

CrisisWatch

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

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Afghanistan](#), [Burundi](#), [Colombia](#), [Korean Peninsula](#), [Macedonia](#), [Pakistan](#),
[South China Sea](#), [South Sudan](#), [Tajikistan](#), [Yemen](#)

↑ Improved situations

[Cyprus](#), [Philippines](#)

June 2015 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Afghanistan](#), [Burundi](#)

☰ Conflict resolution opportunities

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

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

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Africa

Central Africa

↓ 🇸🇰 **Burundi** Protests against President Nkurunziza's run for third term continued amid deepening repression and insecurity. Seventeen officers arrested 14 May following failed coup attempt led by former army Major General Godefroid Niyombare, who fled country. Civil society-led protests continued as violence intensified: some 30 killed, 600 arrested in police crackdown; three killed 22 May in grenade attack on Bujumbura market. Amid increasing antagonism within security forces, soldier reportedly shot by police 20 May. Dialogue between protesters and govt began 23 May, opposition leader Zedi Feruzi shot, killed same day; opposition accused police, 25 May suspended dialogue for three days, 27 May said free, fair elections "impossible". Govt reshuffle 18 May replaced three ministers, violating power-sharing agreement between military old guard and ruling CNDD-FDD. EU and Belgium 11 May halted election aid; Belgium 21 May threatened to halt all govt-to-govt aid if Nkurunziza runs. Govt 26 May asked Burundians for donations to fund elections; EU 28 May suspended its election monitoring mission, withdrew poll observers amid security concerns. East African Community (EAC) 31 May held summit on Burundi, called for postponement of elections, political dialogue about Nkurunziza's candidacy. Nkurunziza 20 May signed decree postponing municipal elections until 5 June, presidential polls to go ahead 26 June.

- Thierry Vircoulon, "[Burundi's Crisis Not over Yet](#)", In Pursuit of Peace, 15 May 2015.
- Thierry Vircoulon, "[Burundi's Coup from Within](#)", In Pursuit of Peace, 13 May 2015.
- "[L'opposition suspend le dialogue après le meurtre d'un de ses leaders](#)", AFP, 24 May 2015.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°111, [Burundi: Peace Sacrificed?](#), 29 May 2015. All is in place for a violent confrontation in Burundi. The failed coup on 13 May has intensified opposition to President Pierre Nkurunziza's push for a third term in office. After ten years of peace, Burundi is in danger of reopening the fault lines that once led the country into civil war.

➡ **Cameroon** Deadly attacks by Boko Haram (BH) in Far North continued: nineteen civilians killed, 76 houses burnt 6 May; two soldiers killed, two wounded 9 May; truck driver killed 10 May. President Biya 12 May dismissed Colonel Owona amid reports he embezzled, mismanaged army donations. Increased insecurity in Adamawa, North and East regions: abductions and attacks by CAR assailants and armed bandits continued. Hundreds of Anglophone barristers 9 May called for separation of judicial systems and special legal system for Anglophone provinces.

- "[Revendications sur le fédéralisme, les avocats Anglophones secouent le pays et menacent l'Etat unitaire](#)", Koaci, 22 May 2015.

➡ **Central African Republic** Participants at Bangui Forum 10 May signed agreement recommending postponement of elections, extension of interim govt mandate. Ten armed groups signed agreement to disarm and demobilise, rejected by former President Djotodia's Seleka faction and Abdulaye Miskine's Democratic Front of the Central African Republic People (FDPC) rebel group. Hundreds of protesters, anti-

balaka and Seleka members 11-12 May opposed forum's outcome, proposed election delay. French prosecutor 7 May opened investigation into alleged abuses by French peacekeepers; justice minister 18 May said ministry not informed of investigation details, said Bangui will open separate inquiry. Leaders of ten armed groups 14 May released over 350 children as part of agreement to end use of child soldiers, facilitated by UNICEF and signed at Bangui Forum. President Samba Panza 27-28 May visited Brussels and Paris to raise funds for elections, ask for stronger humanitarian response to crisis and support for DDR program.

- Crisis Group Statement, "[Le forum de Bangui: ne pas répéter les erreurs du passé](#)", 4 May 2015.
- "[Clashes disrupt Central African Republic peace forum](#)", Reuters, 11 May 2015.

➔ **Chad** Court 20 May sentenced eight policemen to six months' prison for violent assault on protesters late April that left four dead. Parliament 21 May voted to stay engaged in regional fight against Boko Haram (BH). BH 27 May attacked army on Choua island, Lake Chad; four soldiers, 33 BH members reported killed.

- "[Buhari, Deby vow to tackle common challenges](#)", Daily Trust, 11 May 2015.

