Featured Stories

Africa
Sudan: President al-Bashir travels to Chad, defying ICC arrest warrant

Asia
Philippines: President “Noynoy” Aquino addresses nation with his agenda

Latin America
Haiti: Best and brightest fleeing the country
The countries for the **Peace & Justice Update** have been chosen as areas of focus at the institute.

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*The Peace & Justice Updates are written by the Summer 2010 interns at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice at the University of San Diego.*

The interns are Elizabeth Dean (University of California, Berkeley), Gavin Koenig (University of San Diego), Sarah Montgomery (University of California, San Diego), Maryam Rokhideh (University of California, San Diego), and Paige Wopschall (Cal Poly San Luis Obispo).
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CUBA

Cuban President Raul Castro attending the annual July 26 rally.

Cuba celebrated its annual Revolution Day July 26. However, for the first time in 50 years, neither Fidel nor Raul Castro spoke at the rally. The event commemorates the 1953 rebel assault on the Moncada military barracks in Santiago de Cuba, an event celebrated here as the beginning of the revolution against then-President Fulgencio Batista.

Many Cubans interviewed seemed puzzled and disappointed regarding the absence of a speech from the president, saying that they could not remember a year when Fidel or his brother Raul did not speak at the rally. Raul Castro has always seemed to avoid the public eye, but Revolution Day is one of a few set state occasions in which the president traditionally addresses the nation. The decision puzzled Cuban analysts as well, who speculated that Raul might take advantage of the event to reassert his leadership after Fidel Castro’s recent television appearance marked his reemergence into the public sphere after years of illness.

Raul attended the rally but delegated the task of addressing the expectant crowd to the vice-president, Jose Ramon Machado Ventura. Machado asked the Cuban people for discipline and patience as Cuba undergoes economic reform, and condemned the U.S. economic isolation of the island. Machado also expressed Cuba’s support for Venezuela in the conflict between Hugo Chávez and Colombian president Alvaro Uribe. According to Uribe and Colombian officials, Venezuela has been harboring leftist Colombian insurgents, a charge Chávez strongly denies. In his speech, Machado affirmed that, “Venezuela has every right to defend itself and can always count on the steadfast support from the Cuban people.”

Although Machado did address economic issues, many Cubans expressed that they had wanted to hear more about policy reforms and progress from the president. Many Cubans have complained that reforms have been slow and that they want to be kept in the loop.

Since Raul Castro took power, he has made cutting spending in the public sector and increasing agricultural outputs cornerstones of his reform. The government has leased state-owned land to private farmers, increased the price paid for agricultural goods, and agreed to allow farmers to buy
their own supplies rather than have them allocated by the state. However, the agricultural sector’s huge bureaucracy remains problematic and problems with distribution and fertilizer supplies have led to a shortage in agricultural output. Castro is also faced with the task of cutting public sector jobs while creating more opportunities in the private sector. Castro has allowed for some barber shops to be privately owned and permitted more private taxis.

Cuba has been plagued by economic problems since the U.S. enforced a wide-ranging embargo on the country in 1960, shortly after Fidel Castro took power and implemented a communist government. Although various committees of the House of Representatives are considering legislation which would allow the U.S. to purchase agricultural commodities from the island, no significant reforms to U.S. foreign policy toward Cuba have taken place.

(BBC, Granma, New York Times, July 26, 2010)

Haiti:

Best and brightest fleeing the country

Since Haiti’s January 12 earthquake, many Haitians have been fleeing the island to look for a better life. Teachers and students in particular have left Haiti to seek better opportunities, many explaining that they felt they had no future in Haiti. Many have lost families and fortunes in the disaster.

Haitians have been fleeing the island for decades, but after the earthquake U.S. officials feared that the disaster would cause an exodus as it did in the early 1990s when President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted in a military coup. In 1992 alone, nearly 38,000 Haitians were stopped at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard. While no such exodus has occurred since the earthquake, many residents believe that Haiti’s best and brightest have already left and many fear a more massive migration is on the horizon, as Haiti continues to suffer the devastating effects of the disaster with little improvements six months on. Although the U.S. Coast Guard has reported fewer Haitians leaving this year, Haitian residents say that merchants who work near the water and increasingly anxious families are beginning to talk about leaving as well.

