

CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts
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February 2015 – Trends

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Libya](#), [Myanmar](#), [Niger](#), [Nigeria](#), [Syria](#), [Ukraine](#), [Venezuela](#), [Yemen](#)

↑ Improved situations

March 2015 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Bangladesh](#), [Yemen](#)

☺ Conflict resolution opportunities

CrisisWatch summarises developments during the previous month in some 70 situations of current or potential conflict, listed alphabetically by region, providing references and links to more detailed sources. It assesses whether the overall situation in each case has, during the previous month, significantly deteriorated, significantly improved, or on balance remained more or less unchanged. It identifies situations where, in the coming month, there is a risk of new or significantly escalated conflict, or a conflict resolution opportunity (noting that in some instances there may be both). It also summarises Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers published the previous month.

Arrows and alerts: Up, down and side arrows signify, respectively, improved, deteriorated or unchanged situations. Conflict Risk Alerts (identified with bombs) or Conflict Resolution Opportunities (with doves) are used in addition to arrows: a bomb signifies a risk of escalated violence; a dove an opportunity to advance peace. Both bombs and doves tend to be used where events are moving fast.

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Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Burundi** Domestic opposition to President Nkurunziza's potential third term increased: coalition of civil society organisations 4 Feb published warning letter to president; 11 Feb said his candidacy will lead to violence. Head of intelligence service Godefroid Niyombare dismissed 18 Feb, allegedly for warning president of risk of violence should he attempt third term, replaced with Etienne Ntakirutimana 24 Feb. Journalist Bob Rugurika, arrested 20 Jan, released 19 Feb, greeted by thousands of sympathisers in Bujumbura. Human Rights Watch 12 Feb accused security forces, ruling party youth wing "Imbonerakure" of 47 extrajudicial executions during 30 Dec-3 Jan clash with armed group in Cibitoke province near DRC border. Pro-govt demonstrations throughout country 28 Feb, organised by authorities.

- ["Sortie de Bob Rugurika de la prison, après 30 jours d'incarcération"](#), Iwacu, 19 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Cameroon** Regional response to Boko Haram (BH) formulated amid ongoing attacks: international meeting on Joint Multinational Force (FMM) held 5-7 Feb in Yaoundé, regional joint multinational force of 8,700 soldiers announced, based in N'Djamena: Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) 16 Feb announced emergency aid of FCFA 50bn to joint Cameroon-Chad "Operation Logone 2015" force established late Jan to fight BH. Several clashes between BH, Cameroonian forces: deadliest BH attack killed 86 civilians and seven soldiers in Fotokol 4 Feb; five soldiers killed, seven wounded in 16 Feb BH ambush on Waza-Kousseri axis; 21 BH killed by armed forces in 21 Feb Tolkomari clashes. 25 Cameroonian hostages escaped BH 20 Feb. Two marches held early Feb demonstrating support for security forces; third, larger march in Yaoundé 28 Feb.

- ["Lutte contre Boko Haram: l'armée accusée de nombreuses exactions contre les civils"](#), Camer Post, 21 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Central African Republic** Clashes between ex-Seleka and international forces in Bria left six ex-Seleka dead 10 Feb, civilian death toll unknown. Opposition to controversial Kenyan mediation process between some ex-Seleka and anti-balaka factions continued: UN 8 February called for end to Kenyan process; former Presidents Bozize and Djotodia signed "commitment declaration" 21 Feb agreeing to respect July 2014 ceasefire agreement. Sport Minister Armel Sayo, kidnapped 25 Jan, released 10 Feb. Month saw frequent robberies and attacks against NGOs in various towns. Transitional Council 16 Feb began constitution-drafting process.

- ["Le CNT s'entend sur un projet de Constitution"](#), RFI, 16 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Chad** Authorities stepped up response to Boko Haram (BH) regional attacks: troops crossed border 11 and 13 Feb to repel attacks on Gamboru, N Nigeria, and again 24 Feb; 207 BH and one Chadian soldier reported killed. BH 13 Feb launched first attack on Chadian territory, targeting Ngouboua near Nigerian border. Chad 16 Feb launched U.S.-backed counter-terrorism exercise, gathering troops from African and Western states. French FM Fabius 21 Feb met President Deby in N'Djamena to discuss fight against BH.

- [“Boko Haram: au Tchad, Laurent Fabius partage la ‘solidarité’ de la France”](#), *Le Monde*, 21 Feb. 2015.
- ➔ **DR Congo** Following Jan violent protests, President Kabila 18 Feb promulgated amended version of controversial electoral law. Electoral Commission (CENI) 12 Feb published 2015-2016 electoral calendar, condemned by opposition for lack of consensus or realism. UN 13 Feb said it would not support FARDC military operations until controversial commanders in N Kivu replaced. President Kabila 16 Feb reaffirmed decision to launch unilateral military operations against FDLR rebels, operations began 24 Feb in S Kivu. Conflict between Bantu and pygmies flared in Manono district, N Katanga, leaving seven dead mid-Feb.
- [“L’opposition dénonce un calendrier électoral ‘non consensuel et irréaliste’”](#), Radio Okapi, 15 Feb. 2015.
- ➔ **Rwanda** DRC and Rwandan officials 3 Feb met to accelerate repatriation of 718 former M23 rebels to DRC, no specific agenda agreed. Defence Minister early-Feb criticised UN Force Intervention Brigade troop-contributing countries South Africa and Tanzania for lack of intervention against FDLR, accused latter of collaborating with rebel group. FM Mushikiwabo 12 Feb criticised MONUSCO’s inaction on FDLR issue.
- [“Rwandan rebels’ ideology undermines peace, says minister”](#), Xinhua, 11 Feb. 2015.

Horn of Africa

- ➔ **Kenya** MP shot dead in Nairobi 7 Feb, along with two bodyguards and driver. Five suspected Mombasa Republican Council recruits arrested 25 Feb in Kisauni, Mombasa County. Mombasa’s Minaa mosque, closed by govt 19 Nov following police raid, reopened 12 Feb with interim imam and committee following settlement between govt officials and local Muslims.
- [“Kenyan MP shot dead in centre of Nairobi”](#), *Guardian*, 7 Feb. 2015.
- ➔ **Somalia** Parliament 9 Feb approved PM Abdirashidi Ali Shamarke’s third proposed cabinet list, ending months of govt paralysis following ouster of former PM Abdiweli early Dec. Al-Shabaab attacks continued throughout country including: 25 killed, 40 wounded in 20 Feb suicide attack on Mogadishu hotel; mortar rounds fired at presidential compound in Mogadishu 26 Feb; two army bases in Lower Shabelle region attacked 10 Feb. Al-Shabaab 9 Feb killed MP Abdullahi Qayed Barre in Mogadishu, 15 Feb killed govt official. Joint AMISOM/Somali National Army (SNA) campaign against Al-Shabaab continued including 3 Feb Kenyan airstrikes against several Al-Shabaab camps in Yontoy, Lower Juba region. Puntland forces 13 Feb clashed with Al-Shabaab in Madashoor area, claimed sixteen militants killed. Puntland officials accused Somaliland of supporting Al-Shabaab factions in Golis mountains after Al-Shabaab 3 Feb attacked police station in Bossaso; 7 Feb attacked home of senior Puntland police official: Somaliland denied accusations. Clashes erupted 10 and 25 Feb between SNA and Sufi militia Ahlu Sunna wal Jamaa (ASWJ) in Guriel, Galgaduug region, leaving at least fifteen dead. U.S. 24 Feb nominated first ambassador to Somalia since 1991, to be based in Nairobi.
- [“Can Somalia pull out of perpetual crisis?”](#), VoA, 10 Feb. 2014.

➔ **Somaliland** Two wounded 17 Feb in Horu-Fadhi cillage, Togdheer, in clashes between Somaliland forces and clan militias loyal to self-declared administration of Khaatumo. Djibouti 23 Feb closed border with Somaliland after it received intelligence on possible Al-Shabaab attacks in region. President Silanyo 28 Feb reshuffled cabinet ahead of polls.

- [“Somaliland, clan militia clash near Buuhoodle”](#), *Garowe Online*, 18 Feb. 2015.

