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## Issues

AFRICAN AMERICANS  
LOOK TO NEXT STEPS

By Thomas Urbain

With the spirit of Thursday's protest march shattered by a deadly sniper attack, members of Dallas's black community have begun the work of regrouping and taking charge of their future. About a thousand people gathered late Sunday at the Friendship-West Baptist Church, called together by the Next Generation Action Network, which had helped organize the march. The protest ended in bloodshed, with five police officers killed, nine wounded and two civilians also hurt after a lone gunman ambushed police.

African American activists, entrepreneurs and elected officials at the townhall meeting weighed potential next steps and how to build a movement. But the evening was also dominated by ordinary people who had come to express their exasperation. They spoke about police brutality and Eric Casebolt, a white policeman who, in June 2015, violently slammed a 15-year-old black girl to the ground at a party deemed too noisy and drew a gun on two of her friends. None of them was armed.

A grand jury decided last month not to indict the officer from the Dallas suburb of McKinney, touching off a wave of indignation. Others acknowledged that the problem had less to do with the Dallas Police Department, which has made significant reforms in recent years, than with law enforcement in surrounding towns. Dallas Police Chief David Brown, who has received plaudits, still came in for his fair share of criticism. Early on as the situation developed, his department tweeted out a photograph of a man later identified as Mark Hughes, who had been carrying an assault-type rifle at the protest, as a suspect before reversing themselves. His image was beamed around the world.

"Everybody is singing Kumbaya for the chief of police," said Mark's brother Cory Hughes, one of the organizers of Thursday's march. Brown "put my brother out there and he has yet to pick up the phone and call us, to send an email, to send out a tweet, and we can't even go home!" Hughes said, noting the family has received numerous death threats.

