

1 March 2006, N°31

CrisisWatch:

- summarises briefly 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 information sources (all references mentioned are hyperlinked in the electronic version of this bulletin);
- 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;
- alerts readers to situations where, in the coming month, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict, or a particular conflict resolution opportunity (noting that in some instances there may in fact be both); and
- summarises Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers that have been published in the last month.

CrisisWatch is compiled by Crisis Group's Brussels Research Unit, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our more than 110 staff members across five continents, who already report on some 50 of the situations listed here. Comments and suggestions can be sent to crisiswatch@crisisgroup.org.

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March 2006 Watchlist



Conflict Risk Alert

Iraq



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Africa

CENTRAL AFRICA

- Burundi Prospect of peace talks between Front National de Libération (FNL) rebels and government remained low, further complicated by UN mission (ONUB) call for FNL to disarm unconditionally. Clashes between security forces and FNL continued, 5 rebels and 1 soldier killed outside Bujumbura 15 February. ONUB continued progressive disengagement with withdrawal of Kenyan peacekeepers. Government rejected UN Special Representative McAskie's proposal for forum of Burundi's donors to replace Arusha Accord Implementation and Monitoring Committee, whose mandate expired August 2005, saying proposed body would undertake tasks in government's domain and justify undesired extension of ONUB's mandate. Additional 780 political prisoners freed as part of amnesty launched January; released will face questioning by truth commission and possible re-incarceration.
 - "Warning signs: Continuing abuses in Burundi", Human Rights Watch, 27 Feb. 2006.
 - "A political settlement with the FNL: The shortest and cheapest shortcut to sustainable peace in Burundi", Burundi Realities, 17 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°31, *Elections in Burundi: A Radical Shake-Up of the Political Landscape*, 25 Aug. 2005.

- Central African Republic Clashes between army and bandits in northwest displaced over 4,000 villagers; many fled to Chad. Refugees reported 50 killed in violence.
 - "4,000 more Central Africans flee violence this month alone", IRIN, 22 Feb. 2006.
 - "Donors pledge support for humanitarian crisis", IRIN, 21 Feb. 2006.

- Chad Relations with Sudan improved with 8 February agreement in Libya to end support to each other's rebel groups and establish force to patrol border. Cross-border raids continued despite accord and high-level defections from Chad's army to Darfur-based Chadian rebels increasing likelihood of continued escalation between neighbours; many refugees fled to Darfur to escape fighting. Sudanese and Chadian militias from Darfur, with apparent Sudanese government backing, reportedly behind attacks. Chadian rebels demanded President Deby hold national forum for change ahead of 3 May presidential election; threatened coup.
 - "Refugee crisis grows as Darfur war crosses a border", *New York Times*, 28 Feb. 2006.
 - "Chad rebel leader demands change, by force if needed", *Sudan Tribune* (Reuters), 12 Feb. 2006.
 - "With insecurity mounting in the east, are Deby's days numbered?", IRIN, 10 Feb. 2006.

- Democratic Republic of Congo New constitution officially adopted 18 February granting DRC new legal framework, including president-PM power share and 2-term limit for elected president. Parliament approved electoral law but election commission announced polls delayed until 18 June from 29 April. EU investigating option of sending troops to reinforce UN mission (MONUC) for elections, but took no

decision on size of force and member state contributions. Fighting continued in North Kivu and Katanga between army and militias. MONUC threatened to stop assisting army trying to push out rebels in east, if DRC troops continue to commit human rights violations during operations. Setback for reintegration of ex-fighters into army after 6 starved to death at Kamina training camp because allotted rations and payment not arriving.

- "EU nations come forward for Congo force", AlertNet, 27 Feb. 2006.
- "New DR Congo constitution adopted", BBC, 19 Feb. 2006.
- "The peculiar terror that is northern Katanga", IRIN, 13 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°103, *Katanga: The Congo's Forgotten Crisis*, 9 Jan. 2006.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°104, *Security Sector Reform in the Congo*, 13 February 2006. Reform of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's security sector must be the top priority for Kinshasa and its international supporters. Rebuilding the national army is far behind schedule, and newly integrated units are often themselves a security hazard. The police are no match for local militias in much of the country and both police and army must meet the challenge of securing the elections later this year. The international community must engage for the long term to restructure and retrain the army. This includes unifying the chain of command and creating a police force that can deal with everyday maintenance of order, especially in the countryside. All other development and progress - from elections to humanitarian assistance to economic activity - depend on establishing and maintaining a secure environment.

- Rwanda Local government elections held 6 and 20 February passed off peacefully with high voter turnout; mayors to be chosen 1 March by newly elected officials; key steps in broader decentralisation process. Norway agreed to try former Rwandan official Michel Bagaragaza for role during 1994 genocide as Rwanda criticised transfer of case from International Criminal Tribunal.
 - "Political reform reaches last stage in Rwanda", Independent Online, 20 Feb. 2006.
 - "Appeals court confirms ex-minister's acquittal", IRIN, 8 Feb. 2006.

- Uganda President Museveni reelected with 59% of vote in first ever multiparty presidential and parliamentary elections 23 February. Main opposition rival Kiiza Besigye, still on trial for treason, second with 37%; to contest results. Ruling NRM party reportedly won 202 of 309 parliamentary seats while opposition FDC won 40. No major election day violence reported though police clashed with opposition supporters outside Besigye's headquarters. International observers said state media favoured Museveni during campaign, while security forces allegedly intimidated opposition. Tensions between courts and military increased after latter defied court and re-arrested 14 accused of treason with Besigye. Military killed 4 LRA rebels in cross-border operations in Sudan.
 - "Uganda's Museveni wins election", BBC, 25 Feb. 2006.
 - "D-day for the 'new Mugabe' of Africa", *The Observer*, 19 Feb. 2006.
 - "Ugandan judges and generals face off before polls", AlertNet, 17 Feb. 2006.
 - Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°35, *A Strategy for Ending Northern Uganda's Crisis*, 11 Jan. 2006.

HORN OF AFRICA

- Ethiopia Trial of 129 opposition members charged with treason after November 2005 rioting opened 23 February. EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel met with PM Zenawi in effort to restore dialogue; visited jailed opposition and reported many needed urgent medical attention, including CUD party Chairman Hailu Shawel.
 - "Key Ethiopia treason trial starts", BBC, 23 Feb. 2006.
 - "EC commissioner meets jailed opposition activists", IRIN, 20 Feb. 2006.

- Ethiopia/Eritrea Situation remained tense along disputed border with troop movement reported on both sides. UN Security Council agreed 8 February to give U.S. 30 days to resolve border dispute before considering troop redeployment. Witnesses of 2000 Algiers Agreement (Algeria, AU, EU, UN, U.S.) met 22 February in attempt to expedite border demarcation process but Asmara refused to work with independent boundary commission to resolve dispute. Eritrea arrested 27 local UN mission staff; 25 later released but no official reason given for arrests.
 - "Statement by the witnesses to the Algiers agreement", ReliefWeb, 23 Feb. 2006.
 - "Protest at UN arrests in Eritrea", BBC, 15 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°101, *Ethiopia and Eritrea: Preventing War*, 22 Dec. 2005.