➔ **South Sudan** IGAD-led negotiations ended 2 Feb without peace deal; President Kiir and former VP and SPLM-IO leader Machar recommitted to ceasefire, signed document outlining areas of agreement/disagreement regarding proposed transitional govt. Disputes remain over structure of executive. Delayed negotiations began 23 Feb; Kiir reversed previous commitment to attend; 5 March deadline still remains amid scepticism deal will be reached. Small clashes continued in Unity and Upper Nile states. Murle South Sudan Democratic Army-Cobra Faction (SSDA-CF) splinter group 13 Feb defected from govt, pledged allegiance to SPLA-IO. UN confirmed gunmen 14 Feb abducted at least 89 boys, now training as child soldiers, from Wau Shilluk near Malakal, Upper Nile state; thousands of children already fighters. Defence minister 3 Feb signed new Status of Forces agreement with Ugandan counterpart; Ugandan troops may remain in S Sudan another four months. Govt 13 Feb suspended elections scheduled for June for two years as negotiations continue. Kiir 24 Feb issued executive order reversing dismissal of senior party members.

- Jérôme Tubiana, [“An Elusive Peace in South Sudan”](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 3 Feb. 2015.
- [“Fighting erupts in two South Sudan states days after latest truce”](#), *Reuters*, 10 Feb. 2015.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°223, [Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflicts](#), 29 Jan. 2015.

➔ **Sudan** Fighting continued in S Kordofan: SPLM-N claimed al-Jineziya, Angartu and Um Turuq-Turuq taken 14-16 Feb. Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) 12 Feb claimed SPLM-N attack on recently recaptured areas repelled. Election campaigning began 24 Feb amid continued crackdown on civil society and media. Opposition National Consensus Forces umbrella group, several other opposition parties and Muslim Brotherhood announced boycott of elections; Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) only mainstream opposition party not boycotting polls. Civilian opposition, civil society and armed rebel signatories to 4 Dec “Sudan Call” met in Berlin 25-27 Feb to discuss peace, national dialogue: govt not included in talks. New chief of UN forces in disputed Abyei enclave 17 Feb called for resumption of dialogue between Sudan and South Sudan; UNSC 26 Feb renewed mandate of UN mission to Abyei, called for resumption of Abyei Joint Oversight Commission (AJOC) discussions on June 2011 demilitarisation agreement. AJOC co-chair 13 Feb announced AJOC meeting late Feb. Intercommunal clashes increased in area amid rising tensions between Misseriya nomads and sedentary Ngok Dinka.

- [“Sudan election campaign to start as opposition boycotts vote”](#), *Daily Star*, 23 Feb. 2015.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°223, [Sudan and South Sudan's Merging Conflicts](#), 29 Jan. 2015.

➔ **Uganda** Uganda and Sudan 9 Feb agreed to form joint technical security mechanism: Uganda announced it had expelled Sudanese rebels, reportedly Sudan will coop-

erate in apprehending remaining LRA rebels believed to be hiding in Darfur. Dr Aggrey Kiyingi, linked to Federal Alliance rebels reportedly connected to Allied Democratic Force rebel group, 12 Feb announced he will challenge President Museveni in 2016 elections.

- [“Sydney doctor in Ugandan presidential bid accused of funding assassinations”](#), AAP, 20 Feb. 2015.

Southern Africa

➔ **Lesotho** Instability ahead of 28 Feb elections, called two years early in attempt to restore stability following Aug 2014 coup attempt. Two of PM Thabane’s bodyguards shot and wounded outside presidential palace 1 Feb. Conflicting explanations for attack given by military and PM’s adviser, amid concerns over continued politicisation of security forces. Election reportedly peaceful, PM’s party took lead in early results.

- [“Tension is high as Lesotho goes to the polls”](#), Deutsche Welle, 26 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Madagascar** High Constitutional Court 12 Feb upheld President Rajaonarimampianina’s 15 Jan appointment of PM Jean Ravelonarivo following legal challenge by former coup leader Rajoelina. Rajoelina and former President Zafy 19 Feb withdrew from Malagasy Council of Churches (FFKM)-led reconciliation process; Rajoelina cited continued disagreement with PM appointment and lack of meaningful action toward reconciliation. FFKM 20 Feb insisted reconciliation process would continue with remaining former leaders and current president.

- [“Pour la HCC, une majorité doit d’abord se vérifier dans les faits”](#), Madagascar Tribune, 12 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Mozambique** Discussions 7-9 Feb between President Philippe Nyusi and opposition Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama eased deadlock following disputed Oct elections. Dhlakama called on Renamo MPs to end parliamentary boycott, 10 Feb announced Renamo will present Parliamentary Proposal for creation of autonomous provinces where Renamo won/claimed to have won majority. Under proposal Dhlakama would become president of Provincial Council, Renamo would govern autonomous regions. Dhlakama 27 Feb reiterated threat to overthrow govt if proposal not passed. Dialogue on disarmament remains stalled.

- [“UN hails dialogue between Mozambique’s main rivals”](#), APA, 10 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Zimbabwe** Tensions within ruling ZANU-PF remained high amid continued decimation of former VP Mujuru’s faction. Mujuru allies Ray Kaukonde and Enock Porisingazi stripped of seats as chairs of Parliamentary Portfolios 12 Feb. Former ZANU-PF member Didymus Mutasa attacked in state media for declaring Dec party congress unconstitutional, former ZANU-PF provincial chairman Temba Mliswa arrested 1 Feb for illegal weapons possession; both expelled from ZANU-PF 18 Feb. EU mid-Feb committed €230mn for govt support.

- [“Parliament purges Mujuru loyalists”](#), NewsDay, 13 Feb. 2015.

West Africa

➔ **Burkina Faso** Transition saw most serious crisis yet when presidential guard (RSP) 4 Feb demanded resignation of PM Zida, called for their unit not to be dissolved, and for senior military appointments to be reconsidered, specifically the replacement of Théophile Nikiéma, a Zida associate, as president's personal chief of staff. Compromise reached 7 Feb: RSP accepted Zida remain in office; Zida accepted appointment of former Compaoré associates colonel-major Boureima Kéré as president's personal chief of staff and lieutenant-colonel Joseph Moussa Céleste Coulibaly as RSP commander. Thousands demonstrated 7 Feb, called for dismantlement of RSP. Members of former ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) 1 Feb created new political party, New Alliance of Faso (NAFA), supporting presidential candidacy of former FM Djibiri Bassolé. Colonel Yacouba Ouédraogo 14 Feb announced candidacy with new Union for a New Burkina (UBN) party.

- ["La garde présidentielle rassure"](#), RFI, 7 Feb. 2015.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°222, *Burkina Faso: Nine Months to Complete the Transition*, 28 Jan. 2015.

➔ **Côte d'Ivoire** Divisions within political parties persisted: Ivoirian Popular Front (FPI) President Pascal Affi N'Guessan continued to clash with party hardliners; four Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) members expressed desire to contest Oct elections, refused to support President Ouattara's re-election bid, said they would not attend 28 Feb PDCI party congress. PDCI president Henri Konan Bédié 28 Feb announced no PDCI candidate in election, reaffirmed support for ruling Rally of the Republicans (RDR) President Ouattara's re-election bid. Authority for DDR late-Jan estimated 28,000 former combatants yet to be reintegrated; General Chief of Staff Soumaila Bakayoko 11 Feb said military unable to integrate more.

- ["Désarmement/Lancement de la campagne de sensibilisation des ex combattants à Anyama"](#), Abidjan.net, 11 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Guinea** Deadlock between govt and opposition over electoral preparations continued, EU and UN Office for West Africa began separate consultations with both sides. Protests 2-4 Feb against civil service changes in opposition stronghold Labé left some 50 injured. Assassination of former Minister Thierno Alioune Diaouné, civil society leader serving with UN, prompted accusations against regime by opposition supporters.

- ["50 injured in riots in northern Guinea"](#), Reuters, 4 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Guinea-Bissau** Constitutional reform commission inaugurated 16 Feb. UNSC 18 Feb renewed UN Integrated Office in Guinea-Bissau mandate until 29 Feb 2016.