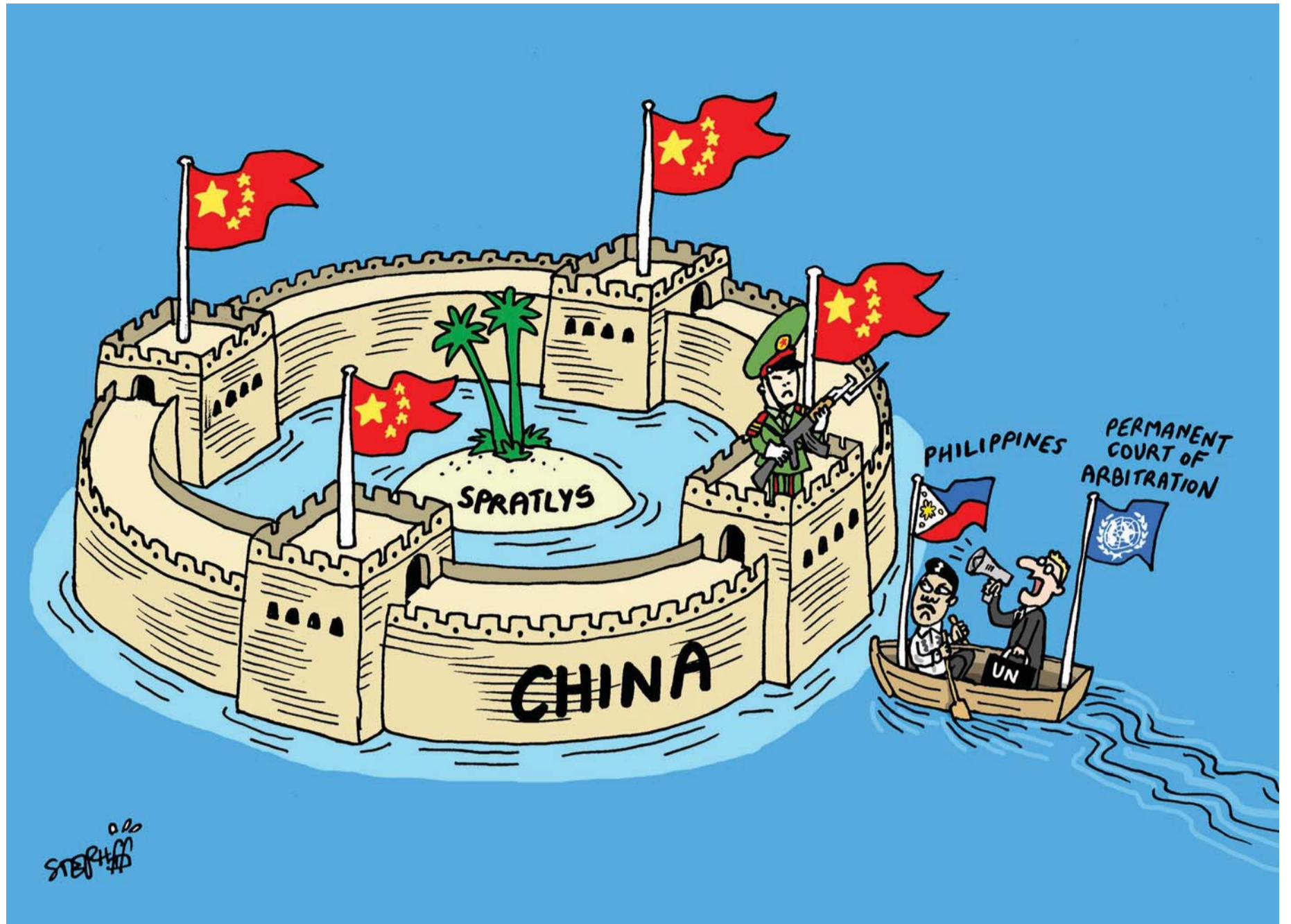
## A Plan of Action

Other participants in the meeting said the problems go beyond law enforcement. In some suburbs of Dallas, blacks and Hispanics are not welcome, according to activist Carlos Quintanilla, president of Accion America. He pointed to Garland and Arlington, while others mentioned Duncanville. And in neighborhoods heavily populated by blacks, rats run rampant in school cafeterias, while mold spreads in classrooms.

Participants pointed to South Oak Cliff High School, which Brown himself attended several decades, as one such school. Dominique Alexander, the charismatic founder of the Next Generation Action Network, spoke of a "school-to-jail pipeline" in majority black, poor neighborhoods. Wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the name of late boxer and civil rights activist Muhammad Ali, senior pastor Frederick Douglass Haynes III called for far-reaching answers. "There are wounds to our souls," said Haynes, who paid tribute to the slain officers. "We can't settle for another Kumbaya moment that is superficial," he said. "We need a plan of action."

Civil society representatives urged people to vote, contact their elected leaders, to be present when movements get started and make donations. "I get a hundred likes when I post a picture" on Facebook, said a young woman with long braids. "I get four when I say come to this townhall meeting." The gathering set a date for the next city council meeting on August 3 and called for another townhall on Thursday in the hopes of setting something in motion. After Thursday's killings, "Dallas is ground zero for change," said Royce West, a Democrat in the Texas Senate. "We don't have a choice," he told AFP. "The loss of lives of officers and citizens, it creates the perfect storm for change."

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## AFTER BREXIT VOTE, STURGEON TAKES CONTROL

By Elisabeth O'Leary

The Friday morning after Britain voted to leave the European Union, leaders in London had little to say. Prime Minister David Cameron resigned in a short statement. Boris Johnson, the face of the leave campaign, spoke for seven minutes. George Osborne, finance minister, was nowhere to be seen and would not appear in public for three days. Four hundred miles away, Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister for the United Kingdom's northernmost nation of Scotland, appeared before the cameras, dressed in red. Her message: Scots had voted decisively to stay in the EU. That may mean Scotland would split away from the rest of the country.

For the next 30 minutes, Sturgeon took questions from reporters in Edinburgh. The next day she held a crisis cabinet meeting and gave a statement. On Sunday she was on three television talk shows and three days later she travelled to Brussels to speak with EU politicians. On Twitter, she called Johnson the leader of "Project Farce" and criticized the uncertainty now faced by EU citizens living in Britain.

By addressing the acute political, economic and social crisis that has gripped the UK after the referendum, Sturgeon and her nationalist party have seized on a chance to revive their ambitions for Scottish independence. It was a project considered shelved nearly three years ago after Scotland voted to remain in the UK in its own plebiscite. Sturgeon has argued since then that many voted to stay in the UK because it guaranteed Scotland's EU membership. Now the Scottish parliament has given her a mandate to try to keep Scotland in the EU by whatever means possible.

"The UK that Scotland voted to remain within in 2014 doesn't exist anymore," she told BBC television. "There are going to be deeply damaging and painful consequences of the process of trying to extricate the UK from the EU. I want to try and protect Scotland from that." It remains to be seen whether Scottish independence will happen. Splitting Scotland from the UK would end three centuries of shared history, upending another tight economic

relationship shortly after a divorce between Britain and the EU. Scotland sells two thirds of its £76 billion (\$99 billion) of goods and services exports to the rest of the UK, excluding oil and gas.

But over the past two weeks, EU politicians have for the first time shown openness to Scotland's EU predicament. That could be a negotiating tactic for Brussels with London. And the return of the Scottish cause shows how the EU referendum - originally pitched by Cameron as an opportunity to prove British unity with Europe while calming anti-EU lawmakers in his own party - is tearing at the social, economic and cultural cohesion within the four nations that make up the UK: England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. An opinion poll published in Scotland's Sunday Post after the EU vote showed support for independence rising to 59 percent from the 45 percent who voted for it in 2014, a level roughly steady since then. The referendum's aftermath has also created an opportunity for Sturgeon, a lawyer turned politician who two weeks ago was barely known outside Britain. She has put herself and her cause center-stage in Europe. "She's a shining light, hardworking and with an integrity that the rest of the motley crew in British politics just doesn't have," said Ian Graham, a 48-year-old businessman from Kirkcaldy in Scotland. Graham said he didn't support independence last time, but may reconsider.