- Somalia Transitional parliament met in Somalia for first time in Baidoa 26 February; adjourned session for 1 week to allow members to resolve personal differences. Insecurity continued throughout country: heavy fighting between militia associated with Islamic courts and those loyal to Mogadishu warlords left at least 38 dead in capital. Severe drought led to clashes between rival clans for control of dam inside Ethiopian border; at least 12 killed. In Puntland, clashes between gunmen loyal to Planning Minister Farole and security forces killed 3; mass protest against Danish newspaper cartoons killed 1.
 - "Calls for patriotism as MPs meet in Baidoa", IRIN, 27 Feb. 2006.
 - "15 killed in Somalia clashes", Al Jazeera (AP), 22 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°100, *Somalia's Islamists*, 12 Dec. 2005.

- Somaliland (Somalia) Land dispute in Hargeysa flared into inter-clan conflict; 6 killed. President Kahin appointed mediation committee at emergency cabinet meeting.
 - "Six killed in clash over land in Somaliland", IRIN, 6 Feb. 2006.

- Sudan UN Security Council authorised planning for expected re-hatting of AU mission in Darfur to UN mission, despite strong objections from Khartoum; resolution expected March after AU makes final decision on handover. UNSG Annan asked U.S. President Bush for greater U.S. role in Darfur; Bush called for doubling of international troops and role for NATO in planning and logistics. Little progress in Darfur peace talks with continued insecurity on ground. UK FM Straw warned would consider UN sanctions if no headway made. Sudan and Chad signed agreement in Libya to end cross-border dispute, committing to preventing presence of rebels on other's territory. UN expert panel recommended Security Council extend arms embargo; discussions on sanctions for individuals seen to be blocking peace process continued. 7 killed in clashes between

South Sudan Defence Forces and SPLA in Upper Nile region. Eastern Front rebels indefinitely postponed peace talks with government.

- "Sudan leader warns against UN force", Al Jazeera, 27 Feb. 2006.
- "Bush calls for more muscle in Darfur", *Washington Post*, 18 Feb. 2006.
- Comment by Jack Straw, "Stop the killing, or pay the price", *International Herald Tribune*, 17 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°102, *Sudan: Saving Peace in the East*, 5 Jan. 2006.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

- Angola President Eduardo Dos Santos indicated presidential elections to be postponed until 2007 to allow for infrastructure repair and voter registration.
 - "Angolans fear fresh violence after key polls", Independent Online, 9 Feb. 2006.

- Swaziland King Mswati III officially brought new constitution into effect 8 February; maintains monarchy's absolute powers. Attacks on government targets continued with Mbabane police camp petrol-bombed. 1 of 16 members of banned PUDEMO opposition party charged with high treason pleaded guilty and confessed to planning attacks on government targets.
 - "New constitution unclear on political parties", IRIN, 8 Feb. 2006.

- Zimbabwe Former activist Arthur Mutambara voted head of pro-senate faction as battle with disputed leader Morgan Tsvangirai for leadership of opposition MDC party continued. Government announced plan to allow seizure of passports of critics. Zimbabwe avoided IMF's threat of expulsion by paying off \$9 million in debt; inflation expected to worsen beyond current 613% after government printed money to pay off loan.
 - "Zimbabwe's 'outsider' faction leader", BBC, 27 Feb. 2006.
 - "Crackdown on the press intensifies", Human Rights Watch, 9 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°97, *Zimbabwe's Operation Murambatsvina: The Tipping Point?*, 17 Aug. 2005.

- WEST AFRICA

- Côte d'Ivoire Key talks between political and rebel leaders, including President Gbagbo and rebel Guillaume Soro, aimed at reviving peace process held 28 February in Yamoussoukro. Meeting of UN-backed international mediators passed off peacefully 17 February; January meeting had provoked violent demonstrations against UN by Gbagbo supporters, angry at mediators' recommendation to dissolve parliament. UN Security Council approved move of small mechanised unit from Liberia to Côte d'Ivoire, though Annan requested larger reinforcement. UN imposed sanctions on Gbagbo supporters Charles Ble Goude and Eugene Djue and rebel commander Fofie Kouakou for hampering peace efforts.
 - "Ivory Coast factions make progress at peace talks", AlertNet, 28 Feb. 2006.
 - "International panel meets, Egeland winds up visit", IRIN, 17 Feb. 2006.

- Guinea Unions representing 80% of all workers called 5-day general strike 27 February to demand wage increases.

Protests held in Guekedou against appointment of mayor belonging to ruling PUP party, which won disputed electoral victory in December; 2 killed in clashes with police.

- [“Capital slows to standstill on first day of general strike”](#), IRIN, 27 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°94, [Stopping Guinea’s Slide](#), 14 June 2005.

➡ Liberia New President Johnson-Sirleaf inaugurated 7-member Truth and Reconciliation Commission to investigate crimes committed during 24-year civil war and launched anti-corruption drive with overhaul of finance ministry. Nominations to cabinet and other top posts nearly complete: controversy over appointment of Nigerian to head restructuring of army and former elections commission chief as justice minister. Workers at Firestone rubber plantation went on strike demanding better wages and work conditions.

- [“Liberia inaugurates truth commission”](#), CNN, 20 Feb. 2006.
- [“Sirleaf starts to form government, some appointments spark protest”](#), IRIN, 14 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°36, [Liberia: Staying Focused](#), 13 Jan. 2006.

➡ Nigeria Security deteriorated with upsurge in religious and political violence. Protests by Muslims against Danish cartoons satirising Prophet Mohammed turned violent, killing 50, mostly Christians, as churches and Christian businesses targeted in several northern cities. In response, riots broke out against Muslims in Christian south; over 100 reported dead. Security situation remained volatile in Delta region, after new series of politically motivated attacks by Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta on oil infrastructure and kidnapping of 9 foreign workers.

- [“Danger signs in Nigeria”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- [“Five days of violence by Nigerian Christians and Muslims kill 150”](#), *The Independent*, 24 Feb. 2006.
- [“Nigeria’s shadowy oil rebels”](#), BBC, 21 Feb. 2006.

➡ Sierra Leone Trial continued for former leader of Civil Defence Forces militia Samuel Hinga Norman, indicted by UN Special Court for crimes against humanity during civil war: President Kabbah subpoenaed to testify. In local trial, former Revolutionary United Front rebel spokesman Omrie Golley and 2 co-defendants charged with treason boycotted proceedings alleging judge biased.

- [“We can’t force Golley, others to appear in court, prison officer”](#), *Concord Times*, 23 Feb. 2006.
- [“Former Sierra Leone vice president reveals more secrets at UN Special Court”](#), *Awareness Times*, 16 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°87, [Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States](#), 8 Dec. 2004.

Asia/Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

➡ Kazakhstan Opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbaev assassinated along with driver and bodyguard, sending shock waves through political elite: second suspicious death of senior opposition figure since November. Senate General Secretary

Erzhan Utembaev arrested and reportedly admitted ordering killing of Sarsenbaev out of “personal enmity”. 5 members of state security service charged with kidnapping and killing, prompting resignation of agency’s head. Opposition suggested Utembaev being used as scapegoat; called for resignation of Senate Speaker Nurtai Abykaev and questioning of president’s daughter, parliamentarian Dariga Nazarbaeva, and her husband Deputy FM Rakhat Aliyev. Around 1,000 marched in Almaty in memory of Sarsenbaev. U.S. FBI assisting Kazakh government in investigation after request for assistance.

