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NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(through Mr. Mulet)

DPI Weekly Press Review

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This week's press review examines the coverage of the worsening situation in the eastern part of Aleppo and the growing clashes affecting Rohingyas in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

With renewed air attacks and an end to functioning hospitals, the situation in eastern Aleppo was the catalyst for much coverage this past week, which frequently included United Nations voices, including your statement on the violence there, and the comments of your Special Envoy and Emergency Relief Coordinator. The coverage and inclusion of UN officials in the reporting helped convey a sense of the Organization actively engaged on humanitarian and diplomatic efforts to end the conflict. Another major angle to the reporting was of a more "bilateral" nature, concentrated on what the relationship between US president-elect Donald Trump and Russia will mean for international efforts to end the war.

The situation in Rakhine state, which has led thousands of Rohingya to seek refuge in neighbouring Bangladesh, not always successfully, catapulted the issue to global media attention – especially amid reports that Bangladesh was not providing support for the refugees. The UN was a mainstay of the reporting, of which a large part seemed to reflect disappointment that Aung San Suu Kyi was not doing more to help those in need. There was little, if any, criticism of the Organization for not doing more. Mentions of the UN tended to focus on facts related to those seeking refuge and calls for more to be done for them.

Looking ahead, in addition to coverage of the Global Sustainable Transport Conference, the always popular International Day to End Violence Against Women and 16 days of activism to end gender-based violence campaign will be a major DPI priority between now and Human Rights Day.

Thank you



Cristina Gallach
23 November 2016

cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Mr. Feltman / Mr. Khare / Mr. Kim / Mr. Ladsous / Mr. Nabarro / Mr. O'Brien / Mr. Amdur / Mr. Dujarric

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PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 23 November 2016

Produced by News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

SYRIA: STILL IN THE CROSSHAIRS

Aleppo surged to the top of news reports this week amid stories of further air attacks in the city's rebel-held eastern part – including the suspected use of chemical weapons – which left many civilians dead or wounded, a situation worsened by the reports that the city's east is now without any functioning hospitals. The United Nations was a mainstay of the coverage, which tended to centre on the situation in eastern Aleppo, UN plans for some sort of halt to the fighting there, a Security Council meeting and the changing relationship between the United States and Russia.

Eastern Aleppo: more attacks, no hospitals

The situation in Aleppo framed much of the reporting on Syria, primarily along the lines of the renewed air attacks and the lack of advanced medical care. On the first angle, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's response to the air attacks in Aleppo garnered coverage. **CNN** reported that Ban condemned the assault and "indiscriminate shelling," while **Al Jazeera** reported that he reminded "all parties to the conflict that targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is a war crime." According to Iraq's Kurdish news agency **Rudaw**, Ban said that the "intense air assault" of eastern Aleppo killed "scores of Syrian civilians, including children." According to the UK-based online **Global Herald**, the UN chief told **France 24** the following: "I think this is a common failure of the international community."

On the end of any functioning hospitals in the besieged eastern part of the city, the **New York Times** cited WHO in reporting that hospitals in these opposition-held areas had stopped providing care to the quarter million people still residing there. **The Guardian** (UK) reported that this left "up to 250,000 residents without access to surgery or specialist care, and rebel-held districts at the point of collapse."

A plan unwanted and unheeded

Unsuccessful diplomatic efforts by the UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura, to secure an agreement on a proposed truce in eastern Aleppo – allowing for the opposition to administer the area – was the dominant storyline in news coverage away from the human rights and humanitarian situation there.

The **Wall Street Journal** reported that the Syrian government rejected the plan. UK-based **Middle East Online** said that de Mistura met Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem in Damascus for talks, but was rebuffed on his proposal. The **Japan Times** reported that Muallem said: "We told him that we reject that completely." According to **AP** and the **BBC**, the Syrian official described the idea as a violation of "national sovereignty." The UN envoy was reported as saying, by **AFP** and **Al Jazeera** following the meeting: "We are running out of time, we are running against time."

Voice of America reported on the divergent views in which Moscow and Damascus see eastern Aleppo as a battle against terrorists, while the UN and Western governments frame it as an onslaught triggering a vast humanitarian crisis.