- ["UN envoy warns of fragile situation in Guinea-Bissau"](#), APA, 9 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Mali** Govt and rebel groups 1 March signed preliminary peace deal; main Tuareg armed coalition, including National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) and Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA) same day requested delay for further consultations before signing agreement. Fifth round of peace negotiations began 16 Feb in Algiers, ceasefire signed 19 Feb between govt and six armed groups despite tensions following string of clashes between pro-govt and rebel groups, including: Gatia 3 Feb launched attack on Coordination of Movement of Azawad (CMA) forces near Tabankort,

some ten killed; CMA 13 Feb clashed with pro-govt forces at Takazkaza, 40km from Tabankort. Mopti region also suffered attacks: group of armed men 14 Feb attacked Gathi-Loumo, clashed with govt troops, four assailants and two soldiers killed.

- [“Accords de paix d’Alger : une dernière chance pour le Mali”](#), *Le Monde*, 1 March 2015.

↓ **Niger** Series of violent Boko Haram (BH) attacks in Diffa region targeting Bosso and Diffa cities. Attacks prompted increasingly strong govt response. Defence Minister Mahamadou Karidjo 6 Feb said 100 BH insurgents, four soldiers died during attack on Bosso; same day bombing of Diffa compelled Chadian, Nigerien forces to launch air-strikes on BH position. Bomb detonated in Diffa central market 9 Feb killed five, wounded twenty. Parliament 10 Feb voted unanimously to send 750 soldiers to reinforce regional military cooperation, authorised army to fight on Nigerian territory as part of regional response against BH insurgency. Authorities 17 Feb arrested some 160 suspected of BH links: thousands same day took to streets in support of army. National Assembly 26 Feb voted unanimously to extend Diffa state of emergency for three months.

- [“Le Niger sans répit face aux attaques de Boko Haram”](#), *Afrik.com*, 19 Feb. 2015.

↓ **Nigeria** Month saw increasing Boko Haram (BH) and election-related violence ahead of postponed polls, while military launched major offensive against Boko Haram (BH). Defence authorities 2 Feb said they retook Gamboru and four other towns near Lake Chad following combined operations by govt troops, civilian vigilantes, Chadian and Cameroonian forces. Authorities 18 Feb reported intensive operations around BH’s Sambisa Forest stronghold liberated eleven communities, some 300 insurgents reportedly killed; 19 Feb reported Special Forces, aided by Air Force and Chadian troops, reclaimed Dikwa local govt area, Borno state, some 117 insurgents killed. BH attacks continued: attack 19 Feb in Gaya village in Hong local govt area of Adamawa state killed 30 residents; some seventeen killed by explosives thrown from car in Jos, Plateau state. BH suicide bombings continued in Gombe, Yobe, Borno states, killing over 100 in Feb including 22 Feb bombing of market in Potiskum by seven-year old and 16 Feb attack on Damaturu bus station by teenager. Electoral Commission (INEC) 7 Feb postponed planned Feb elections: presidential and national polls delayed to 28 March, governorship and state polls to 11 April. Opposition All Progressive’s Congress (APC) condemned postponement, warned it would resist any further delay. Election-related violence increased with deadly incidents recorded almost daily: National Human Rights Commission (NHCR) 13 Feb reported 58 killed in election-related violence since Dec. People’s Democratic Party (PDP) thugs 17 Feb attacked APC rally with explosives, guns in Okrika, Rivers state, two killed, 50 wounded; Rivers APC chair called for international attention to rising violence.

- [“Nigeria’s Elections: A Perilous Postponement”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 12 Feb. 2015.
- [“Nigeria military says kills 300 Boko Haram militants in counter offensive”](#), *Reuters*, 18 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Senegal** President Sall visited Casamance separatist region late Feb to inaugurate development projects as part of greater economic strategy to resolve decades-long conflict, announced delivery of two boats to facilitate link between Dakar and Casamance regional capital Ziguinchor.

- [“Macky Sall en Casamance: la reliance économique pour seule annonce”](#), *RFI*, 25 Feb. 2015.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China (internal)** Radio Free Asia reported three clashes in Xinjiang during month: at least seven killed in reported suicide bomb attack in Hotan prefecture 13 Feb; two killed in clash with police 16 Feb; four police stabbed to death 17 Feb, nine suspected assailants and four bystanders also killed.

- [“Deaths and injuries’ follow clashes between Uyghurs and police in Xinjiang”](#), Radio Free Asia, 16 Feb. 2015.

➔ **China/Japan** Japanese PM Abe pleaded for country to revise its pacifist constitution in speech to Diet 12 Feb, latest in series of calls for constitutional change following killing of two Japanese hostages by Islamic State in Middle East. Abe also expressed “deep remorse” for Japan’s aggression in WWII, in attempt to head off criticism from Japanese left and from China and ROK that he was seeking to return to country’s past militarism. Japan’s ruling coalition 13 Feb began formal discussions of national security legislation needed for country to engage in collective self-defence. Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying 13 Feb called for Japan to honestly face past and honour its apology for wartime aggression. Chinese troops rehearsing for major parade in Sept.

- [“China fears Japan will use hostage crisis to drop pacifist policies”](#), *State*, 3 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** DPRK 6 Feb flight-tested new anti-ship cruise missile in Sea of Japan; media reports that DPRK flight-tested submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) in Jan unconfirmed. DPRK army continued rigorous winter training program, including live-fire missile exercise and island attack drill near ROK islands off DPRK coast. Growing evidence that DPRK has restarted nuclear reactor in Yŏngbyŏn. ROK military 27 Jan conducted live-fire exercise on islands near DPRK coast. ROK conducted air force exercise, large-scale mobility exercise, combined military exercises and multinational exercises, including with U.S. and others in Thailand and Guam. *USS Olympia* nuclear-powered submarine 5 Feb participated in three-day ROK-U.S. combined naval exercise, commemorating inauguration of ROK Navy submarine command. ROK and Chinese defence ministers early Feb discussed bilateral security cooperation, during first visit by Chinese defence minister in nine years; China expressed opposition toward U.S. deployment of THAAD missile defence battery to ROK. DPRK Workers Party Politburo 10 Feb adopted resolution with six main points: Central Committee and the Central Military Commission met next day and published list of over 300 slogans in mass appeal for national exhortation to achieve goals outlined in Kim Jong-un’s New Year’s address. UN 24 Jan announced it would provide \$2mn in aid to DPRK through Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). U.S. think-tank report published late Feb projected DPRK could have up to 100 nuclear weapons by 2020.

- [“Despite sanctions, North Korea’s nuclear stockpile continues to grow”](#), VoA, 26 Feb. 2015.

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan** Delay in forming new unity cabinet continued, paralysing parts of administration and reducing customs revenue representing key source of govt income. New Interior Minister Nur-ul-Haq Ulumi early Feb travelled to outlying provinces to review security situation following parliament's rejection of President Ghani's defence minister nominee; Ulumi 14 Feb promised reform to stem rising police combat deaths. President Ghani 4 Feb threatened to fire any defence officials not ensuring weapons supplies and logistical support for soldiers, reflecting widespread concerns about lack of battlefield supplies. Govt forces mid-month launched major operation against insurgents in Helmand province. Turkish soldier killed in Taliban suicide attack on NATO vehicle in Kabul 26 Feb. Pakistani military officials 18 Feb claimed Taliban ready to begin peace talks with Kabul as early as March. UN 18 Feb reported 25% increase in civilian deaths in 2014 over 2013; ICRC reported collecting twice as many bodies from battlefield in 2014 than 2013.

- ["More than 10,000 Afghan civilians died or were injured in 2014, UN says"](#), *Washington Post*, 18 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Bangladesh** Political crisis continued, threatening severe destabilisation of country: over 100 killed and hundreds injured since early Jan in violent anti-govt protests and country-wide transport blockade led by opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP); anti-corruption court 25 Feb issued warrant for BNP leader Zia's arrest for non-appearance, raising fears of escalating violence in case warrant executed. PM Hasina 6 Feb compared actions of BNP and Islamist ally Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) to actions of Middle Eastern jihadi group Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL). Several civil society groups demonstrated for resolution to crisis, criticised negative economic impact including in country-wide protests early Feb; newly-formed committee of prominent jurists, retired officials and other civil society actors also pressed for AL-BNP dialogue; UNSG Ban mid-month urged Hasina and BNP leader Zia to engage in constructive dialogue. Zia remained confined to BNP offices in Dhaka; police 11 Feb temporarily blocked food and water supplies. Hasina 18 Feb promised govt action against newspaper for reprinting poster of banned Islamist group Hizb-ut Tahrir. Controversial International Crimes Tribunal, tasked with prosecuting war crimes committed during 1971 liberation war, 18 Feb sentenced senior JeI member Abdus Subhan to death.

