

Pacific Island Countries and Territories

Coke-Tiki—On Drug Trade in the Pacific

Drug trade throughout the Pacific region—especially among the PICTs (Pacific Island Countries and Territories)—has grown quickly and steadily over the last ten to fifteen years. Why, and why is it important now?

There are a lot of possible explanations to the expanding trade through the PICTs. For starters, the region is a geographical dream for would-be-drug traffickers, a collection of micro-states consisting of tens to hundreds of islands in the world's largest ocean. The PICTs are also stuck in-between Australia, which according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has one of the highest per-capita use of a multitude of illegal drugs, such as cocaine and amphetamines, and the major producers in Latin America and SE Asia.

The tenacious work of law agencies in the Caribbean has also forced the South-to-North America-trade to use the Pacific as primary region for trafficking, which may explain why Latin American cocaine is increasingly being exported to Australia, as trafficking resources are now concentrated on the Pacific side of the Americas.

The UNODC has also pointed to increasing tourism in the Pacific region as an explanation to the increased use of the Pacific route, arguing that the increase in private and commercial vessels further complicates the already difficult task of patrolling the Pacific islands.

The PICTs may also prove to be especially vulnerable to the dangers associated with drug trafficking. Rising sea-levels and an aggressive campaign for influence in the region by the Chinese Communist Party could be exacerbated by the negative effects of transnational crime, such as corruption and strained communal relations.

That drug-traders from both SE-Asia and Latin America are both using the PICTs whilst vying for influence in the same market could potentially risk conflict between actors from two markets that would otherwise not interact, which poses another risk for the region's stability.

Transnational crime organisations also have large resources at their disposal to facilitate drug trafficking, compared to the small economies of most PICTs. Spillover of substance abuse from the Australia and New Zealand bound is another risk-factor, with signs already seen of rising addiction problems in the major hubs such as Fiji.



Myint and several of the country's senior officials. Myanmar's Commander-in-Chief of Defence Services, Min Aung Hlaing, has seized power as the country's de facto leader as a result of the coup—a move that drew subsequent condemnation of the European Union, the United States and the United Nations. The Tatmadaw announced a year-long state of emergency in response to an alleged election fraud that took place on November 8, 2020. Mass protests followed, with hundreds of thousands of citizens calling for the return of democracy. During a virtual press conference held on March 3, the UN Special Envoy for Myanmar, Christine Schraner Burgener, warned that the chain of events in Myanmar could lead to a "real war" and called upon the Security Council to unite its front against the violence.

Despite protesters employing non-violent methods, their resistance was met with raging reactions of both the military forces and its supporters, which resulted in more than 60 deaths and a total of 2008 individuals being "arrested, charged or sentenced" in relation to the coup, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) reported on March 10. The same day, an exclusive report by Reuters disclosed the case of Tha Peng, one of Burmese police lance corporals who refused to comply with the "shoot to kill" order issued by a superior police officer. According to a "senior Indian official" quoted by Reuters, "around 100 people from Myanmar, mostly policemen and their families" have fled to India to avoid shooting at the peaceful protesters. Research published by Amnesty International on March 11 described the military response as a "killing spree," with the Tatmadaw utilizing "weapons that are only appropriate for the battlefield, not for policing actions."

The rapidly accelerating chain of events prompted the UN Security Council to unanimously condemn violence against the protesters. Issued on March 10 by Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US Ambassador to the UN, the statement stressed that "It is vital that the rights of minorities are fully protected." The declaration drew voices of criticism describing it as "a predictable compromise" and yet, "a minor miracle"—as Richard Gowan, the International Crisis Group's UN liaison, told CNN—referring to the clashing objectives of China and the West that in the past resulted in decision-making deadlocks.

AGNIESZKA GRZY

Northeast Nigeria

Attacks on Dikwa Lead to "Rethinking" of Aid

On March 1, the town of Dikwa, a vital defensive stronghold and humanitarian hub, was attacked by an infiltration squad of the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP). More specifically, a hospital and aid agency's premises were burned and damaged and 25 aid workers trapped in a shelter under siege, AFP reported. The workers were later rescued by the Nigerian military and handed over to the government.

It marked the fourth attack this year, and the second one within 24 hours. Located in Borno state, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates the Dikwa Local Government population at around 114,000, including more than 75,000 internally displaced persons.

Residents were reportedly handed cash to stay in town as they were not the main target, which was the military and anti-Islam forces. The jihadist group split from Boko Haram in 2016, both widely regarded as a deadly threat in the region as well as neighboring states Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

In a decade of Boko Haram's terrorist activities in the country, more than 37,500 people have been killed and an estimated 2.5 million people have been displaced; 12.5 million are in need of humanitarian aid in the Lake Chad Basin region and levels of malnutrition are critically high, according to the UN Refugee Agency.

"Fresh attacks in Dikwa on 18 February and 1 March further reduced the humanitarian footprint and increased security threats," states Reliefweb, OCHA's humanitarian information service, latching on to reports of the UN withdrawing aid workers from Northern Borno.

VICTORIA BECKER

Myanmar

Domestic Democracy Setback Provokes International Media and Diplomatic Response

February 1, 2021: A military coup launched by the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces, deposed numerous members of Myanmar's ruling party, the National League for Democracy. The detainees included the country's effective leader, State Counsellor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi—as well as President Win