Security Council briefed

The Security Council sparked its own spate of coverage, with a meeting at which it was briefed by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, Stephen O'Brien. Switzerland's **Le Temps** reported that humanity was under attack in Aleppo, flagging O'Brien's assertion that he was "at his wit's end" regarding the

situation in the city. **The Japan Times** reported O'Brien drew a bleak picture of life for those under siege. **Voice of America** quoted him as saying that airstrikes on hospitals and schools "have become so commonplace it takes your breath away." According to Nigeria's **Vanguard**, he said: "Shame on us all for not acting to stop the annihilation of eastern Aleppo and its people."

The perspectives of the permanent representatives to the UN also figured in this strand of reporting. According to **The Japan Times**, France's Ambassador Francois Delattre accused the Syrian authorities of waging a "total-war strategy to take back Aleppo, no matter the price." **CNN** reported that the US Ambassador Samantha Power "upbraided Syria's Bashar al-Assad regime and Russia for its military action... and shamed Syrian commanders for their involvement in deadly assaults and running prisons where torture has been reported." In its coverage, **Sputnik News** reported that Russia's Deputy Ambassador Vladimir K. Safronkov pushed back, asking why Power had not named the terrorists as well. The US edition of the **International Business Times** reported that the Syrian Ambassador Bashar Ja'afari, said Syria "allowed civilians in eastern Aleppo to flee and had opened corridors for them to do so."

Away from the Council meeting, **EFE** and **AFP** reported that Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the UN of "sabotaging" a resolution backing peace negotiations saying that it called for "inclusive Syrian talks without preconditions." According to India's **IANS** news agency, he said even the groups closest to Saudi Arabia were aware that refusing to negotiate until Assad stepped down was a dead end.

US and Russia... and Syria

The other major tranche of news reports focussed on what impact relations between the US and Russia will have on the war in Syria, especially in light of the upcoming inauguration of US president-elect Donald Trump.

AP reported that, earlier this week, President Assad said that Trump could prove to be a "natural ally" to Damascus. A **Reuters** article noted that Assad may feel emboldened by Trump's vow to build closer ties with Russia. Russia's **Izvestia** reported that, according to Konstantin Kosachev, the chairman of the international affairs committee for Russia's Federation Council, Russia could enter into an anti-terror coalition with the US under Trump, if the new administration "changes its approach" on key issues. **The Guardian** (UK) reported that US President Barack Obama urged his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to reconsider diplomatic initiatives to reduce the violence. According to the **Washington Post**, he said that given Iran's and Russia's backing of Assad, "I am not optimistic about the short-term prospects in Syria."

The United Nations figured in this stream of reporting. **Reuters** noted that "diplomatic efforts appear stalled" as the US awaited Trump's inauguration. In an interview with **France 24**, Ban said: "Now he's going to be a global political leader, he has to listen to the voices of people." Another **Reuters** article reported that the UN chief's envoy, de Mistura, said he was worried that Assad could launch a new offensive to crush eastern Aleppo before Trump's inauguration on 20 January 2017, saying "it could be tragic." According to the **New York Times**, the UN envoy offered unsolicited advice to the president-elect, advising him to pay attention to what happens between now and January in Syria, and particularly on Aleppo as it risked obliteration by Russian-backed Syrian forces.

Meanwhile, there was limited commentary on what a Russia-US nexus could mean on the ground in Syria. In the **Washington Post**, Ilan Goldenberg of the Centre for a New American Security wrote that although Putin was likely to lobby Trump to accept that Assad stay in power, the remaining problem

was that the Russia-Syria-Iran alliance “will destroy what is left of the acceptable opposition and drive it into the hands of extremists.”

MYANMAR'S RAKHINE STATE: VIOLENCE AND SILENCE

Growing sectarian violence between Rohingya Muslims and others in Myanmar's northern Rakhine state thrust the Buddhist-majority Asian nation into the headlines these past days, particularly in light of reports that neighbouring Bangladesh was making it difficult for fleeing Rohingya to seek refuge there. The United Nations figured prominently in the coverage, which included its voice frequently as one of the few entities speaking out for the refugees and the need for peace in the troubled Rakhine state. Of note, the usually haloed media portrayal of Foreign Minister and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi has come under fire due to her response – of lack thereof – to the developments.

Discounting international pleas

The decision by Bangladeshi authorities to bar, detain or return Rohingya garnered much media attention. **AFP** reported that despite pleas from the UN to open its border after up to 30,000 Rohingya in Rakhine state were displaced by violence, Bangladesh prevented hundreds from crossing. **Voice of America** reported that “ignoring international appeals,” Bangladesh is holding to its decision to bar Rohingya fleeing by boat. **The Telegraph** (UK) said that Human Rights Watch called for an urgent UN investigation into alleged abuses, as new satellite imagery from Rakhine state revealed mass destruction in ethnic Rohingya villages.