- ["Bangladesh on the brink"](#), *New York Times*, 12 Feb. 2015.

New Crisis Group Asia report N°264, [Mapping Bangladesh's Political Crisis](#), 9 Feb 2015.

Violence continues to plague the aftermath of Bangladesh's deeply contested January 2014 elections. The country's two main post-independence parties must turn back from a political dead end that is doing long-term damage to them both, negotiate a return to democratic rules and work toward a new all-party cabinet to oversee new elections.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Several attacks by Maoist militants in Chhattisgarh state including two police killed in Kanker district 2 Feb; another killed in Bihar state 24 Feb. Violence continued in NE: several bomb attacks by militants in Manipur state, construction worker reported killed 5 Feb; suspected separatist militants killed two in Assam state 13 Feb. Anti-corruption Aam Aadmi Party won overwhelming victory in 10 Feb Delhi assembly elections with 67 of 70 seats; ruling Bharatiya Janata Party took remaining seats.

- ["Two killed in Assam blast"](#), *Hindu*, 13 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Kashmir** Shelling continued across Line of Control (LoC) and India-Pakistan working boundary; Pakistan accused India of killing civilian 14 Feb. Pakistani PM Sharif 5 Feb addressed representatives of separatist All Parties Hurriyat Conference in Pakistan-administered Kashmir on occasion of Kashmir Solidarity Day: reiterated support for Kashmiris' right to self-determination, peaceful resolution of conflict. Pakistani Senate and National Assembly passed resolutions pledging support for Kashmiris, condemning "farfetched" state elections in India-administered Kashmir. Trade and travel resumed across LoC 17 Feb after being halted following Indian arrest of truck driver accused of smuggling narcotics early Feb. At least six militants reported killed by Indian forces late Feb including two in Shopian district 25 Feb.

- ["Sixty-year-old man killed in Indian firing at LoC"](#), *Dawn*, 14 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Nepal** Prospective Constituent Assembly vote on draft constitution, pushed for by ruling parties following failure of political parties to meet 22 Jan deadline for reaching consensus, postponed indefinitely mid-month to allow resumption of negotiations; United Communist Party of Nepal-Maoists (UCPN-M) leader Baburam Bhattarai late month said talks will resume following scheduled 28 Feb opposition demonstrations. Govt 10 Feb set up committees to investigate alleged human rights abuses and disappearances during civil war era; Supreme Court 27 Feb rejected amnesty provision in April 2014 bill offering possible amnesty for human rights offenders.

- ["Questions endorsed; CA process on hold"](#), *Kathmandu Post*, 12 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Pakistan** Uneven progress in implementing new counter-terrorism "National Action Plan", adopted following deadly Dec attack on Peshawar school; army 13 Feb said nine militants arrested out of 27 linked to attack. Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT, also known as Jamaat-ud-Dawa) 5 Feb held rallies in several major cities after interior ministry official late Jan admitted neither LeT nor Haqqani Network added to list of banned terrorist organisations, contradicting earlier official claims. Punjab home minister 15 Feb said forty terrorism cases referred to military courts since Jan empowerment of courts to try civilian suspects under 21st constitutional amendment and Pakistan Army Act (amendment) bill; President Hussain 12 Feb extended latter to cover Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), allowing military courts to try terrorism suspects there. Pakistan Bar Council and Supreme Court Bar Association 9 Feb jointly challenged 21st amendment in Supreme Court: said it was passed under military pressure, undermines fundamental rights and judicial independence. Sectarian attacks and other militant violence continued: 22 killed in attack on Shiite mosque in Peshawar 13 Feb, another three killed in attack on mosque in Rawalpindi 18 Feb; paramilitary forces 15 Feb reportedly killed commander of Sunni group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), accused of masterminding deadly late Jan bombing of Shiite mosque in Sindh; several members of Sunni extremist group Sipah-e-Sahaba (also known as Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat) killed in targeted attacks, including three in Karachi 1 Feb; eight killed in suicide attack near Lahore police HQ 17 Feb. Military operation continued in NW: army claimed at least 25 militants killed 4 Feb. Fifteen separatist militants, one soldier reported killed in Balochistan province 10 Feb.

- ["Formed under duress: Military courts challenged in SC"](#), *Express Tribune*, 9 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Month saw new coalition govt make some progress on promised reform although at slower pace and with less public consultation than expected by many supporters: critics pointed to lack of concrete anti-corruption measures, including ar-

rests of former officials; Tamils criticised continued army occupation of land in north and east, failure to release detainees held for years without charges. UN HRC 16 Feb approved six-month deferral of OHCHR report on alleged war crimes during civil war; govt promised to establish domestic accountability mechanism with consultation and support from OHCHR, agreement on details pending. Postponement of OHCHR report criticised by many, especially Tamil groups, who held large demonstrations in north and east. Northern provincial council 10 Feb passed resolution requesting UN investigation of alleged genocide against Tamils. Parliament 20 Feb approved long-promised victims and witness protection bill; text appeared largely unchanged from draft proposed by ex-President Rajapaksa's govt. Supporters of Rajapaksa 18 Feb held major rally in Colombo calling on Rajapaksa to stand as PM candidate for former ruling coalition, United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), in general elections expected in June; rally joined by Buddhist militant group Bodu Bala Sena.

- ["U.N. delays release of report on possible war crimes in Sri Lanka"](#), *New York Times*, 16 Feb. 2015.

South East Asia

↓ **Myanmar** Serious clashes in Kokang region 9-12 Feb as ethnic Kokang Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army, apparently assisted by other groups, attempted to seize control of Kokang capital Laukkai. Attack repulsed, but military reported that over 50 of its troops killed. President 17 Feb declared state of emergency and martial law in area. The fighting, most serious in country since 2009 takeover of Kokang, prompted at least 30,000 to flee across border to China, thousands more internally; sporadic clashes continued late month as military re-established control. Fighting also put huge additional strain on peace process, which remains stalled despite president's push for deal to be signed on 12 Feb Union Day. 12 Feb talks resulted in Deed of Commitment containing significant commitment to federalism. Only four of thirteen armed groups present signed; seen as unlikely that Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) will be signed before elections. In debate on Referendum Bill, legislature 2 Feb approved by 328 votes to 79 president's proposal to allow some one million holders of Temporary Registration Certificates or TRCs (mostly Muslims in Rakhine State) to vote. Following nationalist protests president 11 Feb said all TRCs would expire 31 March, after which citizenship status of holders would be assessed; implies there will be no valid TRCs at time of elections. With citizenship verification process in Rakhine state deadlocked over govt insistence that Muslims identify as "Bengali", seen as unlikely that new identity documents will be issued to Rohingya, raising prospect of further confrontation in coming months in Rakhine.

- ["In Rohingya camp, tensions mount over Myanmar plan to revoke ID cards"](#). Reuters, 16 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Philippines** House of Representatives ad hoc committee on Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) 9 Feb said it would suspend hearings on BBL "indefinitely" pending House probe into 25 Jan deadly clash between police commandos and rebels; means BBL will not pass by previous March 2015 deadline, ahead of congress break in May. Committee chair joined calls for MILF to surrender its members who participated in attack on police; MILF says it disciplines its own fighters in line with 2014 ceasefire agreement, 18 Feb turned over sixteen firearms taken from police commandos. MILF chief negotiator 10

Feb said suspension “bad sign” but respected decision, would not resort to violence. Thousands of people in Mindanao took part in rallies 10 Feb calling on Congress to reconsider suspension of hearings on BBL, calling for BBL to be passed without further delay. MILF 16 Feb asked Congress to pass proposed BBL “with no changes”; 18 Feb said it could accept a diluted BBL, but that this would not address problems in Mindanao. MILF launched operation against breakaway Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) in North Cotabato province 5 Feb; thousands of civilians fled in subsequent clashes in N Cotabato and Maguindanao; BIFF 18 Feb threatened to target provincial capital. BIFF 20 Feb reiterated call for establishment of Islamic state, rejection of BBL. Military 20 Feb launched operation against BIFF in N Cotabato; also engaged in operation against Abu Sayyaf group late month, with 24 militants, two soldiers reported killed.

