

1 April 2006, N°32

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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Crisis Group is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with over 110 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, Crisis Group produces regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers, and backed up with high level advocacy. Crisis Group is chaired by former European Commissioner for External Relations Lord Patten of Barnes, and its President and Chief Executive is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.



Africa

CENTRAL AFRICA

- ↳ Burundi Leader of FNL rebels, Agathon Rwaso, declared group ready for peace talks with government, but Bujumbura dismissed remarks and asked for input from Regional Initiative for Burundi members. UN Security Council called for talks with regional support. Gradual disengagement of UN peacekeepers continued with withdrawal of Ethiopian soldiers. Main opposition Hutu party FRODEBU called on ministers to withdraw from government, alleging President Nkurunziza manipulating power. Final 1,846 political prisoners freed as part of controversial amnesty launched January.

 - [“Former ruling party pulls out of government”](#), IRIN, 27 Mar. 2006.
 - [Security Council statement on Burundi](#), ReliefWeb, 23 Mar. 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 Refugees fleeing unrest in north claimed attacked by government troops: 7,000 have fled to Chad since January, with 50,000 more internally displaced. Government confirmed existence of rebellion in northwest for first time 13 March; accused former President Patasse and MLDC party of fuelling unrest.

 - [“Thousands flee from CAR violence”](#), BBC, 25 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Gov’t accuses ex-president of fomenting rebellion”](#), IRIN, 13 Mar. 2006.

- ↳ Chad Fighting between government forces and rebels intensified, with risk of further deterioration. Military launched operation against SCUD base 20 March: army said base destroyed while rebels claimed repelled attack. Army commander General Itno killed 31 March in clash with rebels and Sudanese militia. SCUD announced would try to stop President Deby from holding 3 May presidential elections, while opposition called for boycott of poll. Earlier, government blamed rebels for reported assassination attempt on Deby. AU endorsed plan to deploy military observers to Chad/Sudan border as provided under February peace agreement.

 - [“New clashes in east, government blames Sudan”](#), IRIN, 31 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Opposition denounces poll as ‘masquerade’, refuses to field candidate”](#), IRIN, 27 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Chad’s vulnerable president”](#), BBC, 15 Mar. 2006.

- ↳ Democratic Republic of Congo EU agreed to send German-led military mission of up to 1,450 troops to assist during elections scheduled for late June/early July: 400 to be stationed in Kinshasa; others on standby outside DRC. EU asked for UN Security Council approval. Elections face possible delay due to slow candidate registration. Former rebel group RCD-Goma announced would contest polls, while supporters of Etienne Tshisekedi’s UDPS party staged mass rallies in Kinshasa calling for reopening of voter registration. Joint UN-DRC military operations continued against militias in Ituri, but insecurity remained widespread, including in Kivus and Katanga, with thousands displaced. DRC elite

commandos ordered to withdraw after dozens mutinied and ransacked UN base 3 March. Leader of UPC militia, Thomas Lubanga, first war crimes suspect to face charges at International Criminal Court.

- [“A step forward for international justice”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 Mar. 2006.
 - Comment by Jason Stearns (Crisis Group), [“DR Congo: Another modern tragedy”](#), *European Voice*, 16 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Reports N°104, [Security Sector Reform in the Congo](#), 13 Feb. 2006; and N°103, [Katanga: The Congo’s Forgotten Crisis](#), 9 Jan. 2006.

 - ↳ Gabon Main opposition leader, Pierre Mamboundou, in hiding after government forces raided his party’s headquarters.

 - [“Gabon opposition chief holed up in South Africa embassy”](#), Reuters, 22 Mar. 2006.

 - ↳ Rwanda U.S. State Dept. report on human rights noted improvements but criticised government for arbitrary arrests and interference in judicial system. Dr. Aisha Kirabo Kakira elected new mayor of Kigali, completing final stage in decentralisation plan aimed at weakening ethnic divisions. UN genocide tribunal asked Tanzania to try remaining suspects after its mandate expires 2008.

 - [“Tanzania asked to prosecute genocide suspects after ICTR mandate”](#), Hironelle, 27 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Rwanda defends rights record as U.S. government decries abuses”](#), Hironelle, 15 Mar. 2006.

 - ↳ Uganda Opposition leader Besigye asked Supreme Court to overturn February vote that saw President Museveni reelected; verdict due 6 April. Besigye treason trial began 15 March after court earlier found him not guilty of rape. Museveni announced Uganda will send troops to DR Congo if attacked by LRA rebels hiding there. LRA blamed for 2 attacks on UN buildings in south Sudan.

 - [“Nullify Museveni win, Besigye lawyer pleads”](#), *The Monitor*, 31 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Ugandan army retreat on Besigye”](#), BBC, 8 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°35, [A Strategy for Ending Northern Uganda’s Crisis](#), 11 Jan. 2006.
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- ### HORN OF AFRICA
- ↳ Ethiopia Series of explosions in Addis Ababa killed 1 and led to fears of continued unrest. Eritrea denied Ethiopian claim Eritrean-backed “terrorists” responsible. Court dropped charges against 18 of 129 opposition members on trial for treason and genocide. 395 prisoners arrested during 2005 post-election unrest freed, bringing total released to 11,600. EU report reaffirmed May 2005 parliamentary elections did not meet international standards.

 - [“Explosions shake Ethiopian capital”](#), CNN, 27 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Charges dropped against 18 in poll-related cases”](#), IRIN, 22 Mar. 2006.

 - ↳ Ethiopia/Eritrea Little progress in resolving border dispute despite talks between Eritrea, Ethiopia and Boundary Commission in London. Ethiopia pushed its November 2004 peace proposal that states parts of Commission’s 2002 ruling require further discussion, while Eritrea rejected calls for new talks. UN Security Council extended UN mission mandate to 15 April to give parties more time to resolve differences. Eritrea

expelled 3 international aid agencies, saying had not met operational permit requirements.

- [“Ethiopia, Eritrea say border dispute unresolved”](#), CNN, 14 Mar. 2006.
- [“Update report on Ethiopia and Eritrea”](#), Security Council Report, 13 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°101, [Ethiopia and Eritrea: Preventing War](#), 22 Dec. 2005.

☞ Somalia Heavy fighting between Islamic Courts’ militia and members of U.S.-backed Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism killed up to 140 in Mogadishu. Talks to resolve conflict collapsed and escalation feared. UN Security Council welcomed first in-country session of full transitional parliament in Baidoa but warned violence could undermine political progress; also indicated readiness to consider arms embargo exemption for possible IGAD/AU peace-support mission if approved by Somali parliament. U.S. navy clashed with seagoing militias after UNSC encouraged operations against piracy off Somali coast.

- [“Somali militia talks collapse, new fight threatens”](#), AlertNet, 29 Mar. 2006.
- [“UN welcomes convening of transitional parliament inside the country”](#), IRIN, 16 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°100, [Somalia’s Islamists](#), 12 Dec. 2005.

☞ Somaliland (Somalia) Fighting between rival Puntland and Somaliland clans killed 6 in border village 29 March. Exploratory activities by Australian oil company in disputed border zone threatened to further aggravate tensions.

- [“Clashes between rival Somali regions kill six”](#), AlertNet, 29 Mar. 2006.

