

# CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts  
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## April 2015 – Trends



### Deteriorated situations

[Burundi](#), [Chad](#), [Colombia](#), [Kashmir](#), [Nepal](#), [South Sudan](#), [Ukraine](#), [Yemen](#)



### Improved situations

[Iran](#)

## May 2015 – Watchlist



### Conflict risk alerts

[Burundi](#), [South Sudan](#)



### Conflict resolution opportunities

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

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

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# Africa

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## Central Africa

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📌🗳️ **Burundi** Ruling CNDD-FDD 25 April officially announced President Nkurunziza's candidacy in June presidential elections, expelled members opposed to his third term, removed from party leadership ("wisemen council") second VP and national assembly chairman due to their opposition to candidacy. Senate 29 April referred Nkurunziza's candidacy to constitutional court. Mass protests organised by civil society and some opposition parties turned violent 26 April; demonstrations ongoing, military deployed, at least six protesters killed. Govt 27 April closed several independent radio stations for broadcasting live from protests, 29 April blocked social media networks. UNSG 28 April condemned violence, called for investigation into deaths. Nkurunziza's nomination came despite increasing domestic, international pressure earlier in month: hundreds protested 17 April; UN Human Rights chief Zeid 15 April expressed concerns after 12-15 April visit; UNSG same day also voiced concern, called for free and fair elections. Over 20,000 reported to have fled to Rwanda since mid-March fearing electoral violence, with number rapidly increasing after announcement of Nkurunziza's candidacy.

- ["Burundi on the Brink"](#), *New York Times*, 28 April 2015.

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**New** Crisis Group Africa Report N°224, [Elections in Burundi: Moment of Truth](#), 17 April 2015. The ever-decreasing likelihood of a free and fair presidential election is in growing conflict with a popular desire for change in Burundi. To safeguard the Arusha principles agreed in 2000 to end Burundi's civil war, the opposition and President Nkurunziza in particular must return to the path of democracy and dialogue.

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➡ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) attacks, abductions and cattle stealing in Far North province continued on smaller scale including 16 April attack on Bia village killing 19. Growing popular support for defence forces: President Biya 2 April signed decree honouring 400 soldiers; several MPs, regional and civil society leaders held fundraisers, made donations throughout month. Suspected assailants from neighbouring CAR 22 April kidnapped seven, killed three in Touboro (north).

- ["Cameroun-Boko Haram : 'La peur a changé le camp'"](#), *Afrik.com*, 15 April 2015.

➡ **Central African Republic** Bangui Forum on national reconciliation postponed until 4 May; preparations hampered by ongoing disagreements between political actors. Following tensions over appointments, President Samba Panza 16 April signed four decrees replacing Jean-Jacques Demafouth with Health Minister Marguerite Samba as coordinator of technical committee in charge of Forum's preparation and designating Senegalese Abdoulaye Bathily, head of UN regional office for Central Africa, as chair of Forum's presidium. Rivalries between armed group factions continued, leaders claimed they were under-represented in Forum; no agreement on participation of Seleka leader and former transitional President Michel Djotodia, former President François Bozizé. Djotodia and Bozizé 14 April signed statement pledging to adhere to July 2014 Brazzaville ceasefire, support political process. Govt rejected 8 April Nairobi peace deal signed by anti-balaka, Seleka representatives. International media late

April reported leaked UN report on 2014 sexual abuse of children by French peacekeepers in CAR; French govt 29 April said investigation ongoing. UNSC 28 April renewed MINUSCA mandate until 30 April 2016. Up to 400 protesters 10 April attacked UN base in Kaga-Bandoro, one killed, dozens injured.

- [“Former CAR leaders sign ‘meaningless’ peace agreement”](#), Al Jazeera, 14 April 2015.

↓ **Chad** Riots and fighting 25 April between population and security forces in Kyabé in south left at least four dead amid growing popular discontent. Civil servants and teachers 8 April announced strike, demanded payment of overdue salaries. Operations against Boko Haram (BH) in Lake Chad region continued.

- [“Affrontements meurtriers entre forces de l’ordre et manifestants”](#), RFI, 26 April 2015.

➡ **DR Congo** Govt early month announced inquiry into 19 March mass burial in Kinshasa’s Maluku district following popular and international calls for independent investigation. Govt said grave used to empty city morgue of unclaimed bodies, amid suspicions it contains bodies of protesters killed in Jan demonstrations against electoral law. Election commission CENI 15 April began candidate registration for Oct provincial elections despite calls to delay; opposition 20 April suspended its participation in process, requested meeting with CENI to revise electoral calendar. Authorities reported Rwandan incursion 22 April in N Kivu, one person wounded; Rwanda denied. Three MONUSCO members kidnapped 23 April in N Kivu, released 28 April. Attacks attributed to Ugandan rebel group ADF continued north of Beni, N Kivu; FARDC 29 April said one of ADF’s leaders killed in operation.

- [“Doubts persist about mass grave in DRC”](#), VoA, 15 April 2015.

➡ **Rwanda** President Kagame 13 April met Burundi President Nkurunziza to discuss Burundi’s pre-election tensions, Burundians fleeing to Rwanda, regional security and co-operation. Authorities late month granted refugee status to over 11,000 Burundians, set up additional refugee facilities following escalation of violence in Burundi (see Burundi).

- [“Rwanda revisited”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 5 April 2015.

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## Horn of Africa

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➡ **Ethiopia** Govt 20 April declared three days of mourning 21-23 April following Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) killing of some 30 Ethiopians held captive in Libya. Tens of thousands marched in govt-supported anti-IS rally 22 April; march in Addis Ababa turned violent when protesters calling for action clashed with police who arrested at least 100, used tear gas to disperse demonstration.

- [“Anti-ISIL rally turns violent in Ethiopia”](#), Al Jazeera, 22 April 2015.

➡ **Kenya** Al-Shabaab attack on university college in Garissa, eastern Kenya, 2 April left at least 148 dead including three police; came days after President Kenyatta dismissed UK, Australian and Canadian travel advisories warning of terrorist attacks on coast and in NE. Slow security forces’ response drew heavy criticism. Kenyatta vowed to clamp down on Al-Shabaab sympathisers and financiers operating in Kenya; accounts of 86 individuals, companies and NGOs frozen 8 April. Govt 12 April gave UN three-month ultimatum to close Dadaab refugee camp near Somalia border. Govt 14 April granted ten-

day amnesty to radicalised youth seeking reintegration; later extended to fourteen days; Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims had requested 30-day timeframe. Ten suspected Al-Shabaab gunmen 17 April hijacked vehicle in Mandera; 23 April abducted and killed local chief Muktar Maalim Ibrahim. Top anti-corruption officials suspended late April following report accusing 175 politicians and high-ranking officials of corruption.

- Cedric Barnes, Abdullahi Abdille and Zakaria Yusuf, [“Al-Shabaab’s Kenyan ambitions”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 15 April 2015.
- [“Scores dead in al-Shabaab university attack in Kenya”](#), *Guardian*, 2 April 2015.

➡ **Somalia** Al-Shabaab attacks continued including, in Mogadishu, 14 April attack on Ministry of Education that left at least seventeen dead including seven attackers; at least ten killed in bomb attack on restaurant 21 April; senior military officer assassinated in 23 April; former PM, two city council officials and senior prison officer assassinated 25-26 April. Sharp rise in attacks in Puntland: Al-Shabaab 5 April attacked two security checkpoints in Bossaso city; UNICEF staff transport attacked 20 April in Garowe killing at least nine. Kenyan jets 6 April bombed several Al-Shabaab camps in south. Formation of interim federal administrations in central Somalia made some progress amid continued opposition from local clans. State conference for Interim Central Administration commenced 16 April in Adado following objections from Dhusamareb elders over location; elders rejoined after Somalia Federal Govt President Hassan Sheikh’s 8 April declaration that Dhusamareb would be future Interim Central Administration’s capital. Selection of Interim Jubaland Administration parliament members concluded 15 April, marred by accusations 75-strong assembly stacked with current interim Jubaland President Madobe’s allies.

- [“Somalia’s promised but problematic national elections”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 9 April 2015.
- [“Al-Shabaab bombs UN workers in Somalia”](#), Reuters, 20 April 2015.

➡ **Somaliland** Govt 6 April confirmed arrival of refugees from Yemen in Berbera. President Silanyo 18 April sacked Chief Justice Yusuf Ismail Ali, following complaints from Judicial Affairs Commission over allegations he ordered 19 April arrest of Human Rights Commission Chair Guled Ahmed Jama. Two Dhulbahante sub-clan militias 21 April clashed in Taleh, Sool region, leaving five dead.