Any idea of the severity of Haiti’s exodus after the quake is hard to come by since the Haitian government does not track these figures. According to estimates from the International Organization on Migration, 20,000 Haitians crossed into the Dominican Republic immediately following the disaster; as of June 2010, 30 to 50 Haitians are returned each week from the Bahamas; and the U.S. Coast Guard has sent 647 people back to Haiti. On smuggling routes, it costs roughly $500 for the slowest rides out of Haiti and up to $10,000 for routes with higher success rates, such as those that first go to the Bahamas then proceed to Florida by speedboat.

Many Haitians who remain in the country feel the loss. Schools have been particularly hard hit. College applications are much harder for high school students now that many of their best teachers are gone and little opportunity for high education remains in Port-au-Prince.

(New York Times, July 8, 2010)
Hugo Chávez addresses a meeting of the United Socialist Party in Caracas July 25, expressing his commitment to cut off U.S. oil supplies should Venezuela face an attack from neighboring Colombia. Source: Christian Science Monitor

Colombia: Tensions increase in conflict between Colombia and Venezuela

Venezuelan leader Hugo Chávez has threatened to cut off oil supplies to the United States if Venezuela is attacked by Colombia. Venezuela is the United States’ fifth largest supplier of oil, providing about a million barrels per day.

Chávez’s threat comes during an escalating conflict between Colombia and Venezuela over Colombia’s claim that Venezuela is harboring leftist insurgents across the Venezuelan border. Chávez strongly denies the charge, and has severed diplomatic ties with Colombia in response to Colombia’s presentation of detailed allegations to the Organization of American States (OAS) July 22.

Chávez said that he had received intelligence that “the possibility of armed aggression against Venezuela from Colombia was higher than it has ever been” Chávez bolstered the Venezuela-Colombia border with military troops on high alert.

The Colombian government suspended all taxes on all commercial transactions for border zones between Colombia and Venezuela July 27, declaring a 30 day “social emergency.” The Colombian government said that the decision was made in response to the economic crisis caused by Venezuela’s decision to cut ties with Colombia. Thirty-seven municipalities in the departments of Boyaca, Cesar, La Guajira, Norte de Santander, Aruaca, and Vichada will benefit from the governments’ decrees.

Tensions between Colombia and Venezuela have increased since Colombia’s decision to allow U.S. troops to occupy military bases in Colombia November 2009. Chávez has said that the Colombia-
U.S. deal is a threat to the sovereignty of the region. The current conflict over Colombia’s allegations against Venezuela occurs in the final month of Alvaro Uribe’s presidency. President-elect Juan Manuel Santos, who is to be inaugurated in August, has pledged to improve diplomatic relations with Venezuela, although it is unclear whether this campaign promise will be fulfilled given the current conflict.

(BBC, July 25, Colombia Reports, July 28)

Guatemala:

**Drug and human trafficking a major concern for Guatemala**

Violence caused by Mexican drug cartels is an increasingly troubling problem in Guatemala, as the territory of the cartels spreads into Central America. The Northern Triangle of Central America, which includes Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, has long been a gateway for drugs trafficked from South America. However, as Mexican president Felipe Calderón wages a U.S.-backed war against the drug cartels, many cartels have relocated to Central American states where it is much easier for them to operate. David Gaddis, chief of operations for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, said that the Mexican cartels are “spreading their horizons to states where they, quite frankly, feel more comfortable. These governments in Central America face a very real challenge in confronting these organizations.”