The UN's perspective figured throughout the coverage, often cited as the source of figures of those fleeing Rakhine or pronouncing on the developments. According to **Voice of America**, a UNHCR spokesperson urged Myanmar to take all measures to protect civilians in Rakhine. Elsewhere, **Reuters** reported that John McKissick, head of UNHCR in the southern Bangladeshi town of Cox's Bazar, said, “Difficult as it is for the Bangladesh government to absorb large numbers, it seems to me there is no other choice, because the only other choice is death and suffering.”

Indonesian daily **Serambi** reported that the country's foreign minister said the Indonesian government was “working together with IOM and UNHCR to place the refugees in countries aligned with UNHCR and IOM criteria.” In an opinion piece in Lebanon's **Daily Star**, former UNHCR official Shamsul Bari expressed hope that the Bangladeshi Prime Minister would pursue efforts with the Myanmar leadership to find durable solutions, while asserting “let all those engaged in policy making and in physically pushing back refugees from our territory” heed the Prime Minister's commitment to protect refugees.

Aung San Suu Kyi in the hot seat

Media coverage on the violence in Rakhine state also pointed to failings on Myanmar's leadership. The Singaporean edition of the **International Business Times** stated, “Rakhine Rohingya crisis: ‘Myanmar government legitimising genocide.’”

Aung San Suu Kyi was highlighted in this strand of coverage. **Reuters** pointed out that the sudden escalation of fighting came as the government grappled with the Rakhine conflict, “posing a new challenge” to the leader “who swept to power last year on promises of national reconciliation.” In reporting on Aung San Suu Kyi's response, **CNN** said “her silence on the issue has been deafening.” Many others took a similar tone. **Time** magazine used the following headlines in its reporting: “We Cannot Believe Aung San Suu Kyi: Why Many in Burma Are Losing Hope of Peace.” While **Nikkei Asian Review** reported that “Suu Kyi is clearly not in control of the army,” **Radio Free Asia** flagged that the country's home, defence and border affairs ministries were appointed by the army commander-in-chief under a constitution written by the army.

Commentary was intensive, with much of it focussed on what Suu Kyi needs to do. A **New York Times** editorial recalled that when Suu Kyi became head of the new democratic government, she inspired hope for an end to the Rohingya's suffering, adding that it "appears to have been premature." The editorial also noted that the UN and US called for an impartial investigation into the violence, and that Human Rights Watch was urging the government to invite the UN to assist, saying "if Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi wants to defend her reputation as a human rights champion, she needs to extend that invitation now." Under the headline "Time for Suu Kyi's Second Revolution in Myanmar," columnist David Hutt wrote in the online current affairs magazine **The Diplomat** that Suu Kyi and her party "must complete the work that they have only just begun." On the **East Asia Forum** website, Lex Rieffel of the Brookings Institution described as "the first order of business" that Suu Kyi "consolidate sufficient power to co-opt or overcome" the vested interests of military leaders and their long-time business partners. An editorial in the **Washington Post** described the plight of the Rohingya Muslims as "a blind spot for Suu Kyi," and urged her to conduct a full investigation, adding that "Burma's road to freeing itself from the past means facing directly the suffering of the Rohingya."

In an analysis in **Time** magazine, journalist Feliz Solomon observed: "With each passing day, the current government is starting to look more and more like the pre-2010 government," noting that Suu Kyi had made few public remarks on the conflict. And in the digital news platform **Caravan Daily**, columnist Yvonne Ridley noted the "uncomfortable truth" that there was little to separate "Suu Kyi from the dictatorship which was globally reviled because of its treatment towards her and her vast army of supporters."



To:
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Subject: Fw: DPI Weekly Press Review and Cover Note - 23 November 2016

From: Rania Abdulrahman/NY/UNO
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Date: 23/11/2016 06:34 PM
Subject: DPI Weekly Press Review and Cover Note - 23 November 2016

Dear Colleagues,

Please find attached the DPI Weekly Press review and cover note.



Note 23 November 2016.docx



Press Review 23 November 2016.doc



DPI Weekly Press Review, 23 November 2016.pdf

Warm regards,

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