- [“No timetable for MILF to turn in SAF killers”](#), Philippines Star, 20 Feb. 2015.

➔ **South China Sea** Regional countries continued to express concerns over Chinese land reclamation in SCS. New satellite imagery from IHS Jane’s came to light 15 Feb showing large increase in size of Chinese construction at Hughes Reef in contested Spratly Islands; Chinese land reclamation efforts also continue at Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reefs and Johnson South Reef. Philippines filed formal protest to Chinese embassy 4 Feb accusing Chinese vessel of ramming three Philippine fishing boats in area of Scarborough Shoal in SCS 29 Jan; Chinese Foreign Ministry said fishing boats were illegally lingering. Philippines also accused China of land reclamation activities on Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands. Philippines continues to try and shore up regional support for its position in international arbitration case against China; Supreme Court judge delivered lecture in Kuala Lumpur 15 Feb on invalidity of China’s SCS claims.

- [“China builds islands in disputed South China Sea: HIS Jane’s Defense Weekly”](#), NBC, 19 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Thailand** Military government facing greater international opprobrium and domestic dissent than since immediate aftermath of May 2014 coup. Speaking to media during visit to Japan early Feb, PM Prayuth repeatedly mentioned gov’t intention to hold elections early 2016, but declined to rule out further coups, stating “Thailand is different from other countries. If something cannot be solved, the military will solve it”. U.S. State Dept expressed “significant concerns” about Prayuth’s statement. EU delegation 13 Feb issued statement expressing concern over continuing imposition of martial law and plans to expand military judicial authority over civilians. China continued expressions of support for junta, with President Xi’s special envoy and defence minister both visiting Prayuth during month, agreement to strengthen military ties. Tensions rising following retroactive impeachment of former PM Yingluck. Public prosecutor filed criminal charges against Yingluck 19 Feb; also faces civil suit for failure to curb alleged corruption in her gov’t rice-subsidy scheme. National Anti-Corruption Commission 24 Feb indicted 250 former lawmakers for their role passing amendment to 2007 constitution providing for fully elected senate; they face five-year ban from politics. Several protests by regime critics; four organisers of 14 Feb protest in Bangkok commemorating Feb 2014 general election detained and charged with violating a ban on political gatherings. Multiple bombing in Narathiwat town 20 Feb in which several people injured marked return to car bombings in urban areas by insurgents in southernmost provinces. Several Malay-Muslims shot dead in separate attacks in Yala and Narathiwat.

- Matthew Wheeler, [“Silencing the Shinawatras”](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 16 Feb. 2015.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Parliament 23 Feb adopted declaration pledging support for EU integration, paving way for EU to active country's Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Ruling coalition parties agreed on new govt 22 Feb, day before visit of EU foreign policy chief Mogherini. House of Peoples 16 Feb elected new speaker Barisa Colak from Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) and Serb and Bosniak deputy speakers. Talks continued on formation of Federation entity govt, with party leaders 25 Feb again failing to agree on distribution of ministerial positions.

- ["Bosnia finally agrees new state government"](#), Balkan Insight, 23 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Kosovo** Following Jan mass protests, PM Mustafa 3 Feb said Serb Minister for Communities and Returns Aleksandar Jablanovic no longer part of cabinet; Jablanovic's removal prompted other Serb ministers in govt to threaten to resign. Kosovo and Serbian PMs met in Brussels 9 Feb for resumed dialogue on normalising relations, first such meeting since March 2014; next day signed agreement on integrating courts in Serb-run north into Kosovo judicial system. EU Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn during visit 18 Feb said Kosovo to sign Stabilization and Association Agreement with EU in 2015. Largest numbers of people reportedly leaving Kosovo since 1990s conflict; police reported 25,000 have crossed illegally from Kosovo into Hungary since Sept 2014, other estimates run to 100,000. On day of seventh anniversary of independence 17 Feb, PM Mustafa urged citizens not to leave.

- ["Kosovans risk perils of roads, forests and criminals in chase for better life in EU"](#), *Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2015.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Media 3 Feb reported Russian soldier accused of killing seven 12 Jan to be tried at Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia; Armenian authorities 3 Feb reportedly called for soldier to be transferred to Armenian custody. Opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) 23 Feb staged parliament walk-out in protest at perceived govt crackdown on leader Gagik Tsarukian, who President Sargsyan early Feb called "evil" and said must be excluded from political process. Police 16 Feb said 200 officers hired to provide security for Tsarukian dismissed; BHK same day said several members imprisoned. Sargsyan 16 Feb said he has recalled parliament protocols on normalisation of ties with Turkey following years of strain, said Turkey's govt has "no political will, distorts the spirit and letter of the protocols".

- ["Armenian opposition in disarray after prominent leader sidelined"](#), RFE/RL, 23 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Azerbaijan** President Aliyev 3 Feb signed law facilitating media shutdowns. New charges brought against journalist Khadija Ismayilova, jailed since 5 Dec, including embezzlement, abuse of power, tax evasion and illegal entrepreneurship: court 23 Feb

found Ismayilova guilty of libel, ordered fine. Court 5 Feb sentenced two men accused of spying for Iran to thirteen, fourteen years' prison. Court 18 Feb extended pretrial detention of rights activist Leyla Yunus by five months to 28 July; 23 Feb extended detention of husband Arif Yunus by additional five months. Rights activist Emin Huseynov 11 Feb reportedly took refuge at Swiss embassy, said victim of political persecution. EU SR for human rights visited Baku 23 Feb. Central Bank 21 Feb devalued currency sparking fears of inflation.

- [“Azerbaijan ‘silencing critics’ by detaining activists”](#), BBC, 17 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Sides continued to trade accusations of ceasefire violations. Azerbaijan authorities 6 Feb said soldier killed in shootout with Armenian troops near N-K 5 Feb. Talks on conflict held 16 Feb in Baku: Azerbaijani FM Elmar Mammadyarov said Azerbaijan ready to start negotiations to prepare draft peace agreement on N-K; Iran FM said Iran ready to play mediation role.

- [“Azerbaijani soldier killed in shootout with Armenian troops”](#), RFE/RL, 6 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Georgia** First Deputy Interior Minister Vakhtang Gomelauri appointed interior minister 2 Feb following Jan resignation of Aleksandr Chikaidze citing accusations he covered up deaths of two men in 2006; three former Interior Ministry officials including former Deputy Minister Irakli Pirtskhalva also arrested in connection with 2006 killings. Police officer arrested 7 Feb, charged with 20 Jan murder of father of one of men killed in 2006. Prosecutor General 17 Feb called for former President Saakashvili, wanted on charges of fraud, assault and abuse of office, to be extradited from Ukraine following appointment to lead Ukrainian reform Advisory Council. Russian media 5 Feb highlighted role of ethnic Chechens living in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge in recruitment to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) militant group. Russian President Putin 4 Feb signed law ratifying “strategic partnership” with breakaway region Abkhazia; Russian FM Lavrov 18 Feb signed “border agreement” with separatist South Ossetia region, agreement condemned by Georgian govt.

- [“New Georgian Interior Minister faces multiple challenges”](#), RFE/RL, 2 Feb. 2015.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Unidentified men 1 Feb opened fire on prominent Ingush opposition activist Magomed Khazbiyev near Chechen capital Grozny, and his house in Nazran, Ingushetia 17 Feb; Khazbiyev put on wanted list by Ingush authorities late Jan. In Dagestan: lawyer for “Memorial” rights groups assaulted 4 Feb in Makhachkala; senior opposition politician Gadjimurad Omarov assaulted 21 Feb; one police officer and two militants killed in Khasavyurt district 24 Feb, nine militants and one police officer killed in special operation in Kizilyurt district 25-26 Feb. Suspected militant killed in Kabardino-Balkaria 12 Feb. Chechen police conducted several raids in Grozny, each time reportedly detaining several dozen young men with beards seen as symbol of radical Islamism. Continued reports of N Caucasus residents' recruitment into Islamist groups in Syria, including Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL); Federal Security Service (FSB) head Aleksandr Bortnikov said their number has doubled in last year, currently 1,700 Russian citizens in Iraq.

- [“Experts say conflict in N Caucasus waning – but far from over”](#), *Moscow Times*, 18 Feb. 2015.