➔ **DR Congo** Attacks attributed to Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in north Beni intensified following confirmation of ADF leader Mukulu's arrest by Tanzania 29 April: two Tanzanian peacekeepers killed in 5 May ambush; some 23 reported killed near Beni 10 May; nineteen ADF fighters, four soldiers killed in clashes 12 May. Dozens reportedly killed in renewed clashes between Bantu and pygmies in south east 30 April-4 May. MONUSCO deputy chief 19 May called for FARDC and MONUSCO cooperation against ADF; cooperation remains dependent on dialogue between govt and MONUSCO. President Kabila's 13 May initiative for political dialogue rejected 18 May by several opposition parties.

- "[Peacekeepers in DRC want army's 'full cooperation'](#)", Voice of America, 7 May 2015.

New Crisis Group Africa Report N°225, [Congo: Is Democratic Change Possible?](#), 5 May 2015. With the 2016 presidential elections approaching, tension in the Democratic Republic of Congo is increasing. President Kabila is nearing the end of his second term and political manoeuvring within the government to create conditions for a third term is mobilising popular opposition, testing the country's fragile democratisation and stability. International pressure is now vital to find a peaceful way forward.

➔ **Rwanda** Govt condemned Burundi unrest and tightened border security amid concerns over intensifying refugee crisis; President Kagame 8 May urged President Nkurunziza to step down. Growing support for Kagame's possible run for third term: parliament 27 May said it will debate amending constitution accordingly in coming months, following petitions signed by some 2mn citizens.

- "[Kagame appelle Nkurunziza à prendre ses responsabilités](#)", APA, 8 May 2015.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Ethiopia** Parliamentary elections held 24 May, results expected 22 June but preliminary results late May indicate landslide victory for ruling Ethiopian People's Revolu-

lutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) and allied groups. Opposition Blue Party rejected results and elections process. AU mission said elections calm and credible; opposition groups accused govt of harassment, illegal detentions ahead of polls.

- [“Ethiopian election marred by harassment claims”](#), *Guardian*, 24 May 2015.

➔ **Kenya** Upsurge of communal violence in north: clashes on border between Baringo and Turkana counties 4 May left 67 dead; same day armed Samburu attacked Turkana village in Loiyangalani, killing two and injuring fifteen, seized large number of livestock; Turkana reprisal attack 5 May killed at least six. Al-Shabaab attacks across NE and along coast continued: Al-Shabaab militants in Lamu county 5 May attacked National Youth Service team and accompanying soldiers constructing new Kenya-Somalia border security fence; twenty suspected Al-Shabaab gunmen 13 May attacked police post near Dadaab, Garissa county; militants 19 May raided two mosques in Tumtish and Kabasalo villages in Ijara, Garissa county. Al-Shabaab 21 May seized Yumbis village for several hours; police 26 May clashed with Al-Shabaab in Yumbis, one policeman killed, four injured. U.S. Sec State Kerry and UNHCR chief António Guterres visited early May, Kerry pledged extra \$45mn to UNHCR to assist voluntary refugee settlement.

- [“Kenyan mosque in Garissa briefly taken by al-Shabab”](#), BBC, 21 May 2015.

➔ **Somalia** Al-Shabaab attacks continued: militants 24 May captured major town Janaale in Lower Shabelle 24 May after Somali forces vacated positions; 15 May briefly captured Awdegle and Mubarak towns in Lower Shabelle; killed local govt official 6 May in Mogadishu. Interim S-W State President Sharif Hassan 18 May survived assassination when convoy hit landmine in Lower Shabelle; Interim Jubaland Administration and AMISOM forces also targeted by landmines in Lower Juba. Attacks reported 4, 5 and 8 May around Bossasso, Puntland. 21 of 66 Puntland parliamentarians 11 May filed motion of no confidence against Puntland govt. Consultative meeting between Somalia Federal Government (SFG) and interim federal states held 1 May, resulted in plan to integrate govt-controlled militias and regional forces into national army. Cabinet 9 May endorsed members of Independent Electoral Commission, Boundaries and Federation Commission, and Judicial Service Commission. At least 35 reportedly killed late May in clashes near Ethiopia border between clan militia and Ethiopian paramilitary unit.

- [“Al-Shabaab takes control of strategic town in southern Somalia”](#), Xinhua, 26 May 2015.

➔ **Somaliland** Unelected upper house of parliament, the *Guurti*, 11 May announced further postponement of presidential and parliamentary elections to April 2017. Opposition UCID and Wadani parties opposed decision; hundreds of Wadani supporters protested in Bur’o, Hargeysa and Berbera, some 30 Wadani party officials arrested. International donors expressed “deep concerns”. Internal dialogue between govt and opposition parties concluded 27 May, parties agreed to hold elections Dec 2016.

- Cedric Barnes and Claire Elder, [“Somaliland’s Guurti Sparks a Crisis”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 21 May 2015.

- [“UN envoy expressed deep concern at postponement of Somaliland elections”](#), Horseed Media, 13 May 2013.

