reversing a previous denial.

A Ugandan military spokesman said Thursday his country's forces are helping to drive rebels out of Bor, the capital of South Sudan's Jonglei state.

Earlier, President Yoweri Museveni said Ugandan forces took part in a "big battle" with rebels Monday about 90 kilometers from the capital, Juba.

Uganda previously said its forces were present in South Sudan to protect and evacuate Ugandan civilians. Rebels had accused Uganda of fighting with soldiers loyal to President Salva Kiir.

In mid-December, President Kiir accused his former deputy, Riek Machar, of a coup attempt. Machar denied the allegations, but has called for the overthrow of Mr. Kiir.

South Sudan's spiraling violence has left at least 1,000 people dead and an estimated 500,000 displaced.

Meanwhile, Human Rights Watch says "appalling crimes" have been committed against civilians in South Sudan for "no other reason than their ethnicity."

Kiir is an ethnic Dinka while Machar is an ethnic Nuer. In a Thursday statement, Human Rights Watch said members of the army killed hundreds of Nuer men in Juba last month, while rebels targeted and killed civilians of Dinka origin in other parts of the country.

SOUTH AFRICA :

Mandla Mandela charged over South Africa 'road rage

16 January 2014/bbc.co.uk

Nelson Mandela's grandson Mandla has been charged with assault, according to the local public broadcaster, SABC.

Mr Mandela allegedly assaulted a teacher and pointed a firearm at him after he crashed into a car

driven by one of his friends late last year.

His case was postponed to 24 February after he made a brief appearance in the Mthatha Regional Court.

Chief Zwelivelile, as he is known, inherited his grandfather's position as traditional ruler.

Senior Public Prosecutor Jongikhaya Busakwe presented a docket detailing two charges that include serious assault, or assault with intent to do grievously bodily harm as it is known in South Africa, and another charge of pointing a firearm, reports the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).

Mr Mandela, 39, who is not in custody, allegedly drew a firearm after an altercation with Mlamli Ngudle, who reportedly crashed his car into a car driven by one of Mr Mandela's guests at a function.

He is yet to plead but his defence attorney, Advocate Kenny Oldwage, asked the court for a postponement, saying they had only received the docket on Thursday morning and need more time to scrutinise its contents.

Mr Mandela is the chief of the Traditional Council in Mvezo, where his grandfather was born.

Mr Mandela and his aunt Makaziwe are vying to be recognised as head of the Mandela family. He is the eldest male descendent, while she is Nelson Mandela's eldest surviving child.

Last year, they fought a bitter court battle over where several members of the family should be buried.

South African pharma firms accused of planning to delay patents law reform

Sarah Boseley, health editor/The Guardian/Friday 17 January 2014

Leaked documents reveal lobbying proposals to delay laws that would allow fast introduction of generic medicines

Drug companies in South Africa have been accused of planning a covert, well-funded campaign to delay the introduction of laws that threaten their profits. Leaked documents show that pharmaceutical companies planned a \$450,000 campaign, involving a high-profile consultancy based in Washington, DC, against changes to intellectual property laws that would enable their patents on new medicines to be bypassed in the interests of public health. This would allow the manufacture of cheaper copies of their medicines.

Campaigners accused the international drug giants of trying to derail life-saving legislation. The trade body IPASA (Innovative Pharmaceutical Industry Association South Africa), which was coordinating the campaign, said on Thursday the plans were no longer going ahead – although it was legitimate for drug companies to promote their views in this way.

One of the leaked documents is an email dated 10 January from a member of IPASA's executive to representatives of most of the big-name drug companies operating in South Africa. As agreed in December, it says, "we have moved ahead in identifying a high-calibre consultancy group to work with us", naming Washington-based Public Affairs Engagement (PAE).

The second document is the proposed PAE strategy, involving the creation of an alliance of businesspeople and academics, the placement of prominent editorials in newspapers, and a bid to "distract" access to medicine campaigners "from their own aggressive campaign".

The document later names Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), calling them a "coalition that was formed to pressure the government into producing [the draft IP policy] in the first place".

The stakes are high, says the document. "South Africa is now ground zero for the debate on the value of strong IP protection. If the battle is lost here, the effects will resonate. Clearly MSF and similar NGOs understand that ... Without a vigorous campaign, opponents of strong IP will prevail – not just in South Africa but eventually in much of the rest of the developing world."

