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NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(through Ms. Malcorra)

✓ DPI Weekly Press Review

JUN 20 2014
14-05363
EXECUTIVE OFFICE
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

This week the press review focuses on the fighting engulfing Iraq and its political and humanitarian consequences. It also examines coverage of the release of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria as well as the latest developments in Mali, nearly a year after the UN peacekeeping mission to that country was formally deployed.

Iraq continues to dominate the global news agenda, with the media discussing the regional implications of the conflict and in particular its relationship to the crisis in Syria. Many commentators are casting the story in historical terms and drawing links to how the West and the broader international community have treated Iraq over the past decade.

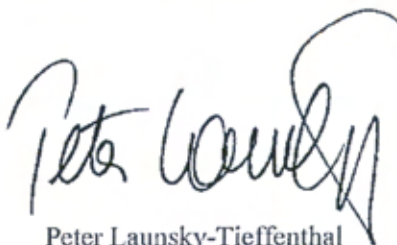
In that context, your speech this morning to the Asia Society drew headlines about both Syria and Iraq. Many journalists, think tanks and permanent missions tweeted lines or themes from your remarks, particularly your comment that "no one can win" the Syrian conflict and your call for an arms embargo.

The Department of Public Information is working to further disseminate the content of the address, including in an adapted form as an op-ed column in Arabic-language newspapers.

Social media showed heavy interest in World Refugee Day today, in part because of the strong endorsement of many celebrities with large personal followings. The use of infographics by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees proved especially popular.

Meanwhile, several media outlets are reporting the claims of lawyers that you were personally served today with a lawsuit related to the Haiti cholera issue, as well as the rebuttal by your spokesperson. DPI will monitor coverage in both traditional and social media in the days ahead and is working with colleagues in OSSG and other UN offices on the communications strategy for your visit to the country next month.

Thank you.



Peter Launsky-Tieffenthal
20 June 2014

cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Mr. Amdur / Ms. Amos / Mr. Dujarric / Mr. Feltman / Ms. Haq / Mr. Kim /
Mr. Ladsous / Mr. Orr

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PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 20 June 2014

EXECUTIVE OFFICE
OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Produced by News and Media Division, Department of Public Information

IRAQ

As the situation on the ground continued to shift rapidly, the media coverage tried to keep pace, focusing on extrajudicial killings, a deteriorating humanitarian situation and the apparent inability of the international community to come up with a decisive response. A range of outlets captured the remarks of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and other UN officials on the spiralling violence and the need to avoid sectarian warfare. A plethora of commentaries and analytical articles followed two main threads: what was the best way to now support Iraq, and fears over the disintegration of the Iraqi-Syrian border and thus the potential overturning of an order that has defined the Middle East for a century.

An entire region roiling

In breaking news coverage of Ban's address to the Asia Society on Friday, many articles focused on his comments on Syria and his call for an arms embargo. **AP** and **Reuters** also reported his opposition to airstrikes in Iraq and cited his quote that such actions "could be ineffective and backfire." In London, Hannah Strange asserted in the **Daily Telegraph** that Ban had "effectively endorsed Barack Obama's decision to hold off from ordering airstrikes." The two wire dispatches, widely reproduced by online outlets, also picked up the Secretary-General's plea for Iraq's feuding communities to "unite against the terrorists" and not to undertake revenge attacks.

Earlier in the week, Ban's statement condemning the upsurge of violence that included mass summary executions by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) generated widespread headlines. "UN chief says reports of mass killings in Iraq are 'deeply disturbing'" ran an **AP** headline. The same theme was echoed by Nigerian daily **The Punch**, **The Independent** (UK) and the US-based **International Business Times**, among others. Pakistani wire service **APP** said Ban called on all Iraqi leaders to curb the spread of retribution while **US News & World Report** gave prominence to the UN chief's warning that sectarian rhetoric carried grave regional consequences. The **Los Angeles Times** reported that "underscoring the menace posed" by ISIL, the UN said it had moved nearly 60 staffers from Baghdad.