- [“Grudge was motive for Kazakh killing - minister”](#), AlertNet, 27 Feb. 2006.
- [“Kazakh opposition marked for death?”](#), ISN, 21 Feb. 2006.

➡ Kyrgyzstan Power struggle between President Bakiev and parliament escalated as powerful parliamentary speaker Omurbek Tekebaev resigned after telling Bakiev to “hang himself”. Bakiev had earlier accused parliament of obstruction and corruption. 2 senior security officials sacked by Bakiev for alleged failure to combat organised crime and corruption. Incident between teenage gangs in Iskra escalated into communal clash between Kyrgyz and Chinese Dungan villagers, leaving 20 injured and raising broader concerns about interethnic relations. Government reportedly to ask U.S. to pay massive rent increase for use of Manas military base. Court rejected asylum of 2 Uzbek refugees now likely to be deported despite UNHCR appeal.

- [“Interethnic clash causes Kyrgyzstan’s ‘Common house’ to tremble”](#), Eurasianet, 16 Feb. 2006.
- [“Kyrgyz speaker resigns in row with president”](#), IWPR, 15 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°109, [Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State](#), 16 Dec. 2005.

➡ Tajikistan Trial of ex-commander of presidential guard Gaffor Mirzoyev on charges including plotting government overthrow resumed 14 February. Supreme Court suspended corrective labour sentence against Mukhtor Boqizoda, chief editor of opposition newspaper *Nerui Sukhan*.

- [“Secret trial in Tajikistan appears connected to upcoming presidential election”](#), Eurasianet, 21 Feb. 2006.
- [“Tajik court suspends opposition editor’s sentence”](#), Eurasia Daily Digest (RFE/RL), 14 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°33, [Tajikistan’s Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation?](#), 19 May 2004.

➡ Turkmenistan Rare protests held after government pension cuts left quarter of all pensioners without benefits.

- [“Pension cuts begin to bite”](#), IRIN, 6 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°85, [Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: A New International Strategy](#), 4 Nov. 2004.

➡ Uzbekistan Trials of opposition Sunshine Coalition leaders Nigora Khidoyatova and Sanjar Umarov continued with activists reportedly unable to access “open trials”: Khidoyatova sentenced to 10 years prison 1 March. 10 Uzbeks seeking refuge in Ukraine after May 2005 Andijon massacre deported back, while Kyrgyzstan’s Supreme Court rejected asylum of 2 others, now likely to be deported despite UNHCR appeal. Rights activist who reported on Andijon sentenced to 7 years.

- [“Uzbek court sentences oppositionist to prison”](#), RFE/RL, 1 Mar. 2006.
- [“Uzbek opposition head faces jail”](#), BBC, 24 Feb. 2006.

- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°38, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, 25 May 2005.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°45, *Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul*, 16 February 2006. With further violent unrest in Uzbekistan a strong possibility for the medium term, the international community must develop new strategies to prepare for potentially massive instability in Central Asia. The government in Tashkent is not at risk of imminent collapse, but Uzbekistan could eventually become the centre of regional volatility, which would have a significant impact on Western interests, including in Afghanistan. Western policies meant to support development of political and economic openness have failed. The new focus should be on: a lifeboat strategy to maintain political activity, civil society and educational opportunities in the expectation of future change to a more reasonable government; and a plan to reduce the impact likely future instability would have on its neighbours.

SOUTH ASIA

- Afghanistan London Conference endorsing “Afghanistan Compact” saw 60 nations and organisations pledge ongoing commitment to Afghanistan, with ambitious benchmarks for governance, development and security; over \$10 billion promised. Dutch parliament voted in favour of sending troops to restive southern region of Uruzgan, while first British troops arrived in neighbouring Helmand province. 12 killed in violent protests against cartoons in European publications. Violence in Helmand province killed 6 police and 20 Taliban, allegedly in connection with control of drug routes. Sectarian clashes between Shiite minority and Sunnis at 9 February Ashura festival killed at least 5 in western Herat. President Karzai visited Pakistan to discuss upsurge of cross-border violence in south and east. U.S. President Bush made first visit to Kabul 1 March.
 - “Taliban continuing to sow fear”, *International Herald Tribune*, 1 Mar. 2006.
 - “A charter in London, troops for the badlands”, *The Economist*, 2 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°107, *Rebuilding the Afghan State: The European Union’s Role*, 30 Nov. 2005.
- Bangladesh Main opposition party Awami League (AL) returned to parliament after year-long boycott. Protests caused chaos in Dhaka: AL-organised general strike called for government resignation, while demonstrations also held against Danish cartoons. Dutch development minister indicated EU readiness to mediate dialogue between government and opposition. Senior AL leader Sheikh Yunus Ali targeted and seriously injured in bomb blast. 4 Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen leaders, including Shayek Abdur Rahman, sentenced to 40 years imprisonment for involvement in November 2005 killing of 2 judges.
 - “Rahman, Bangla Bai get 40 years”, *The Daily Star*, 21 Feb. 2006.
 - “Bangladesh paralyzed by opposition protest”, ISN, 15 Feb. 2006.
- India (non-Kashmir) Maoist violence escalated in Chhattisgarh state while northeastern unrest continued. Maoists killed 70, including 8 police in 9 February raid on state-

run explosives factory, and as many as 55 members of anti-Maoist group in 28 February landmine blast. Protests against death of man in police custody in northeastern Tinsukia district turned violent killing 12. Representatives for United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) held productive talks with state officials 7 February ahead of proposed direct talks between government and ULFA leadership; government agreed to series of confidence-building measures. Attack on state gas workers 14 February killed 3; National Liberation Front of Tripura rebels suspected.

- “25 killed in Maoist attack”, *The Hindu*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- “Strike call after Assam shootings”, BBC, 12 Feb. 2006.

- Kashmir Confidence-building measures continued with resumption of train service across Thar desert after 40-year suspension. Indian PM Manmohan Singh called conference of Indian Kashmiri politicians and separatist leaders for 25 February; many declined calling talks “premature”. Strikes in Indian-controlled Kashmir followed fatal shooting of 4 boys 22 February, apparently in crossfire between security forces and separatists, while further separatist violence killed 5 next day. Clashes erupted between Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh 8 February, after torn pages of Koran found near mosque in Kargil. India reportedly withdrew 5,000 troops from Indian-controlled Kashmir in response to improving security situation.
 - “Separatists boycott talks on Kashmir”, *Dawn*, 25 Feb. 2006.
 - “Farooq Abdullah won’t attend Kashmir roundtable”, *Times of India*, 21 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°79, *India/Pakistan Relations and Kashmir: Steps toward Peace*, 24 June 2004.
- Nepal Municipal elections boycotted by all major parties and criticised by UK, U.S., Japan and India as deeply flawed. Maoists supported boycott with armed campaign, targeting security forces and government buildings and killing 1 mayoral candidate. Royal Nepalese Army (RNA) launched offensive against Maoists in southwest, reportedly in response to deadly attacks in Palpa district. King’s power weakened by increasingly active judiciary: Supreme Court disbanded royalist anti-corruption commission, and ordered release of detained Nepali Congress Party spokesman. Former PM Deuba also released, along with 17 political leaders, but house arrest of CPN-UML leader M.K. Nepal extended by 2 months. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights released report on rights violations by RNA and Maoists and called for violators to be excluded from UN peacekeeping roles.
 - “Grave danger for civilians due to the conflict”, IRIN, 21 Feb. 2006.
 - *Report of the UNHCHR on Nepal*, ReliefWeb, 16 Feb. 2006.
 - “A hollow bid to cling to power”, *The Economist*, 9 Feb. 2006.
 - Crisis Group Asia Report N°111, *Nepal: Electing Chaos*, 31 Jan. 2006.
- Pakistan Sectarian violence erupted in North West Frontier Province: at least 35 killed in suicide bombing on Shiite Ashura procession and subsequent unrest. Government officials blamed external elements rather than local sectarian tensions, while local Shiite leaders blamed government for failing to curb Sunni militants. 5 days of increasingly violent protests held to denounce publication of cartoons of Prophet Mohammed in western media. Protests turned deadly in Lahore and Peshawar; 5 reported killed. Islamist coalition Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal leader, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, briefly held under house