- [“Turkey hopes to revive stalled Istanbul talks as SL continues to maintain its stance”](#), *Somaliland Press*, 8 April 2015.

↓🔴\* **South Sudan** Month saw most serious clashes since Aug in Upper Nile and Unity states, and escalating tensions along Sudan-South Sudan border. Fighting broke out 27 April in Unity state capital Benitu and surrounding areas when govt forces attacked SPLM-IO-held areas. Clashes late April involving SPLA and Sudanese SPLM-N rebels in Pariang. Fighting broke out 21 April between govt troops and allied Shilluk group under command of SPLA Gen. Johnson Olony in Upper Nile state capital Malakal; over 10,000 Shilluk fled back to ethnic Shilluk territory, further 4,000 took shelter with UNMISS. IGAD 11 March announced formation of “IGAD-Plus” mechanism to expand peace talks, yet talks not taking place. Tensions with Sudan escalated: Sudan reportedly bombed several suspected Sudan Revolutionary Front areas in S Sudan’s Bahr El Ghazal region 8-11 April; Sudan President Bashir 29 April threatened to pursue SRF rebels in S Sudan territory.

- [“South Sudan’s elite power struggle deepens crisis”](#), Al Jazeera, 3 April 2015.

➡ **Sudan** Incumbent President Bashir won 13-16 April presidential election with 95.05% of vote amid widespread voter apathy, low turnout. Arab League, AU and IGAD observer missions all endorsed polls. EU 9 April criticised failure to initiate genuine national dialogue, said would not support elections; Troika (U.S., UK, Norway) 20 April denounced elections as not credible. Security forces violently dispersed anti-election protest in Khartoum 8-9 April; Human Rights Watch late-April accused govt of arresting and abusing opponents. Govt late April accused UNAMID of killing seven civilians in clashes in Kass, South Darfur 23-24 April; UNAMID denied accusations, said troops acted proportionally and in self-defence after two patrols were attacked. Growing tensions with S Sudan (see S Sudan): govt 27 April accused JEM of crossing border from S Sudan's Western Bahr El Ghazal to attack Darfur and N Kordofan, threatened to destroy rebel bases in S Sudan.

- ["Omar al-Bashir wins Sudan elections by a landslide"](#), BBC News, 27 April 2015.

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**New** Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°110, *The Chaos in Darfur*, 22 April 2015. The two-year-old flare-up of violence in Darfur continues, adding 100,000 people this year to more than 2.5 million who have lost their homes since war began in 2003. Sudanese, regional and international peace processes have stalled. They should restart with parallel initiatives that take into better account all of Darfur's communities and armed groups.

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➡ **Uganda** Security forces 6 April deployed in Agago and Amuru districts in north following violent escalation of local land conflicts, including intercommunal violence between Acholi and Langi displacing some 180 in Agago; and escalating tensions between Acholi and Madi in Amuru.

- ["Angry women strip bare in ongoing north Ugandan land dispute"](#), RFI, 19 April 2015.

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## Southern Africa

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➡ **Madagascar** Former President Ravalomanana 14 April withdrew from Malagasy Council of Churches (FFKM)-led reconciliation talks after being prevented from speaking at 11 April rally due to house arrest; 24 April announced return to talks following discussions with FFKM leaders. Talks resumed 28 April, only President Rajonarimanjato and former Presidents Ratsiraka and Ravalomanana attended.

- ["Réconciliation - Ravalomanana réintègre la troupe"](#), L'Express de Madagascar, 25 April 2015.

➡ **Mozambique** President Nyusi 13 April reiterated commitment to dialogue with opposition Renamo but emphasised need for tangible results. Nyusi same day called for national unity amid increased support for Renamo's proposal for "autonomous govt" in northern and central provinces. Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama 6 April reiterated threat to "govern by force" if national assembly rejects proposal for autonomous provinces, 9 April announced Renamo troops headed south toward Maputo, advised govt troops to keep distance. Clashes 3 April between Renamo and govt forces in Gaza threatened peace, but violence contained. Dialogue on disarmament remained stalled.

- ["Nyusi concerned at stalemate in dialogue"](#), Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique, 14 April 2015.

➡ **South Africa** Surge in attacks against foreigners in Kwazulu Natal and Gauteng provinces following late-March speech by Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini accusing them of stealing opportunities from South Africans; at least seven killed, thousands displaced, and over 300 arrested for involvement in attacks. Defence minister 21 April said soldiers deployed to help police restore order. Attacks met with regional condemnation: Malawi, Zimbabwe and Somalia repatriated nationals, Nigeria withdrew envoys from Pretoria.

- [“South Africa warned not to forget its history, as police clamps down on xenophobic violence”](#), RFI, 19 April 2015.

➡ **Zimbabwe** Purges within ruling ZANU-PF party continued with 3 April expulsion of former VP and Second Secretary Joyce Mujuru. Former ZANU-PF heavyweights Rugare Gumbo and Didymus Mutasa joined Mujuru 7 April to launch new party, “ZANU People First”, plans to compete against ZANU-PF in 10 June by-elections and 2018 national elections. Opposition MDC 10 April announced boycott of by-elections, demanded implementation of electoral reforms.

- [“Zimbabwe ruling party expels Mugabe rival Joyce Mujuru”](#), BBC, 3 April 2015.

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## West Africa

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➡ **Burkina Faso** Political tensions increased following 7 April vote on electoral law banning “supporters” of Oct 2014 constitutional amendment from contesting Oct 2015 presidential, legislative elections; parties affiliated with former ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) withdrew from National Transitional Council and Commission for National Reconciliation and Reform in protest. Thousands demonstrated in Ouagadougou 25 April in favour of new electoral law. Former regime members arrested 6-7 April, some remain detained and may face prosecution. Military judge, appointed late-March to investigate former President Sankara’s assassination, sealed Sankara’s grave as prelude to exhumation. Country experienced first attack from neighbouring Mali when five unidentified Tuareg gunmen 4 April attacked Tambao mine in north, one gendarme wounded.

- [“L’assemblée intérimaire adopte le nouveau code électoral”](#), RFI, 7 April 2015.

➡ **Côte d’Ivoire** Ruling coalition RHDP 25 April announced official support for President Ouattara’s re-election; Movement of Forces for the Future (small party within ruling coalition) President Anaky Kobenan replaced 12 April with Anzoumana Moutayé after questioning party’s support for Ouattara. Opposition FPI remains divided: court 3 April confirmed Pascal Affi N’Guessan as sole legal party president, following early-March declaration of Aboudramana Sangaré as FPI president by pro-Gbagbo members; pro-Gbagbo camp 14 April re-introduced Gbagbo’s candidacy. Ouattara 11-12 April said country will no longer send officials to ICC, insisted those accused over 2010/2011 post-election conflict will be tried by national courts. UNSC 28 April adopted resolution maintaining sanctions and arms embargo until 30 April 2016, citing continued security concerns.

- [“Moutayé Anzoumana élu à la tête du MFA”](#), RFI, 13 April 2015.



➡ **Guinea** Tensions between govt and opposition over electoral preparations increased after opposition spokesperson Aboubacar Sylla claimed he was shot at in Conakry 4 April. Opposition-organised demonstrations held in Conakry on five separate days starting 13 April, nationwide protests 23 April; two protesters killed, dozens wounded; several arrested, tried, sentenced to short jail terms. Opposition 28 April delayed planned 30 April protests to 4 May, citing logistical constraints. Authorities and opposition traded accusations that firearms were used. Opposition 21 April demanded suspension of electoral commission's operations and withdrawal of electoral schedule as pre-conditions to talks, govt rejected demands.

- Vincent Foucher, ["Guinea needs consensus on poll position if election race is to pass peacefully"](#), *Guardian*, 16 April 2015.
- ["Comment la manifestation contre l'insécurité a viré à l'affrontement avec la police"](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 13 April 2015.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** PM Pereira 7 April held meeting on consultative group on 25 March roundtable where international donors pledged some \$1.5bn aid, announced establishment of follow-up mechanism.

- ["ONU reconhece 'momento de extraordinária oportunidade' para a Guiné-Bissau"](#), RTP, 20 April 2015.
- For latest briefing, see Africa Briefing N°109, [Security Sector Reform in Guinea-Bissau: An Opportunity Not to Be Missed](#), 19 March 2015.