Campaigners said they were shocked. "What is surprising to us is that it is done so subversively," said Julia Hill of MSF. "We have really made an effort to be very transparent. It is disappointing that this is being done in secret and that such an extraordinary amount of money is being spent to interfere with the democratic process."

Lotti Rutter, a senior researcher at TAC, said: "We have got massive concerns over what appears to be quite a covert and well-funded attempt from foreign industry to delay an essential law reform process happening here in South Africa."

Val Beaumont of IPASA said the discussions had taken place but the PAE proposal had not been accepted. "It is a very, very important issue to us and it will be to any of the knowledge-based organisations," she said. "There was a huge concern that it would be rushed." It was OK for an organisation to have a PR agency to help put across its views, she said.

Patients With Deadly TB Released in South Africa

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer/Associated Press/January 17, 2014

The spread of a virtually untreatable form of tuberculosis in South Africa is being fueled by the release of infected patients into the general community, according to a new study.

Scientists tracked 107 patients with extensively drug-resistant TB, also known as XDR-TB in three South African provinces between 2008 and 2012. Despite most patients being treated with about eight TB drugs, 78 died. More than 40 others were released from hospitals without further monitoring. TB is an infectious bacterial infection that usually affects the lungs and is often spread by coughing and sneezing.

In one case, DNA testing confirmed a discharged patient passed on the deadly strain to his brother; both eventually died without being admitted to a hospital.

Researchers said releasing patients with the lethal TB strain was happening on a widespread level in South Africa because there were few available beds in TB hospitals or palliative care facilities.

"These patients can survive for months or even years and are contributing to the community-based spread of XDR-TB," said Keertan Dheda of the University of Cape Town in South Africa, who led the study. The research was published online Friday in the journal, *Lancet*. Dheda described the situation as alarming and called for modern sanatoriums to be built so patients could be treated away from society.

South Africa has the world's highest number of patients with XDR-TB and health officials warn other drug-resistant forms of the disease are spreading at an increasing rate, most notably in eastern and central Europe, China, India and Africa.

In an accompanying commentary, Max O'Donnell and Neil Schluger of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York and the World Lung Foundation, described drug-resistant TB as an "out-of-control problem with potentially vast and devastating repercussions for global public health." Globally, experts estimate only about one in five people with drug-resistant TB is diagnosed or treated.

TANZANIA :

Tanzania: Annual Trade Licences Opposed

By Pius Rugonzibwa/Tanzania Daily News (Dar es Salaam)/17 January 2014

MEMBERS of the Tanzania Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (TCCIA) are up in arms, disputing the government resolve to re-introduce the annual business licence fee that the same government abolished some eight years back.

Over 21,000 business organizations and other individual businessmen have lodged their claims through TCCIA in opposing the arrangement and questioning the rationale of the government's action.

TCCIA President Peter Chisawillo told reporters that the re-introduction of the annual business licence fee will be stubborn to the business community and will create many corruption avenues.

"This system is against the Licence Act of 1972 and its 2004 amendments which directed that the licence fees be charged only once in a business lifetime.

Paying for the business fee every year is a cumbersome procedure that creates an unfriendly business environment," he said.

Apart from other 'toxic' elements in the system, Eng Chisawillo said the government pushed for its implementation without prior sensitization and directives on how the business community will implement it without causing unnecessary inconveniences.

If the system is finally imposed, it might cause a lot of costs of doing business hence affecting final consumers apart from concerned businesses, he charged.

Therefore, according to him, TCCIA has chosen seeking its members to give their views on the system particularly challenges they are likely to face or are already facing as a result of the directive which came into force from July last year.

According to him, the collection of the views will be conducted for four weeks from today using a number of methods including the mobile phones or the SMS mobile system.

"We wrote to the Prime Minister in October last year requesting for clarification on the matter but nothing has been communicated to us so far," he said.

Last year the government presented miscellaneous amendment in the Finance Act which was passed with proposals for resumption of the annual business fee payment system now received with mixed reactions from the business community.

Meanwhile, delegation from the Oman Business Council is arriving today for three day tour in the country under the invitation of TCCIA. Apart from other activities in the timetable, the joint Business Chamber between Tanzania and Oman will be officially established where a number of issues will be discussed and addressed.