arrest to prevent him leading Islamabad rally 19 February. Unrest continued in South Waziristan as 3 soldiers killed by roadside bomb 5 February. Balochistan rebels intensified insurgency with 2 February rocket attack and 5 February bus bomb: at least 21 killed. Nationwide protest planned against 3 March visit of U.S. President Bush.

- ["Mr. Musharraf's other war"](#), *New York Times*, 23 Feb. 2006.
- ["Pakistani riots about more than cartoons"](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 Feb. 2006.
- ["37 die in two Hangu blasts, violence"](#), *Dawn*, 11 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°43, ["Pakistan's Local Polls: Shoring Up Military Rule"](#), 22 Nov. 2005.

☞ Sri Lanka In significant step forward, government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, meeting in Geneva, released joint statement committing to curb violence and hold further talks in April. Violence decreased considerably in run-up to 22-23 February Norwegian-backed talks. Government freed 4 rebels as good-will gesture.

- ["No more S.Lanka talks if pledges not met - rebel"](#), AlertNet, 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["Deal could save Sri Lanka truce"](#), BBC, 24 Feb. 2006.
- ["Significance of Geneva talks"](#), Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, 20 Feb. 2006.

NORTH EAST ASIA

☞ China (internal) Beijing moved to prevent future rural unrest through plan to give aid to poor farmers. Former Communist Party chief He Feng jailed for life after hiring thugs to beat up rural protesters.

- ["China's censored media answers back"](#), BBC, 23 Feb. 2006.
- ["Chinese gov't to spend more on countryside"](#), ABC, 22 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°108, ["North East Asia's Undercurrents of Conflict"](#), 15 Dec. 2005.

☞ North Korea Talks with Japan failed to solve any outstanding issues. NK repeated condition for returning to 6-party nuclear talks, suspended since November 2005, would be lifting of U.S. economic sanctions. North-South military-level talks to resume 2 March after 19-month hiatus.

- Comment by Peter Beck (Crisis Group), ["Keeping North Korea from the brink"](#), Yale Global Online Magazine, 14 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°112, ["North Korea and China: Comrades Forever?"](#), 1 Feb. 2006.

☞ Taiwan Strait Tension raised between Beijing and Taipei after President Chen Shui-bian announced National Unification Council and its guidelines would "cease to function" 27 February. Move brought condemnation from Beijing who previously called Chen "troublemaker and saboteur".

- ["China accuses Taiwan on change in relations"](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 1 Mar. 2006.
- ["Diminishing status of Taiwan's status quo"](#), Asia Times Online, 1 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°42, ["China and Taiwan: Uneasy Détente"](#), 21 Sept. 2005.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

☞ Cambodia Opposition leader Sam Rainsy returned from self-imposed exile 10 February after receiving royal pardon for allegations against PM Hun Sen and National Assembly leader Prince Norodom Ranariddh; pardon followed Rainsy apology. International donor meeting scheduled to start 3 March.

- ["Cambodia restores immunity to opposition leader"](#), AlertNet, 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["In Cambodia, the art of the possible"](#), Asia Times Online, 18 Feb. 2006.

☞ Indonesia Draft bill on Aceh governance under consideration in parliament; key issues include participation of independent candidates in local elections scheduled for June and formation of local political parties. Target deadline for new law 31 March. EU/ASEAN Aceh Monitoring Mission extended for 3 months (until 15 June). Diplomatic tension with Timor Leste eased after President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono met President Gusmao Xanana to discuss UN-backed report on Indonesian human rights violations in former province. Deadline for decision on legal status of West Irian Jaya province passed 20 February without resolution. Heavy sentences on terrorism charges handed down in Ambon: Asep Jaja, man who led attack on paramilitary police post in May 2005, sentenced to death, while 2 others given life in prison. Mostly peaceful demonstrations against Danish cartoons took place throughout country.

- ["Aceh legislators take issue with revised bill"](#), *Jakarta Post*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["West Irian Jaya still in limbo"](#), *Jakarta Post*, 21 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°44, ["Aceh: So Far, So Good"](#), 13 Dec. 2005.

☞ Myanmar/Burma Opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) offered to recognise military rule if military junta frees NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi and convenes parliament elected in 1990. Under proposal, parliament would then recognise junta as de jure transitional government. Deadly clashes reported between military and Indian Nagaland (NSCN-K) separatist groups based in Myanmar.

- ["NSCN-K, soldiers fight in Myanmar jungles, 13 dead"](#), *Times of India*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["Some ethnics and opposition politicians cautious on NLD plan"](#), Irrawaddy, 20 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°34, ["Myanmar: Update on HIV/AIDS Policy"](#), 16 Dec. 2004.

☞ Philippines State of emergency declared by President Arroyo 24 February amidst reports that military thwarted coup attempt and after minor blast at presidential palace. Top military officers "retired" in end to minor rebellion by marines, *Daily Tribune* newspaper's offices raided while 16 members of congress and security forces charged with coup plot. Commemorations to mark 20th anniversary of revolution that ousted President Marcos cancelled but small rallies held, leading to minor standoffs with security forces. Exploratory talks began 6 February between Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and government; both sides hopeful for peace agreement on Moro homeland and future of 12,000-strong MILF force by September 2006. Clashes continued between

military and suspected Abu Sayyaf members on Basilan and with Communist National People's Army south of capital.

- "Marines' rebellion loosens Arroyo's grip on power", *The Guardian*, 27 Feb. 2006.
- "Alleging plot, Arroyo declares emergency", *International Herald Tribune*, 24 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°110, *Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts*, 19 Dec. 2005.

- ⇒ Thailand PM Thaksin Shinawatra dissolved parliament and called snap election for 2 April following mass protests by People's Alliance for Democracy and media tycoon Sondhi Limthongkul calling for Thaksin's resignation over corruption. Opposition parties declared intention to boycott election. Meanwhile daily violence continued in south. Local state school teachers in Narathiwat taken hostage by villagers in response to perceived arbitrary arrests by police, as concern persisted over police powers associated with emergency decree. National Reconciliation Committee due to release final report on southern situation and recommendations in March.
- "Takbai legacy lingers in Thai south", BBC, 27 Feb. 2006.
 - "Crisis deepens", *Bangkok Post*, 28 Feb. 2006.
 - "Me or them", *The Nation*, 25 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°105, *Thailand's Emergency Decree: No Solution*, 18 Nov. 2005.