✚ **South Sudan** Clashes increased dramatically: govt forces during May advanced throughout Upper Nile state, and from Benitu through southern Unity state taking several towns including Leer, SPLM-IO leader Riek Machar's hometown; reports of atrocities, looting. Humanitarian groups evacuated staff from parts of Unity and Upper Nile states amid offensive. Negotiations between SPLA leadership and semi-autonomous Shilluk group within the SPLA commanded by General Johnson Olony failed 15 May. Olony's troops 16 May fought alongside SPLA-IO to recapture Malakal town and surrounding area from govt control; govt recaptured Malakal 24 May, fighting continues. Combined SPLM-IO/Olony forces advanced on govt-controlled Paloch oil fields in Upper Nile state, called on foreign oil personnel to vacate installation, many Chinese workers evacuated. IGAD peace process remained stalled. Kenya late May launched initiative to formally link IGAD process with the SPLM reunification process following SPLM-IO boycott of 7-9 May meeting in South Africa. UNSC 28 May extended UNMISS peacekeeping mandate to 30 Nov 2015. UN humanitarian coordinator Toby Lanzer late May said country on brink of economic collapse.

- ["South Sudan close to economic collapse as famine fears resurface"](#), *Guardian*, 22 May 2015.

➡ **Sudan** National Dialogue Committee comprising govt and govt-allied parties and "7+7" opposition groups met 10 May. Military offensive against SPLM-N in Blue Nile continued: UN resident coordinator Geert Cappelaere 27 May expressed concerns about significant civilian displacement including forced relocations, said humanitarian needs rapidly rising. President Bashir, Defence Minister Abdel Rahim Mohammed Hussein and intelligence service director Mohamed Atta travelled to al-Nakhara, S Darfur, following late-April defeat of JEM rebels in area; at least 30 reported killed, over 70 injured in renewed clashes mid-May between Rizeigat and Ma'aliya tribes in Abu Karinka, East Darfur; govt said UNAMID peacekeeping mission exit plans not affected since mandate does not include resolution of tribal conflicts.

- ["Dozens killed in tribal clashes in Sudan's east Darfur"](#), *Al Arabiya*, 12 May 2015.
- For latest briefing, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°110, [The Chaos in Darfur](#), 22 April 2015.

➡ **Uganda** Ruling National Resistance Movement member registration exercise began early May; complaints registration manipulated in favour of certain NRM candidates. Prominent Muslim cleric killed 21 May in Mbale.

- ["Uganda opposition wants electoral reforms"](#), *VOA*, 31 May 2015.

Southern Africa

➡ **Angola** Govt early-May launched investigation into 16 April police raid on "Seventh Day Light of the World Church" in central Humabo province, following opposition accusations police killed some 1,080 during operation; police reported thirteen civilians, nine police killed. UNHCHR 12 May urged govt ensure "meaningful, independent" investigation; govt 16 May demanded apology.

- ["Angola in Focus: The Mount Sumi massacre – an atrocity that will come to define the new country"](#), *Daily Maverick*, 27 May 2015.

➔ **Madagascar** Parliament 26 May voted to dismiss President Rajaonarimampianina for alleged constitutional violations and incompetence following growing discontent among parliamentarians, with opposition accusing president of constitutional violations, including his threat to dissolve National Assembly. Constitutional Court set to rule on validity of dismissal of president. President 2 May announced former President Ravalomanana freed from house arrest. Armada opposition alliance and parties allied to former coup leader Andry Rajoelina 10 May raised motion in parliament to replace Independent National Electoral Commission of the Transition, arguing it should have been replaced after transition period ended. Rajoelina mid-May threatened to boycott 31 July municipal elections over disagreements on electoral preparations.

- [“Parliament dismisses ‘incompetent’ Madagascar president”](#), Al Jazeera, 27 May 2015.

➔ **Mozambique** Opposition Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama 23 May issued ultimatum to President Nyusi, giving him 35 days to reverse 30 April parliamentary vote against autonomous provinces proposal or Renamo would take provinces “by force”. Mandate of international observation mission tasked with overseeing demobilisation of residual Renamo forces (EMOCHM) ended 16 May; mediators 12 May said Renamo-govt disarmament talks failed.

- [“Dhlakama extends demands over provincial municipalities to the whole of Mozambique”](#), Lusa, 29 May 2015.

➔ **Zimbabwe** Seven former high-ranking ZANU-PF party members expelled 22 May amid continued purges within ruling party; thirteen others suspected of plotting to assassinate President Mugabe and replace him with former VP Joice Mujuru suspended. 87 members suspended from holding leadership position within party for two years 28 May, over accusation of plotting to overthrow Mugabe. Tensions high ahead of 10 June by-elections: voter intimidation and violence reported in Hurunge West including reports citizens being warned an “unsatisfactory vote” will result in food aid and agricultural inputs being withheld.

- [“Seven sacked, 13 suspended in Zimbabwe ruling party purge”](#), AFP, 22 May 2015.

