

with Mail & Guardian

The Continent



Illustration: Elise Swain/The Intercept

INVESTIGATION

The Americans who got away with murder in Somalia

And the family left behind

Inside:

- **Rwanda:** Not a safe place for migrants, says UK court (p7)
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Cover: "When I went to Africa, it seemed like no one was paying attention. It was like 'We can do whatever we want.'" These are the words of an American military drone operator. They are revealed this week in a devastating new investigation into one particular drone strike that killed a young Somali mother and her four-year-old daughter – and left behind a grieving family (pictured on the cover illustration is Qaali Dahir Mohamed, the young woman's sister). The unit that conducted the fatal strike has been completely exonerated by the US military (p11).

HORN OF AFRICA**Stealing from the poor to feed the elite**

After a five-month hiatus, the United States will resume the provision of food aid to Ethiopia next month. It was suspended in March after aid agencies found that Ethiopian government

officials were stealing the donated food in a nationwide scheme. The Ethiopian government has agreed to remove itself from the food dispatch, storage and distribution chain, among other reforms introduced. In September, the European Union said it had “temporarily suspended” disbursements of aid meant for vulnerable people in Somalia because of theft and misuse.

Shore leave: Rising oceans are reclaiming the land. Photo: Stefan Heunis/AFP

**BENIN****30m of coastline lost to the sea each year**

Despite investing over \$160-million to stymie the expanding ocean, Benin's coastline erodes by about 30 metres

a year, Beninois ocean expert Cossi Georges Degbe told Pakistan's *Urdu Point* this week. This eats into community land and threatens infrastructure like roads. Greenhouse gases emitted by the industrialised world have heated our world so much that glaciers are melting into the oceans, driving them to expand.

DRC**WHO pays off sexual abuse survivors**

After journalists revealed that responders to the 2020 Ebola crisis sexually abused and exploited women in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the World Health Organisation commissioned an investigation that confirmed the reports and implicated 21 United Nations staff. The agency, with a budget of \$1.5-million a year for preventing sexual misconduct in the DRC, then gave 104 of the identified victims \$250 each – but only after they attended courses and proposed income-generating activities for themselves, the *Associated Press* reported. Critics are calling this “hush money”, but the WHO says they are “victim survivor packages”.

MADAGASCAR**Opposition boycotts presidential polls**

A tumultuous campaign season ended with 10 opposition candidates urging voters to stay away from polling stations in Thursday’s election, describing the process as a joke. Incumbent President Andry Rajoelina is seeking a second or third term, depending on how one counts. He was the unelected president between 2009 and 2014, following a coup by the army. He then ran in, and won, the 2018 election.



Afromania: President Klaus Werner Iohannis of Romania arrives in Nairobi. Photo: Simon Maina/AFP

GEOPOLITICS**Romania gets in line to woo Africa**

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis is on an “Africa tour” that marks the highest-level diplomatic gesture from Romania towards Africa in 30 years. His first stop was Nairobi before heading to Tanzania, Cabo Verde and Senegal. Prior to the visit, the official Romanian Gazette published decrees bestowing the “Star of Romania” national honours on all the four African presidents that Iohannis is visiting with. Russian state media like *RT* have framed the visit as part of attempts by smaller former Soviet states to compete with Russia in Africa.



Photo: Fabrice
Coffrini/AFP

MALAWI

Times are so tough, the big men have quit globetrotting

Malawi's President Lazarus Chakwera (above) has banned international travel for his ministers and himself amid skyrocketing price increases on the local market. This comes after the government devalued the currency, the kwacha. Last week's 44% devaluation follows a 25% devaluation in May 2022. Devaluation makes imported goods like fuel much more expensive for Malawians who earn in local currency, but should make Malawian exports cheaper for outsiders who can pay in US dollars. This would shore up the government's dwindling forex reserves – and allow it to buy flight tickets again.

EGYPT

Journalists organise Gaza aid

The Egyptian Journalists Syndicate has called for global journalists and activists to join a convoy that will leave Cairo next week for the Rafah border crossing. They are pushing for the border to be opened. The crossing is the only exit and entrance into the Gaza Strip that isn't controlled by Israel. The journalists want the crossing opened for humanitarian purposes. Egypt has resisted calls to open the crossing unconditionally, ostensibly to prevent Israel from removing Palestinians from their home – but also wary of the political impact of hundreds of thousands of refugees.