For Guatemala, a country already plagued by impunity and corruption, confronting these cartels seems to be an even more daunting problem. Drug related violence has increased in recent years. According to a June report by the International Crisis Group, “Guatemala has become a paradise for criminals who have little to fear from prosecutors owing to high levels of impunity. High profile assassinations and the governments’ inability to reduce murders have produced paralyzing fear, a sense of helplessness, and frustration.” Since Mexico and Colombia have cracked down on drug gangs, countries like Guatemala with weak governments, strategic locations, and a bureaucracy whose alliance comes at a cheap price, have become a safe haven for criminals.

With the resignation of Carlos Castresana, the head of the U.N.-mandated International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), bringing the perpetrators of violence to justice within Guatemala’s fragile legal system seems more challenging than ever. Castresana was able to make some significant strides during his time with the CICIG, but resigned in frustration over the appointment of Attorney General Conrado Reyes, who had been accused of corruption. Although Reyes was dismissed after Castresana’s resignation, Castresana cited the government’s unwillingness to cooperate with the CICIG as reason for his resignation. Since his return to Spain, he has said that Guatemala will never be able to escape impunity.

In a report released June 2010, the U.S. State Department listed Guatemala as a country under observation for human trafficking. Victims of human trafficking crimes in Guatemala include men, women, and children who are sexually exploited or used for forced labor. Women and children in particular are subjected to forced prostitution in the country. The report explained that indigenous populations in Guatemala are more vulnerable to human trafficking. Immigrants from Central
America passing through Guatemala en route to the United States are also susceptible to human trafficking. The report says that the Guatemalan government does not meet the minimum standards for eliminating human trafficking but “makes significant efforts to do so.”

Despite the signing of peace accords in 1996 that ended Guatemala’s 36-year long civil war, the country has faced immense challenges including drug and human trafficking. While organizations like the CICIG attempt to address Guatemala’s internal problems, violence, impunity, and corruption continue to escalate in the country.

(Foreign Policy, July 22, Washington Post, July 26, Prensa Libre, July 27, 2010)

SOUTH ASIA

Nepal:

NC seeks votes for August 2 election

CPN-UML Chairman Jhala Nath Khanal plans to abstain in next vote

Source: Nepal News

The second Prime Ministerial runoff election is scheduled to take place August 2. Before that time, the Nepali Congress (NC) is attempting to woo the other political parties in order to garner the 301 votes needed to win the post. The remaining candidates in the election are NC vice president Ram Chandra Poudel and Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (alias Prachanda).

The NC has held meetings within the last week, most significantly with parties unified under the United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) and the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist (CPN-UML). The NC has yet to receive concrete support from either of these parties.

The UDMF has stated that it will vote for a party only after receiving a commitment to the Madhesi agenda that it has lain out. The NC has accepted most of its demands, but the UDMF wants a written commitment before pledging support. Within the CPN-UML, the so-called Oli faction is
pressuring UML chairman Jhala Nath Khanal to support the NC, but Khanal has refused to alter his stance that the party will abstain from the vote.

As the largest party in Parliament, with 238 seats, the Maoists only need 63 votes to win the election. The NC, on the other hand, only has 114 seats. This means that it would require full support from not only the 82-MP strong UDMF, but also the CPN-UML, which has 109 seats.

The CPN-UML originally fielded Khanal for the PM post. The party had managed to obtain Maoist support on the condition that the CPN-UML reached a two-thirds majority. Unable to gain the support of another party to reach the two-thirds mark, the CPN-UML pulled out of the race and abstained from the first two rounds of voting. The UDMF did not field a candidate and also abstained from the vote after not receiving a clear commitment from any party to its agenda.

Prachanda resigned as Prime Minister in 2009 over the firing of the army chief. The CPN-UML Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, who took Prachanda’s place, was forced to step down June 30 as part of a three-point deal to extend the Constituent Assembly one year. The three major parties—Maoist, NC, and CPN-UML—were unable to agree on a consensus government by the July 12 deadline set by President Ram Baran Yadav, causing an election for a majority government to take place.

The election was set for July 21 but with the UDMF and CPN-UML abstaining, neither candidate was able to get the 301 votes needed. A run-off election took place July 23 but again no majority was reached.