West Africa

➔ **Burkina Faso** Constitutional Court 7 May rejected challenge lodged by former ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) against new electoral code banning affiliates of former President Compaoré from contesting Oct 2015 presidential elections, said document not signed by MPs with proper authority to submit challenge. CDP said it would submit appeal to ECOWAS court of justice. At CDP congress 9-10 May, Eddie Komboïgo, former Compaoré associate, named party president. Mariam Sankara, widow of former President Thomas Sankara, heard 18 May by military court inquiry into husband’s assassination; authorities 26 May finished exhuming remains of Sankara and twelve colleagues killed in 1987 coup. Govt and civil society, security and defence force representatives 9 May signed “republican pact of citizenship” to foster trust between population and armed forces.

- [“Le conseil constitutionnel déclare irrecevable la requête du CPD contre le nouveau code électoral”](#), Koaci.com, 7 May 2015.

➔ **Côte d'Ivoire** Anti-President Ouattara parties 15 May signed charter creating National Coalition for Change (CNC) umbrella group. Tensions within opposition Ivoirian Patriotic Front (FPI) persisted between “moderate” wing led by Pascal Affi N'Guessan, and dissident faction led by Aboudramane Sangaré. Fourth FPI extraordinary party congress held 22 May, N'Guessan named as FPI presidential candidate. Three members of Sangaré faction arrested 4 May following dissident faction's 30 April extraordinary congress, based on late-April court ruling banning faction supporting former President Gbagbo from gathering under FPI name. ICC 8 May said Gbagbo and Charles Blé Goudé joint trial set to begin Nov.

- [“Création d'une coalition contre Alassane Ouattara”](#), RFI, 16 May 2015.

➔ **Guinea** Anti-govt demonstrations continued: dozens wounded and arrested, one protester killed 7 May. Political dialogue slow to resume: opposition maintained conditions authorities refused to accept including suspension of electoral commission's operations and withdrawal of electoral schedule. President Condé and opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo met 20 May; after meeting Diallo expressed disappointment over lack of progress on electoral preparations. At Condé's request, Justice Minister Cheik Sacko 26 May called on ruling party and opposition to open dialogue, proposed narrow agenda, with possibility to broaden it. Ex-junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara 5 May announced candidacy in next presidential election with Patriotic Forces for Democracy and Development party.

- [“Rencontre apaisée pour Alpha Condé. Cellou Dalein Diallo se dit déçu”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 21 May 2015.

➔ **Guinea-Bissau** Re-election 10 May of controversial figure Braima Camara, key advisor to President Vaz, to Chamber of Commerce presidency sparked small but violent protests; govt 14 May dismissed heads of National Guard and public order police, known for ties to former chief of staff Antonio Injai, possibly over handling of protests. Judiciary 20 May cancelled Camara's re-election following accusations by opponents he was involved in embezzlement, rumours of corruption.

- [“Governo substitui chefias da polícia e da Guarda Nacional”](#), Agencia Angola Press, 15 May 2015.

➔ **Mali** Armed Tuareg coalition Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) 14 May initialled peace accord in Algiers following international pressure, but continues to refuse to sign comprehensive final agreement before key points concerning group's political and security demands are renegotiated. CMA refused to attend official signing ceremony of accord document 15 May in Bamako; govt, pro-govt armed groups and international mediation 15 May attended. Govt and CMA 30 May met in Algiers for new round of negotiations on peace agreement. Fighting intensified in north: CMA 3 May launched assault on Dire, briefly took control of military camp before Malian Armed Forces (FAMA) intervention forced rebel retreat; CMA 11 May ambushed FAMA convoy near Timbuktu, killing over nine soldiers, wounding dozens. CMA and pro-govt armed group Gatia clashed 13 and 17 May around Ménaka. Attacks on peacekeepers continued: security forces 25 May reported one MINUSMA peacekeeper killed in Bamako; three peacekeepers wounded 28 May by car bomb in Timbuktu.

- [“Violences au nord du Mali malgré la signature d'un accord de paix”](#), RFI, 24 May 2015.

New Crisis Group Africa Report N°226, [Mali: An Imposed Peace?](#), 22 May 2015. Fighting recently resumed in Mali, while a peace accord remains a façade. Both sides, with help from international mediators, need to reopen negotiations. They must go beyond prioritising security to include all belligerents and improve access to basic social services, jobs and justice.

➡ **Niger** 25,000 civilians forced to flee Lake Chad region early May after govt 30 April announced regional sweep operation to neutralise remaining Boko Haram (BH) elements in area and issued 72-hour ultimatum for civilian evacuation. BH 5-6 May ransacked Kouwodou and Kilbouwa villages, five civilians reportedly killed. Minister of security 28 May said some 643 people linked to BH insurgents arrested Feb-May. Representatives from Mauritania, Niger, Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso 11-15 May gathered in Niamey to discuss migration to Europe, Islamist activity in Sahel, 14 May declared willingness to strengthen regional cooperation and intelligence-sharing on Islamist groups in region. Govt 11 May adopted illegal immigration bill to tackle human traffickers operating from Agadez.

- ["Face à Boko Haram, le Niger évacue les îles sur le Lac Tchad"](#), RFI, 2 May 2015.