SPORT

Football World Cup qualifiers kick-off

Lesotho (population 2.2-million, GDP \$2.5-billion) held Nigeria (population 213-million, GDP \$440-billion) to a shock 1-1 draw in Uyo on Thursday in the opening qualifier for the 2026 men's football World Cup. Tiny Djibouti was unable to repeat Lesotho's success, losing 6-0 to Egypt, with Egypt's Mohamed Salah scoring four goals. Meanwhile, tournament co-hosts Morocco didn't play at all after Eritrea withdrew – apparently fearing players would defect if allowed to leave the country.

CULTURE

Julie Mehretu's record-setting sale

Walkers With the Dawn and Morning, a large-scale abstract painting by Julie Mehretu (below) sold for \$10.7-million in New York on Wednesday. This is just

a month after she sold another artwork for \$9.3-million in Hong Kong. Born in Ethiopia, Mehretu moved to the US in the 1970s. There is surging interest in African art but Mehretu's recent sales are still eye-popping. Before October, the highest selling African art piece was *The Visitor* by South African Marlene Dumas which sold for \$6.3-million in 2008.



ETHIOPIA

'Diplomatic incident' as security agents assault bank staff

Two workers of the African Development Bank (AfDB) were on 31 October "unlawfully arrested, physically assaulted and detained for hours" in Ethiopia, the

bank said on Thursday in a statement. Employees of multilateral institutions like AfDB are considered diplomats under international law, and typically enjoy better treatment by state agencies than mere mortals. The incident ruffled feathers all the way to the office of Prime Minister Ahmed Abiy, who intervened to free the bankers. The bank has since lodged a formal complaint with the Ethiopian state.

UK/Rwanda

Supreme Court halts 'unlawful' Rwanda migrant deal

Kiri Rupiah

Rwanda has pocketed £140-million of British taxpayer money thanks to the United Kingdom government's failed attempt at breaking the law.

The plan, introduced by former prime minister Boris Johnson, would have been so simple, if it wasn't so unlawful. Britain would send its unwanted asylum seekers to get processed in the east African country – even though Rwanda has a track record of forcibly deporting asylum seekers back to their country of origin.

On Wednesday, the British Supreme Court upheld an earlier court ruling that the deal was unlawful, and that migrants would not be safe in Rwanda.

In recent months, the Rwanda deal's most enthusiastic proponent has been Suella Braverman, who was herself replaced in a Monday cabinet reshuffle.

Braverman, the daughter of Kenyan



No deal: Asylum seekers should not be sent to Rwanda. Photo: Niklas Halle'n/AFP

and Mauritian immigrants, has built a reputation as being more radically right-wing than a lot of her pale, male colleagues in the ruling party. In a letter following her firing, Braverman wrote to Rishi Sunak, describing the prime minister as weak and dishonest. She said that Sunak ignored her advice to leave the European Court of Human Rights and turn a blind eye to other human rights obligations in order to get the Rwanda deal done. He has since said he'll force through a workaround.

The issue of asylum seekers has become central to British politics, even though the UK receives significantly fewer asylum seekers than other European countries such as Germany and France, as well as many African countries. So far this year, for example, Britain has received 78,768 asylum seeker applications, while Chad is dealing with more than 180,000. ■

Liberia

George Weah meets the limits of his stardom

As a sports legend and leading opposition figure, George Weah swept to power last time around. But after six years in office, the novelty appears to have worn off, and he is fighting for his political life.

Kiri Rupiah

With 99.6% of votes counted in the run-off election in Liberia, opposition leader Joseph Boakai looks set to become the country's president. Incumbent president and former football superstar George Weah has been unable to repeat his landslide win in the run-off against the same opponent six years ago.

When elected in 2017 – and inaugurated in office the next year – Weah promised to create jobs and crack down on corruption. In this year's re-election campaign he was asking for more time to do the same, but was weighed down by several high-profile corruption cases and the cost-of-living crisis. It didn't help that he spent months at a time abroad, away from growing dissatisfaction at home.

A day before his return from a 48-day trip abroad last December, hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Monrovia to protest against his government's

inability to control inflation. Three months prior, the US government had imposed sanctions on three officials of his government, including his chief of staff, over corruption.