The Secretary-General's warning at a Geneva press conference that the ISIL onslaught raised the spectre of a sectarian conflict extending beyond Iraq's borders also drew headlines. **AFP** opted for "UN's Ban warns Iraq crisis could spill across borders" while **Reuters** used "UN's Ban urges Iraq to hold dialogue to stop violence." **DPA**, **Voice of America**, UK television network **ITV** and the online news portal **Spy Ghana** were among those to report that Ban had urged Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki to conduct inclusive dialogue to restore peace and stability, or risk a "breeding ground for extremism and terrorism." **AP** noted that the growing sectarian crisis "caught the attention of United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon," who had cautioned against acts of reprisal that would only intensify the violence.

A spill-over of epic proportions

A slew of opinion pieces linked the conflicts in Iraq and Syria and spoke of dire consequences for the broader region. **Bloomberg Businessweek** maintained that "the Iraqi and Syrian conflicts are intertwined more closely than ever, highlighting the inability of the various political, ethnic and sectarian groups to come up with an accord." A **Le Monde** editorial suggested there would be no lasting stability in Iraq without stability in Syria. "We must act on both fields, because it is the same front," the paper underlined. In an op-ed in Saudi Arabia's **Arab News**, columnist Ramzy Baroud pronounced that "that factory of radicalization must close down as soon as possible in a way that would allow Syria's

wounds, and by extension Iraq's, to heal." Myriam Benraad warned in *Le Monde* that the partition scenario "is no longer excluded."

Elsewhere, others examined how the jihadist threat may soon affect more than two countries. *The Jakarta Post* editorialized that the rising tensions within Iraq and Syria had strong repercussions for the wider world. *The Nation* (Bangkok) argued that the Iraqi conflict would not end at the border, but instead spill across the Middle East, "rendering political boundaries insignificant as people divided along ethno-nationalist lines." *The Independent* noted that as both Syria and Iraq unravel, ISIL may soon turn its attentions elsewhere, such as the "ethnically and politically fractured kingdom of Jordan." In an analysis for the website of *Stratfor* consultants (US), Reva Bhalla mused that "today, the most ardent defenders of those colonial borders sit in Baghdad, Damascus, Ankara, Tehran and Riyadh, while the Europeans and Americans, already fatigued by a decade of war in this part of the world, are desperately trying to sit this crisis out."

UN responds to humanitarian fallout

The press also tracked the growing scale of the disaster. *The Washington Post* reported that UNICEF had upgraded the humanitarian crisis to its most severe level – as UN officials "scrambled" to provide basic services for some 1.5 million displaced people. Beneath the headline "UN cites destabilizing risk of mass Iraqi refugee exodus," *Reuters* underscored that UN Refugee Commissioner António Guterres flagged the risk of a mass exodus of Iraqis in a region already reeling from millions of uprooted Syrians. UN Human Rights Commissioner Navi Pillay's assertion that ISIL "almost certainly" had committed war crimes echoed throughout the media – including via *Reuters* and *CNN*. As the *Indo-Asian News Service* (New Delhi) reported that cargo planes had arrived carrying emergency supplies from UN agencies, *AFP* noted that the supplies aimed "to help over one million people driven from their homes by fighting," a point also mentioned in a story by the *South African Press Association*.

The blame game

The UN did not feature prominently in the majority of opinion columns, which tended to offer advice to governments on what to do next, criticize the Western intervention a decade ago, and point the blame at domestic rifts. Rami G. Khouri opined in Beirut's *The Daily Star* that the crisis was the result of the underlying Arab-made structural problems of Iraq's "corrupt and incompetent governance... and a severe lack of cohesion among different ethnic and sectarian groups within countries." In Switzerland's *Le Temps*, Boris Mabillard maintained that Maliki bore the responsibility of increased religious tensions. Under the headline "Iraq in turmoil: The rise of 'Syraq'," US-based Professor Ibrahim Al-Marashi asserted on the website of *Al Jazeera* that while colonial politics may have led to the problem, the current crisis was sparked by Baghdad's poor policy choices. Similarly, Thomas Friedman elaborated in *The New York Times* that as Maliki had chosen to rule in a sectarian and partisan way, "we owe him nothing."