☞ Sudan AU extended peacekeeping mission until 30 September and “in principle” accepted transfer of operation to UN. Sudanese government maintained opposition to re-hatting: President al-Bashir said AU did not need foreign assistance at Arab Summit 28 March, but First Vice President Kiir stated UN troops could enter if had clear mandate. UN Security Council asked UNSG Annan to expedite planning for transfer of mission. AU also endorsed plan to deploy military observers to increasingly volatile Chad/Sudan border. Seventh round of Darfur peace talks threatened by rebel in-fighting and continued clashes in Darfur. Faction of SLA rebels renounced leader el-Nur, but AU maintained both el-Nur and Minawi as SLMA representatives in talks. AU proposed placing rival forces in Darfur behind buffer zones to demilitarise humanitarian supply routes and camps for IDPs. In south, government-allied militia killed 12 SPLA soldiers in ambush near Abyei, while UN buildings in Yambio and Yei attacked by alleged Ugandan LRA rebels. Grenade attack 12 March killed 4 in Massala, eastern Sudan.

- Comment by John Prendergast and Colin Thomas-Jensen (Crisis Group), [“Matching rhetoric with action in Darfur”](#), allAfrica.com, 17 Mar. 2006.
- [“African mediation maintains SLM’s Nour in spite of latest rebels split”](#), *Sudan Tribune*, 10 Mar. 2006.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°106, [Sudan’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement: The Long Road Ahead](#), 31 March 2006. Sudan’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement could unravel unless the parties return to their core commitments and the international community plays a much more supportive role. Fifteen...

...months after the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Army/Movement (SPLM) signed the deal, there is little reason for optimism, as the NCP systematically delays and undermines the implementation process, and the SPLM is in disarray. A strengthened and better organised SPLM would help push implementation forward and hold the NCP to its core commitments. The international community has failed to live up to its envisioned role as a guarantor. Concerned world actors must push the implementation process back on track.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°105, [To Save Darfur](#), 17 March 2006. Without rapidly boosting international forces in the region, the Darfur crisis and the escalating proxy war between Sudan and Chad will cost tens of thousands more lives and destabilise a wide swathe of Africa. The small AU Mission in Sudan (AMIS) has reached its military and political limits, and the AU has accepted in principle a UN mission after September 2006. However, the situation cries out for a new multinational force with a strong protection mandate, distinct from AMIS but working with it, to bridge the gap over the crucial next six months. A militarily capable UN member state - France seems the most promising candidate – should offer to the Security Council to lead for this purpose a blue-helmet stabilisation force, consisting of some 5,000 troops.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

☞ Angola Government claimed negotiations held on “special status” of Cabinda enclave, but civil society and FLEC separatists denied talks took place.

- [“Chairs stay empty around the Cabindan negotiating table”](#), IRIN, 14 Mar. 2006.

☞ Swaziland Police cracked down on opposition PUDEMO party rally, arresting several party leaders.

- [“Police crush pro-democracy rally”](#), IRIN, 20 Mar. 2006.
- [“Treason suspects free on bail”](#), IRIN, 13 Mar. 2006.

☞ Zimbabwe “Anti-senate” faction of divided MDC party elected former leader Morgan Tsvangirai as new head during party congress. Government continued crackdown on opponents, arresting 16 on conspiracy charges after alleged discovery of weapons cache, and charging MP from MDC for criticising President Mugabe. Government proposed new terrorism bill that could allow life sentences for opponents. Inflation climbed to record high of 782%.

- [“Zimbabwe publishes proposed anti-terrorism law”](#), AlertNet, 27 Mar. 2006.
- [“Tsvangirai re-elected by MDC faction”](#), IRIN, 20 Mar. 2006.
- For most recent report, see Africa Report N°97, [Zimbabwe’s Operation Murambatsvina: The Tipping Point?](#), 17 Aug. 2005; for background, see Africa Report N°93, [Post-Election Zimbabwe: What Next?](#), 7 June 2005.

WEST AFRICA

☞ Côte d’Ivoire Prospects of long-delayed peace process improved: Forces Nouvelles leader Guillaume Soro returned to Abidjan 14 March for first full session of transitional government headed by PM Charles Konan Banny. Military dialogue began with ex-rebels 1 April on disarmament and forming new national army. UN troops

who fled due to January's violent demonstrations prepared to redeploy in Guiglo. Head of independent election commission formally began work after political parties agreed on distribution of executive posts in commission.

- ["Ivory Coast rebels accept offer of military talks"](#), AlertNet, 30 Mar. 2006.
- ["Ivorian rebel takes cabinet seat"](#), BBC, 16 Mar. 2006.

↳ Gambia Government said it thwarted coup plot by army. 28 arrested, including 15 officers, but supposed leader, former defence chief Ndure Cham, still at large. Intelligence and defence heads replaced and *Independent* newspaper editors arrested in "coup" aftermath.

- ["Accused Gambia coup plotters confess on state TV"](#), AlertNet, 27 Mar. 2006.

↳ ✂ Guinea President Conté temporarily evacuated to Switzerland mid-month for medical treatment. Amidst coup fears, opposition parties proposed establishing transitional government with international support. Trade union general strike that crippled Conakry ended early March after government reached agreement with civil servants; spurred National Consultation with civil society and opposition.

- ["Guinea's Conte, better, flies home to protest call"](#), AlertNet, 24 Mar. 2006.
- Comment by Gareth Evans and Mike McGovern (Crisis Group), ["No coups are good coups"](#), allAfrica.com, 22 Mar. 2006.
- ["Trade unions claim strike victory as government promises higher wages"](#), IRIN, 7 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°94, ["Stopping Guinea's Slide"](#), 14 June 2005.

↳ Guinea-Bissau/Senegal Fierce fighting between G-B army and Senegalese Casamance rebels near border killed at least 12 and displaced 5,000. Rebel group's hardline wing rejects 2004 peace deal with Senegal. Rebels blamed for landmine that killed 12 in minibus outside G-B town of Sao Domingos 16 March.

- ["Bissau army hits mines, halts Senegal rebel attack"](#), AlertNet, 25 Mar. 2006.
- ["Guinea Bissau troops battle Senegalese rebels"](#), CNN, 19 Mar. 2006.

↳ Liberia President Johnson-Sirleaf called upon Nigeria to extradite former President Charles Taylor to face war crimes charges before Special Court for Sierra Leone. Taylor fled but captured 29 March and transferred to Sierra Leone. Tribunal requested trial be held in Hague in interests of regional security. Johnson-Sirleaf visited EU, U.S. and UN to garner support for ambitious reform agenda, expressing hope UN sanctions on timber and diamonds would be lifted. UN Security Council approved extended UN mission mandate to 30 September; UNSG Annan had recommended 1-year extension for 16,000-strong mission with fewer troops and more police.

- ["UN resolution readied on Taylor transfer to Hague"](#), AlertNet, 31 Mar. 2006.
- ["Sirleaf wins Bush pledge to aid Liberia's reconstruction"](#), Voice of America, 22 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°36, ["Liberia: Staying Focused"](#), 13 Jan. 2006.

↳ Nigeria Attacks on oil infrastructure by rebels continued in Niger Delta region, but in positive development, MEND rebels released all 9 foreign hostages taken February. Violence marred disorganised 7-day census, including 10 killed in

clashes between census workers and Biafran separatists angry over omission of ethnicity question. Members of senate constitution review committee recommended 3-year extension of tenure for president and state governors, which would allow for controversial third term for President Obasanjo. Obasanjo agreed to make former Liberian President Charles Taylor available to Special Court for Sierra Leone, following request by Liberia. Taylor fled but recaptured 29 March and extradited to Liberia.