The Chairman of Tanzania Oman Joint Business Council (TOJBC) Mr Evalist Maembe, said a number of issues will be discussed during the visit including insurance of transit goods, quality and standards of the goods, banking services and transportation of the goods.

KENYA :

ANGOLA :

AU/AFRICA :

Turmoil in the heart of Africa

January 17, 2014/thehindu.com

The crisis in the Central African Republic and the ongoing military intervention highlight the security challenges in Africa and the need for a rapid reaction force

The Central African Republic (CAR) is an impoverished country of 4.5 million inhabitants spread over 623,000 sq. km, located in the centre of Africa, which became independent from France in 1960. It has recently turned into another hub of instability. Responding to an urgent appeal from the African Union and the transitional authorities of the CAR, on December 5, 2013, France decided to deploy 1,600 soldiers in the country. The French soldiers are bolstering the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA). Several international partners — many European — have contributed with logistical and financial support.

This intervention was urgent and necessary to prevent a catastrophe. Since rebels ousted the ruling government in March 2013, the daily life of civilians was reduced to exactions, arbitrary arrests, looting, recruitment of child soldiers, scorched villages, rape, mutilation, and summary executions. One out of ten inhabitants was forced to abandon their house, 70,000 Central Africans have fled the country, and 2.3 million people urgently need help. Even more disquieting, the clashes between Christian and Muslim groups had assumed extremely dangerous communal and religious tendencies.

Threat of anarchy

Anarchy in the CAR is also a threat to its neighbours, especially Sudan as well as the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan, where the United Nations maintains peacekeeping operations with large Indian contingents. In an already quite fragile region, the CAR must not become a new sanctuary for trafficking, militias and terrorist groups.

Our goals are clear. The first is to restore security in the CAR, check the spiralling extortions and religious drift, and enable the return of relief organisations as well as the reinstatement of a functioning government. The situation is still fragile, but the initial results are encouraging. Through dissuasive patrolling, French soldiers have been able to avert widespread massacres at a time when the situation in the capital city of Bangui was becoming particularly critical.

The second goal is to put the MISCA in a position to ensure control over the security situation, with the task of disarming militias and facilitating political transition before 2015. We support swift augmentation of MISCA capabilities from 2,400 men to 6,000 men. The French engagement is temporary and not a substitute for African efforts. But in the face of the urgency of the situation, it was necessary to act promptly with sufficient and swiftly deployable resources. France, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, responded in keeping with its international responsibilities and on the basis of a UN mandate. Resolution 2127 provides for the option of a UN peacekeeping operation to follow the MISCA, should the Security Council so decide.

Working hand in hand with our African partners, we hope to enhance the international forces swiftly and stabilise the situation on the ground within a few months. The intervention in the CAR is quite different from that which took place in Mali. Mali required countering a terrorist offensive led by particularly determined groups operating from strongholds they already occupied in the north of the country. We repulsed and defeated this offensive, helped Mali regain its territorial integrity and have democratically elected political authorities, with the presidential election held in July and legislative polls in December. Of course, on the ground, the fight to defeat any terrorist resurgence continues. In the CAR, we have to disarm militarily not a specific enemy but completely out-of-control militias, and prevent communal violence between Christians and Muslims.

In the face of such crises, terrorism, piracy, and all kinds of trafficking, Africa must organise ways to deal by herself with such challenges rapidly and efficiently. At the Summit for Peace and Security in Africa, held in Paris in early December, the African Heads of State and government agreed on the necessity of forging collective security in Africa by establishing an African rapid reaction force in the coming months. France hails this important development and will support this force. The international community must rise to this challenge together in the interest of Africa's security, which is important for all of us, well beyond the boundaries of this continent.

Army chief said to be focused on Egypt's problems

By Associated Press/Friday, January 17, 2014

CAIRO — Having secured victory in a referendum on a relatively liberal constitution that he championed, Egypt's military chief is turning his attention to the country's overwhelming array of problems — from health and education to government subsidies and investments, insiders said.

According to information offered by two insiders, senior army officers who work closely with Gen. Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, the military chief could be planning a run for president, capping a stunning transformation for the 59-year-old who started in the infantry.

A year and a half ago when then-President Mohammed Morsi promoted him to defense minister in what has emerged as a colossal political miscalculation, el-Sissi was widely seen as an obscure and

acquiescent subordinate.

