

BURUNDI: A DEEPENING POLITICAL IMPASSE

By George F. Ward

On February 23, 2017, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres submitted a [report](#) to the UN Security Council on the situation in the Central African state of Burundi as required by [Security Council Resolution 2303](#). The report described in convincing detail the progressive withdrawal by the government of Burundi from engagement with international efforts to help resolve the country's long-running political crisis. That crisis began with the decision by Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza to seek a third term in office in 2015. It is worth examining the course of recent developments in Burundi to better understand possible future directions. [more...](#)

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses.



A protester holds up a poster as Burundi nationals from across the U.S. and Canada, along with supporters, demonstrate outside U.N. headquarters, calling for an end to political atrocities and human rights violations unfolding in Burundi under the government of President Pierre Nkurunziza, Tuesday April 26, 2016, in New York. (Source: AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews.)

IN SOUTH SUDAN A MAN-MADE CRISIS REPEATS ITSELF

By Sarah Graveline

On February 20, 2017, the UN announced that two counties in South Sudan were experiencing [famine](#). Over the next three months, 50 percent of the country's population is expected to be affected by emergency levels of [food insecurity](#). Although South Sudan's history of conflict-related hunger stretches back to the 1990s, the current famine highlights a worrisome new trend. While government and rebel forces have intermittently sought to control food aid for political ends, over the last three years soldiers have begun to target aid workers at unprecedented rates. Government obstruction is limiting the international community's response, thereby putting millions of South Sudanese at risk and sowing grievances that may fuel future conflict. [more...](#)



On March 6, 2017, South Sudanese women wait for food distribution by the World Food Programme in Leer County, Southern Leich State in South Sudan. (Source: AP Photo.)

Sarah Graveline is a Research Associate in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

About IDA

The Institute for Defense Analyses is a non-profit corporation operating in the public interest.

IDA's three federally-funded research and development centers provide objective analyses of national security issues and related national challenges, particularly those requiring scientific and technical expertise.

IDA's Africa team focuses on issues related to political, economic, and social stability and security on the continent.

BURUNDI: A DEEPENING POLITICAL IMPASSE

By George F. Ward

On February 23, 2017, United Nations (UN) Secretary-General António Guterres submitted a [report](#) to the UN Security Council on the situation in the Central African state of Burundi as required by [Security Council Resolution 2303](#). The report described in convincing detail the progressive withdrawal by the government of Burundi from engagement with international efforts to help resolve the country's long-running political crisis. That crisis began with the decision by Burundian President Pierre Nkurunziza to seek a third term in office in 2015. It is worth examining the course of recent developments in Burundi to better understand possible future directions.

Background

Burundi has experienced periodic episodes of violence and instability since its post-colonial restoration of independence in 1962. As [Africa Watch](#) previously reported, the Arusha accords, agreed to in August 2000, effectively ended 12 years of civil strife between members of the minority Tutsi and majority Hutu ethnic groups. The accords established a framework for a post-civil-war government based on ethnic inclusion and power-sharing. The agreement specified that no ethnic group could comprise more than 50 percent of the Burundian armed forces. Before the accords, Tutsi had dominated the armed forces. Post-Arusha, a serious program of security sector reform built the Burundian military into an inclusive and professional organization that made major contributions to UN peacekeeping operations.

President Pierre Nkurunziza's decision to pursue a third term shattered Burundi's 15 years of relative calm. Opposition to the decision broke out across ethnic lines, and the government responded with violent repression. The police and political party militias were the principal perpetrators, but an abortive coup led by a former army chief of staff increased the government's distrust of the armed forces.

International Conflict-Resolution Efforts Launched ...

Significant pre- and post-election violence in 2015 resulted in many deaths and sizable [refugee flows](#). Peace talks between the government and opposition, which were brokered by neighboring members of the East African Community, the African Union (AU), and the UN, began in the closing days of 2015. Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni took on the role of mediator. Later, with Museveni focused on his own campaign for a fifth consecutive term, the [East Africa Community](#) named former Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa as an additional mediator, or "facilitator." Despite three meetings in the dialogue process chaired by Museveni and intensive consultations by Mkapa with the government and members of the political opposition, little or no progress has been achieved at the negotiating table.

The UN Security Council, which had periodically decried the violence in Burundi, adopted on July 29, 2016, a [resolution](#) that called for renewed efforts to resolve the conflict. The resolution noted that the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) had documented 348 extrajudicial executions and 651 cases of torture in Burundi between April 2015 and April 2016. Among other provisions, the resolution called on the government of Burundi to accept the deployment of 100 human rights observers and 100 military experts by the African Union. It requested the UN Secretary-General to establish a UN police component in Burundi to monitor the security situation and to support the OHCHR in monitoring human rights violations. The Secretary-General was asked to report every three months on the situation in Burundi.