## Door-To-Door

Since her days as a teenager in Dr Marten boots and listening to Duran Duran in Ayshire, Western Scotland, Sturgeon has wanted Scottish independence. In 1987, at age 16, she knocked on the door of Kay Ullrich, a family neighbor in Dregthorn and an SNP candidate who would later become a lawmaker. It was a time when many local families had lost their jobs after factories closed. Sturgeon wanted to help campaign for the Scottish National Party (SNP), which argued that Scotland would be better off socially and economically if it unhitched from the rest of the UK.

At the time, SNP membership was around 2,000 nationally, said Ullrich, 73, who recalls Sturgeon as an ardent campaigner. "We'd be in the

pub already and her group would come in and say 'We'd have been here earlier but Nicola said 'let's do another street.'" Sturgeon studied to be a lawyer and practiced until 1999, when she entered Scotland's devolved parliament. She had met then party leader Alex Salmond years before when he was a rising SNP star.

Salmond, considered smart but divisive by those close to him, asked Sturgeon to be his deputy when he ran, and won, the 2004 contest for party leadership. She stayed by his side until 2014 and the Scottish independence vote. During the campaign, she debated the economic merits of leaving. Independence would mean Scotland had control of its own tax take and its own energy resources, most notably, North Sea oil, she argued.

Being around Salmond toughened her stance and rhetoric. "When I was first in politics, women were very rare and the people around you tended to be middle-aged men and inevitably you do, subconsciously start to behave ... like a man," she told Reuters in an interview before the referendum. "It's only now that I'm older that I have had the confidence to be myself." That confidence has earned respect from peers and constituents. "There's no doubt that Nicola is focused. She can be ruthless and controlling (but) remains highly professional and enormously competent," said former Conservative Scottish lawmaker Mary Scanlon, a rival of Sturgeon's.

Constituents say Sturgeon is dedicated to political outreach, attending fundraisers with her husband Peter Murrell, who is the SNP's chief executive, and still finds time to call her mother every day. Since she took over the party in 2014, SNP membership has risen fivefold. The party won 56 of the 59 Scottish seats in the national parliament in 2015. The SNP's strong presence on the British political stage has helped to keep independence hopes alive at home, by giving a voice to Scottish issues. Scotland has about 9 percent of a total of 45 million UK voters and the devolved Scottish parliament decides health and education spending. From this year, it also has the power to set tax rates and bands after a deal to increase its clout offered just before the 2014 referendum.

## Tactics

In Brussels, Sturgeon has played a tactical game. The day before she went to the European capital on June 29, she won a rare mandate from a unified Scottish parliament to keep Scotland in the EU by whatever means possible. In meetings with officials from across the political spectrum, including Martin Schulz, the German Social Democrat speaker of the European Parliament, she did not raise the issue of independence outright. Rather, she spoke about the disappointment of EU-loving Scots, according to several people who attended. "She didn't use the referendum as an excuse to leave. She wasn't pushing independence at all," said an EU source who attended.

Not acknowledging the elephant in the room is a ploy for both sides, European officials say. In the past, EU officials have been cold towards potential Scottish independence. That's because they feared igniting a nationalist fuse elsewhere in Europe, such as in Spain, where a drive for an independent Catalonia in 2014 brought hundreds of thousands of people onto the streets of Barcelona.

Now, however, Scottish independence is more appetizing in Brussels - if only as a negotiating tool to signal annoyance at London. Sir David Edward, a Scot and a former judge of the European Court of Justice, said goodwill has been eroded by the years Britain has spent fighting for opt-outs of EU policy. European officials are "absolutely fed up to the back teeth" of the British, he told Reuters, explaining why many senior EU officials were more than happy to see Sturgeon.

What Scotland can do to retain EU membership remains legally unclear. But Edward says it is "almost all about political will". There are alternative relationships that could work for Scotland, short of full EU member status, including opt-outs or a trade agreement which would treat it as a separate entity. Sturgeon's task at home is tough. She needs to balance keeping independence activists happy while trying not to scare off unionists, some of whom vote for her as the best defender of Scottish interests but oppose independence, according to party insiders. —Reuters

## COLOMBIA WAR WIDOWS, EX-FIGHTERS CLEAR MINES

By Anastasia Moloney

Knelling down in the middle of a minefield, Noralba Guarin uses a spade to scrape away the hard red earth on a remote wooded hillside in southwestern Colombia. Sweating under her protective anti-explosive vest and shatterproof mask, she searches for landmines, a deadly legacy of 52 years of civil war in Colombia, one of the most mine-scarred countries in the world. "I never imagined I'd be looking for mines," said the widow and mother of two young children as she hacked away at vegetation near the village of San Rafael in Colombia's province of Antioquia.