In swift succession, el-Sissi threw Morsi in jail along with hundreds of his Islamist cohorts, his Muslim Brotherhood has been declared a terrorist group with membership in it banned, and a carefully orchestrated personality cult appears to have been successfully engineered for the general.

El-Sissi remains an enigma. Little is known about his private life, other than that he is married with four children. His daily activities and whereabouts are generally hidden from the public view.

Although there are few credible public opinion polls in Egypt to know for sure, el-Sissi appears to have struck a chord through a combination of cunning moves and a personality that offers something for everyone in a country that is highly polarized along religious and socio-economic fault lines.

“It appears that el-Sissi’s populist power is derived from his ability to instill optimism, joy and pride in the hearts of many Egyptians,” Adel Iskandar, an expert on Arab affairs who lectures at Georgetown University, said in a post on social media this week “The Muslim Brotherhood, the January 25 (2011) revolutionaries, and anyone who opposes the country’s current trajectory must contend with this new fact.”

It was evident this week that many people voted for el-Sissi as much as for the new charter.

Many, particularly women, kissed posters of the general after casting their ballots or chanted: “El-Sissi is my president.” He had asked women to take their spouses and children to the balloting, and the response was overwhelming, with women dominating lines outside polling stations in Cairo and other big cities.

A popular video on social networking sites hyped the sentiment.

“All of Egypt’s women listened to el-Sissi when he asked us to come out and vote. ... If he needs anything else, he only has to tell us and, God willing, we will not disappoint him,” a female voter said on the clip.

In el-Sissi’s neighborhood of Gamaliya, as in much of the country, he is regarded as a savior and a hero.

In a small alley where he once lived, an office bore this sign: “Headquarters of the campaign asking el-Sissi to run for president.”

A banner nearby declared: “The people of Gamaliya congratulate el-Sissi on his birthday.”

“He is a man that we will all follow, and not just because he comes from Gamaliya,” said driver Mahmoud Farouq, a father of four, who was sitting in a coffee shop.

Sohair Mohammed, a housemaid with two children, expressed her admiration by saying: “I adore him. I hope he becomes president. If he does not run for president, I may kill myself.”

The Muslim Brotherhood won each of the five elections held since the revolution that deposed autocratic leader Hosni Mubarak in early 2011. Consequently, there was an anti-democratic veneer to the July 3 coup and the government’s subsequent actions, which included a severe crackdown on protests, arrests of journalists and the establishment of hotlines, where people could report suspected members of the Brotherhood.

At the same time, however, el-Sissi seems to have tapped into widespread, genuine outrage at how Morsi and the Brotherhood ran the country, making it more Islamist during their year in power and contradicting campaign promises of an inclusive society.

For liberals who might be expected to oppose a military coup, el-Sissi offers an alternative to the nightmare scenario of an Egypt headed for theocracy, due in part to the automatic support of illiterate and conservative rural voters. The more progressive voters seem to have accepted the trappings of democracy that have been erected around the coup, embracing el-Sissi.

For the conservative Egyptians who probably voted for Morsi in the past, the general's down-to-earth personality carries a lot of appeal. When Morsi picked el-Sissi to replace the previous military leadership, the army chief seemed to be that rare case of a devout senior officer who could be sympathetic — if not outright supportive — of the Brotherhood's cause.

El-Sissi peppers his speeches with quotations from the Quran and has let it be known that he is a pious, though moderate, Muslim. On Monday, he shed a tear while listening to interim President Adly Mansour cite a moving Quranic verse.

“He's going to give them ‘Islamism light,’” said Robert Springborg, a Middle East expert from the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. “That's what they want, and that's what they are going to get.”

The combination of charm, personality and religious piety is somewhat unique in modern Egyptian political history — even if it appears to be part of an orchestrated campaign.

El-Sissi's sense of justice was on display when a leaked video showed him sternly warning army officers against mistreating troops. His support for a free-market economy was made evident when he said in another clip that he wanted cellphone users to be charged for calls they receive as well as those they make.

El-Sissi even benefited from another leak by a pro-Morsi activist group that was meant to hurt his image.

Showing that he shares a spirituality associated with dreams that is common among Egyptians, he told a newspaper interviewer in comments apparently not intended for publication about two visions he had: in one, he brandished a sword inscribed with an Islamic declaration of faith; in another, he saw himself telling the late Anwar Sadat that he himself would be president one day.