A day before his return from a 48-day trip abroad, hundreds of demonstrators gathered in Monrovia to protest growing inflation.

Not all of this is Weah's fault: he inherited an economy struggling from the impact of two civil wars and the Ebola crisis, and then had to navigate the coronavirus pandemic and a global economic slowdown.

Boakai, who will replace Weah in the Executive Mansion, served as vice-president in the government of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the country's Nobel Peace Prize-winning first post-war president. ■

Sport

The African Football League experiment worked

The football was great, the prize money even better. Can CAF make it bigger and richer next year?

Daniel Ekonde

Whether they played well or not, the eight clubs which contested the inaugural FIFA-backed African Football League (AFL) have all pocketed at least \$1-million – even though some played only two matches. The global football governing body and its African superintendent, the Confederation of African Football (CAF), dished out \$14-million in the six-week, 14-match tournament.

The final was won last Sunday by South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns, who beat Morocco's Wydad Athletic over two legs. Sundowns is owned by the billionaire Patrice Motsepe, who is also the president of CAF. His team earned \$4-million for

winning the trophy.

To put these sums into perspective, the Nigerian representative Enyimba FC received \$1-million despite losing both its games in the quarterfinals. Last season, it received just \$120,000 for winning the Nigerian domestic league title after five months of grueling competition.

The competition received scant TV coverage but was available to watch online. The quality of football was generally excellent, and the result may indicate a geographical shift in the power balance of continental football: the long-running CAF Champions League, the other major continental tournament, has been won by north African teams for the last seven iterations.

Next season, the AFL is planning to expand to 24 teams – if, that is, this pilot edition has convinced sponsors to cover the \$100-million in prize money that has been promised by CAF and FIFA. ■



Photo: Muzi Ntombela/BackpagePix

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Illustration:
Elise Swain/
The Intercept

A US drone killed a Somali mother and her daughter – but no one was found guilty

The world's most powerful military force mistook a woman and a child for a man in rural Somalia, killed them, and decided their deaths were no one's fault.

Nick Turse in Mogadishu

On the morning of 1 April 2018, Luul Dahir Mohamed was on her way to visit her brother in the Galguduud region of central Somalia. She wanted to meet his children for the first time. Her brother, Qasim Dahir Mohamed, was supposed to pick her up. But they could not reach each other on the phone, and so Luul caught a ride in a maroon Toyota Hilux pickup

instead.

Qasim actually passed the Hilux on the road, and saw Luul sitting in the passenger seat. Her four-year-old daughter, Mariam, was on her lap. He waved and hooted, but the vehicle kept going.

A little while later, Qasim heard an explosion, followed by another and, after a pause, one more blast.

The news spread fast: A drone strike had hit a pickup. Qasim and his brother

rushed towards the site. When they found the Hilux, the roof was torn open, the bed was smashed, and its cargo of mattresses and pillows were aflame. Four men were dead inside and another young man lay lifeless in the dirt nearby. About 200 feet away, Qasim found what remained of Luul. Her left leg was mangled, and the top of her head was missing. She died clutching four-year old daughter, Mariam, whose body was peppered with tiny shards of shrapnel.

Qasim tore off a swath of his sarong and began gathering up small pieces of his sister. Stunned and grieving, he spent hours searching for fragments of her body along the dirt road, working by the glare of his car's headlights as the sky darkened.

Finally, he bundled Luul's and Mariam's remains and brought them home. Luul's body was so mutilated that it was impossible to properly wash, as is required in Islam. Instead, he wrapped her with care in a shroud. Luul and Mariam were buried together in a village cemetery. The next day, locals living near the strike site called Qasim. They had found the top of Luul's skull complete with hair and a delicate gold teardrop dangling from one ear. She was only 22-years old at the time of her death.

The blindness of war in distant places

Nearly a century ago in Nicaragua, American Marines in an armed propeller plane spotted a group of civilian men chopping weeds and trimming trees far below. Convinced that something nefarious was underway, they opened



Qaali Dahir Mohamed, Luul's sister, shows a photo of her with her nephew Mohamed Amin (right). Photo: Omar Faruk/*The Intercept*

fire. The US never bothered to count the wounded and dead.