- ["Thumbs up for Nigeria's census?"](#), BBC, 28 Mar. 2006.
- ["In Nigeria, things fall apart"](#), *New York Times*, 26 Mar. 2006.
- ["Signs of Obasanjo third-term bid stir already boiling pot"](#), IRIN, 17 Mar. 2006.

↳ Sierra Leone Special Court asked International Criminal Court in Hague to host trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor to avoid regional instability. Liberia handed Taylor to Special Court following extradition from Nigeria. Trial for Revolutionary United Front spokesman Omrie Golley and 2 co-accused continued despite reports all needing medical attention. Charles Margai, Golley's lawyer, appeared before Supreme Court in relation to harassment of Vice President Berewa in Bo, December 2005.

- ["Human rights on trial in Sierra Leone"](#), *Concord Times*, 20 Mar. 2006.
- ["Waiting for the lion in Calabar"](#), *Concord Times*, 16 Mar. 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 Questions continued to be raised over official investigation into February murder of opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbaev. Jailed opposition leaders Bulat Abilov and Petr Svoikbegan began hunger strike in protest. In positive development, Abilov and Sarsenbaev's Naghyz Ak Zhol party registered by authorities. President Nazarbaev visited Uzbekistan, expressing support for President Karimov's suppression of 2005 Andijon uprising.

- ["A murder case pre-judged?"](#), IWPR, 10 Mar. 2006.
- ["Nazarbaeva says Kazakh opposition, secret service in cahoots"](#), RFE/RL, 10 Mar. 2006.

↳ Kyrgyzstan Parliament elected Marat Sultanov new speaker 2 March. Central Electoral Commission overturned court ruling that allowed alleged organised crime boss Ryspek Akmatbayev to stand in April parliamentary by-elections; his supporters protested in Bishkek.

- ["Bakiyev faces maturing opposition in Kyrgyzstan"](#), ISN, 14 Mar. 2006.
- ["Kyrgyzstan gets new speaker"](#), IWPR, 3 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°109, ["Kyrgyzstan: A Faltering State"](#), 16 Dec. 2005.

↳ Tajikistan Court jailed 8 supporters of rebel Mahmud Khudoyberdiyev for role in 1998 armed incursion in Sogd region. Agreement signed with U.S. to increase cooperation on border security and law enforcement.

- ["Tajikistan sentences armed rebels in closed trial"](#), RFEL/RL, 7 Mar. 2006.

- [“Tajik Islamists hesitate over political direction”](#), IWPR, 3 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°33, [Tajikistan’s Politics: Confrontation or Consolidation?](#), 19 May 2004.

- ↳ Turkmenistan European Parliament committee recommended supporting trade agreement with Turkmenistan; NGOs appealed for parliament to vote down proposal, citing country’s appalling human rights record. President Niyazov sacked senior energy officials for alleged corruption and reshuffled cabinet.
- Joint letter (Crisis Group and other NGOs) to European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee, [“EU: No trade agreement for Turkmenistan”](#), 20 Mar. 2006.
 - [“U.S. Radio Liberty reporters arrested in Turkmenistan”](#), AlertNet, 10 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°85, [Repression and Regression in Turkmenistan: A New International Strategy](#), 4 Nov. 2004.

- ↳ Uzbekistan Government intensified crackdown on opposition activists and international organisations, sentencing dissidents to long prison terms and expelling UNHCR and U.S. NGO Freedom House. Opposition Sunshine Coalition leaders Nigora Khidoyatova and Sanjar Umarov given 10- and 11-year sentences for economic crimes which supporters say politically motivated; rights activist Mutabar Tojiboeva received 8-year sentence. Government published new restrictions on foreign journalists’ activities, as President Islam Karimov said nation under attack from West in “information war”.
- Comment by Chris Patten (Crisis Group), [“Saving Central Asia from Uzbekistan”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 22 Mar. 2006.
 - Comment by Andrew Stroehlein (Crisis Group), [“A lifeboat for the media”](#), Transitions Online, 22 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°45, [Uzbekistan: In for the Long Haul](#), 16 Feb. 2006.

SOUTH ASIA

- ↳ Afghanistan Taliban announced start of “Spring offensive” with 29 March attack on U.S. and Canadian troops in southern Helmand province that killed 2 soldiers and 32 Taliban: escalation of violence expected. Taliban targeted prominent pro-government officials in south and east, including former governor of Ghazni province, Helmand province intelligence chief and senior official in Langman province. Relations with Pakistan deteriorated to worst level since fall of Taliban as sides engaged in war of words over cross-border militant infiltrations. Assassination attempt in Kabul 12 March on Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, former president and head of National Reconciliation Commission, blamed by Mujaddedi on Pakistani military intelligence. 16 Pakistanis killed near border town of Spin Boldak 22 March: Kabul claimed they were militants, Islamabad tourists. New cabinet presented to National Assembly for confirmation 22 March, in first confrontation between executive and legislature.
- [“Can Islam and democracy coexist in Afghanistan?”](#), IWPR, 29 Mar. 2006.
 - [“A fragile corner of order”](#), *The Economist*, 16 Mar. 2006.
 - For most recent report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°107, [Rebuilding the Afghan State: The European Union’s Role](#), 30 Nov. 2005; for background, see N°101, [Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning?](#), 21 July 2005.

- ↳ Bangladesh Leaders of banned Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB), Abdur Rahman and Bhangla Bhai, arrested after February sentence in absentia. Suspected JMB member, Mollah Omar, died along with family in explosion during military operation 13 March. Opposition alliance led by Awami League (AL) clashed with police during attempted siege on electoral commission, which they accuse of bias. Ruling Bangladesh National Party (BNP) proposed joint BNP-AL election committee 21 March.

- [“A new challenge for Bangladesh”](#), Yale Global Online, 30 Mar. 2006.
- [“Govt invites opposition to form committee”](#), *Daily Star*, 21 Mar. 2006.

- ↳ India (non-Kashmir) Religious, Maoist and northeastern separatist violence continued throughout month. 2 bombs claimed by Kashmiri militant group Lashkar-e-Kahar killed 15 in Hindu city of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Police shot dead 4 suspected Islamic militants in western Gujarat for planning to attack religious sites. Maoists in Chhattisgarh continued to target security forces and civilians: 4 villagers suspected of being police informers killed and CPI-Maoist group apologised after 24 March mine blast killed 14 civilians. Clashes with police in Dantewada district left 6 Maoists and policeman dead 26 March. Northeastern separatists in Manipur state clashed with security forces 11 March, killing 7. U.S. President Bush signed deal to give India access to U.S. civilian nuclear technology: Delhi agreed to open 14 nuclear facilities to inspection, but 8 military sites to remain closed. 4 died in clashes in Lucknow after Muslims protesting Bush visit tried to force Hindu traders to strike.

- [“In India, remains of a massacre revive tensions”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 21 Mar. 2006.
- [“Waiting for the backlash”](#), *The Economist*, 9 Mar. 2006.

- ↳ Kashmir India and Pakistan announced schedule for third round of composite dialogue. Meetings began 28 March and will conclude June followed by 2 high-level review sessions July. Pakistani accusations of Indian inaction on Kashmir and Indian calls for end to cross-border terrorism soured atmosphere. Indian PM Manmohan Singh made conciliatory speech while inaugurating bus service 24 March. Clashes continued between security forces and militants while Lashkar-e-Kahar militants claimed responsibility for bombings in Indian Uttar Pradesh state.