In the long run, however, el-Sissi is not likely to lose his reputation as a military leader with little or no tolerance for criticism.

“The military is known for its incredible hierarchy and giving orders, while politics is supposed to be about give and take,” said Samer Shehata, a Middle East expert at the University of Oklahoma. “Can you imagine someone legitimately criticizing the president in this context?”

Government officials and pro-military commentators have suggested that el-Sissi would view the referendum's passage by a comfortable margin with a decent voter turnout as legitimizing what he has done since July, as well as a signal that the people want him to run for president.

On Thursday, officials said nine out of 10 voters supported the charter. Reports suggested that participation was higher than the one-third that cast ballots in December 2012, when Morsi rammed

through a more Islamic constitution and liberals boycotted the referendum.

Despite the fairly liberal nature of the constitution — it was drafted by a 50-member panel dominated by secular figures — el-Sissi's commitment to freedoms is unclear. Liberal activists say there have been increasingly discouraging signs, from placing stringent conditions on protest and shutting down Islamic TV channels to jailing prominent pro-democracy activists. In this week's referendum, campaigns for a "no" vote resulted in arrests.

If el-Sissi runs, most observers expect him to win by a landslide, becoming the latest in a line of military men who became president since the monarchy was toppled in the early 1950s. He would be the first from the armed forces to be freely elected.

As president, el-Sissi would face daunting problems: a terrorist campaign by Islamic militants and a veritable insurgency in the Sinai desert; high unemployment; soaring food prices; low worker productivity; rising crime; and a feared reduction in Egypt's water supply by a dam still under construction on the Nile in Ethiopia.

Behind closed doors in his Defense Ministry office, el-Sissi has been poring over thick files on domestic issues such as education, social services, subsidies and investment, the insiders said Thursday, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the topics. They said a broad plan of action to pull Egypt out of its crisis has been drafted.

A national project was needed to rally the people behind its leadership, just like the construction of the Aswan Dam did in Egypt's socialist days in the 1960s. Such a project, the insiders said, would most likely be building at least one nuclear reactor to generate electricity. Another project could be the overhaul of overcrowded shantytowns around Cairo, or a free, universal health care system.

UN/AFRICA :

UN official sees risk of genocide in CAR

17 Jan 2014/aljazeera.com

John Ging says situation in violence-torn Central African nation can be reversed with swift intervention.

A senior UN official has given warning of the risk of genocide in the Central African Republic without a more robust international response to communal bloodshed in which at least eight more people have died.

John Ging, director of operations for the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), said on Thursday that the crisis was foreseeable and stemmed from many years of international neglect.

"The stakes are extremely high," he said after returning from a five-day trip to the country.

"It has all the elements that we have seen elsewhere in places like Rwanda and Bosnia," he said.

"The elements are there, the seeds are there for a genocide, there's no question about that."

The former French colony descended into chaos after a mostly Muslim rebel coalition, Seleka, seized power in March, unleashing a wave of killings and looting that spurred revenge attacks by Christian militia known as "anti-balaka" (anti-machete).

More than a million people have been displaced by the violence since Seleka installed their leader Michel Djotodia as interim president.

Up to 1,000 people were killed last month alone in the capital Bangui, prompting neighbouring countries to evacuate more than 30,000 of their citizens.

However, with swift intervention the country's dire situation could be reversed, Ging said.

"This one is not a hopeless case," he said. "The consequences will be dramatic if we don't act immediately and effectively."

There has been relative calm since Djotodia resigned last week under intense international pressure, but sporadic violence has persisted in Bangui.

On Thursday, a spokesman for a 15,000-strong group of anti-balaka criticised the interim government and threatened a return to violence if it was not overhauled.

CAR is designated by the UN as one of the top three global humanitarian emergencies, along with Syria and the Philippines. But a UN appeal has received only six percent of a \$247m target.

France hurriedly sent some 1,600 troops to its former colony in December.

The deployment of Rwandan troops, the first of whom arrived aboard a US military aircraft on Thursday, will increase the African Union contingent to more than 5,000 peacekeepers this month.

US/AFRICA :

CANADA/AFRICA :

AUSTRALIA/AFRICA :

EU/AFRICA :

Bouteflika a regagné l'Algérie après son hospitalisation à Paris
16.01.2014/LeParisien.fr

Le président algérien, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a regagné discrètement Alger, ce jeudi après-midi. De sources officielles algériennes, il aurait subi des «contrôles médicaux», à l'hôpital du Val-de-Grâce à Paris où il avait été admis lundi.