Eastern Europe

↓ Ukraine Month saw one of heaviest defeats yet for Ukraine with fall of major military garrison at Debaltseve to rebels days after signing of peace deal, also increasing Russian pressure on Kyiv, deepening economic crisis. New peace agreement announced 12 Feb in Minsk; key elements include ceasefire to start 15 Feb, withdrawal of heavy weaponry from contact line, exchange of prisoners, amnesty for crimes committed during fighting, withdrawal of “foreign armed formations”; also local elections in east, constitutional reform providing unspecified form of decentralisation, and adoption of permanent “special status” for certain areas. Hostilities continued unabated, Debaltseve fell 18 Feb. Moscow rejected accusations of extensive Russian involvement in last phase of Debaltseve battle, including advanced weaponry, regular combat forces and command and control. U.S. Sec State Kerry 4 Feb said U.S. weighing option of supplying arms to Kyiv. Limited prisoner exchange took place 21 Feb; reports of limited pull back of heavy weapons 26 Feb with reports ceasefire holding in some areas. Govt under increasing criticism domestically over economy and slowness in reform, major currency depreciation; also anger directed at political and military leadership among troops involved in Debaltseve fighting. UN launched new humanitarian appeal amid reports of increasingly dire conditions in east. Russia late month threatened to cut off gas supply as Ukraine struggled to make payments. IMF 12 Feb announced €15.5bn package for Ukraine over four years. Attacks on civilian targets continued including three killed when shell hit hospital in Donetsk city 4 Feb. Four killed in explosion at march in Kharkiv 22 Feb.

- Jean-Marie Guéhenno, [“Russia and the U.S. in Ukraine and the Middle East”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 17 Feb. 2015.
- [“Ukraine crisis: Poroshenko bruised by army retreat”](#), BBC, 20 Feb. 2015.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ Cyprus Tensions remain high over Turkish warships, hydrocarbon drilling in east Mediterranean. Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 3 Feb said he could not restart suspended reunification negotiations while “war ships were at sea”, referring to Turkey’s Oct warship deployment to shadow offshore rig off Republic of Cyprus’ SE coast. Turkey’s EU Minister 12 Feb said Turkey ready to withdraw vessel if Greek Cypriots agree natural gas belongs to both Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities.

- [“Anastasiades: No Cyprus talks until Navtex cancelled by Turkey”](#), Famagusta Gazette, 19 Feb. 2015.

➔ Turkey Turkey-PKK peace process entered important phase 28 Feb: govt said it was ready to start negotiations; pro-Kurdish People’s Democracy Party (HDP) MP Önder said PKK leader Öcalan called for spring PKK congress with aim to announce laying down weapons if his ten articles accepted as basis for talks. 20 Feb fight between PKK sympathisers and Turkish nationalists at Ege University in western Izmir province left one student dead. AKP-backed domestic security bill triggered fist fights in parliament 17, 19 Feb; thousands protested 21 Feb against draft law that would significantly increase police powers to detain, search suspects. MIT and army 21 Feb conducted operation around 30km inside northern Syria in area besieged by Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), to evacuate 40 soldiers and historic artefacts from tomb of Süleyman Şah. Damascus de-

scribed incursion as “flagrant aggression”. Explosion 13 Feb at police checkpoint in SE Sanliurfa province on Syria border injured at least three. Govt 19 Feb signed agreement with U.S. to jointly train moderate Syrian opposition in Kırşehir province; expected to begin late-March. Govt 25 Feb detained dozens in illegal wiretapping raid.

- [“Kurdish rebel leader in Turkey calls for disarmament congress”](#), Reuters, 28 Feb. 2015.

Central Asia

➡ **Kazakhstan** Ethnic violence erupted in south after ethnic Tajik 4 Feb allegedly stabbed ethnic Kazakh man; around 200 ethnic Kazakhs rioted next day, attacked ethnic Tajik property. Unrest spread to nearby Bostandyk village 6 Feb; authorities launched large-scale police operation. Parliament’s upper chamber 19 Feb approved early presidential elections, stating President Nazarbayev needs another term “to ensure the continuity of the current policy”. Nazarbayev’s former son-in-law and later political opponent Rakhat Aliyev found dead in Austrian jail 24 Feb.

- [“Expert names reasons for Kazakhstan holding early presidential election”](#), Trend, 16 Feb. 2015.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Arrests on extremism and terrorism charges continued: 26-year-old arrested in Kara-Suu, Osh province 3 Feb; four alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members arrested in Issyk-Kul province in east 9 Feb; homes of twenty other alleged members raided in Osh next day. Head imam of largest mosque in south Rashod Kamalov arrested 9 Feb in Kara-Suu on extremism charges, family said to have links with Hizb ut-Tahrir. Kamalov denied charges; observers fear arrests will aggravate ethnic Uzbek tensions in south. Officials 19 Feb claimed they detained suspected Hizb ut-Tahrir leader in Karakol. Protest at U.S. embassy 27 Feb against appointment of new chargé d’affaires.

- [“Kyrgyzstan detains imam for ‘encouraging followers to fight for Isis’”](#), *Guardian*, 18 Feb. 2015.
- For latest briefing, see Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°72, [Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia](#), 20 Jan. 2015.

➡ **Tajikistan** Deputy head of State Committee for National Security said Pakistan early Feb handed over six Tajik citizens alleged to be Jamaat Ansarullah members. Supreme Court 17 Feb sentenced thirteen alleged Jamaat Ansarullah members to jail.

- [“Tajik President Concerned About Rise Of Extremism Among Youth”](#), RFERL, 18 Feb. 2015.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Army and border service reservists being called up since Jan for three months’ training; students graduating secondary school who want to attend university to serve two-year military service following recent changes to conscription law. Russian and opposition media report extensive call-up is due to reports of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) operation in Afghanistan close to Turkmen border.

- [“Turkmen borders are under attack from ‘Islamic State’”](#), *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 18 Feb. 2015.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Amid ongoing rumours about his health and ahead of presidential elections set for 29 March, President Karimov 11 Feb approved new cabinet: Muzraf Ikramov appointed justice minister, replacing Nigmatilla Yuldashev, now chairman of Senate and substitute to president if he is unable to fulfil his duties.

- [“Uzbekistan’s new government approved”](#), Trend, 12 Feb. 2015.

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** 33rd cycle of govt-FARC negotiations began 25 Feb. Previous round of talks saw first meeting of joint “technical sub-commission” on “the end of the conflict” 4 Feb. Negotiators 10 Feb received delayed final report of Historical Commission on the Conflicts and its Victims: no consensus on origins or causes of conflict, but FARC praised 800-page report for ending “official distortion” of history. FARC 12 Feb announced minimum recruitment age raised from fifteen to seventeen, 16 Feb said thirteen current under-fifteen members would be released soon. Former president Gaviria 16 Feb suggested transitional justice model covering FARC members, state forces and “non-combatant sectors” including politicians and businessmen. Proposal received broad political support, but also triggered concerns over impunity for serious crimes. President Santos 19 Feb said some 13,000 judicial processes underway could be covered by transitional justice scheme. U.S. 20 Feb announced appointment of Bernard Aronson, former U.S. Asst Sec State for Inter-American Affairs, as special envoy to talks. Prospects for new talks with ELN suffered setback with 24 Feb confirmation of kidnapping of four employees of geology contracting firm. ELN 11 Feb released Dutch kidnapping victim, 1 March released mayor of Alto Baudó, who they had kidnapped over corruption allegations. Supreme Court 27 Feb convicted former head of secret police DAS, María del Pilar Hurtado, for her role in illegal wiretapping operations during Uribe govt. Clashes during protests in Cauca dept left 44 indigenous and twelve police injured to date.

- Jean-Marie Guéhenno, [“El principio del fin del conflicto armado en Colombia”](#), *Semana*, 19 Feb. 2015.
- Javier Ciurlizza, [“¿Justicia transicional para todos?”](#), *Razón Pública*, 23 Feb. 2015.
- [“Comienza el conteo regresivo para que hable Hurtado”](#), *La Silla Vacía*, 27 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Guatemala** President Pérez Molina and El Salvador President Sánchez Cerén 5 Feb agreed to create high-level bilateral commission on security and justice to combat organised crime; also promised to boost economic growth through infrastructure investments. Civil-society organisations 1 Feb called for extension of International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala’s (CICIG) mandate, due to expire Sept 2015.