- [“Kashmir militants ready for conditional truce-report”](#), AlertNet, 30 Mar. 2006.
- [“Pakistan welcomes India overture”](#), BBC, 24 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°79, [India/Pakistan Relations and Kashmir: Steps toward Peace](#), 24 June 2004.

- ↳ Nepal Widespread clashes between Maoists and security forces continued while government threatened clampdown. Escalation of violence feared ahead of 6-9 April planned demonstrations called by political parties and supported by Maoists. Maoist 6-day nationwide road blockade caused chaos while clashes with army included Palpa district clash 1 March where 31 killed. U.S. President Bush called on Maoists to end violence and urged King to reach out to political parties, while visiting Chinese delegation called for “reconciliation among constitutional forces”. 7-party alliance and Maoists held talks in Delhi to refine 12-point agreement. Tensions emerged within Maoist ranks as leadership criticised

by central committee members. UN human rights commissioner in Nepal visited political detainees including CPN-UML leader M.K. Nepal; called detentions "illegal".

- "Heading for a showdown in Nepal", BBC, 29 Mar. 2006.
- "Off his head", *The Economist*, 23 Mar. 2006.
- "Nepal's Civil War: The Conflict Resumes", Human Rights Watch, Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°111, *Nepal: Electing Chaos*, 31 Jan. 2006.



Pakistan Fierce fighting in North Waziristan risked spreading to neighbouring tribal regions. Government claimed nearly 200 local Taliban militants and 5 soldiers killed. Further 25 killed in operation outside Miranshah near Afghan border. Unrest in Balochistan continued with series of mine blasts and attacks on infrastructure: 26 killed in Dera Bugti 10 March. In North West Frontier Province's Khyber Agency, clash between supporters of rival clerics killed 26.

- "Balochistan 'militants' hit power", BBC, 31 Mar. 2006.
- "Revolution in the Pakistani mountains", Asia Times Online, 23 Mar. 2006.
- "The other Taliban", *The Economist*, 16 Mar. 2006.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°46, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
Pakistan: Political Impact of the Earthquake, 15 March 2006. Its response to the October 2005 earthquake calls into question the superior efficiency on which Pakistan's military government bases its claim to power and its commitment to fighting jihadi extremism. While it eventually provided important logistical help, the army's inadequate initial response cost lives, and its domestic priorities translated into encouraging a major relief role for jihadi groups banned as terrorists. Its attempt to maintain central control threatens to waste much international effort while increasing extremism and sectarianism in political life. As reconstruction of the devastated areas begins, donors should form partnerships with secular political parties and civil society and seek to persuade the government to broaden its approach by allowing civilian oversight and transparency measures and preventing banned groups from gaining credibility through privileged positions.



Sri Lanka Initial calm after positive late February peace talks between Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and government gave way to further unrest. 10 killed in low-level violence, while LTTE denied involvement in 25 March attack on navy gunboat that killed 8. President Mahinda Rajapakse's United People's Freedom Alliance won overwhelming victory in local elections suggesting support for negotiations with LTTE. Next round of talks due 19-20 April but LTTE and government exchanged accusations of violating ceasefire: state of emergency renewed for another month. Norway announced replacement of peace envoy Erik Solheim with Jon Hanssen-Bauer.

- "Monitors warn gunboat sinking could return Sri Lanka to war", Asia Pacific News, 27 Mar. 2006.
- "Violence down, but Sri Lanka extends state of emergency", ReliefWeb, 21 Mar. 2006.

NORTH EAST ASIA



China (internal) PM Wen Jiabao promised to uphold land rights of farmers at annual National People's Congress. Talks with Japan failed to resolve issue of overlapping claims on gas

fields - exacerbated by Japanese PM Koizumi's continued visits to Yasukuni shrine.

- "New breed of activist is changing China", *International Herald Tribune*, 31 Mar. 2006.
- "Planning the new socialist countryside", *The Economist*, 9 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°108, *North East Asia's Undercurrents of Conflict*, 15 Dec. 2005.



North Korea Nuclear negotiations remained stalled. Military talks held between North and South, at highest level since Korean War, made little progress. Cabinet-level talks due in April uncertain after Pyongyang protested annual U.S./South Korea military exercises. Significant bilateral meeting held in New York with U.S. administration to explain economic sanctions imposed September 2005. U.S. concerned as NK military reportedly conducted short-range missile tests despite agreed moratorium.

- "US pressures on N. Korea diversified", *Korea Times*, 31 Mar. 2006.
- "CNS special report on North Korean ballistic missile capabilities", Center for Nonproliferation Studies, 22 Mar. 2006.
- For most recent report, see Asia Report N°112, *North Korea and China: Comrades Forever?*, 1 Feb. 2006; for background, see N°89, *Korea Backgrounder: How the South Views its Brother from Another Planet*, 14 Dec. 2004.



Taiwan Strait President Chen Shui-bian and opposition held competing rallies promoting rival positions on independence and relations with China. Kuomintang and People's First Party leaders visited U.S. to explain opposition to U.S. arms deal they see as overpriced and unnecessary. China announced defence spending increase of 14%.

- "Beijing speaks softly to Taiwan", *International Herald Tribune*, 30 Mar. 2006.
- "Fresh anti-Chen rally in Taiwan", BBC, 19 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°42, *China and Taiwan: Uneasy Détente*, 21 Sept. 2005.

SOUTH EAST ASIA



Indonesia Jakarta increased security presence in eastern province of Papua amidst increasing unrest. Violent protests erupted in Timika, Jayapura and Jakarta, demanding closure of Freeport mine due to concerns over local land rights and environmental degradation. 4 police and airforce officer killed in 16 March clash with protesters in Jayapura. Parliament missed 31 March deadline for approval of law on Aceh autonomy. Aceh Monitoring Mission scaled down as half foreign monitors withdrawn, rest to remain until 15 June. Government launched new reintegration program in Aceh late March involving cash disbursements to former GAM combatants and militia for economic empowerment projects, but questions raised over accountability mechanism. Supreme Court reinstated 10-year verdict for former East Timorese militia leader Eurico Guterres; all other defendants acquitted.

- "Papuan anger focuses on world's richest mine", Asia Times Online, 23 Mar. 2006.
- "Jakarta reinforcing its troops in Papua", *International Herald Tribune*, 22 Mar. 2006.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°48, **International Crisis Group** WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE
Aceh: Now for the Hard Part, 29 March 2006.
 Converging problems call for renewed leadership from...

...Jakarta and for international donor vigilance to prevent any backsliding on the August 2005 peace deal between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM). Confidence in peace remains high, but a series of differences have arisen between the central government and the Acehnese. These include disagreement over the concept of self-government reflected in disputes over the draft law on Aceh's governance; efforts to divide the province; questions over who can run in local elections and when those elections take place; and the urgent employment needs of returning GAM members. Since local elections seem to be delayed until late July or August, the EU-led Aceh Monitoring Mission should postpone its scheduled June departure to ease fears of pre-election violence.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°47, *Papua: The Dangers of Shutting Down Dialogue*, 23 March 2006. The Papuan People's Council, the key institution charged with easing tensions between Papuans and Indonesia's central government, may be about to collapse, with grave consequences given the region's current volatility. Created in late October 2005 as the centrepiece of the autonomy deal, the Council was almost immediately confronted with two major crises: stalled talks over the legal status of West Irian Jaya and riots over the giant Freeport mine. If the Council can now manoeuvre its way through the two crises, it may yet be able to take on other outstanding grievances and become a genuinely representative dialogue partner with Jakarta. If it fails, local resentment against the central government will almost certainly increase. The central government should realise it is in its own interest to help the Council succeed.