PACIFIC

- ⇒ Fiji Military repeated vow to stop controversial Promotion of Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill which would give amnesty to perpetrators of 2000 coup.
- "Military, government head for new showdown", *Pacific Magazine*, 17 Feb. 2006.



Europe

BALKANS

- ⇒ Albania First component of Stabilisation and Association Agreement signed with EU 18 February; EU approval of full agreement expected later in year. EU Commission President Barroso urged Albanian consensus on solving priority issues of judicial reform, organised crime and economy.
- "Albania takes major step on road to EU membership", *Southeast European Times*, 21 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°153, *Pan-Albanianism: How Big a Threat to Balkan Stability?*, 25 Feb. 2004.
- ⇒ Bosnia & Herzegovina Milorad Dodik formed new government as PM for Republika Srpska 28 February. EU Commission and High Representative Schwarz-Schilling said negotiations on Stabilisation and Association Agreement could be completed by end 2006 provided Bosnia cooperates with ICTY and strengthens state-level police and public broadcasting. War crimes suspect Milan Lukic transferred from Argentina to Hague. Court charged ex-state presidency member Mirko Sarovic and Bosnian Serb wartime minister Momcilo Mandic with financial irregularities designed to aid Radovan Karadzic. War crimes suspect Dragomir Abazovic, whose wife was killed during his arrest by EUFOR, released

after court found arrest warrant invalid. International Court of Justice case brought by BiH against Serbia-Montenegro for genocide during 1992-1995 war began 27 February.

- Speech by Olli Rehn to European Parliament, "Perspectives for Bosnia and Herzegovina", 15 Feb. 2006.
- "Debate follows collapse of Bosnian reform drive", *Balkan Insight*, 9 Feb. 2006.
- Comment by Christian Schwarz-Schilling, "How to move Bosnia forward", *International Herald Tribune*, 1 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°164, *Bosnia's Stalled Police Reform: No Progress, No EU*, 6 Sept. 2005.

- ⇒ Kosovo Law professor Fatmir Sejdiu from late President Rugova's LDK party elected new president by parliament 10 February. First face-to-face final status talks held in Vienna 20-21 February, discussing rival decentralisation proposals with Serbian counterparts. Talks inconclusive as expected; next round 17 March. Kosovo represented at UN Security Council for first time as PM Kosumi attended meeting on Kosovo as observer 14 February; proposal by Serbian President Boris Tadic for 20-year delay on status decision dismissed. Governing LDK-AAK coalition agreed LDK to name head of newly created interior ministry and AAK, justice ministry.
- "Kosovo talks: independence or occupation?", ISN, 20 Feb. 2006.
 - "UN envoy tells Security Council that Kosovo operation now in 'critical phase'", UN News, 14 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°165, *Bridging Kosovo's Mitrovica Divide*, 13 Sept. 2005.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°170, *Kosovo: The Challenge of Transition*, 17 February 2006. To create a stable Kosovo, the international community must dare to impose independence rather than attempt finessing Pristina and Belgrade's differences with an ambiguous and unstable settlement. While agreement between all parties remains desirable in theory, it is extremely unlikely that any Serbian government will voluntarily acquiesce to the kind of independence, conditional though it is likely to be, which is necessary for a secure, long-term solution. The international community - particularly UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari - must prepare for the possibility of imposing an independence package. Kosovo's Albanian majority, however, must first negotiate deals for Serb and other minority rights. The EU and its member states should increase the resources they commit to the Western Balkans. The international community will have to remain in Serb-dominated northern Kosovo to avoid a violent breakdown after independence.



- ⇒ Macedonia EU Commission President Barroso, Enlargement Commissioner Rehn and NATO officials emphasised importance of continued reforms to accession processes during visits to Skopje; NATO hopeful necessary reforms will be completed by 2007. Justice minister and ICTY agreed 16 February to begin transfer from Hague of 4 cases involving former Albanian rebel National Liberation Army members, despite Albanian claims of pre-2001 Ohrid Agreement pledge of amnesty for cases not tried in Hague.
- "ICG recommends Hague cases not be returned to Macedonia", *Southeast European Times*, 8 Feb. 2006.
 - Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°41, *Macedonia: Wobbling toward Europe*, 12 Jan. 2006.

↳ Serbia & Montenegro EU Council threatened Serbia with suspension of Stabilisation and Association negotiations if Ratko Mladic not arrested by 5 April. False reports that Ratko Mladic arrested caused media furore. EU FMs also supported Miroslav Lajcak's formula of 55% majority for Montenegro's independence referendum; Montenegrin PM Djukanovic accepted proposal. First face-to-face Kosovo status negotiations between Serbian government and Kosovo Albanians held 20-21 February in Vienna, ended inconclusively; next round 17 March. Serbian parliament accepted results of first round of talks but announcements by key international officials that Kosovo independence likely outcome set off political firestorm in Belgrade. Serbs in Bujanovac, southern Serbia, proposed referendum on partition of town into Serbian and Albanian sectors, after Serb concern local Albanians will increase links with Kosovo.

- ["Partition demand fuels South Serbia tensions"](#), BIRN, 16 Feb. 2006.
- ["Serbia rejects EU's vote guidelines"](#), *The Guardian*, 16 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°169, ["Montenegro's Independence Drive"](#), 7 Dec. 2005.

CAUCASUS

↳ Armenia Parliament elected long-time aide to President Kocharian as human rights ombudsman. Outgoing ombudsman, seen as more critical, not permitted to present report to parliament but said would still publish findings. Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe issued declaration condemning rigging of November 2005 referendum on constitutional amendments.

- ["Kocharian adviser elected ombudsman"](#), Armenia Liberty, 17 Feb. 2006.
- ["Outgoing Armenian ombudsman not permitted to report to parliament"](#), Eurasia Daily Digest, 7 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°158, ["Armenia: Internal Instability Ahead"](#), 18 Oct. 2004.

↳ Azerbaijan President Aliyev removed influential head of Customs Committee, appointing him to minor ministerial post, and dismissed labour minister: measures seen as further sidelining of potential rivals and "old guard". Musavat party broke with opposition Azadlig alliance by ending boycott of new parliament and announced will participate in May election re-runs in 10 constituencies. OSCE report reaffirmed earlier conclusions that November elections did not meet democratic standards. Protests held in Baku and religious suburb of Nardaran against Danish cartoons. European Parliament passed resolution accusing Baku of destroying Armenian cemetery in Nakchivan.

- ["Protesting for the prophet, not for political change"](#), Eurasianet, 17 Feb. 2006.
- ["Leading opposition party breaks with coalition partners"](#), RFE/RL, 13 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°40, ["Azerbaijan's 2005 Elections: Lost Opportunity"](#), 21 Nov. 2005.