Since then, anonymous, unaccountable devastation from the air has been a feature of the American way of waging war in places like in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, and Syria.

This investigation, published in partnership with *The Intercept* and based on exclusive documents and extensive interviews, examines the flawed and fatal decision-making that led to one such air strike – the attack that killed Luul and Mariam. It is a story about missed connections and faulty intelligence, about Americans misreading what they saw and obliterating civilians they didn't intend to kill but didn't care enough to save.

When Luul and Mariam boarded the maroon Hilux, they had no idea that it

was being surveilled from the sky by the American military, who suspected that several al-Shabaab militants or sympathisers were on board.

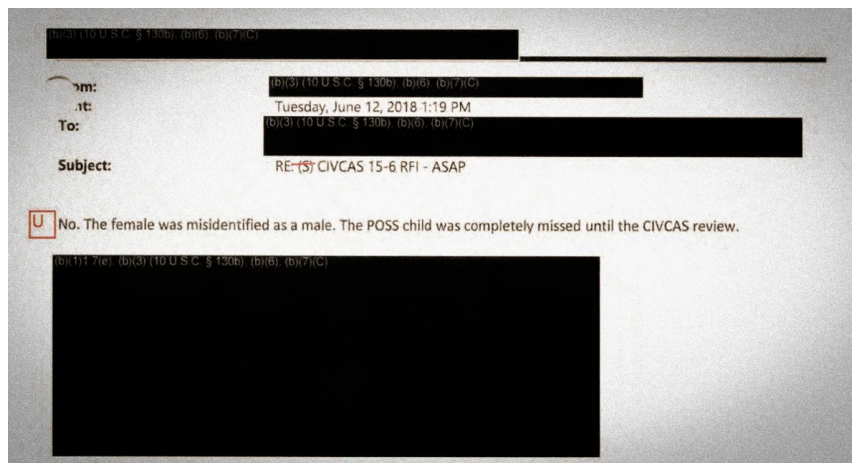
Thousands of kilometres away, in a military joint operations centre that the US government refuses to identify, members of a Special Operations task force that officials won't name watched live footage, that they declined to release, of everyone who entered the Hilux. They recorded and scrutinised it, chronicling when each "ADM" – or adult male – got in or out, where they walked and what they did. The Americans logged these minute details with a pretence of precision, but they never understood what they were seeing.

For all their technology and supposed expertise, the Americans were confused, and some were inexperienced, according to a US Department of Defence

investigation obtained by *The Intercept* via the Freedom of Information Act.

The Americans logged these minute details with a pretence of precision, but they never understood what they were seeing.

The investigation report is the first such document to be published about a US drone strike in Africa. It reveals that after months of "target development," the Americans suddenly found themselves in a mad rush to kill people who posed no threat to the US in a war that the US Congress never declared. They argued among themselves about even the most basic details, like how many passengers were in the vehicle. And in the end, they got it wrong. The Americans couldn't tell a man from a woman, which might have



The Intercept obtained this AR 15-6 investigation of the drone strike that killed Luul Dahir Mohamed and Mariam Shilow Muse via the Freedom of Information Act.

affected their decision to conduct the strike. They also missed the four-year-old child whose presence should have caused them to stand down.

In the joint operations centre, the Americans quickly realised their initial strike had failed to kill all the passengers and decided to eliminate what the investigation file refers to as a sole “survivor running away from vehicle post the first engagement”. But the “survivor” was actually two people: Luul and Mariam. Seconds later, another missile screamed down from the sky.

“It seemed like they did everything wrong,” said an American drone pilot who worked in Somalia and examined the investigation file at *The Intercept*’s request.

The next day – 2 April – US Africa Command, or AFRICOM, announced it had killed “five terrorists” and destroyed one vehicle, and that “no civilians were killed in this airstrike”. The Somali press immediately said otherwise. By the following month, the task force had appointed an investigating officer to sort it all out. He quickly determined that his unit had killed an “adult female and child” – as well as four adult men – but expressed doubt that their identities would ever be known.

According to the secret investigation, the attack was the product of faulty intelligence as well as rushed and imprecise targeting carried out by a Special Operations strike cell whose members considered themselves inexperienced. Despite this, the investigation exonerated the team involved. “The strike complied with the applicable rules of engagement,”

wrote the investigator.