Myanmar/Burma Counter-insurgency by military in western Karen state reportedly forced villagers to flee homes, bringing total internally displaced to 5,000 since January. Crackdown believed connected to military junta's sudden move of capital to Pyinmana. After long-awaited inspection of democratic progress on behalf of ASEAN, Malaysian FM Syed Hamid Albar concluded little change has occurred and expressed frustration not allowed to visit National League for Democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi. French contingent of Médecins Sans Frontières closed operations in Mon and Karen states due to restrictions imposed by authorities.

- "ASEAN seeks to prod Myanmar to democracy", *Washington Post*, 30 Mar. 2006.
- "Karen forced to flee fighting with Burmese military", ReliefWeb, 29 Mar. 2006.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°34, *Myanmar: Update on HIV/AIDS Policy*, 16 Dec. 2004.

Philippines President Arroyo ended week-long state of emergency tied to alleged coup attempts and protests in capital 3 March. Government announced arrests of suspected organisers and increased defence spending to quell unrest. Administration pushed "people's initiative" petition to prompt referendum on constitutional shift from presidential to parliamentary system. Bombing on Jolo island 27 March killed 9; police suspect Abu Sayyaf group. Informal negotiations between government and Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels resumed but yielded no firm agreements; to reconvene April.

- "Arroyo rides Charter change train", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 31 Mar. 2006.

- "MILF seeks power sharing with govt", *Manila Times*, 28 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°110, *Philippines Terrorism: The Role of Militant Islamic Converts*, 19 Dec. 2005.

Thailand Mass demonstrations against PM Thaksin Shinawatra continued in capital ahead of 2 April elections. Main opposition Democratic Party submitted evidence to electoral commission of fraud by ruling Thai Rak Thai party. Almost daily violence continued in south, including attack by militants in Pattani province killing 6 Muslim officials and journalist 16 March, day after gunmen shot dead principal of Yala province Islamic school linked to separatist groups.

- "Growing aggression before Thai elections", *International Herald Tribune*, 28 Mar. 2006.
- "Nineteen Muslim teachers held in restive Thai south", Reuters, 28 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Reports N°105, *Thailand's Emergency Decree: No Solution*, 18 Nov. 2005; and N°98, *Southern Thailand: Insurgency, Not Jihad*, 18 May 2005.

Europe

BALKANS

Albania PM Berisha reconfirmed Albania's commitment to existing borders after FM Mustafaj's controversial comments that Albania could not guarantee inviolability of borders if Kosovo becomes independent.

- "Albanian border remarks anger neighbours", BIRN, 24 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°153, *Pan-Albanianism: How Big a Threat to Balkan Stability?*, 25 Feb. 2004.

Bosnia & Herzegovina Potentially momentous breakthrough as vital EU/U.S.-sponsored constitutional reforms agreed by 7 main political parties. Reforms would create single rotating presidency, larger and more efficient parliament, and curtail powers of Council of Ministers. Agreement now awaiting parliamentary approval. First-round negotiations with EU on Stabilisation and Association Agreement began 17 March. High Rep. Schwarz-Schilling announced gradual repeal of laws banning certain officials from public office, except those dismissed for aiding ICTY indictees. Republika Srpska (RS) court, in second ever war crimes conviction in RS, sentenced Bosnian Serb to 20 years.

- "Schwarz-Schilling urges BiH Parliament to support constitutional reform agreement", *Southeast European Times*, 20 Mar. 2006.
- "Republika Srpska ready to punish war crimes", *Balkan Insight*, 17 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°164, *Bosnia's Stalled Police Reform: No Progress, No EU*, 6 Sept. 2005.

Kosovo Provisional government revitalised after Kosovo Protection Corps Head and former KLA commander Agim Ceku elected new PM by parliament 10 March, following Bajram Kosumi's resignation. Serbia condemned nomination. Ceku promised to reach out to Serb minority and appointed

Serb as deputy minister of interior. UNMIK chief Jessen-Petersen pushed for Serbs to end boycott of institutions, but Serbia responded with call for 17,000 Kosovo Serbs to quit UNMIK and Kosovo government jobs. Second round of status talks on decentralisation held in Vienna; third round due 3 April, with divided Mitrovica in spotlight. UK FM Straw argued Kosovo's independence "almost inevitable"; Russia and China reportedly indicated would not block it in UN Security Council. Mitrovica Serbs protested after Serb youth seriously wounded in stabbing 28 March; 2 policemen dismissed over issue.

- "Talks resume on Kosovo's future", BBC, 17 Mar. 2006.
- "Kosovo ditches its prime minister", BIRN, 3 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°170, *Kosovo: The Challenge of Transition*, 17 Feb. 2006.

➤ Macedonia Opposition withdrew threat to boycott forthcoming elections after government agreed to include party members alongside public officials on election boards. EU and NATO emphasised polls must be fair and democratic, warning integration processes could be jeopardised. Police criticised for killing suspected criminal during arrest in Albanian-suburb Kondovo, former militant stronghold.

- "Police shooting in Kondovo scrutinized, exploited", Balkanlysis.com, 3 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°41, *Macedonia: Wobbling toward Europe*, 12 Jan. 2006.

➤ Serbia & Montenegro Former President Slobodan Milosevic died of heart attack 11 March in Hague before conclusion of his trial. Fears raised death could mark return to reactionary nationalist politics and derail EU integration process. Serbian government provided quasi-state funeral that passed nationalist torch from Socialist Party of Serbia to Serbian Radical Party. EU extended deadline by which war crimes suspect Ratko Mladic must be arrested to 30 April; failure will halt Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations. Belgrade called for 17,000 Kosovo Serbs to quit UNMIK and Kosovo government jobs despite UNMIK's earlier plea for end of Serb boycott of institutions. Montenegrin parliament set independence referendum for 21 May; took control of all State Union military forces on its territory.

- "Milosevic's last victory", openDemocracy, 13 Mar. 2006.
- "With referendum date set, Montenegro looks ahead", *International Herald Tribune*, 3 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°169, *Montenegro's Independence Drive*, 7 Dec. 2005; and Briefing N°39, *Serbia: Spinning its Wheels*, 23 May 2005.

CAUCASUS

Crisis Group Europe Report N°173, *Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role*, 20 March 2006. The unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus could ignite into full-fledged wars in Europe's neighbourhood. To guarantee its own security, the EU must become more engaged in resolving them. Thus far, others have taken the lead in promoting conflict settlement in the region, but over a decade of negotiations led by the UN in Abkhazia and the OSCE in Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia have failed to produce peace. With its reputation as an "honest broker", the EU has a greater role to play, and especially since the 2004 enlargement brought the South Caucasus closer, it has strong incentive to get involved. This is a challenge Brussels has only begun to address.



➤ Armenia Opposition failed to collect enough support for parliamentary investigation into alleged fraud in 2005 referendum on constitutional amendments. Millennium Challenge Account compact, worth \$235.5 million in aid, signed with U.S.

- "Limited press, religious freedom in Armenia, says U.S.", RFE/RL, 8 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°158, *Armenia: Internal Instability Ahead*, 18 Oct. 2004.