↳ Chechnya (Russia) PM Sergei Abramov resigned over ill health, paving way for likely takeover by current caretaker PM, pro-Kremlin hardliner, Ramzan Kadyrov. Chechen rebels claimed responsibility for military barracks collapse, which Russia said caused by domestic gas explosion: 13 killed. At least 16 soldiers and 4 rebels, reportedly including senior rebel

commander, killed in series of clashes. Rebels conducted major leadership reshuffle, ordering most ministers abroad to return; move said to reflect ideological split between leader and radical elements. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour expressed concern over abuses in Chechnya during visit to republic; President Putin warned UN against politicising rights issues. Chechen government banned Danish aid workers in response to Danish newspaper cartoons of Prophet Mohammed.

- ["Chechnya's pro-Moscow PM Abramov quits"](#), AlertNet, 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["Chechen separatist envoy confirms government reshuffle"](#), RFE/RL, 6 Feb. 2006.

↳ North Caucasus (non-Chechnya) Violence spread north from turbulent border republics with clash between security forces and suspected militants in Stavropol krai, leaving 7 police, 12 gunmen dead. Head of Daghestan Republic Magomedali Magomedov resigned stoking fears of power struggle: Kremlin installed Mukhu Aliyev as successor. In further clashes, at least 5 reported killed in Daghestan and 2 in Ingushetia. 3 blasts, treated as terrorist attacks, at gaming halls in North Ossetian town of Vladikavkaz killed 2.

- ["Russia installs new chief to calm volatile region"](#), AlertNet, 20 Feb. 2006.
- ["Fighting near Chechnya kills 19"](#), BBC, 10 Feb. 2006.

↳ Georgia Tensions escalated between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia. Parliament adopted resolution, watered-down under international pressure, instructing government to replace Russian peacekeepers with international forces, while Russia announced visa halt for Georgians. Joint Control Commission meeting planned in Vienna 20-21 February cancelled, replaced by meeting in Moscow not attended by Georgia or OSCE. Tense situation in conflict zone continued: Georgia detained 3 Russian officers for visa violation, and Georgian and Russian troops set up tit-for-tat roadblocks. UN-led Georgian-Abkhaz negotiations in Geneva 2-3 February failed to finalise agreement on non-resumption of hostilities or set date for both sides' leaders to meet.

- ["Communications breakdown: Russia and Georgia engage in war of words"](#), Eurasia Insight, 23 Feb. 2006.
- ["Tbilisi seeks EU support as tensions rise in South Ossetia"](#), RFE/RL, 21 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°38, ["Georgia-South Ossetia: Refugee Return the Path to Peace"](#), 19 April 2005.

↳ Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) Talks between Azerbaijani President Aliyev and Armenian President Kocharian produced no tangible results, reportedly after failure to agree on linkage between referendum on status and withdrawal from occupied territory. Mediated by OSCE Minsk Group, talks sought to produce statement on general principles of settlement. Sides expressed readiness to continue negotiations and OSCE co-chairs set to meet in Washington early March. Russian President Putin during Baku visit said Russia willing to help broker negotiations.

- ["Nagorno-Karabakh summit ends in failure"](#), ISN, 27 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°167, ["Nagorno-Karabakh: A Plan for Peace"](#), 11 Oct. 2005.

EASTERN EUROPE

- Belarus Opposition leader Sergei Skrebets, who withdrew from presidential race in January, given 2.5 year prison sentence on corruption charges said by rights activists to be politically motivated. Visit by high-level EU and U.S. officials cancelled after Belarus refused visas. OSCE said 400 observers will monitor March presidential election. As official campaigning of 4 registered candidates started, intimidation of opposition candidates continued: signatures collected by candidate Milinkevich invalidated in Hrodna oblast; 120 opposition supporters arrested in rallies protesting President Lukashenko 16-19 February.
 - ["In Belarus, expecting to lose, then win"](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 26 Feb. 2006.
 - ["More simulated democracy for Belarus"](#), RFE/RL, 9 Feb. 2006.

- Moldova Former Defence Minister Pasat indicted for attempt to stage coup and assassinate senior opposition figure. Pasat already serving prison sentence for abuse of ministerial position. Russia said will not remove weapons cache stored in Transdnistria region until peace settlement reached. EU extended travel ban on senior Transdnistrian officials over lack of cooperation in resolving conflict and smuggling.
 - ["Moldova indicts former defense minister on assassination charges"](#), RFE/RL, 7 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°157, ["Moldova: Regional Tensions over Transdnistria"](#), 17 June 2004.

- Ukraine President Yushchenko called for new constitution in annual address to parliament. In apparent reaction to his pro-NATO drive, parliament voted down bill allowing foreign troop exercises in Ukraine. Russia told to increase rent payments for stationing its Black Sea fleet in Crimea. UN condemned deportation of 10 asylum-seekers back to Uzbekistan.
 - ["Ukraine leader faces opposition on NATO drive"](#), *LA Times*, 10 Feb. 2006.
 - ["Yushchenko urges new constitution"](#), BBC, 9 Feb. 2006.


WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

- Basque Country (Spain) Statements by Spanish PM Jose Zapatero and Basque President Juan Jose Ibarretze fuelled speculation ETA could soon announce ceasefire: but mass protests in Madrid urged government not to negotiate. 3 bombings in Basque Country and 1 in Navarre region were preceded by ETA warnings.
 - ["Thousands march against Eta talks"](#), BBC, 25 Feb. 2006.
 - ["ETA bomb dims Spanish peace hopes"](#), Reuters, 16 Feb. 2006.

- Cyprus EU Council voted 27 February to release €139 million in aid to Turkish Cypriots by controversially de-linking aid from direct trade regulation: Turkish Cypriots criticised de-linkage. UNSG Annan and President Papadopoulos met 28 February; agreed resumption of negotiations "must be timely and based on careful preparation". Greek Cypriot ship attempting to access Turkish port, first time since 2005 Turkish commitment to allow all EU states docking rights, refused access by Turkish authorities. Cypriot government asked EU to take action. New Greek FM Dora Bakoyanni, known to have

supported Annan peace plan while mayor of Athens, said Cyprus solution a priority.

- ["Cyprus: Annan and Papadopoulos meet on strategies toward reunification"](#), UN News, 1 Mar. 2006.
 - ["EU approves Turkish Cypriot aid"](#), BBC, 27 Feb. 2006.
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- Northern Ireland (UK) Political party talks halted 20 February as DUP refused to negotiate with Sinn Fein (SF) directly and SF rejected alternative format. UK Northern Ireland Sec. Peter Hain had called for devolution agreement by 8 March; unveiled bill 16 February that facilitates agreement by allowing early elections and increase in assembly responsibility for law and order. Independent Monitoring Commission Report released 1 February: accepted IRA "eschewed terrorism", confirmed significant, but incomplete, decommissioning, and condemned IRA involvement in organised crime and illegal intelligence gathering. Report also reprimanded UDA for "continuing paramilitary activity". 41 arrested in Dublin after 25 February Republican riots in protest at Unionist march organised to remember victims of Republican violence.
 - ["Dublin riots damage fragile peace efforts"](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 26 Feb. 2006.
 - ["Row as NI talks session collapses"](#), BBC, 20 Feb. 2006.
 - ["Northern Ireland self-rule hopes in disarray"](#), ISN, 13 Feb. 2006.