Nepal has been in a state of political deadlock since Prachanda resigned. If the opposition Nepali Congress party were to come into power, the Maoists presumably might continue to obstruct parliament. Furthermore, Khanal has declared that the CPN-UML will sit in opposition to any government installed without its involvement. Khanal also stated that the only way forward for Nepal is for a consensus government to form between the major parties.


Pakistan:

Sri Lanka:

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Philippines:

President “Noynoy” Aquino addresses the nation with his agenda
In his State of the Nation Address July 26, President “Noynoy” Aquino primarily addressed corruption and extra-judicial killings.

The Philippines’ new president, Benigno S. “Noynoy” Aquino III, made his first State of the Nation Address July 26 in Manila. During his speech in the Congress Hall, Aquino criticized his predecessor Gloria Arroyo, speaking about the desperate financial situation in which she left the nation.

Aquino addressed the concern that the government’s funds are low, especially for emergencies such as typhoons and floods. Budget Secretary Florencio Abad stated that the government is not prepared to “raise the target for the budget deficit in 2010 and nor does it plan to seek a supplementary budget.” Since Aquino took office June 30, he has raised the budget deficit target to $7.1 billion. However, he continued to insist in his speech that of the total 2010 budget only 6.5 percent remains.

Aquino stated that during his six-year term, he intends to implement three major policies. First, he plans to set up a truth commission to investigate corruption charges and create a campaign to stop extra-judicial killings. Another goal is to provide affordable healthcare and education for all. His final promise is to achieve this agenda without raising taxes.

The secessionist group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) welcomed the new president and his administration. “We hope President Noynoy will make a difference,” said MILF peace panel chairman Mohagher Iqbal. During his address, Aquino stated that peace and order would prevail in Mindanao only if all parties, including the Moros and Christians, united.

Former National Treasurer Leonor Briones denounced Aquino’s speech, stating that it failed to consider the establishment of concrete programs to fight poverty, important in a nation where a third of the country lives below the poverty line.
The son of former president, Corazón Aquino and democracy hero Benigno “Ninoy” Aquino “Noynoy” was elected the Philippines’ 15th president May 10. There is no doubt that the Aquino family name helped bring him into office. A recent poll showed he had an 88 percent approval rating. Only time will tell if he can live up to those ratings and his family name.

(BBC, July 26; Reuters; PhilStar, July 27; Inquirer, July 28, 2010)

EAST AFRICA

Sudan:

President al-Bashir travels to Chad, defying arrest warrant from ICC

Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir shakes hands with First Vice President Salva Kiir Mayardit as he prepares to leave for Chad. (Source: Christian Science Monitor)

Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir arrived in Ndjamena, Chad July 21 on his first trip to an International Criminal Court (ICC) member state since the court called for his arrest in 2009. While in Chad, al-Bashir attended a meeting of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD). The court called on Chad to arrest the president, yet Chadian officials stated that they were under no obligation to do so.

Both Chad and Sudan have signed the Rome Statute that established the ICC; however, Sudan has yet to ratify the treaty. Chad’s Interior Minister Ahmat Mahamat Bachir declared July 21, “Bashir will not be arrested in Chad.” However, according to the ICC and the Rome Statute, Chad is required to arrest al-Bashir during his stay in the country. Elise Keppler, spokeswoman from the non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch, commented, “Chad risks the shameful distinction of being the first ICC member state to harbor a suspected war criminal from the court.”
The two countries have been fighting each other through dissidents from each country for years. During the conflict in Darfur, the Sudanese government accused Chad of supporting anti-government rebels in Darfur. Chad has charged Sudan of backing rebels who have attempted to overthrow Chadian President Idriss Deby. The Sudanese-Chadian relationship improved greatly after Deby visited Khartoum in February 2010, the first such visit in six years. Since the normalization of ties, Chad and Sudan have also agreed to joint military border controls.