➡ **Mali** Negotiations remain stalled following main Tuareg armed coalition Coordination of Movement of Azawad's (CMA) refusal to initial 1 March peace agreement. Govt and international mediation continued to pressure CMA to sign: CMA 31 March-5 April consulted with Algerian FM Ramtane Lamamra and UNSG SR Mongi Hamdi. PM IBK 9 April announced CMA willing to sign agreement in Algiers 15 April; CMA denied, reiterated position against current agreement. Attacks on military personnel, peacekeepers and civilians persisted in north, including: 1 April attack on MINUSMA camp near Ansongo by Movement for Oneness and Jihad (MUJAO), in which one child killed and two peacekeepers wounded; booby-trapped vehicle detonated in MINUSMA camp near Ansongo 15 April, three civilians and nine peacekeepers killed. Violence spread to central regions including: national armed forces (FAMA) attacked 1 April in Boulkessi; two soldiers killed when FAMA vehicle hit IED in Segou region 12 April. Pro-unity Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) militants 27 April captured National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA)-controlled Ménaka in NE after brief fighting; CMA said attack constituted breach of Feb ceasefire. CMA 29 April launched attack on Goundam, 80km from Timbuktu, two soldiers, one child killed.

- ["Crise au Mali : nouvelle réunion à Alger, la médiation internationale dans l'impasse"](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 14 April 2015.

➡ **Niger** Military operations against Boko Haram (BH) continued. BH 25 April attacked military base in Karamga Island, Lake Chad; Interior Minister Hassoumi Massoudou reported some 50 soldiers, 26 island residents and 156 militants killed. Opposition 6 April announced boycott of 2016 polls if govt continued alleged manipulation of internal dissensions following 20 March dissolution of opposition-led N'Gourti municipal council in Diffa region.



- [“Niger president: end of Boko Haram is near”](#), VoA, 1 April 2015.

➡ **Nigeria** Gubernatorial and state assembly elections firmed All Progressives Congress's (APC) hold on power following 28 March victory of party's presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari. Gubernatorial and state assembly elections held 11 and 25 April, APC won governorship in twenty of 29 states where elections held including commercial capitals Lagos and Kano. National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) reported 55 killed during state elections, estimated 200 killed in election-related violence before and after polls. Suspected Boko Haram (BH) gunmen 27 April shot dead 21 people in Bultaram village, Yobe state. Hundreds of bodies, reportedly BH victims, discovered 25 April in Damasak, Borno state. Military spokesmen mid-April reported all BH camps in Borno state destroyed except those in Sambisa Forest Reserve. Troops 23 April invaded Sambisa forest in attempt to defeat BH insurgency, 28 April reported rescue of 200 girls and 93 women from BH stronghold. President-elect Buhari 14 April pledged to improve military cooperation with U.S. as part of military reforms.

- Nnamdi Obasi, [“Nigeria's unexpected election success”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 2 April 2015.
- [“Nigeria's opposition sweeps ahead in governor polls”](#), *Financial Times*, 12 April 2015.

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# Asia

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## North East Asia

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➡ **China (internal)** State media 13 April reported plans for anti-terrorism law that would give govt broader surveillance powers. Police reportedly detained hundreds of villagers in Shayar in Xinjiang's Aksu prefecture during 16 April raid. Prominent Uighur scholar Qamber Amber sentenced to nine years' jail 21 March for "refusing to cooperate" with authorities. Security forces engaged in three-month anti-terrorist operation in Xinjiang killed three members of ethnic Uighur family and jailed two 7 April. State media 17 April announced two suspected terrorists shot dead on Vietnam border.

- ["China steps up anti-terror controls in sign of anxiety after series of attacks"](#), International Business Times, 14 April 2015.

➡ **China/Japan** U.S. and Japan 27 April announced new defence guidelines increasing defence cooperation, envisaging greater Japanese military role globally, potentially assisting U.S. militarily even if it is not directly threatened; agreement prompted criticism from China. Japanese PM Abe met Chinese President Xi on sidelines of Asian-African summit in Jakarta 23 April; agreed to work on improving ties, but Abe warned will "never allow to go unchecked the use of force by the mightier to twist the weaker around" during speech, likely a veiled criticism of China. Speaking in media interview 20 April Abe stated he supports 1995 Murayama Statement apologising for suffering caused by Japan during WWII, but would not repeat wording at Aug WWII anniversary. Japanese Cabinet ministers 23 April visited controversial Yasukuni Shrine; Abe 20 April sent offerings to Yasukuni.

- ["US-Japan defense deal broadens Tokyo's role in face of growing Chinese might"](#), Guardian, 27 April 2015.

➡ **Korean Peninsula** ROK and U.S. held bilateral military consultations, including early April Seoul visit by U.S. Sec Defense Carter for talks with ROK counterpart Han Min-gu. U.S. hosted two trilateral meetings mid-month in attempt to reinforce cooperation between Japan and ROK. ROK and Japan held first high-level security talks in over five years. ROK and U.S. 22 April agreed on revision of bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement. DPRK test-fired several anti-ship and air defence missiles early April. ROK 31 March approved creation of Cyber Security Secretary Office under National Security Office to strengthen coordination in response to cyber threats; 20 April disclosed mid-term defence plan for 2016-2020, with 7% increase in military budget compared with previous version. Chinese nuclear experts told U.S. DPRK may already have 20 nuclear warheads. DPRK media 26 March reported arrest of two South Koreans based in Chinese border city Dandong, accused of spying for ROK's National Intelligence Service and illegally spreading foreign information within DPRK; ROK denied. UN Human Rights Council 27 March adopted, for twelfth year in a row, resolution condemning DPRK's human rights violations.

- ["China warns North Korean nuclear threat is rising"](#), Wall Street Journal, 22 April 2015.

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## South Asia

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➡ **Afghanistan** Lower house of parliament 18 April confirmed all President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah's sixteen ministerial candidates, bringing protracted process of finalising govt formation near completion; defence now only portfolio without minister. Second VP Mohammed Sarwar Danish 1 April announced parliamentary elections scheduled for 2015 would be postponed for a year to allow for electoral reforms. Senate chairman Fazl Hadi Muslimyar 12 April said electoral reform commission illegal, national assembly would have no legal status if parliamentary elections are postponed. MP Ghulam Hussein Nasiri 11 April argued weak govt performance and differences between Ghani and Abdullah had created conditions for rising insecurity and emergence of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) in Afghanistan. 2015 reportedly most violent spring season since 2001. Violence during month included 2 April suicide attack in Khost province killing seventeen; 10 April attack in which insurgents overran army outposts in Badakhshan province, killing at least eighteen soldiers and reportedly beheading some; and 18 April suicide bombing in Jalalabad that killed 38. President Ghani blamed IS for Jalalabad attack; Ministry of Defence spokesperson and NATO officials refuted IS involvement in or support of attack. District police chief in NW province Faryab 9 April said group of insurgents had seized control of three areas, displacing thousands of families.

- ["IS or Taliban? Either way, fear stalks war-weary Afghans"](#), AFP, 19 April 2015.

➡ **Bangladesh** After Dhaka court granted her bail in two corruption cases, opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) leader Khaleda Zia returned home 5 April, ending 92-day confinement in her Dhaka office. Police prevented Zia's supporters from carrying out rally upon her return. Court scheduled next hearing for 5 May. Ahead of 28 April Dhaka and Chittagong mayoral elections, in which BNP decided to back candidates, assailants 20 April attacked Zia's motorcade during Dhaka campaign rally, injuring some of her security entourage and journalists; BNP called for nationwide strike, excluding Dhaka and Chittagong. Election Commission decided to deploy army to ensure security at elections. On day of vote 28 April BNP announced boycott, claiming polls rigged; PM Sheikh Hasina's Awami League (AL) won; some reports of violence at polling stations. Police 8 April finally submitted charge sheet in April 2014 murder of local AL mayor and six others in Narayanganj district, accusing 35 people including Narayanganj ward councilor who fled to India after killings, and three former members of elite paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion. Senior Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) member Muhammad Kamaruzzaman hanged 11 April for committing atrocities in 1971 liberation war, after Supreme Court rejected review petition. JI called daylong strike 13 April; one JI student wing activist killed in clashes with police.

- ["Mob attacks Bangladesh opposition leader during election rally"](#), *Guardian*, 21 April 2015.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Increase in Maoist attacks during month saw seven Special Task Force police killed, ten wounded in Maoist ambush on convoy in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh state 11 April. Four Chhattisgarh Armed Forces killed, seven injured same day. Five police killed as Maoists blew up anti-landmine vehicle in Dantewada district 13 April; one soldier killed in attack on Border Security Force camp in Kanker earlier same day. Body of soldier abducted by Maoists 7 April found 15 April. Maoist

commander killed in clash with police in Kondagaon district of Chhattisgarh 23 April. Elections in Assam's autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council 8 April passed off largely peacefully amid heavy security presence; one person reported killed 6 April in violence ahead of polls. Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) won twenty of 40 seats, formed new executive council with support of three independents. Security forces killed two Bodo militants in clash in Sonitpur 1 April. Several militants arrested for role in Dec 2014 Adivasi massacre.