AFRICOM declined to answer *The Intercept*’s questions about the attack or civilian casualties in general. When the command finally admitted the killings in 2019, AFRICOM’s then-commander, General Thomas Waldhauser, said it was “critically important that people understand we adhere to exacting standards and when we fall short, we acknowledge shortcomings and take appropriate action”.

“We can do whatever we want”

Some who took part in America’s drone war in Somalia dispute that. “When I went to Africa, it seemed like no one was paying attention,” the drone pilot and strike cell analyst, who served in Somalia the year Luul and Mariam were killed, told *The Intercept*. He spoke on condition of anonymity due to government secrecy surrounding US drone operations. “It was like ‘We can do whatever we want.’ It was a different mindset from the Special Forces I worked with in Afghanistan. There was almost no quality control on the vetting of the strikes. A lot of safeguards got left out.”

He explained that, as Americans watch targets from the sky, a series of “wickets” – such as the absence of civilians or a potential target seen associating with a “known bad guy” – must be achieved before launching a strike. “When I was in Afghanistan, you normally had to hit five wickets, and in Africa, these ‘wickets’ were lessened,” he said. “I never really figured out what was a go or no-go in Somalia. It seemed to be all over the place. We often didn’t have all the information that we

should have had to conduct a strike.”

Existing safeguards on airstrikes had been relaxed by president Donald Trump when he assumed office in 2017. Waldhauser said the looser targeting rules allowed the military “to prosecute targets in a more rapid fashion”. Almost immediately, attacks in Somalia tripled. So did civilian casualties in US war zones including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The US conducted 208 declared attacks in Somalia during Trump’s single term in the White House, a 460% increase over the eight years of the Obama presidency. (The Biden administration has conducted 31 declared strikes there, including 13 so far in 2023.)

There was another possible contributing factor to civilian casualties. During 2017 and 2018, commanders within Task Force 111, the military unit responsible for drone attacks in Somalia, Libya, and Yemen, competed to produce high body counts, raising red flags in the intelligence community, according to a US intelligence source who asked not to be identified due to the sensitivity of the topic.

The US conducted 208 declared attacks in Somalia during Trump’s single term ... a 460% increase over the eight years of the Obama administration

The US Defence Department has publicly confirmed just five civilian harm incidents in Somalia and maintains a \$3-million annual budget to compensate

survivors, but there is no evidence that any Somali victims or their families – including the family of Luul and Mariam – have ever received amends.

To date, AFRICOM won’t even discuss reparations with a journalist, much less provide compensation to relatives of the dead.

Airwars, the airstrike monitoring organisation based in the United Kingdom, says up to 161 civilians have been killed by US strikes in Somalia. The official number is five.

Collateral damage

Over the last century, the US military has shown a consistent disregard for civilian lives. It has repeatedly cast or misidentified ordinary people as enemies; failed to investigate civilian harm allegations; excused casualties as regrettable but unavoidable; and failed to prevent their recurrence or to hold troops accountable. These long-standing practices – evident in the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the carpet bombing of Vietnam and Cambodia – stand in stark contrast to the US government’s public campaigns to sell its wars as benign, its air campaigns as precise, its concern for civilians as overriding, and the deaths of innocent people as “tragic” anomalies.

During the first 20 years of the war on terror, the US conducted more than 91,000 airstrikes across seven major conflict zones – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen – and killed up to 48,308 civilians, according to a 2021 analysis by Airwars.

Key elements of America’s destructive

brand of air war echo into the present. In recent weeks, Israeli officials have repeatedly justified attacks on Gaza by citing methods employed by the US and its allies against Germany and other Axis powers during World War II. The United Nations has said “there is already clear evidence that war crimes may have been committed” by the Israeli military and Hamas militants. In Gaza, Israel has also embraced the use of “free-fire zones” – which the US employed to open wide swaths of South Vietnam to almost unrestrained attack, killing countless civilians.

We are not the enemies

Living in al-Shabaab territory in the 2010s, Luul inhabited a world almost devoid of smartphones and social media. Her family has no photographs to remember her by.

The US government, meanwhile, has countless images of Luul. Its cameras captured video of her and Mariam entering the pickup truck, and analysts had eyes on her through her last moments. Luul’s visage now exists only in classified files and in the memories of those who knew her – and in the face of her younger sister, to whom she bore an uncanny, almost identical, resemblance.