The ICC added genocide to the charges against al-Bashir July 12, but he has yet to be arrested since his indictment in 2009. April 2010, al-Bashir was re-elected in a landmark election, the first multiparty elections in 24 years, despite facing charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. According to the UN-AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID), 221 people were killed in the Darfur region in June. Fighting has increased in the region since the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) pulled out of peace talks in May.

(BBC, UPI, Guardian July 21, 2010)

Uganda:

AU Summit: 4,000 more peacekeeping troops to be sent to Somalia

Chairman of the AU Commission Jean Ping (l. to r.), Uganda’s President Yoweri Museveni, and AU Chairman President Bingu Wa Mutharika at the opening of the AU Peace Hub.

Source: Christian Science Monitor

Following July 11 bomb attacks in Kampala by the Somali terrorist group, Al-Shabab, which killed 76 people, 4,000 more peacekeeping troops are to join the already 6,000 strong African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) force.

This announcement came at the African Union (AU) Summit that took place in Kampala July 19-27. African leaders immediately voted to dispatch 2,000 more Ugandan and Burundian troops to
AMISOM, the only two countries already contributing forces. Guinea and Djibouti have now committed an additional 2,000 troops.

Hopes that strong African nations, such as South Africa or other East African countries, would contribute forces failed to materialize. But Guinea and Djibouti’s commitments are significant not just for the added troop levels but also because the two countries are primarily Muslim, taking away the “infidel” sentiment that Ugandan and Burundi forces could cause.

Uganda attempted to strengthen the AMISOM mandate in Somalia from peacekeeping to peace enforcement. That did not happen, but AMISOM’s rules of engagement will be modified to allow for a more forceful approach.

The U.S. has pledged support for the extra troops. Since 2007, the U.S. has given “training, logistical support and equipment worth more than $175 million” to AMISOM and has promised additional resources.

The International Criminal Court’s (ICC) arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for genocide and war crimes in Darfur was also discussed at the Summit. It is an issue over which African nations are divided. AU chairman, Malawi President Bingu wa Mutharika, requested that the United Nations postpone the arrest warrant.

Uganda is a member to the Rome statute of the ICC and therefore would have been obliged to arrest al-Bashir. Al-Bashir failed to attend an economic conference in 2009 in Uganda because of the indictment and again decided not to travel to Uganda for this AU Summit.

The official maternal and child health theme of the AU Summit was overshadowed by discussions regarding African peacekeeping forces in Somalia, due to the bomb attacks that came two weeks before the start of the summit.

Al-Shabab was the militant wing of the Somalia Council of Islamic Courts that controlled much of Somalia at one time. The group is listed as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and still controls large parts of Somalia. This was the first transnational attack by the group.

The Summit occurred amid fighting in Mogadishu that left 14 people dead, including two AMISOM peacekeepers. Uganda’s president vowed to eliminate al-Shabab following the Kampala attacks.


WEST AFRICA

Guinea:

Guineans send peacekeeping troops to Somalia
Guinea has agreed to send hundreds of troops to Somalia to bolster the African Union’s peacekeeping force in the country after Somali insurgents claimed responsibility for bombings in Uganda during the World Cup final July 11 that killed 76 people.

The announcement came during the 15th African Union summit meeting in Kampala. African Union Commission chief Jean Ping said an 850-member battalion of Guinean troops is trained and ready to join AMISOM, the AU peacekeeping force in Somalia.

Guinea would become the third country to join the AMISOM mission, along with Uganda and Burundi, and the first country from West Africa. Other countries have failed to deliver on promises to send troops to AMISOM, adding to the current 6,000 troops. Ping also said he has made a personal plea to South African President Jacob Zuma to send troops to Somalia, but has not received a reply.

Speaking to reporters, the AU Commission chairman said the Guineans, and an additional 2,000 Ugandan troops, could bring AMISOM’s overall troop strength to 9,000 within weeks. AMISOM’s mandate is likely to be strengthened to give it authority to be more aggressive in fending off attacks by Somalia’s al-Shabab militants. Their current mission is limited to protecting a few strategic installations in Mogadishu.