➡ **Nigeria** Presidential handover effected smoothly 29 May. Fight against Boko Haram (BH) continued: military authorities 17 May reported ten BH camps destroyed in Sambisa forest 16 May, unconfirmed number of insurgents died. Continued BH attacks included: some 55 killed in raids on Bale and Kayamla villages near Borno state capital Maiduguri 13 May; security forces same day repelled attack on Maiduguri, majority of 60 killed were reportedly insurgents; eight residents of Gur village, Borno state killed in 14 May attack; Gubio town attacked 23 May, 43 residents killed; army repelled BH attack 29-30 May on Maiduguri, some 26 killed. Borno state deputy Governor Mustapha Zannah 15 May reported insurgents seized Marte town near Lake Chad. Seven killed in suicide attack 16 May on bus station in Yobe state capital Damaturu; nine reportedly killed in 30 May suicide attack on mosque in Maiduguri. Communal violence continued in Plateau state including at least six attacks by cattle herders 25 April-11 May on villages in Riyom and Barkin Ladi Local Govt Areas, some 70 killed. Tensions in Niger Delta simmered: President Buhari 29 May announced Niger Delta militants amnesty program will end in Dec, after several groups including National Coalition of Niger Delta Ex-Agitators 15 May warned that calls for new govt to scrap program could trigger violence.

- ["Nigeria's President Buhari promises change at inauguration"](#), BBC, 29 May 2015.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China (internal)** Six reported dead and four injured in two suicide bombing attacks in Hotan and Lop early month; police claimed attackers were ethnic Uighurs, detained more than 200 people including relatives of suspected attackers. State media 25 May reported crackdown on 181 “terror gangs” in Xinjiang. Authorities in Ili prefecture ordered all residents to hand over passports by 15 May amid widening security clamp-down. Police reportedly shot dead two Uighur men who attacked police station in Hotan prefecture late month.

- [“China hails crackdown on terror in Xinjiang”](#), BBC, 27 May 2015.

➔ **China/Japan** Japanese cabinet 14 May approved defence bills that would allow military forces to participate in collective self-defence; PM Abe vowed to limit Japan’s use of force. China President Xi 9 May met Abe in Indonesia. China 15 May opposed Japan’s proposal to insert language commemorating Hiroshima and Nagasaki in UN NPT Review Conference, insisting it will allow Japan to portray itself as WWII victim rather than aggressor. Japanese Defence Minister Gen Nakatani 30 May said Japan continues to have “deep remorse” for actions in WWII that “brought suffering to the peoples in Asian countries”, a position he said Abe administration upholds. Amid increasing tensions in South China Sea, Japan issued joint statement with U.S. and Australia expressing concern over Chinese land reclamation activities in disputed areas (see South China Sea).

- [“Japan is about to pass a bill that would allow its military to fight abroad for the first time since World War II”](#), Reuters, 14 May 2015.

⚠ **Korean Peninsula** DPRK 8 May conducted submarine-launched ballistic missile ejection test, triggering alarm in Seoul, and conducted live-fire artillery exercises around NLL mid-May; evidence of expansion of Pyongyang’s satellite launch facilities also prompted concern, with DPRK media reporting that Kim Jong-un visited new satellite command and control centre close to his Pyongyang residence. ROK intelligence service reported late April purge and execution of KPA General Hyŏn Yŏng-ch’ŏl. KPA claimed seventeen ROK Navy patrol boats crossed into DPRK territorial waters on DPRK-claimed northern side of Military Demarcation Line Extended 1-7 May; KPA warned it would fire at ROK patrol boats if they were to enter “DPRK territorial waters”. U.S., ROK and Japan 27 May discussed how to raise pressure on DPRK to halt nuclear program. ROK Navy 19 May conducted live-fire missile exercise in Sea of Japan; together with coast guard conducted two-day defence drill around Tok-to/Takeshima Islets. ROK military 26 May said DPRK is building artillery positions near inter-Korean sea border. DPRK 20 May said it is able to miniaturise nuclear weapons, a key step toward building nuclear missiles.

- [“What lies behind North Korea’s nuclear claims”](#), BBC, 20 May 2015.