- ["Force alone cannot crush Maoist insurrection, activists say"](#), Benar News, 14 April 2015.

↓ **Kashmir** Region saw sharpest rise in violence in months. Indian army 13 April reportedly killed two men in southern Kashmir, militant and his non-combatant brother. Violent protests erupted next day, injuring at least six; police placed separatist leaders Yasin Malik and Masarat Alam under preventive custody. Separatist Hurriyat Conference leader Syed Ali Geelani called for strike, which saw violence break out in several areas as police clashed with protesters. Police shot dead 16-year-old boy during protest outside Srinagar 18 April. Pakistani soldiers patrolling Working Boundary between Pakistan and India-administered Kashmir on high alert after Indian army shelling reportedly damaged houses near Pakistani Punjab's Sialkot district 16 April. Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) operative Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, charged with masterminding 2008 Mumbai attack, released on bail 10 April after Lahore High Court dismissed govt detention order; Punjab govt 14 April petitioned Supreme Court to overturn decision.

- ["Protesters burn Indian flag in Pakistani Kashmir"](#), Channel News Asia, 19 April 2015.

↓ **Nepal** Powerful 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck 77km NW of Kathmandu 25 April causing widespread devastation, directly affecting a quarter of population; over 5,500 confirmed dead with numbers expected to increase, 1.4 million reportedly in need of food aid. Disaster struck amid ongoing impasse between Nepal's political parties on overdue draft constitution; 30-party alliance of opposition parties led by Unified Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) and two major Madhesi groups declared three-day nationwide strike 6 April to protest against adoption of constitution by majority vote instead of by consensus, but called strike off next day in response to anger over disruption, violent clashes between protesters and police.

- ["How political instability affected Nepal's disaster preparedness"](#), Deutsche Welle, 27 April 2015.

➔ **Pakistan** Army Chief Sharif 2 April approved first sentences issued by military court under new powers granted under 21st constitutional amendment (passed 6 Jan), including six sentenced to death. Supreme Court 16 April issued stay on any death sentences awarded by military courts until judges decide on legal challenge against 21st amendment. According to govt reports on implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) to combat violent extremism in wake of Dec Peshawar school attack, law enforcement agencies arrested over 32,300 people as of 25 March, but found fewer than 1% linked to terror groups. Gunmen 11 April killed twenty Sindhi and Punjabi workers in Balochistan's southern district Kech; separatist Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) claimed responsibility. Paramilitary Frontier Corps claimed it had killed thirteen BLF militants, including those responsible for attack, in operation around Turbat. U.S. drone strike in S Waziristan 12 April killed four. Supreme Court 8 April formed judicial commission to investigate allegations of rigging in 2013 elections. Parliament 10

April unanimously passed resolution calling for neutrality in Yemen conflict, while pledging to help defend Saudi Arabia against violation of its territorial integrity. Prominent activist Sabeen Mahmud shot dead in Karachi 24 April after organising event on Balochistan, originally meant to be hosted by Lahore University of Management Sciences 9 April but canceled reportedly under pressure from military intelligence agency.

- [“Gunmen kill arts advocate in Pakistan after human rights event”](#), *New York Times*, 24 April 2015.

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**New** Crisis Group Asia Report N°265, *Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan*, 8 April 2015. In Pakistan, women’s security and political, social and economic status are under attack by religious extremists, undermined by discriminatory legislation and unprotected by the state. The government must stand by its pledge to end gender inequity and violence against women, especially in the conflict zones of north-western Pakistan and the tribal belt bordering Afghanistan.

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➡ **Sri Lanka** Parliament 28 April approved President Sirisena’s signature 19th amendment to constitution to reduce presidential powers. Amendment delegates considerable powers to PM, re-imposes two-term limit, restricts president’s immunity and ability to dissolve parliament and establishes series of independent oversight commissions. Passage came a week after end of Sirisena’s ambitious 100-day agenda and followed efforts by section of Sirisena’s own SLFP party to delay and weaken law; parliament likely to consider 20th amendment to reform electoral system before being dissolved for fresh elections later in year. Police 22 April arrested former Minister Basil Rajapaksa and two others on corruption charges; Bribery Commission 23 April questioned former Defence Secretary Gotabaya Rajapaksa, is due to interview former President Rajapaksa, despite public protests by pro-Rajapaksa faction of Sirisena’s UPFA coalition. Series of international visitors encouraged govt to deepen progress on human rights and reconciliation, including 2 April Sri Lanka-EU Joint Commission; negotiations begun to restore GSP+ trade benefits removed in 2010. UN Special Rapporteur on transitional justice following late March visit welcomed govt’s initial moves on reconciliation, outlined major challenges for effective transitional justice. Rajapaksa-appointed commission on missing persons 3 April presented unpublished interim report to Sirisena, reportedly recommended further investigations into certain cases of Army and LTTE “wrong-doing”.

- [“Aye for 19 Amendment”](#), *Daily FT*, 29 April 2015.

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## South East Asia

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➡ **Indonesia** Military 20 April announced six-month operation in Sulawesi to help police track down militants linked to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), first major military counter-terrorism operation since 2009 Jakarta bombings. Govt and House of Representatives 1 April agreed to work on amendment to Anti-terrorism Law to address IS threat. UNSC 23 April revealed names of twenty individuals and foundations affiliated with al-Qaeda, Taliban and Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) operating in Indonesia.

- [“Indonesia military launches anti-IS operation on eastern island”](#), *Reuters*, 20 April 2015.

➔ **Myanmar** Clashes continue between govt forces and MNDAA in Kokang area of northern Shan state. State media reported 21 soldiers killed and 128 wounded in assaults that seized several mountain outposts 13 and 15 April. MNDAA will attend early May meeting of ethnic groups to discuss text of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement. President Thein Sein appointed eight additional members from Myanmar's largest ethnic minorities to election commission 3 April, addressing concerns over body's lack of diversity. Long-awaited talks between main political actors including opposition and ethnic political party reps held 10 April; govt reported they agreed on next meeting in May, to discuss constitutional change, elections and peace process. Population Control Bill sent to president 6 April, following approval by legislature; president to sign into law or send it back with comments to be considered in next legislative session in May. Bill part of package of four discriminatory pieces of legislation aimed at "protection of race and religion", championed by Buddhist nationalists. After upper house passed fast-tracked amendment to 2014 Education Law incorporating some key demands of student protestors 26 March, lower house returned bill to upper house with further amendments 7 April. Student leaders expressed concern that bill as it stands does not go far enough, and that some important amendments have been removed.

- ["At high-level dialogue, six parties agree to more talks"](#), *Irrawaddy*, 10 April 2015.

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**New** Crisis Group Asia Report N°266 [Myanmar's Electoral Landscape](#), 28 April 2015.

Myanmar's November elections will be a critical inflection point. Despite significant progress in election administration and in ending a two-generation-long civil war, the fragile peace process and incomplete political reforms constitute major challenges. All sides must ensure that zero-sum politics around the elections does not imperil the transition.

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➔ **Philippines** Deliberations on Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) in House of Representatives resumed 20 April; lawmakers debating who will exercise operational control over local police in future Bangsamoro region. Resumption of BBL hearings overshadowed by Department of Justice (DOJ)'s 22 April announcement of murder and theft charges against 90 MILF implicated in 25 Jan botched counter-insurgency operation in which 44 police commandos, seventeen MILF and five civilians killed. DOJ also released report same day stating MILF, MILF splinter group Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and private armed groups continued to fire on police after they surrendered; MILF said report "very doubtful", MILF acted in self-defence. International Monitoring Team, responsible for monitoring and upholding ceasefire, 6 April published report concluding both govt forces and MILF at fault for deadly clash, both violated ceasefire. MILF 17 April reiterated it would not surrender fighters implicated in clash to govt. BIFF leader Ameril Umra Kato reportedly died of heart attack 14 April; BIFF 19 April attacked army and police positions in Shariff Aguak, Datu Hofer and Datu Salibo, said attack was to show group still "alive and kicking". MILF training facility in Iligan City dismantled 18 April by joint team of govt, MILF, Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process and CSO representatives.

- ["DOJ on SAF deaths: it was murder all the way"](#), *Philippine Star*, 23 April 2015.

➔ **South China Sea** Chinese foreign ministry 9 April issued statement defending ongoing reclamation and construction activities in SCS. U.S. Sec Defense Carter 1 April said China's activities in SCS seriously aggravating China-U.S. tensions. IHS Jane's released new images 15 April indicating China building 3km airstrip on Fiery Cross Reef.