A protester holds up a poster as Burundi nationals from across the U.S. and Canada, along with supporters, demonstrate outside U.N. headquarters, calling for an end to political atrocities and human rights violations unfolding in Burundi under the government of President Pierre Nkurunziza, Tuesday April 26, 2016, in New York. (Source: AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews.)

... But Have Proven Unsuccessful

None of the international efforts aimed at resolution of the conflict in Burundi have borne fruit. A January 2017 summary by [Human Rights Watch](#) chronicled the government's pattern of noncooperation. After the office of the prosecutor at the International Criminal Court opened a preliminary investigation on Burundi, the government on October 27, 2016, advised the UN Secretary-General of its decision to withdraw from the treaty that established the court. When UN human rights agencies moved to address the situation in Burundi, the government suspended all cooperation with those agencies. The Burundian government has also stonewalled on the AU's deployment of human rights and military observers to the extent that only a few have been deployed. The government rejected the deployment of a larger prevention and protection mission authorized by the AU, saying that the force would constitute an "invading and occupying force." Targeted sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union do not seem to have had a significant effect.

Current Situation

The [report](#) by the UN Secretary-General to the Security Council on February 23, 2017, painted a dramatic picture. In addition to chronicling the lack of progress in peace negotiations and on human rights issues, the report noted increased activity by the *Imbonerakure*, the ruling party's youth militia. The militia has been increasingly participating in joint operations with the police and intelligence services, and it has been implicated in numerous cases of arbitrary arrest, disappearance, sexual violence, and killings. In addition, the report noted that recently approved legislation on the armed forces could legalize the military use of the *Imbonerakure* and other ruling party militia elements. The effect of that could be to reduce the cohesion of the military, which until now has remained mostly neutral in the conflict.

The Secretary-General also pointed out that the political turmoil in Burundi has had a negative impact on the socioeconomic situation in the country. The key macroeconomic indicators are trending in negative directions—decreasing growth, falling investment, increasing public debt, and increasing unemployment, especially among youth. Most recently, Burundi's health minister declared a [malaria epidemic](#) after more than 9 million cases and 3,700 deaths were recorded since 2016.

Outlook

The current situation in Burundi is a starkly drawn example of the ability of a sovereign nation to successfully withstand international pressure and to reject international humanitarian and political efforts aimed at conflict resolution. In terms of international law, the UN Security Council has the power under Chapter VII of the [United Nations Charter](#) to "take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security."

The UN has not exercised that authority with regard to Burundi and is unlikely to do so as long as the government of Burundi retains the support of Permanent Members of the Security Council, such as China, that have the power of veto. Beginning March 13, 2017, the Chinese foreign minister hosted his Burundian counterpart on an official visit to Beijing. Marking the occasion, the Chinese Foreign Ministry [noted](#) the ties between the two countries: "China and Burundi have been friendly with each other for a long time. In recent years, there has been a continual rise in the two countries' political mutual trust and the result of cooperation in infrastructure, medical care and public health, education, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges, and in other areas have been fruitful."

Given that more robust action by the United Nations on Burundi seems unlikely, the responsibility to act may fall on the AU and the East African Community. The crisis has driven 391,700 Burundians into [exile](#) since April 2015, and 27,000 have left since January 2017. The burden on neighboring countries of these refugees, along with the occasional violence related to spillover of the conflict in Burundi, may eventually prompt more forceful intervention. If African regional or subregional organizations take that course, they will deserve the support of friends in the developed world.

Ambassador (ret.) George F. Ward is editor of Africa Watch and a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analyses.

IN SOUTH SUDAN A MAN-MADE CRISIS REPEATS ITSELF

By Sarah Graveline

On February 20, 2017, the UN announced that two counties in South Sudan were experiencing [famine](#). Over the next three months, 50 percent of the country's population is expected to be affected by emergency levels of [food insecurity](#). Although South Sudan's history of conflict-related hunger stretches back to the 1990s, the current famine highlights a worrisome new trend. While government and rebel forces have intermittently sought to control food aid for political ends, over the last three years soldiers have begun to target aid workers at unprecedented rates. Government obstruction is limiting the international community's response, thereby putting millions of South Sudanese at risk and sowing grievances that may fuel future conflict.