 - Turkey Explosions in Istanbul café and supermarket killed 1; militant group Kurdistan Liberation Hawks claimed responsibility. Army killed 7 PKK rebels in clashes in southeast Mardin province. Freedom of speech trials continued, including of 5 prominent journalists for insulting judiciary.
 - ["Dozens wounded in Istanbul blast"](#), ISN, 14 Feb. 2006.
 - ["The trials of free speech in Turkey"](#), OpenDemocracy, 6 Feb. 2006.
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Latin America / Caribbean
- Bolivia President Morales threatened protests if congress refused talks on rewriting constitution and continued push towards nationalisation of natural gas industry. Morales controversially re-elected as leader of largest coca farmers union despite indicating would step down from post; later met with U.S. ambassador to discuss drugs issue.
 - ["Coca group calls to end U.S anti-drug efforts"](#), *Washington Times*, 16 Feb. 2006.
 - ["Morales pushing to rewrite constitution"](#), *Washington Times*, 13 Feb. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°15, ["Bolivia at the Crossroads: The December Elections"](#), 8 Dec. 2005.

 - Colombia Controversy over government's alleged links to paramilitaries continued with 2 congresswomen expelled from pro-Urbe party (in addition to 5 expelled in January). 2,500 AUC paramilitaries gave up weapons in ceremony 2 February but arrest warrants issued for 2 demobilised leaders. UN report criticised Justice and Peace legislation and questioned true extent of AUC disarmament; also reported rise in extrajudicial executions by security forces. Second round of exploratory talks held with ELN rebels in Cuba; government officially recognised ELN delegation and agreed to suspend capture orders for 2 ELN leaders to build trust; third round set for April.

Military launched bombing raids on Macarena National Park after FARC rebels killed 6 police involved in coca eradication operation. FARC killed 9 civilians and 7 town council members in separate attacks in Caqueta and Huila regions. Head of military resigned after allegations officers tortured 21 recruits.

- ["Colombia, ELN rebels to talk again in April"](#), AlertNet, 27 Feb. 2006.
- ["UN: Amnesty plan benefits abusers"](#), *Miami Herald*, 15 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°14, ["Colombia: Presidential Politics and Peace Prospects"](#), 16 June 2005.

↪ Ecuador Security forces clashed with Colombian FARC rebels near border 18 February after destroying alleged FARC camp. Diplomatic row with Colombia after Colombian helicopter entered Ecuadorian airspace in pursuit of rebels without permission end January. Row worsened as Colombia accused Ecuador of allowing guerrillas to launch attacks across border. State oil firm suspended exports after violent demonstration in Napo province shut key pipeline 21 February. 2 journalists killed in separate incidents in Guayaquil.

- ["Ecuador agreement in oil protests"](#), BBC, 23 Feb. 2006.
- ["Ecuador-Colomb border row heats up"](#), *Prensa Latina*, 10 Feb. 2006.
- ["Ecuador destroys 'guerrilla camp'"](#), BBC, 2 Feb. 2006.

↪ Haiti Former President René Préval declared winner of long-awaited 7 February presidential and parliamentary elections with just over 51% of vote. Voting generally peaceful after chaotic start, with 63% participation despite long lines and distances to polling stations: 3 died, including 1 police officer. Voting irregularities slowed vote count and triggered days of mass protests throughout country calling for Préval to be declared winner without run-off vote. Préval officially declared winner 15 February, after authorities reached deal on allocation of blank ballots; main rivals disputed results. UN Security Council renewed MINUSTAH's mandate for 6 months.

- ["Haiti election woes may delay legislative runoff"](#), CNN (AP), 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["Aristide can return, Haiti's president-elect says"](#), AlertNet, 22 Feb. 2006.
- ["Full of Haitian promise"](#), *The Guardian*, 17 Feb. 2006.

↪ Peru Preparations continued for 9 April presidential and legislative elections. Shining Path guerrilla commander Hector Aponte, believed responsible for killing 8 police in December 2005, killed in shootout with security forces.

- ["Peru election 2006"](#), University of British Columbia, Feb. 2006.
- ["Polemic legislative candidates in Peru"](#), *Prensa Latina*, 8 Feb. 2006.

↪ Venezuela Bush administration and Chavez continued to exchange criticism, with both expelling diplomats early February. Sec. State Rice accused Chavez of being menace to Latin American democracy. President Chavez announced intention to increase weapons purchases.

- ["Chavez tells Rice: 'Don't mess with me, girl'"](#), CNN (Reuters), 19 Feb. 2006.
- ["Venezuela gets 2m reserve troops"](#), BBC, 16 Feb. 2006.



Middle East / North Africa

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

↪ Israel/occupied Territories President Mahmoud Abbas asked Hamas' Ismail Haniyeh to form new Palestinian Authority (PA) government 21 February. Hamas rejected Abbas' call to pursue exclusively peaceful methods of resistance but left open question of respecting existing agreements. Hamas leaders pursued international recognition, visiting Egypt, Qatar, Turkey; received invitation to Moscow. Israel vowed to sever remaining relations with PA, although interim PM Olmert did not rule out negotiations. Israeli government prevented new Palestinian legislature from meeting 18 February, characterised PA as "terrorist entity", and instituted sanctions including halt to monthly transfer of tax revenues collected on behalf of PA. Hamas called on Arab and Muslim states to make up shortfall. EU announced aid package of €120 million to avoid breakdown of administration. Violence escalated with 8 killed in Israeli raids on Palestinian towns and villages in West Bank, clashes between youths and Israeli troops, and air strikes on Gaza militants. Protesters threw stones at headquarters of international observers in Hebron and EU offices in Gaza in protest at European publication of caricatures of Prophet Mohammed.

- ["Palestinians on financial brink, envoy warns"](#), *Washington Post*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- Comment by Rob Malley (Crisis Group), ["Making the best of Hamas' victory"](#), *Baltimore Sun*, 19 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°49, ["Enter Hamas: The Challenges of Political Integration"](#), 18 Jan. 2006.

↪ Lebanon First anniversary of assassination of former PM Rafik Hariri marked 14 February: son and parliament majority leader Saad Hariri branded President Lahoud agent of Syria during mass rally. Major political parties continued efforts to remove Lahoud. 5 pro-Syrian ministers ended their boycott of government after PM characterised Hizbollah guerrillas as national resistance fighters and not militias, allowing them to retain arms. Israeli aircraft and artillery attacked suspected Hizbollah positions in south 3 February after guerrillas attacked military post in border Shebaa Farms area, in retaliation for Israeli troop shooting of teenager inside Lebanese territory. Protests against Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed led to burning of Denmark's Beirut consulate, accidental death of 1 protester and resignation of Interior Minister Hassan Sabei.

- ["Lebanon talks seen doing little to end crisis"](#), *Washington Post* (Reuters), 28 Feb. 2006.
- ["Lebanon remembers Hariri with calls to unseat President"](#), *The Times*, 14 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°48, ["Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm"](#), 5 Dec. 2005.

↪ Syria Opposition showed signs of unity: former Vice President Abdel-Halim Khaddam and exiled leader of Muslim Brotherhood Ali Bayanouni agreed to form joint plan of action to topple President Bashar al-Assad. Opposition unanimously rejected \$5 million U.S. funding program for NGOs working on issues

related to "core democratic values". Government reshuffle saw hardliner Faruq al-Shara removed from long-standing position as FM and sworn in as vice president. Serge Brammertz, head of UN investigation into killing of former Lebanese PM Rafik Hariri, met new FM Walid al-Muallim to discuss further investigations. Security forces clashed with armed Islamist group on outskirts of Damascus, killing group's leader. Norwegian and Danish embassies attacked in Damascus in protest at Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed.