South Asia

↓ 🇦🇫 **Afghanistan** Tens of thousands fled fighting outside northern provincial capital Kunduz early month amid deteriorating security situation, as govt 7 May launched major counteroffensive against Taliban's *Azm* offensive, which was launched late April and quickly advanced on outskirts of Kunduz, routing several hundred Afghan security personnel in three districts. Situation in Kunduz stabilised end-May, but further unrest expected after planned withdrawal of two battalions of Afghan soldiers deployed to counteroffensive. More than two dozen security forces killed in Taliban attacks in Helmand, Paktika and Wardak 25-26 May. Govt organised militias to bolster security in Kunduz and other provinces, raising concerns about irregular/semi-regular forces. Govt worried about risks of district centres falling to insurgency in Kunduz, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Ghor, Badghis, Uruzgan and Helmand provinces, reflecting broad geographic spread and unprecedented intensity of fighting. Insurgents reportedly aided by foreign fighters, including Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). First deputy chief executive Mohammed Khan 3 May warned Lieutenant-General Carsten Jacobson, commander of NATO's Resolute Support mission, that insecurity in north would spread if not contained with active support of international forces. Ministry of Interior 12 May said security forces had regained control of Jawand district of Badghis province, which fell to Taliban 10 May, but many parts of province remain contested. Delegation of Taliban leaders met with govt representatives for informal talks, hosted by Pughwash, 2-3 May in Qatar; participants expressed desire for political solution to conflict, agreed on shared opposition to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), Taliban reiterated demand for complete withdrawal of international forces. Meeting condemned by Afghan leaders concerned that peace talks would mean surrender; criticism of negotiations intensified after Afghan and Pakistani govts 18 May announced as yet informal intelligence cooperation agreement. NATO 13 May said it will maintain presence in Afghanistan even after current training mission ends late 2016, to "advise and instruct". Five killed in Taliban attack on Kabul hotel 14 May. Kidnappers 11 May released nineteen of 31 passengers seized in southern Zabul province in Feb, in apparent prisoner swap for Uzbek militants held by Afghan govt.

- ["Season of bloodshed"](#), *Economist*, 28 May 2015.

➡ **Bangladesh** Opposition BNP leader Zia and 37 other BNP leaders charged 7 May with murder and arson for 23 Jan attack on bus in which one person died and 27 injured; first time that Zia has been charged in criminal (rather than corruption) case. Among those charged is BNP joint Secretary Salahuddin Ahmed, who went missing two months ago and reappeared 10 May in India. Masked men attacked and killed secular blogger and editor Ananta Bijoy Das 12 May, third blogger to be hacked to death in 2015. Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) 3 May issued video claiming responsibility for Avijit Roy's murder, killed in Dhaka 26 Feb. Controversial International Crimes Tribunal 20 May sentenced to life imprisonment Muslim League members Mahidur Rahman and Afsar Hossain Chutu for crimes committed during 1971 independence war. Indian parliament 7 May unanimously ratified 1974 Land Boundary Agreement; agreement, hailed by both PM Sheikh Hasina's govt and BNP opposition as historic, paves way for exchange of land on each other's territory, potentially affect-

ing 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India and 100 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh, home to more than 50,000 people.

- [“Bangladesh probes group suspected in blogger’s death for ties with al-Qaeda”](#), *Washington Post*, 4 May 2015.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Maoists 8 May kidnapped at least 250 villagers in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh state to stop construction of bridge; one hostage killed, others released next day. Abduction took place day before PM Modi’s visit to state’s insurgency-affected Bastar region during which he launched two major infrastructure projects to promote development. Maoists launched two-day shutdown in Bihar and Jharkhand 25 May to protest 17 May killing by joint security forces/police operation of female Maoist leader and security forces operation against Maoists. Several civilians and security forces reported killed in Maoist attacks during month; at least two police and two rebels reported killed in clashes in Bijapur district, Chhattisgarh 17 May. Several Maoist arrests during month including two leaders.

- [“India looks to mega-projects to counter Maoists”](#), *Benar news*, 14 May 2015.

➔ **Kashmir** Following Lahore court’s April release of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) operative and UN-designated terrorist Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, charged with masterminding 2008 Mumbai attack, India’s permanent representative to UN early May requested UN act against his release; U.S. ambassador to India said release “a mistake”. Pakistan army 5 May issued statement accusing India’s intelligence agency of “involvement in whipping up terrorism in Pakistan”; FM Chaudhry reiterated accusation 14 May. J&K chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed 16 May pledged to improve cross-LoC travel and trade. India’s foreign ministry 12 May summoned Chinese envoy to object to passage of proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor through Gilgit-Baltistan, which India considers part of Kashmir and thus disputed territory. Pakistan early May refused request by Afghan President Ghani to allow trade between India and Afghanistan to transit through Pakistan’s Wagah border. Several Indian army personnel and militants reported killed in clashes during month.

- [“Corps commanders’ conference: ‘RAW whipping up terrorism in Pakistan’”](#), *Express Tribune*, 5 May 2014.

➔ **Nepal** Continuing relief efforts following April earthquake amid renewed international focus on Nepal’s longstanding political impasse and inability to reach consensus on new constitution; four former PMs spoke in parliament 9 May underscoring need for a national govt to cope with country’s challenges. Over 8,500 confirmed to have died in April earthquakes, close to 18,000 injured; another strong earthquake hit 12 May.

- Anagha Neelakantan, [“Nepal’s Political Fault Lines”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 26 May 2015.
- [“Nepal parties propose formation of national government to meet post-quake challenges”](#), *Economic Times*, 9 May 2015.