Vietnam Communist Party chief Nguyen Phu Trong met Chinese President Xi in Beijing 7-10 April, pledged to increase cooperation; highest level political exchange between countries since China deployed oil rig in disputed waters May 2014. Philippines and U.S. 20 April launched biggest joint combined military exercises in fifteen years; Chinese state media said drills “inappropriate”. At ASEAN summit, Philippines President Aquino 27 April criticised China’s “excessive and expansive” claims in SCS; ASEAN leaders in statement expressed “serious concerns” over land reclamation, said it “has eroded trust and confidence”; urged Code of Conduct consultations “be intensified”. Chinese foreign ministry 29 April accused Vietnam and Philippines of illegal reclamation and construction in Spratly islands. U.S. Navy 10 April reported Beijing sending additional patrol ships to SCS.

- [“ASEAN has role ‘to keep temperature down’ on South China Sea dispute: PM Lee”](#), Channel News Asia, 28 April 2015.

➡ **Thailand** PM Prayuth 1 April invoked Section 44 of 2014 interim constitution, investing him with absolute power, and replacing martial law (in place since May 2014) in most of country. Under Section 44, National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) retains many powers granted to military under martial law. Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) submitted draft constitution to National Reform Committee (NRC) 20 April. Draft curbs authority of elected politicians and political parties while permitting unelected PM and enhancing power of various appointed officials and oversight bodies; provides for Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system; senate to have greater powers to propose legislation and scrutinise cabinet appointments. Of 200 senate seats, only 77 for elected representatives, one from each province, with candidates selected by appointed committees. Car-bomb exploded on tourist island Koh Samui 10 April, injuring seven. Fire broke out same day on mainland at Surat Thani Cooperative Store belonging to Suthep Thaugsuban, former Democrat Party head and leader of anti-govt protests ahead of May 2014 coup. Officials blamed “politicians”, ruled out involvement of southern militants, but five warrants issued for Malay-Muslim men from insurgency-affected Yala province.

- [“Thai junta enjoys absolute power as opposition quietly bides its time”](#), Washington Post, 13 April 2015.



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## Europe and Central Asia

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### Balkans

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➡ **Bosnia** Bosnian Serb SNSD adopted resolution during its party congress 25 April calling for referendum in 2018 on secession of Republika Srpska (RS) unless RS is given more autonomy. SNSD 7 April also said it will boycott newly-established Council of Ministers. Tensions increased further following 27 April attack on police station in Zvornik in RS by man suspected of being radical Islamist: gunman killed one policeman and wounded two before being shot dead. Govt increased security across country. RS President Dodik 28 April said federal security forces incompetent, RS will develop its own intelligence service. Prosecutor's Office 14 April charged four men with financing terrorist activities, recruiting fighters for Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL).

- ["Bosnian party congresses set stage for new conflicts"](#), Balkan Insight, 27 April 2015.

➡ **Kosovo** Stabbing of ethnic Serb in Mitrovica 9 April sparked series of minor attacks between ethnic Serbs and Albanians. EU hosted another round of Kosovo-Serbia talks 22 April; Pristina agreed to stop privatisation of companies in north without local Serbs' consent. Kosovo Serb politicians ended two-month boycott of parliament. Kosovo Centre for Security Studies 14 April released report saying over 200 Kosovans fighting alongside Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIS).

- ["Report finds alarming outflow of Kosovars to Islamic State"](#), RFE/RL, 20 April 2015.

➡ **Macedonia** Escalating political crisis as opposition Social Democrat leader Zoran Zaev produced further tapes that opposition alleges show PM Gruevski's govt was illegally wire-tapping thousands of citizens, interfering with judiciary, media, elections. Zaev charged with revealing state secrets; previously charged with corruption, attempted blackmail. EU Council 21 April expressed "grave concern regarding the deteriorating situation", particularly in rule of law, fundamental rights and freedom of media; called for political dialogue, investigation of all allegations. Members of European Parliament facilitating talks between govt and opposition. Group of 40 armed men 21 April attacked and briefly took over police station in Goshince village on border with Kosovo, reportedly claiming to be members of Albanian National Liberation Army.

- ["EU envoys warn that Macedonia 'can explode'"](#), Euractiv, 3 April 2015.

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### Caucasus

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➡ **Armenia** Increasing international recognition of 1915 mass killings of Armenians by Ottomans as genocide ahead of event's centennial 24 April: Pope Francis 12 April, EU parliament 15 April and Germany 23 April said killings were genocide, prompting protest from Turkey. Opposition group 8 April announced plans to organise anti-govt protests 24 April: six group leaders detained for organising mass disorder.

- ["A hundred years on, Armenian genocide reverberates"](#), CFR, 22 April 2015.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Amid ongoing condemnation of govt crackdown on opponents, rights activist Rasul Jafarov sentenced 16 April to 6.5 years' prison for tax evasion and illegal entrepreneurship, human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev sentenced 22 April to 7.5 years' prison on similar charges; rights groups said verdicts politically motivated. Alliance of human rights and sports NGOs 7 April called on European Olympic Committees to condemn govt crackdown ahead of first European Olympic Games to be held in Baku in June.

- [“Azerbaijan jails two rights campaigners”](#), Guardian, 23 April 2015.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Tensions, clashes along contact line continue, including two Armenian soldiers reportedly killed 7 April in two separate incidents; Azerbaijani soldier reported killed 16 April. Armenian FM met with Russian counterpart 7-8 April to discuss issues including NK conflict. President of Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe 13 April said NK a “real concern” for Europe, called for dialogue.

- [“Anna Brasseur: Nagorno-Karabakh issue is a real concern for Europe”](#), APA, 13 April 2015.

➡ **Georgia** Elders of Kists, ethnic Chechens from Georgia's Pankisi Gorge 6 April called on govt to undertake measures to stop Pankisi youth recruitment by Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL). During late month visit to Georgia, Belarusian President Lukashenko said Belarus supports Georgia's territorial integrity.

- [“Georgian Kists demand action to stop Pankisi youth joining IS”](#), RFE/RL, 7 April 2015.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Anti-terrorist operations by Russian counter-terrorist committee (NAK) continued: five killed in Dagestan 19 April, including Aliaskhab Kebekov, leader of NC insurgency since early last year, leaders of Untsukul and Central groups of Dagestani insurgency and two women. Leaders of Makhachkala and Kaspiysk groups, who had previously sworn allegiance to leader of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), killed in security operation in Krabudakhkent district 24 April; leader of Aukh group, who also swore allegiance to IS last year, killed in Khasavyurt district 27 April. Two alleged militants killed in Kabardino-Balkaria 15 April, one supporter killed 14 April, four suspect supporters detained in Urvansky district 6 April. Operations taking place as Moscow intelligence 10 April warned of growing IS influence in region. Leaders of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay insurgent groups 26 April swore allegiance to IS leader. Federal police 19 April killed Chechen man in Grozny; Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov responded with official statement to security forces to “shoot to kill” unauthorised non-Chechen security officers; comes amid growing tensions between Kadyrov and federal security officials. Moscow court 1 April ruled 7 March arrest of Zaur Dadayev, chief suspect in killing of opposition politician Boris Nemtsov legal, despite Dadayev's claim his earlier confession was forced by torture.

- [“Russian forces ‘kill top jihadist’ Kebekov in Caucasus”](#), BBC, 20 April 2015.

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## Eastern Europe

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⬇ **Ukraine** Despite initial claims by both sides to have pulled back heavy weaponry from front line in compliance with Feb Minsk agreement, shelling along separation line resumed around 12 April, breaking over a month of calm, and intensified during month, particularly near Mariupol and outside Donetsk city. Ukrainian army 13 April launched tank probe on separatist positions north of Donetsk airport, substantial casualties reported on both sides; numerous separatist sources reported Russian intervention to push

back attack. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) leader Zakharchenko 18 April said Ukraine building up troops on line of separation, warned DNR will expand control to all of Donetsk oblast if fighting breaks out again; said DNR moving further away from Ukraine. Zakharchenko late month told *Der Spiegel* separatists redeploying heavy weaponry on front lines in response to alleged Ukrainian violations of Minsk agreements; later claimed he was misquoted, but separatist commentators note some heavy weaponry already returned to front. Military training continuing on both sides: U.S. 17 April confirmed 300 soldiers arrived in Ukraine to train its military. Russian President Putin 16 April said no Russian troops in Ukraine; U.S. 22 April said Russia building up troops on border. EU 27 April said it will not send armed peacekeepers to Ukraine, will send civilian assessment mission as soon as possible; also said Kyiv needs to speed up crucial reforms to seek closer political association and economic integration with EU. Poroshenko said he planned to have all conditions in place to apply for EU membership in five years. Russian defence ministry 1 April said under new conscription law 500 draftees from Crimea will be recruited to Russian army by July 2015, will stay in region after training. Living conditions continued to deteriorate in separatist-controlled areas. Amid ongoing economic crisis, Ukraine's biggest mining and steel company, owned by politically influential oligarch Rinat Akhmetov, announced it has defaulted on its debt obligations. Kyiv and Moscow 2 April signed short-term deal allowing Ukraine to buy gas from Russia at lower price.