Her family have yet to come to terms with her death.

“I was bewildered at the beginning when my daughter and wife were killed. I expected an apology and compensation considering the Americans’ mistake. But we received nothing,” said Luul’s husband, Shilow Muse Ali. “They admitted there were civilian casualties, but this



Shilow Muse Ali, Luul's husband. Photo: Omar Faruk /*The Intercept*

investigation shows that they don’t even know who they killed.”

In the intervening years, bewilderment has turned to anger. “We aren’t the people they are targeting. We are not supposed to be treated like we’re enemies. Does the US military even see a difference between enemies and civilians?” he asked.

“We want the truth from the American government. But we already know it,” he said. “This attack shows that there’s no distinction, none at all. The Americans see enemies and civilians as the same.” ■

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Brain Drain



Photo: Godong/
Universal Images Group
via Getty Images

Trainee doctors are (barely) holding healthcare together in Africa

As the Global North poaches African doctors, healthcare falls to overworked and unmentored interns, who learn medical procedures from YouTube

Francis Kokutse

Fifteen of the world's (fiscally) richest countries have over 55,000 African doctors in their health systems, a new data

analysis by *The Continent* shows. These are doctors who qualified before entering those countries. The United Kingdom is the top culprit, followed by the United States, France, Canada, Germany and

Ireland, in that order.

Of the African countries being drained of doctors, an analysis of the latest data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development shows that Egypt has lost the most, followed by Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria and Sudan.

These countries have consequently paid a significant price in the quality of healthcare they can offer their own residents. Egypt, for example, has the lowest doctor to patient ratio of its north African neighbours. In many of the drained countries, there are so few trained doctors left that the bulk of healthcare falls to doctors in training: medical interns.

Research in Uganda and Kenya details the cost to those interns. The study titled “We were treated like we are nobody” was published this month in the *British Medical Journal for Global Health* and is based on data on more than 700 medical interns in the two countries, as well as interviews with 54 junior doctors and 14 consultant physicians.

In many of the drained countries, there are so few trained doctors left that the bulk of healthcare falls to doctors in training: medical interns.

It found that medical interns are suffering from burnout and stress because they are working unreasonable hours and frequently don't have superiors to train and supervise them. Their working conditions continue to have the same



Leeched: Africa's medical brain drain is leaving trainees in the lurch and making healthcare hazardous. Photo: Patrick Meinhardt/Bloomberg via Getty Images

challenges that drive more experienced doctors to seek greener pastures.

The research found that the lack of support and supervision also “threatened individuals’ well-being and the quality of care being delivered”.

“Many reported working unreasonable hours as long as 72 hours due to staff shortage,” Yingxi Zhao, one of the researchers, told *The Continent*. “Sometimes interns were the only staff managing the wards or had to perform certain procedures unsupervised. These included cases where interns had to learn how to perform caesarean sections from YouTube.”

Such conditions threaten not just the

lives of patients but the trainee doctors too. Research by the World Health Organisation found that people who work 55 or more hours a week had a 35% higher risk of suffering a stroke and a 17% higher risk of dying from ischemic heart disease, compared to those who worked 35-40 hours.

The Kenya and Uganda findings echo those of a Nigeria study published in May in the *Public Library of Science* journal.

Researchers interviewed 628 early career doctors and nearly 40% said they felt overwhelmed by their work. About 16% said they wanted to quit the profession and twice as many said they experienced anxiety.

The researchers in both studies recommend capping the hours that medical interns and junior doctors work. But limited training facilities and continuing brain drain make the doctor to patient ratio so low that reducing working hours is all but impossible.

By a large margin, the best doctor to patient ratios are in Libya and Algeria – 22 and 17 doctors for every 10,000 residents respectively. But even Libya and Algeria compare poorly to the top importers of African doctors, the UK and US, which have between 32 and 37 doctors for every 10,000 people.

To a doctor looking for a liveable work-life balance, going to the Global North is a no-brainer.

Lucy Nyokabi, a medical trainee at a Nairobi hospital, says her workload is overwhelming and she often doesn't have safety equipment or the supplies to do the job properly, like oxygen masks. "My family supports me in getting the things that I need for the job. I have to remind myself that I need this training to excel at the actual job," she says.