On March 6, 2017, South Sudanese women wait for food distribution by the World Food Programme in Leer County, Southern Leich State in South Sudan. (Source: AP Photo.)

Understanding the Roots of the Famine

The UN's [announcement](#) of famine clearly stated that the crisis was man-made, a result of instability that has spread across the country as conflict between government forces and rebel militias devolved into widespread violence. As [Africa Watch](#) has reported, the current crisis was sparked in July 2016 when fighting between forces loyal to South Sudanese President Salva Kiir and the opposition leader Riek Machar caused Machar to flee the country and destabilized the already faltering peace process.

In a [report](#) released on March 6, 2017, the UN Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan found that between July 2016 and March 2017, fighting between the government's Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and opposition forces SPLA-IO (In-Opposition) spread to three regions across the country, leading 700,000 people to flee South Sudan and displacing 2 million inside the country.

This massive displacement created widespread food insecurity because civilians in states like [Central Equatoria](#), which typically produces much of South Sudan's food, were forced to abandon their farms. Conflict has made travel risky, which has reduced exports from neighboring countries that might otherwise have filled the gap in domestic production. The lack of food supply and the concurrent financial crisis have caused [food prices](#) to soar, making provisions out of reach to many even in areas where food is available.

Hunger as a Political Tool in South Sudan

South Sudan's leaders have a long history of using hunger for political and financial gain. In the 1990s, when the SPLA was a rebel group fighting for South Sudanese independence from Sudan, [SPLA leadership](#) arranged "hunger camps" by gathering displaced civilians to solicit international relief. Once the aid was delivered, the SPLA would loot the food for its own troops, leaving the civilians to suffer. Similarly, during this same period, Riek Machar (who in [1991](#) left the SPLA to form his own militia before rejoining in 2002) [was accused](#) of keeping child soldiers in camps and stealing the aid that was delivered for the boys.

These tactics continued after South Sudan gained independence in 2011. After conflict broke out in 2013, the government attempted to tax the [World Food Program](#) when it tried to deliver aid, and soldiers regularly looted food supplies intended for civilians. More perniciously, [human rights groups](#) accused soldiers on both sides of the conflict of purposefully destroying civilians' food supplies as a coercive measure.

This pattern has repeated itself in 2016 and 2017. Multiple [reports have](#) indicated that the SPLA, SPLA-IO, and a proliferating number of militias are directly targeting civilians along ethnic lines. Abuses include physical and sexual violence as well as cattle theft and the looting of food supplies.

This intentional targeting of civilian populations has put the international community in a difficult position in South Sudan. Providing food to starving civilians is a clear humanitarian imperative, yet the need to deliver aid makes humanitarian missions vulnerable to political interference. As recounted above, South Sudanese elites have regularly sought to control the provision of food aid to align with specific political or tactical goals. This has forced humanitarian missions into compromising situations and also put aid workers at risk.

Current Aid Obstruction Reaches Dangerous New Levels

Such risks have been a factor previously in South Sudan. In the 1990s and early 2000s, aid workers were killed and missions were pressed to pay bribes to deliver aid. Over the past four years, however, the South Sudanese government has shown an increasing willingness to target international missions through bureaucratic interference and a tacit endorsement of violence against humanitarian workers.

Since 2013, the government has regularly [threatened](#) to expel foreign workers and occasionally followed through on this threat. In [June 2015](#), South Sudan expelled Toby Lanzer, the deputy head and humanitarian coordinator of the UN Mission in South Sudan. In [December 2016](#), two officials from the Norwegian Refugee Council were deported. Following the declaration of famine, South Sudan raised the international [visa fee](#) from \$100 to \$10,000, in a move nongovernmental organizations claim was designed to limit the presence of humanitarian workers in the country.

The South Sudanese government has also overseen an uptick in violence against foreign workers. In July 2016, [presidential guard soldiers](#) fired at a U.S. Embassy vehicle carrying the Deputy Chief of Mission. In the same month, [SPLA soldiers](#) killed a journalist and raped Western aid workers at the Terrain Hotel in Juba. In total, since December 2013, [67 aid workers](#) have reportedly been killed in South Sudan, making the country one of the most dangerous for humanitarian workers.

Conclusion

South Sudan's famine has not come as a surprise to the international community. South Sudanese leaders in both the government and opposition have a long history of using hunger for political ends. Under these conditions, the humanitarian response is challenging and, as some have [argued](#), potentially counterproductive.

Sarah Graveline is a Research Associate in the Africa Program at the Institute for Defense Analyses.