At the same time, the *China Daily* blamed the US for "what has happened to the innocent Iraqi people," adding "it is high time that US learned the lesson of war it launched in Iraq." Dubai's *Khaleej Times* was in accord that the West was "reaping what it sowed" – namely wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In *Expression* (Algiers), Karim Mohsen spelled out that US leaders were "the architects of the disintegration of the Middle East." Bill Van Auken, writing for *The Herald* of Harare, called the situation in Iraq the "greatest debacle for US imperialism since the fall of Saigon." In the same paper, Paul Craig Roberts echoed that sentiment under the headline "Iraq: The price of US megalomania." In the Indian financial daily *Live Mint*, Gayatri Chandrasekaran mused that Iraq needed weapons, equipment and materiel, but could do without external "goodwill." In Berlin's *Die Welt*, Clemens Wergin believed that "abandoning Iraq and failing to act in Syria" had left a vacuum for ISIL and other terrorist groups to fill.

Some articles delved further back into history. The UK's pan-Arab **Asharq Al-Awsat** reflected on the collapsed Ottoman Empire where re-drawn regional lines did not serve the interests of its people – “Arabs must play their role in protecting the sovereignty and stability of Iraq.” In **The Australian**, Tom Switzer said the lesson was that democracy was not an export commodity, “especially to arbitrarily created States and ethnically and tribally divided societies with no genuinely liberal democratic traditions.” The President of the US Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, charged in the **Financial Times** that the US had been mistaken to premise its Iraq pull-out on “calendars rather than condition,” and should rethink its decision to pull all US forces out of Afghanistan by the end of 2016.

SYRIA: HUMAN RIGHTS

With the developments in neighbouring Iraq grabbing the biggest headlines, news from the conflict in Syria drew somewhat less attention than usual. Many media outlets nevertheless spotlighted a new report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Syria, with most of the reports setting the conclusions of the commission's experts against the context of the Middle East being “on the cusp of regional strife.”

Syria's carnival of horror

The press were quick to report the commission of inquiry's observations about the unprecedented violence, arbitrary denials of humanitarian aid and impunity of criminal perpetrators, as well as strong warnings about the spill-over effect of Syria's war. Online newsletter **Legal Monitor Worldwide** and the Catalan-language daily **El Punt Avui Catalunya** recalled that the commission was investigating photographs of thousands of emaciated bodies, bearing marks of abuse consistent with previously documented torture methods. French-language daily **Horizons** (Algiers) underscored that the commission had conducted more than 3,000 interviews reporting a “massive war crimes and crimes against humanity.” The **BBC** ran a story beneath the headline “Syria conflict: UN reports mass executions by ISIS,” while South Africa's **Business Day Live** used: “Regional war threatens Middle East, says UN.”

A common assessment in the media coverage was found in the lead paragraph of an **AP** article: “A UN commission on Syrian war crimes is sounding the alarm that the entire region is on the brink of war.” This refrain emerged in a **Reuters** dispatch which quoted the commission's Vitit Muntarbhorn as pointing out: “We predicted a long time ago the dangers of spill over both ways, which is now becoming a regional spill over.” The **New York Times** reported that the UN panel cautioned that the onslaught of extremist Sunni militants in Iraq would have violent repercussions within Syria. **Voice of America** and the **South African Press Association** were among numerous outlets to amplify that warning. **ITAR-TASS** covered the story under the headline: “Events in Syria push Middle East to brink of war – report.”