➤ Azerbaijan Campaigning for May reruns of November elections in 10 constituencies began 14 March. Opposition Azadlig bloc refused to field candidates citing illegitimacy of current parliament. Trial against 3 opposition youth activists accused of attempting to overthrow government began 31 March. U.S. State Dept. rights report criticised police brutality and political intimidation.

- "Campaigning begins in Azerbaijan for repeat elections", RFE/RL, 14 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°40, *Azerbaijan's 2005 Elections: Lost Opportunity*, 21 Nov. 2005.

➤ Chechnya (Russia) Kremlin-backed strongman Ramzan Kadyrov approved as new PM by parliament 4 March. At least 7 Russian soldiers reported dead in clashes with rebels.

- "Kadyrov's Chechnya is more independent than ever", AlertNet, 15 Mar. 2006.
- "Chechen rebels radicalize", ISN, 9 Mar. 2006.

➤ North Caucasus (non-Chechnya) In Daghestan, Shamil Zainalov, pragmatic former minister of industry, unanimously appointed new PM 6 March by parliament. But security remained volatile with assassinations of senior policeman and official. In Ingushetia, 2 soldiers wounded in clashes with militants 10 March, while explosions damaged rail and telecommunications infrastructure.

- "Daghestan appoints new prime minister", RFE/RL, 6 Mar. 2006.
- "Russia car bomb kills policeman", CNN, 10 Mar. 2006.

➤ Georgia Relations with Russia thawed after sides resolved visa row and signed agreement on Russian withdrawal of military by 31 December 2007. Joint Control Commission meeting held in North Ossetia 27-28 March; agreed to reconvene in Tskhinvali in April. Head of Abkhaz government-in-exile Irakli Alasania appointed Georgian presidential envoy to negotiations with Abkhazia. Alasania met with de facto Abkhaz FM Sergei Shamba, agreeing to revive bilateral talks through Georgian-Abkhaz Coordinating Council, suspended since 2001. Abkhaz officials blamed Georgia for 8 March shooting of 4 civilians; Tbilisi denied charge. UN Security Council extended UNOMIG mandate until 15 October. Unrest increased in Javakheti region after death of ethnic Armenian in clash with Georgian youths 9 March.


- "Georgia and Abkhazia agree to resume bilateral talks", RFE/RL, 29 Mar. 2006.
- "Property restitution deal for South Ossetia", IWPR, 24 Mar. 2006.
- For most recent report, see *Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus: The EU's Role*; for background, see Europe Briefing N°38, *Georgia-South Ossetia: Refugee Return the Path to Peace*, 19 Apr. 2005.

- Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents exchanged threats to resume hostilities, as shooting intensified across ceasefire line. 1 Armenian and 2 Azerbaijani soldiers reported dead 8 and 18 March. U.S., French and Russian Minsk Group co-chairs met in Istanbul 20 March to discuss further negotiations. Armenian and Azerbaijani delegations to Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe agreed to extend monitoring commission mandate.
 - [“Slim chance for peace?”](#), Eurasia Insight, 16 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Minsk Group fails in Nagorno-Karabakh talks”](#), ISN, 10 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°167, [Nagorno-Karabakh: A Plan for Peace](#), 11 Oct. 2005.

EASTERN EUROPE

- Belarus Incumbent Aleksandr Lukashenko declared winner of 19 March presidential election with 82.6% of vote. OSCE observers said poll not free and fair. Opposition came under pressure in run-up to election with series of arrests, beatings and clampdown on independent press. Protests held against election violations in Minsk, culminating in large rally 25 March, violently broken up by police. 1,000 reportedly arrested after week of protests, including senior figure Alexander Kozulin. EU and U.S. declared would target sanctions at those responsible for electoral violations and post-election crackdown. UN Special Rapporteur Adrian Severin led UN call for immediate investigation into deteriorating rights situation. Russia congratulated Lukashenko.
 - [“Belarus courts sentence protesters to jail”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 28 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Minsk riot police end demonstration, detain some 250”](#), RFE/RL, 24 Mar. 2006.
 - [“What’s real in Belarus: The faking of democracy or the hope of revolution?”](#), *The Guardian*, 23 Mar. 2006.
- Moldova Ukraine introduced new restriction on all goods from Moldova’s breakaway Transdniestria region, requiring Moldovan customs clearance. Transdniestrian and Russian authorities said amounted to economic blockade while EU issued statement in support of measures. Subsequently, Transdniestrian authorities announced withdrawal from peace talks; OSCE said next round would be postponed.
 - [“OSCE says Transdniester talks delayed”](#), RFE/RL, 30 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Transdniester pulls out of talks on settlement”](#), RFE/RL, 7 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°157, [Moldova: Regional Tensions over Transdniestria](#), 17 June 2004.
- Ukraine President Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine Party suffered major setback in 26 March legislative elections, receiving just 14% of vote according to preliminary results. Yanukovich’s pro-Russian Party of the Regions led with 32%, while Tymoshenko’s bloc followed with 22%. OSCE and EU observers praised election for democratic standards. Pro-Russian Ne Tak bloc announced it had 4.5 million signatures for referendum against future NATO membership 1 March. Ukraine said 10 Uzbek asylum seekers deported in February had links to al-Qaeda.
 - [“Yushchenko meets rivals to push for coalition”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 29 Mar. 2006.
 - [“Ukraine’s new political complexion”](#), OpenDemocracy, 24 Mar. 2006.

WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

Crisis Group Europe Report N°172, [France and its Muslims: Riots, Jihadism and Depoliticisation](#), 9 March 2006.  The riots of October-November 2005 and the jihadist militancy in its Muslim population are the product of not only discrimination and exclusion but also the absence of political representation and a resulting sentiment of abandonment, all of which France must urgently address. With the neutralisation of Muslim youth organisations and political Islamism, and the failure of the secular political parties to engage properly with the Muslim population, there is a growing tendency to resort to violence. Security and socio-economic measures are a priority, as is decreasing the state’s coercive presence in suburban areas and reducing social discrimination. But equally critical is a political solution that aims to reform the means of representation for the Muslim populations, invigorate community associations and revitalise political participation in marginalised suburbs.

- Basque Country (Spain) ETA announced “permanent” ceasefire 22 March, raising hopes for solution to longstanding conflict. Spanish PM Zapatero indicated government would seek parliamentary support for peace talks “before summer” if ceasefire sincere and comprehensive. Basque nationalist party Batasuna organised strike 9 March after 2 ETA members died in custody; 2 bombs exploded same day.
 - [“Madrid shows rare unity”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 29 Mar. 2006.
 - [“PM seeks talks after ETA cease-fire”](#), CNN, 24 Mar. 2006.
 - [“A Basque peace opportunity”](#), OpenDemocracy, 23 Mar. 2006.
- Cyprus Turkey rejected UN envoy Michael Moller’s meeting request, questioning his neutrality. EU said Turkey must live up to commitments regarding Cyprus, including opening of ports, or jeopardise progress over EU membership. Turkish Cypriot census scheduled for 26 March postponed to 30 April.
 - [“EU says Turkey must show progress on Cyprus in membership talks”](#), Bloomberg, 8 Mar. 2006.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°171, [The Cyprus Stalemate: What Next?](#), 8 March 2006.  The failure of the Annan Plan to reunify Cyprus – accepted by Turkish Cypriots but rejected by Greek Cypriots in the 2004 referendum – has left the peace process stagnant. With no settlement process in sight, and attempts to negotiate confidence building measures likely to be unproductive diversions, the only way forward is unilateral efforts by the relevant domestic and international actors aimed at sustaining pro-solution momentum in the north, inducing political change in the south, and advancing inter-communal reconciliation. External players should press the political elites of both communities to recommence negotiations. The key to unblocking the situation is for the Greek Cypriot leadership to re-engage with the process meaningfully. Meanwhile, the EU (including Greece putting more pressure on the Republic of Cyprus government), UN and U.S. should do everything possible to reduce Turkish Cypriot isolation, most urgently by improving and implementing trade with the north.