- Crisis Group Statement, ["Statement on the Ukraine Crisis and European Stability"](#), 1 April 2015.
- ["Violence escalates in east Ukraine ahead of talks"](#), Reuters, 14 April 2015.
- For latest briefing, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°73, [The Ukraine Crisis: Risks of Renewed Military conflict after Minsk II](#), 1 April 2015.

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## Western Europe/Mediterranean

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➡ **Cyprus** Independent leftist Mustafa Akinci won presidential elections in Turkish Cypriot north; Akinci seen as moderate, has pledged focus on reunification. Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 28 April announced series of confidence-building measures ahead of planned early-May meeting with Akinci. UNSG Special Adviser Eide 7 April expressed optimism suspended talks could resume following late-March withdrawal of Republic of Cyprus and Turkish seismic research vessels off Cypriot coast.

- ["Mustafa Akinci wins northern Cyprus presidential election"](#), *Guardian*, 27 April 2015.

➡ **Turkey** Military and PKK clashed in Agri province 11 April, leaving five militants dead, four soldiers wounded. Ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) stated pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) continuing to stoke violence and intimidate citizens in east to vote for HDP in 7 June elections; HDP said clash part govt attempt to discredit party, prevent it from passing 10% electoral threshold. Govt responded angrily to statements by Pope Francis, European Parliament and Germany recognising 1915-18 Ottoman mass killings of Armenians as genocide: Ankara 15 April said statements "distortion of history", part of international campaign against AKP. Security forces apprehended nineteen Syria-bound foreign nationals in Hatay and Gaziantep early month. Istanbul court 29 April acquitted 26, including five leaders of Taksim Solidarity, umbrella group of civil society, union and political groups, charged with involvement in 2013 protest against AKP.

- [“Turkey’s Erdogan condemns EU, Pope Francis over Armenia ‘genocide’ label”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 15 April 2015.

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## Central Asia

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➡ **Kazakhstan** Amid worsening economic situation, particularly in north, President Nazarbayev emphasised anti-crisis measures ahead of 26 April presidential elections; re-elected with 97.7% of vote. OSCE criticised lack of “credible opposition”, “significant restrictions” faced by media. Deputy Economy Minister Timur Zhaqsylyqov 22 April reiterated govt’s rejection of Russian suggestion of single currency for Eurasian Economic Union. Defence Minister Imangali Tasmagambetov 16 April said 2014 agreement with Russia to create unified regional air defence system moved to practical level.

- [“Investors hope reelection of Russian ally Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan promises stability”](#), *Moscow Times*, 21 April 2015.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Political fallout continued surrounding country’s largest gold mine, Canadian-owned Kumtor, focal point of popular protests late 2012-2013 calling for its nationalisation. PM Otorbayev resigned 23 April, reportedly after his instructions on controversial restructuring of mine ownership not followed. Following March speech by President Atambayev in which he said Kyrgyzstan is dependent on Russian security presence and assistance, reports emerged 16 April that surveillance drones are operating from Kant Russian military base near Bishkek. Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states (except Uzbekistan) held joint special forces manoeuvres in Shamsi Gorge in north.

- [“Kyrgyzstan’s PM resigns; Fourth down in five years”](#), Eurasianet, 23 April 2015.

➡ **Tajikistan** Amid heightened concerns over extremism, govt 13 April announced ban on citizens under 35 undertaking *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca; followed 27 March call by imams, encouraged by govt, to dissolve Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. During Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) meeting in Dushanbe 2 April to discuss threat from Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) in Afghanistan, FM Sirojiddin Aslov expressed dissatisfaction over existing attempts to strengthen Tajik-Afghan border, called on CSTO to provide more practical measures. Russian daily *Kommersant* 3 April reported Russia planning \$1.23bn in military-technical assistance to Tajikistan. Russian defence minister 16 April reiterated support for Tajikistan against IS, threats from Afghanistan.

- [“No Hajj, No hijab, and shave your beard”](#), *Diplomat*, 17 April 2015.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Reports of renewed attacks on border village Marchak by Taliban in Afghanistan’s Faryab province mid-April. Head of U.S. Central Command 26 March told U.S. Congress Turkmenistan has requested military aid to strengthen border with Afghanistan. Unconfirmed media reports late March that Russian and Uzbek military experts were sighted on Turkmen-Afghan border.

- [“Neutral no more? Turkmenistan seeks U.S. arms”](#), Silk Road Reporters, 17 April 2015.

➡ **Uzbekistan** President Karimov sworn in for fourth term. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan released video late March pledging allegiance to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL).

- [“Uzbekistan would ‘cooperate with Russia’ to combat domestic security threat by IS”](#), RFE/RL, 13 April 2015.

## Latin America

↓ **Colombia** 36th round of Govt-FARC negotiations began 28 April amid high political tensions following 14 April FARC ambush in Buenes Aires, Cauca region, which killed eleven soldiers and wounded twenty; two FARC members also killed. President Santos 15 April declared attack violation of group's Dec 2014 unilateral ceasefire, announced resumption of airstrikes days after renewal of March decision to temporarily suspend bombings. FARC 16 April said incident was "legitimate reaction" to continued counter-insurgent operation. Attack had no discernible immediate impact on ongoing negotiations: 35th cycle concluded as planned 20 April, with FARC reporting significant progress on detailed protocol for implementation of early-March joint humanitarian demining initiative. However attack raised risks of new military escalation and triggered political backlash. In 17 April speech, Santos suggested being open to calls to impose deadline on peace process, widely perceived to be stalling. FARC 20 April weakened conditions for abstaining from violence, from not being attacked, to not being "permanently harassed" by military, tried to argue "offensive actions" can be part of its "legitimate defence". Santos administration 14 April substantially modified its proposal on controversial military justice reform to appease criticism from human rights groups who argued original proposal could lead to impunity for serious international crimes. Interior Minister Cristo 21 April denied plans to seek referendum on peace process in Oct local elections. ELN leader Gabino 24 April said during interview 80% of future negotiation agenda has been agreed on, but doubts about swift opening of formal negotiations persist. Health minister 27 April recommended suspending controversial aerial spraying of coca crops; fumigations continue, pending final presidential decision.

- Crisis Group Statement, "[Colombia: A Dangerous Setback](#)", 16 April 2015.
- Christian Voelkel, "[¿Tiene futuro el proceso de paz con el ELN?](#)", Razonpublica.com, 27 April 2015.
- "[Proceso de paz, contra el tiempo y presión](#)", *El Colombiano*, 21 April 2015.

➡ **Guatemala** Thousands demonstrated 25 April in Guatemala City's Plaza Mayor demanding end to corruption; many called on president and VP to resign. President Pérez Molina 23 April asked UN for two-year extension of Commission Against Impunity (CICIG); decision came as president struggled to manage political crisis sparked by CICIG investigation into massive customs fraud allegedly perpetrated by tax officials and orchestrated by VP's private secretary. Authorities 16 April arrested 21 people, including current and former heads of tax authority; VP's secretary still fugitive. Revelations galvanised support for CICIG across political spectrum. Official presidential candidate Alejandro Sinibaldi 19 April left ruling party, citing corruption scandal, called for creation of national coalition. Activist opposed to silver mining project in Santa Rosa department murdered 5 April by armed men, fourth mining opponent killed in 2015.

- "[Guatemala arrests current, ex-tax chiefs in corruption case](#)", AP, 16 April 2015.

➡ **Haiti** Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) 1 April published list of 126 political parties registered to contest long-overdue elections. FM Duly Brutus 6 April submitted resignation letter to present himself as candidate in 25 Oct presidential election. Elec-

tion officials 23 April stated some 2,000 candidates registered for 119 seats in Chamber of Deputies and twenty open Senate seats. Concerns persisted over increase in violence ahead of elections: protest over delayed electrification program sparked violence 14 April in border city Ouanaminthe as armed protesters assaulted Dominican truck drivers and police officers, shot dead Chilean UN soldier. Tensions continued with Dominican Republic on issue of Haitian migration: Dominican govt tightened immigration policy, persisting with deportation of undocumented migrants and children of unauthorised citizens. Dominicans in Moca 10 April attacked Haitian camp, forcing some 300 to flee.

- [“Elections loom: Haiti’s year of living dangerously”](#), AFP, 19 April 2015.