A tipping point

Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, the head of the commission, generated his own stream of coverage after his speech to the Human Rights Council outlining the report. **Reuters**, **Le Temps**, **DPA**, Syria's **Al Watan**, **India Blooms News Service** and **AP** each noted his assessment that “the conflict in Syria has reached a tipping point, threatening the entire region.” Similar reports were carried by Tunisian weekly **L'Expression** and Egyptian daily **Youm 7**. An **AFP** article – which appeared in **Le Figaro** and Lebanon's **L'Orient-Le Jour** – zeroed in on Carla Del Ponte's assertion that political will was needed to create a tribunal to try the perpetrators of war crimes. Brussels' **Le Soir** and **Al Wafd** (Cairo) noted Del Ponte's comment that the commission's mandate was to engage in “judicial proceedings against those” who have committed war crimes and not against “groups” such as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

While commentary on the report was limited, many of its findings were referred to or expanded upon. A **Miami Herald** editorial advocated for the United States to take the lead in uniting anti-extremist forces across the region. In his analysis for **The Christian Science Monitor**, Nicholas Blanford pointed out that “although sworn enemies on paper,” ISIL and the Syrian regime had largely refrained from fighting – adding that Bashar al-Assad used the brutal exploits of ISIL and other jihadist groups to justify its argument to the international community that it was fighting Islamic “terrorists.”

MALI

A year after the UN deployed a peacekeeping mission in Mali to stabilize the country, the lack of substantive progress with the political process and the continuing security threats drew the media's attention. The additional prospect of the United Nations using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for surveillance also stoked interest this week as peacekeeping chief Hervé Ladsous and MINUSMA head Bert Koenders both addressed the Security Council.

UN officials brief the Council

Reports that the UN plans to use UAVs in Mali's volatile north spread rapidly, as even major media outlets such as the **BBC** led with a headline: “Mali unrest: UN surveillance drones to be deployed.” Ladsous was quoted by **Nederlands Dagblad**, **China Radio International**, **Voice of America** and Indonesian paper **Pikiran-Rakyat** as informing the Security Council that UAVs would be used to enhance “situational awareness” for the UN to help protect civilians and troops. South Africa's **News 24** underscored his statement that the UAVs would provide critical information for peacekeepers. **Le Monde** emphasized the assurance of Koenders that UAVs could be deployed without formal authorization from the Council. According to **France 24** and **AP**, Mali's Foreign Minister Abdoulaye Diop told the Council that Bamako would like the UAVs to be in action “as soon as possible.”

KUNA news agency (Kuwait) focused attention on Ladsous' assessment that the Government and armed groups had made little progress towards a real dialogue, and now armed groups had assumed effective military – and, to an extent, administrative – control of Kidal. **Xinhua** added that Ladsous emphasized the importance of a successful political process for the country's stability and to reverse the deterioration of the security situation in Kidal. Pakistani financial daily **The Business Recorder** chimed in with an **AFP** report noting that Ladsous highlighted that the “status quo” was no longer acceptable and “the time for peace talks is now.” India's **IBN-TV** and the **Saudi Press Agency** ran similar stories. Tehran's **Press TV** covered the story under the headline “UN calls for immediate peace talks in Mali.” Earlier in the week, as, armed groups agreed to peace talks, **Al Jazeera** zeroed in on Koenders' warning that the entire region was in danger if peace was not restored to the north.

Nearly 500,000 children at risk of malnutrition

Mali needs “courageous leadership” was a principal theme of the reporting of the press conference by OCHA's John Ging after his visit to the country. An **AP** report carried by the **New Zealand Herald** drew attention to his assessment that almost 500,000 children under the age of five were at risk of acute malnutrition. News website **Maliactu** elaborated that in terms of humanitarian needs, Ging prioritized access to drinking water as number one, along with a focus on the lack of health and education services. **DPA** illuminated the UN official's observation on violence against women: “Violence against women is a big issue and it's an appalling issue and it's an issue that we really have to mobilize much more effective action to address... These women have the right to be protected.” **AFP** carried Ging's appraisal that “the situation is extremely fragile but the situation can be stabilized, it is not hopeless.”

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