The troops from Guinea are expected to join a separate force from Djibouti, yielding the mission’s first deployments from predominantly Muslim countries. Somalia’s UN-backed government has said it wants a Muslim country to join AMISOM to get rid of what some analysts refer to as an “infidel Ugandans” tag which they say leads to foreign jihadists joining al-Shabab. Since Guinea and Djibouti are predominantly Muslim nations, the choice to send their troops to Somalia may have been an attempt to help neutralize tension.

“We welcome them,” said Felix Kuliagye, a Ugandan military spokesman. “Religion plays a key role in acceptability.”

AU officials say the Guinean troop deployment will take place as soon as Guinea is reinstated as a member in good standing of the continental body. The country’s membership was suspended after a 2008 military coup, but a first round of presidential elections was held last month, and a second round is expected shortly.


Tanks of African union peacekeepers in Somalia roll on the street of Mogadishu.
Source: VOA News

Liberia:

Governments of Liberia and Nigeria sign crude oil deal agreement
The Liberian authorities have ratified a “purchase and sale” agreement with Nigeria through which the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) will provide 20,000 barrels of crude oil per day to the Liberia Petroleum Refining Corporation (LPRC).

The news was announced July 23 at a news conference attended by members of the LPRC Board. The signing ceremonies took place in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, where the Liberian government was represented by Justice Minister, Christina Tah and LPRC’s Managing Director T. Nelson Williams.

The corporation has also signed a management service contract with Sahara Energy Resources Ltd. to oversee the operations, logistics and system of lifting the oil, including the programming, loading, transportation and trading of the crude oil. Sahara is a global oil trading company conducting trade in countries around the world, including some countries in West Africa.

“This manifestation of assistance will enable the government of Liberia to accrue about $120,000 per month, an amount that will be used for national reconstruction projects,” said Williams in a statement.

According to the management of the LPRC, the contract is expected to last for a period of twelve months, but is also renewable for an additional period of twelve months upon negotiations between the LPRC and NNPC.


Source: African News

Côte d'Ivoire: Dutch court has found multinational Trafigura guilty of exporting toxic waste
A Dutch court has fined the multinational shipping company Trafigura one million Euros for illegally exporting toxic waste to Côte d'Ivoire. Presiding judge Frans Bauduin said the company was guilty of breaking European waste export laws and, in doing so, causing the deaths of 17 Ivorian.

In July 2006, Trafigura, a Switzerland-based oil trading company, attempted to unload low-grade oil waste in Amsterdam for treatment, declaring it “harmless slop.” When the treatment company, Probo Koala, asked a high price to clean the waste, the cargo was shipped to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire to be handled at a much lower rate. Because the dangerous nature of the waste was concealed, it was dumped in a city, allegedly leading to the deaths of 17 people and injury of thousands. Trafigura has denied any wrongdoing.

In a ruling July 23, the company was found guilty of concealing what the charge termed, the “harmful nature” of the waste on board the Probo Koala ship that arrived at the port of Amsterdam in July 2006 and was redirected to Côte d'Ivoire.

Trafigura “exported the waste... to the state without having done a thorough analysis of the port city of Abidjan’s capacity to process the waste... in a responsible way,” said the judge.

Trafigura said it was disappointed by the ruling in the Amsterdam district court, its first court sanction for the events in Côte d'Ivoire, and would consider an appeal.

Denis Yao Pipira, president of the Ivory Coast’s national federation of victims of toxic waste, hailed what he called “a courageous decision.”

“It’s the first time in four years that a verdict convicted Trafigura. We need a trial on the dumping of the toxic waste in Abidjan to take place. As long as that is not done, we victims will not be satisfied,” Pipira said.

Amnesty International said the waste “had a huge impact on the lives of tens of thousands of people,” and several dumping areas “are yet to be fully decontaminated.”

A United Nations report published in September 2009 found strong evidence blaming the waste for at least 15 deaths and several hospitalizations.

(Afrique en Ligne, July 27; Agence France-Presse, BBC, July 23, 2010)