➡ **Mexico** Cartel-related violence increased in Jalisco state: fifteen state police officers killed 6 April when convoy attacked by members of Jalisco Cartel, New Generation; gunmen same day murdered municipal police chief in Zacoalco de Torres. Security forces 17 April captured José Tiburcio Hernández Fuentes, alias “El Gafe”, leader of Gulf Cartel in border city Reynosa; federal authorities same day announced arrest of Jesús Salas Aguayo, alias “El Chuyín”, leader of Jáarez Cartel in northern Chihuahua state. Investigative journalist report published 18 April alleged police killed 16 during Jan protest by former vigilantes demanding payment from govt for incorporation into Rural Police force in Apatzingán town, Michoacán state. Congress 21 April approved new National Anticorruption System, designed to give greater authority to investigative bodies against diversion of public funds; opposition criticised law for failing to assure new entity’s independence.

- [“15 Mexican police killed in gang ambush”](#), AFP, 7 April 2015.

➡ **Venezuela** On eve of 10-11 April Summit of the Americas, group of 25 former-Ibero-American heads of state, led by former Spanish PM Aznar, 9 April issued statement deploring deepening social, economic and political crisis in Venezuela, called for restoration of democracy, human rights and rule of law. Resolutions in similar vein from Chilean and Colombian senates mid-April; Brazilian President Rousseff critical of Maduro during 9 April interview. Spanish lawmakers 14 April called on Venezuela to release jailed opposition leaders. Maduro 10 April claimed some 13 million signatures collected in support of revocation of U.S. President Obama’s 9 March executive decree imposing sanctions on seven Venezuelan officials and declaring Venezuela “exceptional threat” to U.S. national security; rights groups allege many signatures obtained under duress. Criticism from opposition Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) intensified after National Electoral Council 15 April announced redistribution of parliamentary seats based on population estimates, effectively stripping seats from opposition-dominated districts.

- [“Latin American ex-leaders urge ‘free’ polls in Venezuela”](#), AFP, 9 April 2015.



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## Middle East & North Africa

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### Eastern Mediterranean

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➡ **Israel-Palestine** President Rivlin 20 April gave PM Netanyahu additional fourteen days to form new govt following 17 March elections; Netanyahu signed coalition deals with ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism and centre-right Kulanu late month. Israel and Palestinian Authority (PA) 18 April announced they had reached agreement on amount to be deducted from tax revenues which Israel had withheld. Amid tensions over tax revenue crisis, Israel took further measures to ease relations with W Bank; allowed Palestinian security forces to operate in three Jerusalem area towns and 14 April allowed Palestinian doctors' vehicles to enter Jerusalem for first time in fifteen years. Army 15 April announced arrest of 29 Hamas activists in major sweep around Nablus city in northern occupied W Bank; several dozen Hamas activists arrested since 1 April. PA ministers from Gaza and Ramallah met 19 April in attempt to resolve ongoing salary crisis. Several explosive devices set off by unidentified assailants in Gaza during month, including explosions reported in Gaza City 17-18 April near Palestinian cabinet HQ, UNRWA offices and Islamic University. Palestinian shot dead 8 April after stabbing two Israeli soldiers in W Bank. Israeli troops 24 April shot dead Palestinian after attempted stabbing of border police officer at E Jerusalem checkpoint. Protesters clashed with Israeli troops in northern occupied W Bank 17 April. Israeli forces 23 April struck Hamas sites near Beit Hanoun in northern Gaza after rocket was fired toward Israel, Israel said by non-Hamas militants. Amid Israeli discontent over 2 April P5+1 (EU3+3) agreement on Iran nuclear framework (see Iran), Israel reportedly "happy" with U.S. President Obama's 14 April agreement that U.S. Congress must review any nuclear deal with Iran.

- ["Despite victory, Israeli leader struggling to form coalition"](#), AP, 19 April 2015.

➡ **Lebanon** Clashes between Hizbollah and Syrian rebels continued along Lebanon-Syria border as parties reportedly preparing for offensive in Qalamoun mountain range: Hizbollah 3 April reportedly destroyed Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) base in area of Khachaat; rebels 12-13 April seized strategic hill near Flita village close to border. During raid in northern city Tripoli, police 9 April shot dead Islamist militants Osama Mansour and Ahmad Nazer, arrested extremist cleric Sheik Khaled Hoblos; Mansour believed to have links to Jabhat al-Nusra, had been sentenced to death in absentia over 2014 attacks in Tripoli. Hizbollah and Future Current continued renewed political dialogue despite public disagreements over Saudi Arabia's military campaign in Yemen. Following 2013 Saudi-funded arms deal, Army 20 April received first delivery of French weapons to help fight against terrorism. Army 7 April clashed with militants near eastern border village Ras Baalbek; three militants reported killed. Israeli Air Force 22 April reportedly raided Hizbollah weapons convoy along Syrian-Lebanese border.

- ["Lebanese factions battle to control Yemen narrative"](#), Al Jazeera, 18 April 2015.

➡ **Syria** Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) 1 April captured large areas of Yarmouk camp in southern Damascus in cooperation with al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (JN). Regime responded with military campaign against IS including aerial bombings



8 April; IS reportedly withdrew from much of camp by 14 April, leaving JN as main rebel force in Yarmouk. Rebels continued expansion in south Daraa province after late-March gains in Busra al-sham; Southern Front rebels 2 April captured Nasib border crossing at Syria-Jordan border. Tension erupted between rebel groups as JN attempted to establish presence at Nasib; Southern Front 15 April announced they will not co-operate militarily with JN, publicly disassociating themselves from group. Coalition of rebel forces consolidated control in Idlib province, NW Syria, after late-March capture of provincial capital; 25 April seized control of Jisr al-Shughour as campaign to capture remaining regime holdings in province continued. JN confirmed death of local commander in Marea, in 7 April car bombing in N Aleppo, reportedly attributed to IS. Local media 10 April reported IS holding 50 civilian hostages following 31 March raid on Mabujeh village, Hama province. Clashes in Qalamoun region ongoing; 30 rebels and twelve IS fighters reported killed 21-22 April. Rebels including JN attacked govt intelligence centre in Aleppo 13-14 April; thirteen militants reported killed, twenty regime forces killed/wounded. Deadly regime shelling continued including 16, 22 April strikes in areas around Damascus. 6 April Russia-facilitated talks between Syrian govt representatives and low-profile opposition figures ended without notable result. Israel reportedly carried out raids in Qalamoun, including on Hizbollah arms convoy 22 April (see Lebanon), missile depot 23 April.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“Statement on a Syrian Policy Framework”](#), 27 April 2015.
- [“Syrian insurgents expose weak regime”](#), *Daily Star*, 30 April 2015.
- [“Ban: Yarmouk the deepest circle of hell”](#), *Daily Star*, 10 April 2015.

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## Gulf

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➡ **Bahrain** Renewed Shiite protests ahead of 19 April Formula 1 race: hundreds marched in Shiite village Duraz. Court 5 April adjourned case of rights activist Nabeel Rajab, appealing six-month jail sentence for insulting govt, after he was arrested again 2 April following comments on treatment of inmates at Jaw prison; Rajab charged 26 April with “disseminating false news in time of war” and “openly discrediting a statutory authority”. Interior Ministry 27 April announced 28 suspected terrorists arrested.

- [“Decision postponed in closely watched rights case”](#), AP, 5 April 2015.

⬆ **Iran** Iran and P5+1 (EU3+3) 2 April announced initial agreement on key parameters of “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action” on Iran’s nuclear enrichment. Iran and IAEA 15 April met to resume cooperation. Parties reconvened 22-25 April to discuss technical details and implementation plan, talks continued 27 April on sidelines of Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference. If implemented, Plan of Action parameters will reduce enrichment capacity by two thirds, reduce stockpile of enriched material by 97% for ten years, lengthening breakout time from two-three months to twelve months. Will also limit research and development to laboratory scale for ten to fifteen years, modify Arak heavy-water reactor to eliminate weapons-usable plutonium, establish safeguards and rigorous inspections and provide phased sanctions relief. Suspicions in Tehran about U.S. President Obama’s ability to deliver on final agreement exacerbated by U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee’s 14 April approval of bill requiring Obama to submit any deal for Congress vote. Charges against U.S. journalist

Jason Rezaian, detained July 2014, made public 20 April: Rezaian charged with espionage, “propaganda against the establishment” and “collaborating with hostile govts”. Marshall Islands ship seized 28 April, reportedly in connection with court case involving unresolved cargo claim.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“Open Letter to Iran’s and the P5+1/EU3 +3’s Nuclear Negotiators”](#), 2 April 2015.
- Ali Vaez, [“A Good Deal: How Both Sides Can Sell Iran Nuclear Agreement Back Home”](#), Reuters, 3 April 2015.
- Ali Vaez, [“Iran: Deal or no deal”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 9 April 2015.
- [“Kerry, Zarif meet at Iranian envoy’s residence”](#), Al-Monitor, 27 April 2015.