War forced Guarin to flee her home twice, once aged 13 to avoid being forcibly recruited by rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and years later when rebels threatened her again when she was heavily pregnant. Now Guarin works for the British-based Halo Trust, a demining group, clearing the mines the FARC planted in their fight against government troops. "At the start of the day, the first thing you think is that I know that here in front of me, there could be mines where I haven't yet cleared," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "I have to be cautious and careful and follow what I've been taught and trained to do to the letter," said the 26-year-old, who started her demining job a year ago.

## Historic Ceasefire

In the surrounding rolling countryside guns have fallen silent and the bombing raids have stopped following a bilateral ceasefire signed in June between the government and rebels. This brings Colombia ever closer to signing a full peace accord to end half a century of war and Latin America's longest-running insurgency. A final deal is expected within weeks. But as Colombia emerges from decades of war, the enemy remains - in the form of landmines that lurk beneath the soil.

Getting rid of mines in Colombia - a land of mountains and jungle terrain - is a key challenge facing the battered nation and is a crucial for rural development and tackling poverty. It's a task

experts estimate will take a least a decade. After Cambodia and Afghanistan, Colombia has the third highest number of landmine casualties, with 11,440 people, including civilians, children and soldiers killed or injured by landmines since 1990, government figures show.

Most of the landmines have been planted by FARC fighters in rural areas to push back army troops and destroy their morale. The drug-running FARC rebels have also planted mines in and around coca fields - the raw ingredient of cocaine - to protect their valuable crop. Often made from empty glass bottles of rum, coffee and tuna cans, and plastic tubes filled with sulphuric acid, homemade mines have been a cheap, and easy to make, weapon of war.

The government says nearly 700 of Colombia's 1,096 municipalities are thought to be contaminated by landmines. Now with the historic ceasefire three weeks in, hopes have been raised that the FARC will stop laying landmines for good. It paves the way for mine clearance to speed up and expand as security improves in areas once controlled by the rebels. "We hope with the peace agreement we can move into more areas," said Alex Greenall, Halo Trust's senior operations officer in Colombia.

## Slow Pace

As part of the peace effort, a pilot program started last year involving guerrilla fighters working alongside army soldiers to identify and clear a small number of minefields. Such efforts are likely to increase once a peace deal is signed. In addition, the Colombian military has been carrying out its own demining operations for more than a decade. It says all of the mines it planted over the years have now been cleared and the army has found and destroyed 5,262 mines since 2004.

Colombia's president, Juan Manuel Santos, this year pledged to make the country free of mines by 2021 and said there will be 10,000 people working on mine clearance by next year. But near San Rafael, thick vegetation makes mine clearance hard going. Nearby electricity towers interfere with metal detectors and workers must use simple gardening tools. Guarin and the 27 oth-

er civilian deminers working for Halo Trust in this area clear an average of just 6.8 square meters each day, roughly half of what can be cleared in easier terrain using a metal detector. "It's 90 percent gardening. The terrain, vegetation and logistics of accessing areas make it slow pace," Greenall said.

The other challenge is that no one knows exactly where and how many mines there are or how much it will all cost, he said. It means Halo Trust staff go from village to village, from house to house, gathering information from villagers about the possible whereabouts of mines to piece together a detailed map. On the hillside Guarin's colleague, Wilmar Gil, is scouring for mines. Beside him two sticks mark the spot where landmines have been found since demining started here in May.

For him the work has a personal poignancy. Gil was 14 when he heard the screams of his father who stepped on a landmine while tending his cassava crops one day in 2005. The mine tore off his father's ankle, forcing doctors to amputate his leg below the knee. "I was nearby and heard an explosion, then my father screaming help, help! He almost bled to death," said Gil, 25. "I was drawn to the job because of what happened to my father. It made my very sad seeing him like that. I think that this is something very, very inhumane. It's very barbaric."

## Catalyst for Rural Development

A peace deal could pave the way and encourage more of Colombia's 6.7 million displaced people to finally return home. But unless swathes of land are cleared of mines, many farmers and their families will be too afraid to go back. For Juan Romero, an ex-combatant who belonged to an illegal armed group for four years and laid down his weapons in 2006, clearing mines is a chance to contribute to building peace. He is one of nearly 20 ex-combatants, from all sides in the war, employed by the Halo Trust as mine clearers.

Romero, who declined to give his real name, started clearing mines last year and has so far found one. "Before we were actors in the conflict," the 32-year-old said. "Now we are actors of peace, actors of construction and transformation." —Reuters