↓ **Pakistan** Criminal and terrorist violence continued in Karachi, despite govt claims 18 May that targeted killings in city had halved since Sept 2013 launch of paramilitary Rangers operation; gunmen 13 May attacked bus with members of Ismaili Shia minority on board, executing 45. Police 19 May said four members of militant group “inspired by al-Qaeda” arrested and confessed involvement in attacks on Ismaili and Bohra communities and on social activist Mahmud, U.S. educationalist Lobo and

police officials. Militant violence in FATA and adjacent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) continued, contradicting army chief's 18 May claims that army had "cleansed large remote areas of terrorists". Militants attacked military checkpoints in Bajaur and S Waziristan agencies; military claimed to have killed 56 militants in N Waziristan and 56 in Khyber agency in airstrikes. Peshawar police counter-terrorism department deputy superintendent killed 20 May in TTP-claimed shooting. Drone strikes in N Waziristan's Shawal region 16 and 18 May reportedly killed six suspected militants. Paramilitary Frontier Corps 7 May claimed they had killed thirteen Baloch militants including Baloch Liberation Army commander south of Quetta. At least twenty bus passengers shot dead in Balochistan attack 29 May.

- Samina Ahmed, Melanne Verweer, "[Pakistan must lift women in order to counter security threats](#)", *Boston Globe*, 30 April 2015.
- "[Gunmen ambush bus in Pakistan, killing dozens](#)", *Wall Street Journal*, 13 May 2015.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°265, [Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan](#), 8 April 2015.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Much-anticipated 6 May meeting between President Sirisena and former President Rajapaksa – first since election – saw Sirisena reject Rajapaksa's demands to be made SLFP's PM candidate and to call off multiple criminal investigations into Rajapaksa family and political associates. Supreme Court 13 May granted Gotabaya Rajapaksa's request to stay possible arrest by police Financial Crimes Investigation Division, investigating several cases against Gotabaya. Decision to dissolve parliament and go for elections continues to be delayed by negotiations on 20th constitutional amendment for new electoral system; parties split over details of plan to create mostly first-past-the-post system with some degree of proportional representation. Slow action by police in 13 May rape and murder of 18-year-old Tamil student led to violent protests and clashes with police in Jaffna 20 May; Sirisena visited victim's family 25 May, promised swift justice. Sinhala nationalist politicians criticised govt over alleged threat of renewed Tamil militancy. Govt held 19 May "remembrance day" event (renamed from "victory day") to commemorate end of war in 2009; in north, Tamils allowed for first time to commemorate publicly those who died in war, though intense police surveillance and intimidation reported. Ex-President Rajapaksa and supporters held alternative victory day rally 20 May, following political rallies 1 and 18 May. Challenges facing govt's promise of effective accountability brought into relief by 7 May appointment of Major General Jagath Dias as army chief of staff, despite strong evidence implicating 57th Division he commanded in 2009 in war crimes. U.S. Sec State Kerry visited 2-3 May, urged effective investigations and accountability for rights abuses.

- Alan Keenan, "[A New Sri Lanka?](#)", *In Pursuit of Peace*, 18 May 2015.
- "[Former Sri Lanka army chief says he would welcome war crime investigation](#)", *Guardian*, 27 May 2015.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** During visit to West Papua provincial capital Jayapura 9 May, President Widodo announced amnesty for five West Papuan political prisoners and lifted decades-old restrictions on foreign journalists in W Papua; govt 26 May said foreign

media would continue to be tightly monitored. Widodo also announced infrastructure drive to spur economic growth in W Papua, including large seaport in Sorong. Anti-terror police 16 May detained six people at Surabaya Juanda airport; suspects being probed for links with Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL). Security forces 26 May arrested seven in terror raids in Central Sulawesi.

- [“A look at the Papua conflict – Indonesia’s ‘low-level insurgency’”](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 12 May 2015.

➡ **Myanmar** Continued uncertainty over whether March Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) will be signed. Leaders of twelve armed groups 1-6 May met in Wa (UWSA) HQ to discuss peace process and draft NCA; points in joint statement included: no NCA would be credible while fighting continued in Kokang and other parts of N Shan state; groups involved in Kokang fighting – MNDAA, Arakan Army, TNLA – should be given opportunity to participate in peace process and sign NCA; participants “understood” Wa demand for separate Wa state. National Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) of ethnic armed negotiators met in Thailand 25-27 May to prepare for 2-6 June ethnic leaders summit to seek final approval of draft NCA. Heavy fighting in Kokang area continued, with military claiming more territorial gains mid-May, stating only one remaining position held by Kokang; stray shells in fighting between military and MNDAA landed in China 14 May; five injured. Escalation in refugee crisis in Andaman sea early May following Thai crackdown on smuggling/trafficking camps, with thousands of Rohingya from Myanmar as well as Bangladeshis left stranded at sea by their traffickers, highlighted dire situation of Rohingya in Rakhine state. President Thein Sein 19 May signed into law controversial Population Control Bill.

- [“Myanmar ethnic leaders to seek final approval of preliminarily signed ceasefire pact”](#), Xinhua, 23 May 2015.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°266, [Myanmar’s Electoral Landscape](#), 28 April 2015.