D'après l'agence officielle algérienne APS qui confirme cette information, «les examens et contrôles ont montré une nette amélioration de l'état de santé du président Bouteflika.

L'équipe médicale a autorisé le chef de l'Etat à rentrer en Algérie 24 heures avant le délai prévu». Le président algérien devrait signer «le 16 ou le 17 janvier», le décret permettant de convoquer le corps électoral qui fixera donc la date du scrutin présidentiel 90 jours plus tard.

Initialement, cette hospitalisation était prévue jusqu'à vendredi, «pour parachever son bilan de santé, initié à Alger, et dans le cadre d'une visite médicale routinière de contrôle, arrêtée et programmée depuis le mois de juin 2013», avait alors précisé la présidence algérienne dans un communiqué.

Le président Bouteflika avait déjà séjourné en France après que son état de santé s'est dégradé en mai 2013. Pendant quinze jours, Bouteflika avait été pris dans une tourmente médiatique, la presse algérienne lui reprochant l'opacité de la communication sur sa santé. Alger tente depuis de rassurer à tout prix. Le Premier ministre Abdelmalek Sellal avait alors dénoncé les «fausses» informations de presse affirmant que le pronostic vital de Bouteflika n'avait «jamais» été engagé et qu'il était en «convalescence».

CHINA/AFRICA :

Sino-Japanese acrimony spills over into Africa

January 17, 2014/thehindu.com

A day after Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the African Union (AU) and pledged loans worth \$2 billion over five years as private sector assistance to the continent, China's Ambassador to the AU, Xie Xiaoyan, described Mr. Abe as "the biggest troublemaker in Asia."

"What can Japan do... in order for Africa to realise its brilliant future?" Mr. Abe asked, in his speech at the conclusion of a week of continent-wide diplomacy to tie up precious energy resources in Mozambique, offer billions of dollars in aid, trade and loans, and re-invigorate Japanese ties with Africa.

Mr. Abe's diplomatic push has upset the Chinese government that accords great strategic significance to Africa as a source of raw materials and a market for finished goods. In 2012, China's trade with Africa was set to surpass \$200 billion.

Ambassador Xie's comments come at a time of rising Sino-Japanese tensions over flight zones, maritime rules for fishing vessels, the disputed Senkaku Islands, and Prime Minister Abe's recent visit to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine.

Military drill

On Monday, Japan held a military drill, termed "Island Defence", in which elite Japanese paratroopers simulated the recapture of a remote island from an enemy country.

“We can never overlook China’s repeated entries into our territorial waters. In addition to diplomatic efforts, we will cooperate with the Coast Guard to securely defend our territory and waters around the Senkaku islands,” said Japan’s Defence Minister Itsunori Onodera after the drill.

At the AU on Wednesday, China’s Ambassador Xie held an emotional press conference where he held up photographs of Japanese brutality in the course of what came to be known as the “Rape of Nanjing” in the Second Sino-Japan war of 1937.

“The Yasukuni Shrine was once a spiritual tool and symbol of Japanese militarism,” Mr. Xie said, referring to Mr. Abe’s recent visit. “This is a brazen affront on people of all countries that once suffered from Japanese militarist aggression.”

“The Japanese Prime Minister is trying to put on two faces – one to be a peace-loving leader who talks about cooperation, economics and trying to be friends with Africa,” Mr. Xie said. “In Asia he is trying... to make trouble amongst Asian countries.”

‘Not aligning with people’

Prior to Mr. Abe’s visit, the Japanese government made several allusions to China’s apparent strategy of aligning with African leaders rather than their people.

“We will centre the axis of Japan’s diplomacy towards Africa on two groups,” Mr. Abe said in his speech on Tuesday. “Young people, who will without a doubt shoulder the responsibility for the future Africa, and women, who will give life to Africa’s future generations.”

In comments to the BBC, Mr. Abe’s spokesperson said, “Countries like Japan... cannot provide African leaders with beautiful houses or beautiful ministerial buildings.”

On Wednesday, China hit back. “China and Africa started cooperation, supported each other for many decades, when China was poor, when Africa was not getting the kind of attention it is getting today, it was neglected,” said Mr. Xie. “We don’t engage in such competition as subscribed by some countries.”

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