This makes leaving attractive: "We all hope to work outside the country. I believe the conditions are better out there." ■

Top destinations for African doctors

13,909 United Kingdom	12,692 United States	10,731 France	5,888 Canada	4,535 Germany
3,056 Ireland	1,999 Australia	928 New Zealand	434 Israel	356 Belgium
301 Switzerland	114 Italy	65 Norway	50 Netherlands	47 Finland

*Numbers represent foreign-trained doctors of African origin (2021/22)

PHOTO ESSAY

Beyond Uganda's headlines

The Ugandan Press Photo Awards recently named their selection of winners for photo storytelling. The theme given was 'Beyond the Headlines' – encouraging photographers to share diverse perspectives on Ugandan life. In this essay we share two photos from each of the shortlisted photo stories.



1

First-place winner **Kuloba Peter Tera's** submission *Basani Barura (The Men are Getting Out)*, depicts the practice of imbalu, where boys are initiated into manhood. It begins after the second full moon in August.



2

Atiko Anthony, who came in second place, submitted *Human Mobility – Loss and Damage*. It depicted the effects of climate change, particularly in relation to displacement, human mobility and migration.



Third-place winner **Julius Odeke's** *Mount Elgon Floods* covered the heavy downpours of 30 July 2022 that destroyed several areas, displaced 150 homesteads and killed at least 29 people. People wailed as the bodies of their loved ones were pulled out by locals with no protective gear.





Miriam Watsemba, an honourable mention, submitted *Postponed Dreams*. It explores teenage girls' experience with unplanned pregnancies during the Covid-19 lockdown in Northern Uganda. The project was inspired by national media coverage and public concern about the high and growing number of teenage pregnancies throughout the country.



Vanessa Mulondo's *The Fishermen's Tale*, another honourable mention, exhibits Lake Eyasi's fishermen, tucked away amidst the stunning landscapes of the Ngorongoro hills and Rift Valley in Tanzania. Their fishing practice is unique: they catch small fish, which they carefully dry and sell as animal feed.





Spin fast and spin furious

High-speed heroics and teen dreams gang up on the meanest of streets

Wilfred Okiche

Spinners is the latest co-production between Showmax and French premium television channel CANAL+. In eight thrilling one-hour episodes, *Spinners* follows Ethan (Cantona James), a teenage driver working for a gang in the notoriously rough Cape Flats area of Cape Town, while struggling to raise his younger brother. Increasingly disillusioned with gang life, Ethan discovers a possible way out in the form of spinning, an extreme motorsport. However, a looming gang war threatens

his hopes and dreams.

In many ways, *Spinners* is the classic hero's journey: Young man born on the wrong side of the tracks tries to claw his way out but is held back by systemic forces intent on preventing upward mobility. So far, so familiar.

What makes *Spinners*, co-created by producer Joachim Landau and showrunner Benjamin Hoffman, feel like a refreshing take on otherwise familiar property is a uniquely colourful local flavour plus the relative smoothness of the technical stunts.

Delivered in a blend of English, Kaaps and Afrikaans, *Spinners* opens with a bang, as director Jaco Bouwer unspools a thrilling getaway car sequence that sets the mood for the rest of the show.

The world of *Spinners* is gritty, violent and volatile, populated as it is with underworld types who would think nothing of sending a kid born with an intellectual disability to the slaughter. James's Ethan is a believable guide, as the actor imbues him with the world weariness and vulnerability of a teenager who is increasingly out of their depth.

Separate from the gore, *Spinners* never forgets that the show is led by a 17-year-old and as such, even while juggling a sprawling cast of villains, schemers and cops, makes room for a sweet and serviceable coming of age story. There isn't a lot of actual spinning in the first half of the season, at least not enough to justify its title. But *Spinners* is busy enough that it does not overstay its welcome. ■

The 'immoral festival' perseveres

Even a terror threat could not stop the party at the epic annual Nyege Nyege music festival in Uganda

Dan Ayebare in Kampala

Since its establishment in 2015, the Nyege Nyege music festival in Uganda has consistently put knickers in a twist. Many Ugandan politicians and religious leaders have labelled it immoral, advocating for its cancellation. This year, the United States and United Kingdom issued terror alerts warning their nationals not to attend the event, which took place in Jinja from 9 - 12 November.