➤ Northern Ireland (UK) Following February breakdown of political party talks, UK and Irish PMs met 8 March to discuss blueprint to restore devolution. UK army published timetable on troop withdrawal from province, from around 9,000 to 5,000 by August 2007. Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams invited to White House St. Patrick's Day celebrations, reflecting recent progress in IRA decommissioning.

- "Ahern in NI political discussions", BBC, 30 Mar. 2006.
- "Frantic diplomacy ahead of NI blueprint", BBC, 18 Mar. 2006.

➤ Turkey Security rapidly deteriorated in southeastern cities of Diyarbakir and Batman. Protests at 28 March funeral of 4 PKK militants, among 14 killed in military operation in Mus province, sparked 4 days of rioting in which 7 reported dead. Suspected PKK attacks killed at least 10 including 3 in suicide bombing outside governor's office in Van 9 March. 1 killed in Istanbul explosion 31 March claimed by Kurdistan Freedom Falcons. In on-going inquiry into alleged army involvement in November Semdinli bombing, regional prosecutor Ferhat Sarikaya called for investigation into army second-in-command General Yasar Buyukanit. Army condemned Sarikaya and rejected investigation of any officers.

- "Turkish police break up widening Kurdish rioting", *International Herald Tribune*, 31 Mar. 2006.
- "Turkish military rejects call to probe general", AlertNet, 20 Mar. 2006.

Latin America / Caribbean

➤ Bolivia U.S. State Dept. report voiced concern over increased political influence from coca growing organisations. Chile rejected President Morales' call for OAS session on Bolivia's right to access sea. Explosions at 2 La Paz hotels killed 2, 21 March; American and Uruguayan arrested in connection but as yet no clear motive.

- "Bolivia takes control of airports", BBC, 31 Mar. 2006.
- "Bolivia arrests US man over hotel blasts", ISN, 23 Mar. 2006.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°15, *Bolivia at the Crossroads: The December Elections*, 8 Dec. 2005.

➤ Colombia Largely peaceful congressional elections held 12 March despite FARC violence in run up to vote. Parties loyal to President Uribe won 61 of 102 seats in senate and 91 of 166 in lower house, reinforcing Uribe's position as top candidate for May presidential election. FARC killed 18 members of security forces and 4 civilians in attacks across country ahead of polls. Smaller rebel group ELN, currently in preliminary talks with government, declared ceasefire for elections. U.S. Justice Department indicted 50 top FARC members, while Uribe - in move to induce rebels to disarm - expanded suspension of extradition orders to FARC members who demobilise and submit to prosecution under Justice and Peace Law. AUC paramilitary disarmament continued, 3,500 remain armed.

- "FARC indicted in U.S. on drug charges", *Miami Herald*, 23 Mar. 2006.
- "Uribe's re-election bid boosted", BBC, 13 Mar. 2006.

Crisis Group Latin America Report N°16, *Colombia: Towards Peace and Justice?*, 14 March 2006. If the Colombian government does not change its policy on the demobilisation of paramilitaries, it...



...risks prolonging the 40-year armed conflict and damaging democracy. Paramilitary demobilisation is now drawing to a close, but President Uribe may be prioritising a quick fix removal of the extreme right-wing group from the conflict at the cost of justice for their victims and at the risk of leaving their criminal power structures largely untouched. While the Justice and Peace Law has serious shortcomings that make it difficult to end impunity and establish the truth for grave crimes committed by demobilised individuals and to achieve fully satisfactory reparations for victims, it can be an important vehicle for protecting Colombia's democracy against dangerous paramilitary and criminal interference. It needs to be revised and implemented effectively.

➤ Ecuador Indigenous demonstrations demanding end to free-trade talks with U.S. caused widespread turmoil. State of emergency declared in 5 central provinces. Indigenous leaders called temporary halt to protests 24 March, but reconsidered demonstrations at assembly at end of month. Interior Minister Castillo resigned over government's handling of crisis.

- "Ecuador's Indian movement halts protests", *Washington Post*, 24 Mar. 2006.
- "Trade protests crippling Ecuador", CNN, 15 Mar. 2006.

➤ Haiti Situation showed signs of improvement, with decline in kidnappings and attacks on UN mission since February elections. Government announced delayed second round of parliamentary polls to be held 21 April. Inauguration of president-elect René Prével expected 14 May. Prével met key Latin America leaders and U.S. president; called on UN Security Council for more aid.

- "Preval talks trade, meets with Bush", *Miami Herald*, 29 Mar. 2006.
- "Haiti changes date again for runoff election", Reuters, 11 Mar. 2006.

➤ Peru Ollanta Humala, nationalist presidential candidate who led failed 2000 uprising, overtook front-runner, centrist Lourdes Flores, in run-up to 9 April presidential election. Leader of Marxist rebel group Tupac Amaru, Victor Polay Campos, sentenced to 32 years in prison in civilian retrial.

- "Woman joins presidential race in Peru", *Washington Post*, 31 Mar. 2006.
- "Peru's Lourdes Flores challenging neopopulist trends", *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 14 Mar. 2006.

➤ Venezuela Tense relations with U.S. continued. U.S. ambassador called for improved security from Venezuelan authorities after President Chavez supporters threatened U.S. delegation. New 4-month training program for 2 million army reservists began early March.

- "Invasion or civil war for Venezuela?", ISN, 24 Mar. 2006.
- "Venezuela extends its oil influence", ISN, 8 Mar. 2006.

Middle East / North Africa

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

➤ Israel/occupied Territories Interim Israeli PM Ehud Olmert's Kadima party won 28 March general elections, but by smaller margin than expected. Coalition discussions to begin early April. Olmert stated would continue to refuse negotiations with Palestinians, instead moving unilaterally to consolidate

settlements and impose border “by 2010”. Unable to agree on Palestinian coalition government, Hamas cabinet won parliamentary confidence vote and was sworn in by President Mahmoud Abbas 29 March: Ismail Haniyeh new PM. Israeli raid on Palestinian prison in Jericho heightened tensions: troops seized Ahmed Saadat, leader of left-wing Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine, and other inmates, killing 3. Saadat due to stand trial for assassination of extreme right-wing Israeli tourism minister in 2001. In first fatal suicide attack of 2006, 4 Israelis killed by al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigade near Kedumim 30 March, while Israeli soldiers killed 2 militants near Gaza boundary. Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) blamed Israel and Palestinian security forces for killing leader 31 March; Israeli army denied involvement. Subsequent PRC clashes with Palestinian security forces killed 3.

- “The morning after the elections”, *International Herald Tribune*, 1 Apr. 2006.
- “Killing of militant commander sparks gun battles in Gaza”, *The Guardian*, 1 Apr. 2006.
- Comment by Hussein Agha and Robert Malley (Crisis Group), “ [Hamas: The perils of power](#)”, *New York Review*, 9 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°49, [Enter Hamas: The Challenges of Political Integration](#), 18 Jan. 2006.