- [“Guatemala y El Salvador crearán comisión bilateral para afrontar inseguridad”](#), *Agencia Guatemalteca de Noticias*, 5 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Haiti** Provisional Electoral Council proposed legislative elections in July, presidential in October; opposition parties protested lack of consultation, President Martelly yet to issue executive decree confirming dates. Police 9 Feb violently dispersed anti-govt demonstrators in capital Port-au-Prince protesting delayed elections, high fuel prices. Minibus union early Feb called two-day strike to protest high fuel prices. Resurgence of gang violence in Cité Soleil continued, at least eight killed in second half of month.

- [“Deadly clashes continue in Cité Soleil”](#), *Haiti Libre*, 24 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Mexico** UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances 13 Feb criticised authorities for failing to prevent or investigate forced disappearances including kidnappings

linked to police and military forces. Tensions in Guerrero state over Sept disappearance of 43 students continued, including clashes with police 24 Feb in resort town Acapulco that left one person dead. Over 30 reportedly died in first three weeks of Feb in shootouts between security forces and rival criminal gangs in Tamaulipas state. President Peña Nieto 3 Feb appointed political ally Virgilio Andrade Martinez as head of civil service, functions include overseeing investigations into corruption and conflicts of interest including current scandals involving president's family and finance secretary. Police 28 Feb arrested Servando "La Tuta" Gomez, leader of Knights Templar drug cartel, in Michoacan state.

- ["UN report criticizes Mexico on enforced disappearances"](#), AP, 13 Feb. 2015.

New Crisis Group Latin America Report N°54, *Back from the Brink: Saving Ciudad Juárez*, 25 Feb. 2015. For lessons on crime prevention, Mexico can look to the example of Ciudad Juárez, the world's "murder capital" in 2008-2010. Government and citizens worked together to bring violence down by strengthening local law enforcement and addressing socio-economic inequalities. These initiatives should be monitored, refined and expanded if Mexico is to overcome its country-wide crisis of confidence at all levels.

↓ **Venezuela** Govt 12 Feb said it had thwarted U.S.-backed opposition plot to overthrow President Maduro: some 40 air force members accused of involvement, several arrested. Maduro accused entire opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) leadership of knowing of plot, claimed Primero Justicia party coordinator Julio Borges selected coup bombing targets; accused Caracas mayor and MUD faction leader Antonio Ledezma of playing key role. Ledezma arrested 19 Feb by intelligence agents; U.S., Colombia and Chile expressed concern, human rights bodies and NGOs criticised arrest. MUD said it fears govt may be seeking to create conditions in which it can outlaw opposition parties. Govt also alleged that Borges and Ledezma planned murder of opposition Voluntad Popular party leader Leopoldo López, confined to military prison for past year following accusations he planned violent demonstrations to overthrow Maduro. MUD faction leaders López, Ledezma and former legislator Maria Corina Machado 12 Feb published manifesto calling for "transitional govt". Fourteen-year-old boy killed 24 Feb during anti-govt student demonstration in San Cristobal, Táchira: President Maduro promised full investigation, policeman arrested and charged with murder. Five other students killed during Feb in Táchira, Mérida and Caracas, some allegedly shot after participating in protests. Month also saw relations further worsening with U.S., with implementation of sanctions against Venezuelan officials, and with Spain.

- Javier Ciurlizza, ["Time for Venezuela's Friends to Act"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 23 Feb. 2015.
- ["Sliding toward dictatorship"](#), *Economist*, 20 Feb. 2015.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Amid continued economic crises in Gaza and W Bank, Hamas test fired long-range rockets toward sea in Gaza, demanded international community ensure payments for Gaza's civil servants and delivery of unpaid donor funds for Gaza reconstruction. Palestinian President Abbas late month threatened to halt security coordination with Israel unless Israel releases frozen Palestinian tax revenues, withheld since Abbas's late Dec signing of Rome Statute, undermining PA's ability to pay W Bank employees. Campaigning continued ahead 17 March Israeli elections; observers suggested release of Palestinian revenues unlikely before elections. Israeli troops 24 Feb shot dead Palestinian during clash in W Bank refugee camp.

- ["Gaza donations fall way short of pledges"](#), Al Jazeera, 19 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Lebanon** Hizbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah 16 Feb admitted group has "limited presence" in Iraq, said Hizbollah role still "in its earliest stages" raising suspicions over possible preparations for deeper engagement. Authorities mid-Feb allegedly foiled assassination attempt against former Information Minister Michel Samaha, detained since Aug 2012 for plotting bomb attacks in Lebanon in coordination with Syrian officials; plot reportedly organised by Samaha's former allies.

- ["Hezbollah admits to having military 'presence' in Iraq: Nasrallah"](#), Middle East Eye, 16 Feb. 2015.

⚡ **Syria** Regime and allied forces early Feb began major campaign in south following months of rebel gains in Daraa and Quneitra provinces: retook some ground from rebels including areas south-west of Damascus, scores reported killed by mid-month; pro-regime media reported direct Iranian, Hizbollah participation, signalling apparent major escalation by non-Syrian pro-regime forces in south. Regime and allied forces 16 Feb launched attack on rebel-held areas north of Aleppo and inside city: captured some ground but suffered heavy casualties; hundreds of rebels and pro-regime forces reported killed. UN Syria Envoy de Mistura 17 Feb briefed UNSC on efforts to broker "freeze" of Aleppo fighting: said regime indicated willingness to halt aerial bombardments for six weeks while pursuing agreement on "freeze" in part of Aleppo. Announcement made without rebel agreement to halt fighting; rebel scepticism of UN efforts increased following de Mistura's 13 Feb statement that Bashar Assad is "part of the solution", later clarified to mean Assad needed for "de-escalation of violence". Kurdish forces and allied rebels continued advancing following late Jan victory over Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) in Kobani: seized several mostly Kurdish towns south of city, late Feb seized north-eastern town Tel Hamis. IS late Feb reportedly abducted over 200 Christian villagers in north east. Deadly regime airstrikes continued including scores killed around Damascus 5 Feb following rebel shelling of regime-held areas. U.S.-led coalition airstrikes against IS continued; at least 30 reported killed in Raqqah province 6 Feb.

- ["Troops launch offensive in Syria's south"](#), Al Jazeera, 11 Feb. 2015.

Gulf

➔ **Bahrain** Continued clashes between protesters and police around 14 Feb anniversary of 2011 uprising; main opposition al-Wefaq said scores injured. Authorities 17 Feb announced criminal investigation into al-Wefaq, claimed group undermining national security.

- [“Bahrain launches criminal investigation against main opposition group”](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Iran** Progress in nuclear talks between Iran and U.S. during bilateral negotiations in Munich 6-8 Feb: Iran appeared to accept P5+1 (also known as EU3+3) formula for curtailing enrichment capacity, lengthening nominal nuclear weapons “breakout time” to one year; major disagreements remained including on schedule for sanctions relief, duration of possible agreement. Talks continued in Geneva 20-23 Feb; next round in Montreux from 2 March. Supreme Leader Khamenei 8 Feb voiced unusually strong support for negotiations: referred to Iranian concessions under Nov 2013 interim agreement as “logical”, equated them with Iran’s 1988 acceptance of UNSC resolution ending Iran-Iraq war; expressed opposition to any deal contrary to “nation’s interests”. Some U.S. Senate Democrats maintained President Obama has until end of March to reach political understanding with Iran before additional sanctions will be pursued; Obama 9 Feb said further extension of talks unlikely unless Iran agrees to P5+1’s “bottom line”. Several U.S. lawmakers vowed not to attend Israeli PM Netanyahu’s scheduled 3 March address on Iran to joint session of Congress, blamed lack of Republican consultation with White House on inviting Netanyahu. Iran 2 Feb placed domestically made satellite into orbit; critics alleged move unofficial attempt to launch inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) despite Iran being years away from ICBM technology; satellite imagery revealed launch site lacked necessary components for ICBM launch.