Nonetheless, the party went on – although, thanks to the terror warning, numbers were down this year and the usually carefree and exuberant atmosphere was tinged with a sense of caution. Revellers left the party scene quite early every evening.

“The security people were all over the place. It was kind of discomforting as everywhere you would turn you would see a UPDF [Uganda People’s Defence Force] or police uniform. I don’t think people had as much freedom to have fun,” said

Rose Amony, who attended the last two days of the festival.

But the music festival did showcase an unbelievable range of performers. Some 300 artists performed this year, including South Africans Sho Madjozi and DJ Vigro Deep, Uganda’s Grammy-nominated singer Eddy Kenzo and Nigeria’s Aunty Rayzor.

According to the organisers, 4,000 tourists joined at least four times as many Ugandans for the four days of merrymaking in Jinja, Uganda’s second largest city.

Never one to resist taking a jab at the West, the country’s President Yoweri Museveni took to Ex-Twitter to claim credit for the effectiveness of Uganda’s security forces in protecting “suspected sinners” and labelled the US and UK embassies “mistake makers” and “global policemen” for issuing the terror alert. ■



Yes/no? Ugandans got the party going, but got going from the party early too.

Photo: Andrugua Media

THE QUIZ

0-3

"I think I need to start reading more newspapers."

4-7

"I can't wait to explore more of this continent."

8-10

"TIL that Kier Starmer was not the first president of South Sudan after all."



Photo: Amir Makar/AFP

- 1_ In which country is the Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut (pictured) found?
- 2_ Name the first president of South Sudan.
- 3_ Which team won the inaugural season of the African Football League?
- 4_ In which country is the Nyege Nyege festival held?
- 5_ Which Nigerian artist has earned a Grammy nomination for the chart-topper *Unavailable*?
- 6_ The ariary is which country's currency?
- 7_ What is Africa's deepest lake?
- 8_ Jinja is a city in which country?
- 9_ Which country was the United Kingdom's government attempting to send asylum seekers to?
- 10_ Which three colours are on Mali's flag?

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The next coup: Coming to a state near you?

The only people who know where the next coup will occur are the coup orchestrators themselves.

Afolabi Adekaiyaoja

Following the recent series of coups there is a growing focus on which countries might be next. Commentators worry about military intervention in Nigeria and Ghana, and the risk of “contagion” to other states. It is important to go beyond speculation to consider the factors that shape how likely a coup is.

The experience of Gabon and Niger suggests that coups are most likely when weak democratic institutions, frail economies, unpopular leaders and politicised militaries coincide.

Both military interventions occurred in the wake of considerable evidence of instability and a politicised armed forces, with failed coups in 2019 (Gabon) and 2021 (Niger). Instead of responding by demonstrating their democratic credentials, in both cases presidents responded by attempting to further tighten their control.

Economic difficulties also made the Nigerien and Gabonese governments less popular, but it is important to recognise the opportunist way coup plotters attempt to take power. In Niger, for example, insecurity was a fig leaf used to disguise

a straightforward power grab by military figures about to be removed and so lose their access to power. The significance of the French colonial legacy needs to be understood in the same light: by propping up failing leaders France helped to undermine democratic governance. But anti-French sentiment has also been manipulated by juntas that care little for national sovereignty.

So which countries are now at risk? This is a challenging question because potentially vulnerable governments in countries such as Cameroon are already trying to coup-proof their regimes. Countries with no history of military intervention, such as Kenya and Zambia, should be safe. But those that have recently seen failed coups, such as Guinea-Bissau, need to be carefully watched.

The alarming reality after unexpected coups in Zimbabwe (2017) and Gabon (2023), however, is that the next coup may not occur where we expect it to. ■

Afolabi Adekaiyaoja is a research analyst at the Abuja-based Centre for Democracy and Development. This analysis was produced in collaboration with Democracy in Africa



THE BIG PICTURE

Tree's company: Members of a Taekwondo academy plant seedlings in an urban forest in Nairobi on 13 November – a special holiday in Kenya during which the public are encouraged to plant trees to aid national efforts to curb the effects of climate change.

Photo: Luis Tato/AFP



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