Lebanon Main political leaders met 14 March to resolve key issues: agreed on removing weapons from Palestinian factions outside refugee camps, and called for full diplomatic ties with Syria. Talks suspended 27 March with no agreement on ending President Lahoud’s term or Hizbollah disarmament. Lahoud called for early legislative elections, saying would not resign and Hizbollah should keep arms. UN investigators presenting third report into assassination of ex-PM Hariri stated better cooperation from Syria helping investigations. Syrian President Assad agreed to meet investigators in April and did not rule out handing over suspects to international courts. UNSC resolution called for UNSG Annan to begin talks with Lebanon government on establishment of international tribunal.

- “[Resolution gives green light for talks on Hariri tribunal](#)”, IRIN, 30 Mar. 2006.
- “[Ministers walk out of Lebanese cabinet](#)”, Al Jazeera, 30 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°48, [Lebanon: Managing the Gathering Storm](#), 5 Dec. 2005.

Syria Muslim Brotherhood issued joint statement with former Vice President Abdelhalim Khaddam announcing formation of broad coalition of opposition groups, National Salvation Front. Clashes between Arabs and Kurds in north sparked by riots at football match in Qameshli. Details remained unclear but included incidents in Aleppo and Afrin and reported shooting by security forces of Kurds marking anniversary of 1988 Halabja gas attack. Officials denied unrest although several reported dead. Security forces killed 2 members of militant group Jund al-Sham northwest of Damascus 14 March. President Assad agreed to meet UN officials investigating Hariri murder in April and did not rule out handing over suspects to international courts. Assad met Lebanese PM Fuad Siniora briefly on sidelines of Arab Summit in Khartoum.

- “[Syria’s Assad meets Lebanese PM](#)”, BBC, 28 Mar. 2006.
- “[Syrian opposition plans united front](#)”, Al Jazeera, 17 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°39, [Syria After Lebanon, Lebanon After Syria](#), 12 Apr. 2005.

GULF

Bahrain Demonstrations held against detention of youths protesting brief arrest of Shiite cleric; 24 more arrested.

- “[Protesters arrested in Bahrain](#)”, Al Jazeera, 11 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group’s Middle East Report N°40, [Bahrain’s Sectarian Challenge](#), 6 May 2005.

Iran UN Security Council unanimously approved non-binding statement 29 March calling on Iran to end uranium enrichment and IAEA to report to UNSC within 30 days. Disagreements over timeframe and which body would oversee issue had led to 3-week debate. China and Russia opposed points relating to UNSC lead, suggestion Iranian actions “threat to international peace and security”, shorter reporting period and possible sanctions. Compromise statement refers to IAEA resolution after Russia backed down from insistence UNSC be left out. U.S. suggestions of sanctions at Berlin meeting 31 March strongly rejected by Russia and China. Iran maintained its nuclear program is peaceful and “will not, definitely, suspend enrichment”. Reports of successful test-fire of missile not detectable by radar added to tensions 1 April. In separate development, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei agreed to talks with U.S. on instability in Iraq. Sunni rebel group Jundollah killed 22 in southeast 17 March.

- “[Rice floats the idea of U.N. sanctions on Iran, but China and Russia reject it](#)”, *New York Times*, 31 Mar. 2006.
- “[Who will blink first?](#)”, *The Economist*, 30 Mar. 2006.
- “[The key lies in Iran’s history](#)”, *International Herald Tribune*, 30 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°51, [Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?](#), 23 Feb. 2006.

Iraq Increased anxiety about slide into full-scale civil war with polarised political process, institutional fragmentation and on-going sectarian conflict. U.S. military suggested 30 sectarian killings occurring daily; informal tallies much higher. Iraqi leaders continued high-level talks to form national unity government. Parliament met for first time 16 March, but members took no action in absence of agreement on government. Shiite Alliance chose PM Ibrahim al-Jaafari to lead government but Sunni Arabs and Kurds rejected choice; Alliance said will resist any efforts to drop Jaafari. Iran agreed to talks with U.S. to discuss Iraq. Insurgent attack in Baghdad slum, Sadr City, 13 March killed 52. Police continued to be targeted by insurgents: at least 25 killed in 23 March suicide attack in Baghdad; another police post stormed by insurgents 21 March, killing at least 22. Trial of Saddam Hussein to reconvene 5 April.

- “[US envoy ‘calls for new Iraqi PM’](#)”, BBC, 28 Mar. 2006.
- “[Murder is certain](#)”, *The Economist*, 23 Mar. 2006.
- Comment by Iraqi PM Ibrahim al-Jafari, “[My vision for Iraq](#)”, *Washington Post*, 20 Mar. 2006.
- Comment by Robert Malley and Peter Harling (Crisis Group), “[The enemy we hardly know](#)”, *The Boston Globe* and *International Herald Tribune*, 19 Mar. 2006.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Reports N°52, [The Next Iraqi War? Sectarianism and Civil Conflict](#), 27 Feb. 2006; and N°50, [In Their Own Words: Reading the Iraqi Insurgency](#), 15 Feb. 2006.

- Saudi Arabia Saudi authorities reportedly arrested 40 al-Qaeda members in ongoing operations.
 - "Saudi Arabia says its war with al Qaeda not over", AlertNet, 19 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°45, *The Shiite Question in Saudi Arabia*, 19 Sept. 2005.
- Yemen Following September 2005 presidential amnesty, 627 Zaidi rebels held in connection with rebellion of late radical preacher Hussein al-Huthi released.
 - "Yemen frees 627 from Shia group", Al Jazeera, 3 Mar. 2006.

NORTH AFRICA

- Algeria Government amnesty aimed at national reconciliation began 4 March; covers 2,629 imprisoned militants including Islamic Salvation Front deputy leader Ali Benhadj and Armed Islamic Group leader Abdelhak Layada. International rights groups criticised measures as granting impunity for atrocities. Government said toll of 15-year conflict was 200,000 and government forces had killed 17,000 rebels - first official figures for anti-government casualties. 5 civilians killed by rebel gunmen 23-24 March.
 - "Algeria rebels kill five including mayor", AlertNet, 25 Mar. 2006.
 - "Algeria frees Islamic Front leader", Al Jazeera, 7 Mar. 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 Government crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood (MB) continued with dozens of arrests, including Advisory Council member Professor al-Bayoumi, and closure of *Afaq Arabiya* newspaper, considered MB mouthpiece. Journalist Amira Malash sentenced to 1 year for libel in case condemned by press freedom activists. Judges Club national assembly protested against questioning of 4 judges who had spoken out against irregularities in 2005 parliamentary elections.
 - "Egypt's opposition targets reforms", *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 Mar. 2006.
 - "Islamists say Egypt accuses members of militancy", Reuters, 14 Mar. 2006.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°46, *Reforming Egypt: In Search of a Strategy*, 4 Oct. 2005.
- Western Sahara Moroccan King Mohammed VI visited Western Sahara 20-25 March, holding talks with Consultative Council for Saharan Affairs on plans for greater autonomy. Visit seen as reaction to February commemoration of thirtieth anniversary of self-declared Sahrawi Republic by Polisario Front.
 - "Moroccan king moots autonomy plan with Western Saharan council", AFP, 25 Mar. 2006.

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