➡ **Iraq** Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) militants early April reportedly retreated from Tikrit, under IS control since June 2014, after three-week siege by Shiite militias operating under “popular mobilisation forces” umbrella. Militias together with Iraqi govt units took over city under cover of U.S. airstrikes. Following victory PM Abadi made first visit to Washington, secured almost \$200mn humanitarian assistance support, refrained from explicitly requesting increased U.S. military assistance, discussed Iraq’s budget crisis with World Bank and IMF. Reports emerged mid-April suggesting IS leader al-Baghdadi seriously wounded in airstrikes mid-March. In western Iraq, govt forces early April withdrew from eastern Ramadi, govt’s only remaining foothold in Anbar province, paving way for IS advance; 90,000 displaced. Police official 27 April said some 30 police killed mid-April in clashes between local security forces and IS in Ramadi. IS 16 April seized parts of Iraq’s biggest oil refinery in Baiji city. Amid rise in intra-Kurdish rivalries and external interference in Kurdish affairs, Kurdistan Democratic Party working to secure allegiance of Ninewa province officials, minorities and tribes; KDP security forces 5 April arrested Yazidi leader Haider Shasho, who allied with KDP rival People’s Protection Units (YPG). IS claimed 18 April bombing outside U.S. consulate in Erbil; five arrested.

- [“Bloody battle for Iraq develops into war on two fronts”](#), *Telegraph*, 18 April 2015.

⬇ **Yemen** Saudi Arabia 21 April announced end to five-week air campaign against Huthis and security forces aligned with former President Saleh. Both Saudi and Huthi actions suggest preparing for long fight: Huthi leader, Abdulmalik al-Huthi 19 April refused to surrender; Saudi-led air attacks ongoing, intensifying in southern and western provinces, bombed Sanaa airport late-month. Naval and air blockade to stop Huthis from resupplying still in place, preventing food, medical supplies and other products entering country; Huthis preventing aid convoys from entering Aden. ICRC said humanitarian situation catastrophic; UNOCHA estimated over 300,000 displaced. UNSC 14 April imposed arms embargo on Huthis and allied military units. Iranian-dispatched ships reportedly bound for Yemen turned around 23 April; U.S. dispatched two additional warships to Yemeni waters, reportedly to deter arms shipments to Huthis. UNSC Ban 25 April appointed Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed as Yemen special envoy to replace Jamal Benomar, who left post amid criticisms from Gulf countries. Al-Qaeda 3 April captured govt buildings, freed prisoners and looted central bank in Al-Mukalla, Hadramout.

- April Longley Alley, [“Nobody Will Win the War in Yemen”](#), Al Jazeera, 8 April 2015.

- [“Affiliate of Al Qaeda seizes major Yemeni city, driving out the military”](#), *New York Times*, 3 April 2015.
- For latest briefing, see Middle East Briefing N°45, *Yemen at War*, 27 March 2015.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** Regime 21 April declared end to Yemen airstrikes (see Yemen); said new phase to begin focused on rebuilding and preventing Huthi operational movements. Interior Ministry 28 April said 93 suspected Islamic State operatives arrested. King Salman 29 April appointed Interior Minister Prince Mohammed bin Nayef as Crown Prince and Defence Minister Prince Mohammed bin Salman as deputy crown prince.

- [“For Saudi Arabia, struggles in Yemen have deep roots”](#), *Washington Post*, 5 April 2015.

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## North Africa

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➡ **Algeria** Opposition parties continued to call for “democratic transition”, dismissed talk of constitutional changes as unnecessary distraction. In response, main governing coalition parties National Liberation Front (FLN) and National Democracy Rally (RND) accused opposition of seeking to “rehabilitate terrorists”, said opposition lacks grassroots support. PM Sellal 9 April visited Ouargla, centre of protests against shale gas prospecting in south, amid accusations police had silenced local activists. Defence Ministry 6 April said some 500 illegal migrants intercepted in Tamanrasset province; 14 April said weapons cache discovered near border with Libya; 28 April said five militants killed in Tizi Ouzou region.

- [“The Algeria alternative”](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 15 April 2015.

➡ **Egypt** Crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood (MB) continued: court 11 April confirmed death sentences for MB leader Mohammed Badie and thirteen others accused of plotting unrest. Ousted President Morsi sentenced to twenty years’ prison for ordering arrest and torture of protesters; fourteen other MB figures also sentenced, most to twenty-years. Court 20 April sentenced 22 MB supporters to death for Aug 2013 attack on police station; 19 April sentenced eleven football fans to death for role in 2012 Port Said stadium riot that left 74 dead. MB in exile head Ahmed Abdul-Rahman 23 April announced MB undergoing review, admitted past mistakes. Committee established to review new electoral laws in light of March Supreme Court ruling that draft law was unconstitutional 28 April approved new electoral laws omitting changes demanded by many political parties; President Sisi said elections will not take place until after Ramadan June–July. U.S. 1 April lifted weapons export ban on Egypt, imposed when military seized power in July 2013. Attacks in Sinai continued: fifteen soldiers and two civilians killed in gun attack 2 April near Sheikh Zuweid town; at least eleven civilians and two police officers killed 8–9 April; at least twelve killed 12 April in separate attacks on police station, checkpoint and highway in N Sinai. Three military academy students killed by roadside bomb in Kafr el-Sheikh 15 April.

- [“Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood says new younger leaders taking over”](#), Reuters, 21 April 2015.

➡ **Libya** Fourth round of political dialogue held mid-April in Algeria and Morocco; agreement to end current institutional crisis remains distant. UNSMIL chief Bernardi-

no León 27 April unveiled proposed draft agreement but supporters of both Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) and Tripoli-based General National Congress (GNC) expressed criticism. HoR supporters do not accept proposal that HoR be reduced to purely legislative body with new unity govt taking over executive powers, including appointment of army chief of staff; also question creation of new presidential council composed of some former GNC members. Pro-GNC faction resent proposed deal's full recognition of HoR authority and extension of its timeline. Military confrontations continued: over twenty killed in Tripoli 17-18 April in clashes between armed groups affiliated with opposing military factions Tripoli-Misratan Libyan Dawn Coalition and Tobruk-affiliated Libyan National Army (LNA). Heavy fighting resumed in Benghazi mid-month. Islamic State video 19 April showed alleged killing of some 28 Coptic Christians in Sirt and east Libya. Same day some 900 migrants died at sea leaving Libya for Europe; EU said will launch military operations against smuggling networks in Libya; both pro-GNC and pro-HoR representatives said they would not cooperate with any unilateral EU action against trafficking sites; UNSG Ban criticised EU proposal to destroy traffickers' boats.

- Jean-Marie Guéhenno and Issandr El Amrani, ["The Only Cure for Libya Is Diplomacy. Military Restraint and Patience"](#), Al Arabiya, 10 April 2015.
- Issandr el Amrani and Claudia Gazzini, ["Libyans Don't Need More Weapons"](#), Al Jazeera 22 April 2015.
- ["As Libya crumbles, calls grow for feuding factions to meet half way"](#), *New York Times*, 13 April 2015.

➡ **Mauritania** Court 21 April sentenced suspected al-Qaeda leader Younis al-Mauritani to twenty years' prison for terrorist activities.

- ["Mauritania jails senior Qaeda figure"](#), AFP, 22 April 2015.

➡ **Morocco** Authorities 13 April reported militant cell near northern city Nador loyal to Islamic State and planning attacks in Morocco and Netherlands dismantled.

- ["Morocco says breaks up Islamic State cell with Dutch ties"](#), Reuters, 13 April 2015.

➡ **Tunisia** Attention on counter-terrorism continued in wake of 18 March Bardo Museum bombing. Religious affairs ministry increased efforts to bring mosques under its control, dismissed imams seen as overly political, reappointed imams from former President Ben Ali era. Civil society, Tunisian journalists' trade union and Human Rights Watch warned anti-terrorism bill approved by cabinet late-March and bill on repression of aggression against armed forces, aimed at improving efficiency of security forces in fighting terrorism, could provide impunity for security forces, endanger human rights and freedom of speech. Four soldiers killed in militant attack on patrol in Sbeitia, NW; authorities 24 April said ten militants and two soldiers killed in clashes in central Kasserine region.

- ["Draft security law raises concerns about rights in new Tunisia"](#), Reuters, 20 April 2015.

➡ **Western Sahara** UNSC 29 April renewed MINURSO peacekeeping mission mandate for another year.

- ["UN renews Western Sahara force without changes Africans wanted"](#), Reuters, 29 April 2015.