- [“Phased US-Iran nuclear deal taking shape”](#), AP, 23 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Iraq** Criticism of PM Abadi’s inability to impose govt authority intensified after killing of prominent Sunni tribal leader Sheikh Qassem al-Janabi, his nephew and six guards at Baghdad checkpoint manned by Shiite militiamen 13 Feb; some 75 lawmakers responded by boycotting parliament, blamed cabinet and defence ministry for ignoring criminal activities of Shiite militias. Govt early Feb approved draft law establishing National Guard commanded by locals, particularly Sunnis, at governorate level; Sunni ministers rejected draft, demanded clarity regarding chain of command and amendment of de-Baathification legislation excluding former security and military figures. Abadi early month declared end to decade-long night-time curfew in Baghdad and withdrawal of army and federal police from some areas handed over to “local forces”, causing fear of further increase in militia activity. Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) attacks continued in Anbar province: IS mid-month seized Al-Baghdadi town north west of Ramadi, reportedly burned 45 residents to death; attacked nearby Ain al-Asad airbase hosting U.S. military advisors. Deadly bombings continued in Baghdad: at least 34 killed 7 Feb, mostly in majority Shia area; another 37 killed 24 Feb. Mass graves containing scores of Yazidis killed by IS discovered in north mid-month.

- [“Iraq’s Sunni blocs halt parliament activities after sheikh’s killing”](#), Reuters, 14 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Jordan** Authorities 4 Feb executed two jihadi prisoners after captive Jordanian fighter pilot burned alive by Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) in Syria; govt vowed to step up involvement in U.S.-led anti-IS coalition.

- ["Jordan, shaken by ISIS killing, executes 2 inmates"](#), AP, 4 Feb. 2015.

↓ 🇻🇪* **Yemen** Political crisis deepened as Huthis moved to fill void left by late Jan resignation of President Hadi and govt: Huthi leaders 6 Feb announced establishment of revolutionary council, high security committee and parliamentary body charged with electing presidential council. Move triggered immediate international and domestic condemnation: several foreign embassies suspended operations and evacuated diplomats including U.S., EU, UK, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia and UAE; all political parties rejected declaration, anti-Huthi protests grew in Sanaa and central provinces. UNSC 15 Feb called on Huthis to relinquish control of state institutions, release president and ministers from house arrest; GCC countries lobbying for diplomatic isolation argued UNSC resolution should have allowed for enforcement under UN Charter's Chapter Seven. UN 20 Feb brokered agreement on creating transitional council; President Hadi next day escaped Sanaa for southern city of Aden: issued statement reasserting his authority as president, accusing Huthis of coup d'état and calling on body created to oversee implementation of national dialogue outcomes to meet in Aden or Taiz; fears move could further accelerate conflict, territorial disintegration. Groups in several southern and western governorates declared autonomy from Sanaa, many actively prepared to resist Huthis; battle lines increasingly taking sectarian overtones, pitting Shafai (Sunni) areas against Huthis. Popular committees in Aden, funded by Hadi but with unclear loyalties, 16 Feb clashed with govt Special Security Forces allegedly affiliated with Huthis and/or former President Saleh: seized key areas including city's port, intelligence HQ and other state buildings. Huthis advanced against al-Qaeda (AQAP) in Baydah province, dozens reported killed 14 Feb; AQAP 12 Feb captured military base in Shebwa province. U.S. drone strikes continued including four killed in Baydah 2 Feb.

- ["Yemen's Hadi declares Houthi power grab illegal"](#), Al Jazeera, 22 Feb. 2015.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Political tug-of-war between governing FLN-RND coalition and opposition parties continued over holding of "national consensus conference" on transition to address issues related to President Bouteflika's failing health, falling oil prices and delayed constitutional reform. Officials from two ruling parties said they would not participate in any meeting that would "undermine the legitimacy of republican institutions starting with the presidency" or put focus on any "transition". Protests over shale gas exploration widened early Feb after officials from Sonatrach, national oil company, suggested drilling would continue despite govt assurances to contrary.

- ["Shale gas project encounters determined foes deep in Algerian Sahara"](#), *New York Times*, 25 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Egypt** Egyptian air force 16 Feb bombed militant targets inside Libya after Libyan group calling itself Islamic State – Tripoli Province released video showing execution of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians (see Libya); govt urged UNSC to support intervention,

lift arms embargo on Egyptian-allied govt of Libyan PM al-Thinni and impose maritime blockade on Libya. Violence continued in Sinai: jihadi group Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM; also known as Sinai Province and linked to jihadi group Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL)) 10 Feb claimed execution of eight tribesmen accused of collaborating with army and Israel; army reportedly killed scores of militants, including 47 in N Sinai 6 Feb. Deadly bomb attacks continued in Cairo including policeman killed 13 Feb. Court 4 Feb sentenced protest leader Ahmad Douma and 229 others to life imprisonment over clashes with army during Dec 2011 protest. Crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood (MB) continued: court 2 Feb confirmed death sentencing of 183 MB members; govt 23 Feb dissolved 169 MB-affiliated NGOs. Authorities early Feb released and deported Al Jazeera journalist Peter Greste, court released two others from detention. At least nineteen killed in stampede after police 10 Feb tear-gassed football fans in Cairo.

- [“Egypt strikes ISIL group in Libya after video of mass beheading”](#), Al Jazeera, 16 Feb. 2015.

↓ **Libya** As deadly violence continued to rise, Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) withdrew from UN-sponsored talks aimed at finding solution to political crisis. Armed group pledging allegiance to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) 15 Feb released video showing militants beheading 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Sirte; in response, Egyptian jets 16 Feb launched aerial attacks on IS stronghold of Derna (see Egypt), Libyan air force commander said at least 40 militants killed. Libya and Egypt 18 Feb called on UNSC to lift arms embargo. At least 45 killed in simultaneous car bomb attacks in Qubba, near Derna, 20 Feb; attacks targeted police HQ and home of HoR speaker Aguila Salah Issa and were claimed by IS. Islamist militants 4 Feb attacked Mabruk oil field killing ten. Efforts at diplomatic solution continued: warring factions 10 Feb resumed UN-sponsored talks but HoR 22 Feb voted to suspend participation in talks, citing rival assembly’s failure to condemn Qubba bombings, said dialogue lacked vision.

- Claudia Gazzini, [“More weapons are not the answer to Libya’s jihadi upsurge”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 25 Feb. 2015.
- [“Libya, Egypt ask UN to lift arms embargo to fight Islamic State”](#), Reuters, 18 Feb. 2015.

New Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°157, [Libya: Getting Geneva Right](#), 26 Feb. 2015. After six months of worsening clashes, Libya is on the brink of all-out civil war and catastrophic state collapse. All parties must press the two rival authorities to join a national unity government, resolutely uphold the UN arms embargo, and persuade regional actors to stop fuelling the conflict.

➔ **Mauritania** Govt 5 Feb announced senatorial elections planned for 15 March postponed in order to allow govt and opposition, which currently plans to boycott vote, time to negotiate acceptable timetable and conditions for polls. Hundreds protested 12 Feb calling for release of three anti-slavery activists arrested Nov 2014; activists 23 Feb began hunger strike to protest prison conditions, abuse.

- [“Mauritania postpones senatorial elections”](#), AFP, 5 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Morocco** King Mohammed visited France early Feb, met with President Hollande to discuss terrorism, security cooperation after year-long chill in bilateral relations, suspension in counter-terrorism cooperation. Flights to and from Libya suspended

mid-Feb due to security concerns. Three suspected of seeking to join Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) militants in Libya arrested 20 Feb in Casablanca and Oujda, near Algerian border.

- [“Morocco arrests 3 seeking to join ISIS in Libya”](#), AP, 20 Feb. 2015.

➔ **Tunisia** New govt approved by parliament 4 Feb following weeks of delay: technocrats and Nida Tounes, An-Nahda, Free Patriotic Union (UPL) and Afek Tounes parties all awarded minister positions. Security forces clashed with demonstrators in southern provinces protesting imposition of entry and exit taxes along Libya border, one killed 8 Feb. Security official 13 Feb said some 500 Tunisian Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) fighters returned from Iraq and Syria, exacerbating existing security concerns; security forces announced up to 3,000 arrested 6-13 Feb, some further 100 arrested 20-24 Feb. Following IS attack in Libya (see Libya), army moved several units to southern border to prevent terrorist infiltration. Four national guards killed 16 Feb by al-Qaeda brigade near Mount Chaambi.

- [“Tunisia lawmakers approve landmark government”](#), AFP, 5 Feb. 2015.