- "He doesn't know where to go", *The Economist*, 9 Feb. 2006.
- "Khaddam in alliance against al-Assad", *Al Jazeera*, 9 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°39, *Syria After Lebanon, Lebanon After Syria*, 12 Apr. 2005.

GULF

➡ Bahrain Human rights groups expressed concern at 2-year sentence given to 12 activists for unauthorised anti-government gathering in December 2005.

- "Jailing of Bahrain activists slammed", *Khaleej Times*, 14 Feb. 2006.

➡ Iran U.S. Sec. State Rice said Iran in "open defiance" of international community; asked Congress for \$75 million to fund dissident groups and media. Inconclusive talks held 20-22 February in Moscow on Russian compromise plan to enrich uranium for Iran. Natanz nuclear plant, location of uranium conversion facility, reopened 13 February. UN Security Council debate on Iran due 6 March. Violent protests against European publication of cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammed targeted several European embassies.

- "Iran forges ahead with enrichment", *BBC*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- "Iran's gift: New unity in the West", *Washington Post*, 23 Feb. 2006.
- Comment by Gareth Evans (Crisis Group), "Time to take a deep breath over plans for a nuclear Iran", *Financial Times*, 22 Feb. 2006.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°51, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?, 23 February 2006. European diplomacy has so far not persuaded Iran to drop its uranium enrichment ambitions; the UN Security Council seems unlikely to agree on sanctions strong enough to force it to do so; and preventive military force would be both dangerous and unproductive. Two possible scenarios remain, however, for a negotiated compromise. The more attractive is a "zero enrichment" option, building on Russia's proposal, under which Iran would indefinitely give up its right to enrich uranium in return for guaranteed offshore nuclear fuel supply. If this option proves unachievable - as seems more likely than not - the only realistic diplomatic alternative is the "delayed limited enrichment" plan detailed in this report.

➡ ➡ Iraq Fears grew of descent into full-scale civil war as sectarian violence escalated and political negotiations over composition of new government increasingly characterised by pursuit of narrowly-defined ethnic and sectarian interests. Bombing of Shiite al-Askariya shrine in Samara 22 February set off worst sectarian violence of U.S. occupation. Massive demonstrations, reprisal attacks and suicide bombings followed; estimates put death toll at 800. Surge in violence prompted talks between Sunni and Shiite leaders who promised to work together. Shiite-led United Iraqi

Alliance (UIA) sought coalition partners to form new majority government but agreement with Kurdish, Sunni Arab and secular parties remained elusive. Interim PM Jaafari selected as UIA candidate for prime minister; requires two-thirds parliamentary approval for cabinet. U.S. intensified effort to bring Sunni Arabs into political process; U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad issued thinly-veiled threat to restrict U.S. aid should new government include politicians with "sectarian agenda".

- "Sectarian slaughter sets Iraq on road to schism", *The Times*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- "More clashes shake Iraq; political talks are in ruins", *New York Times*, 24 Feb. 2006.
- "Iraq spurns pressure from U.S. on cabinet", *International Herald Tribune*, 21 Feb. 2006.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°52, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict, 27 February 2006. The bombing of the al-Askariya shrine in Samara and subsequent reprisals are but the latest, most serious signs efforts to hold Iraq together verge on collapse. There is still time to stop the slide into civil war if Iraqi leaders and the international community act urgently. The winners of the December 2005 elections must strongly condemn sectarian-inspired attacks and urge restraint; establish a government of genuine national unity with popular credibility and Sunni Arab leaders in more than token positions; address Iraqis' top concerns - safety and basic amenities; begin to disband the sectarian militias; and revise the constitution's provisions on federalism and oil. The U.S., EU and regional players must push for these steps, or risk Iraq's disintegration and the Middle East's destabilisation.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°50, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency, 15 February 2006. The U.S. and its allies seem to know little about their enemies in Iraq, despite volumes of information on insurgent web sites, chat rooms, magazines and videos - a large part of their communication with each other and their constituents. Analysis of this communication suggests insurgency groups are less divided between nationalists and foreign jihadis than commonly reported, and are increasingly coordinated, confident and information-savvy. The better the U.S. understands their message and why it resonates, the better it will understand how to win hearts and minds. Coalition forces should take what the opposition says seriously and adjust political strategy accordingly. An anti-insurgency approach based squarely on reducing the insurgents' perceived legitimacy - rather than on military destruction and dislocation - is likelier to succeed.

➡ Saudi Arabia Failed attack on Abqaiq oil installation 24 February claimed by al-Qaeda, led to shootout with security forces. 5 militants including suspected head of al-Qaeda in Saudi Arabia killed.

- "Saudi most wanted killed in raid", *BBC*, 28 Feb. 2006.
- "Al-Qaida vows more attacks", *Al Jazeera*, 25 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°45, *The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia*, 19 Sept. 2005.

➡ Yemen Fighting reported in northwest between government troops and tribesmen, killing 30. Jailbreak of 13 al-Qaeda members seen as serious blow to security efforts.

- "Ruling party and opposition dialogue fails", *Yemen Times*, 19 Feb. 2006.
- "Yemeni soldiers die fighting rebels", *Al Jazeera*, 19 Feb. 2006.

NORTH AFRICA

Algeria Government provisionally approved amnesty plan 21 February extending rebel surrender deadline and providing compensation to families of those killed or who disappeared during civil war. U.S. Defense Sec. Rumsfeld met President Bouteflika in 3-day North Africa tour, stating intention to deepen military and counterterrorism ties. Reaction to Danish cartoons depicting Prophet Mohammed caused media upheaval: 2 reportedly pro-Islamist newspaper editors arrested and their publications banned after reprinting cartoons, while several journalists dismissed from state television.

- ["Oil-rich Algeria to pay bereaved in amnesty plan"](#), AlertNet, 22 Feb. 2006.
- ["US seeks closer ties with Algeria"](#), Al Jazeera, 12 Feb. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°29, *Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page*, 30 July 2004.

Egypt Parliament voted to delay local elections by 2 years. Move, criticised by U.S., seen as effort to block Islamists from fielding presidential candidates in any elections before 2008 due to local council role in presidential nomination process. 4 prominent independent judges stripped of immunity and charged with "insulting and defaming" state after they called for international investigation into judicial vote-rigging in parliamentary elections. 1 killed in sectarian rioting in Luxor over church demolition, while 8 injured in Christian-Muslim clash in Al-Ayat village.

- ["Defiant judges charged with 'defamation'"](#), IRIN, 20 Feb. 2006.
- ["US slams Egypt local poll delay"](#), BBC, 14 Feb. 2006.
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Advocacy Offices

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Brussels | brussels@crisisgroup.org
+32 2 502 9038 |
| Washington | washington@crisisgroup.org
+1 202 785 1601 |
| New York | newyork@crisisgroup.org
+1 212 813 0820 |
| London | london@crisisgroup.org
+44 20 7031 0230 |
| Moscow | moscow@crisisgroup.org
+7 095 251 4485 |

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