⬆ **Philippines** House Ad Hoc Committee on the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) 20 May passed BBL, approving creation of new autonomous political entity; restored “opt-in” clause stating plebiscite for inclusion in Bangsamoro may be held in any local govt unit outside jurisdiction of Bangsamoro, opening up more provinces for inclusion in Bangsamoro. House appropriations committee 26 May approved BBL funding; House of Representatives to debate BBL early June, with target of passing it by 11 June when congress enters recess. MILF 20 May said it is “90% satisfied” with draft BBL. Senate report on BBL 21 May said BBL cannot be approved in its present form, pointing out some of its provisions require constitutional amendment. Govt troops 17 May retook two villages in Basilan from Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) after days of operations, 19 May clashed with ASG retaliating against civilians who killed five of its members in Panguturan island. MILF and military 6 May confirmed Basit Usman, bomb maker sought in botched counter-insurgency operation leading to January 2015 clash, killed by MILF 3 May.

- [“House panel approves Bangsamoro Basic Law”](#), GMA News, 20 May 2015.

⬇ **South China Sea** Month saw rapidly rising tensions as U.S. challenges China’s reclamation of islands in disputed Spratly chain. U.S. surveillance flights 21 May flew near Fiery Cross Reef, where China is building airfield on enlarged island; Chinese na-

vy warned U.S. aircraft to leave. Beijing accused U.S. of undermining regional peace. Pentagon said flights conducted in “international space”. U.S. Sec Defense Carter 27 May called for “immediate and lasting halt” to land reclamation in disputed SCS; reiterating point at Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore late month, singled out China as going “much further and faster” than other claimants in reclamation activities; also said U.S. “will fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows”, and announced new “Southeast Asia Maritime Security Initiative”. Pentagon spokesman 28 May said U.S. detected two mobile artillery pieces on one of China’s reclaimed reefs. Chinese admiral 31 May said reclamation does not impede freedom of navigation, but said Beijing could set up air defence zone in SCS if necessary. U.S., Japan and Australia made joint statement expressing strong opposition to use of force or coercion to alter status quo in SCS and East CS. Taiwan 26 May proposed SCS peace plan, calling on claimants to temporarily shelve disagreements to enable negotiations on sharing resources. Japanese PM Abe and Malaysia PM Najib 25 May agreed to bolster security cooperation.

- Yanmei Xie, [“Raising the Stakes in the South China Sea”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 16 May 2015.
- [“China, U.S. tone down rhetoric but far from South China Sea solution”](#), Reuters, 31 May 2015.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°267, [Stirring up the South China Sea \(III\): A Fleeting Opportunity for Calm](#), 7 May 2015. The South China Sea is the cockpit of geopolitics in East Asia, and growing tensions pose a serious threat to stability in the region. China and ASEAN must take advantage of the currently favourable environment to establish new codes of crisis management, especially at sea, to withstand any new conflicts.

➡ **Thailand** Special session of Constitution Drafting Committee 13 May unanimously agreed to urge PM Prayuth Chan-ocha to hold referendum on new constitution; followed heavy criticism of draft constitution late April. Govt 19 May approved referendum, an amendment to interim charter needed to enable public vote. Deputy PM Wissanu Krea-ngam said referendum not possible before Jan 2016, meaning Sept 2016 earliest possible date for general election. Former PM Yingluck Shinawatra 19 May appeared at Supreme Court for start of her trial on charges of “abuse of authority” and “dereliction of duty”, after failing to curb losses from her govt’s rice-pledging program. Police arrested dozens protesting against military govt on one-year anniversary of 22 May coup, most later released without charge. String of bomb attacks by suspected Malay-Muslim insurgents 14-16 May injured 22 people in Yala province. Security forces 2 May killed suspect in 10 April Koh Samui bombing during raid in Pattani’s Muang district. National Security Council chief 12 May announced dialogue with separatist leaders in exile could open in Malaysia in June. Govt launched crackdown human traffickers/smugglers following early May discovery of dozens of graves and suspected human trafficking camp; crackdown resulted in smugglers abandoning boats containing thousands of Myanmar Rohingya and Bangladeshi migrants on land and sea (see Myanmar).

- [“Thailand’s government approves referendum on constitution”](#), AP, 19 May 2015.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Following 27 April attack by suspected radical Islamist on police station in Zvornik in Bosnia's Republika Srpska (RS) entity, RS police 6 May arrested 30 Bosniaks suspected of involvement in Islamist radical activity; also reportedly seized arms and other military equipment. Arrests carried out without coordination with state agencies, raising concerns among Bosniaks and contributing to increased ethnic tensions. State House of Representatives 28 May adopted conclusion condemning Zvornik attack as terrorist act.

- ["Macedonia violence touches a nerve in unstable Bosnia"](#), Balkan Insight, 12 May 2015.

➔ **Kosovo** President and PM 11 May expressed concern over reported involvement of nine Kosovo citizens in clashes with police in Macedonian town Kumanovo 9-10 May (see Macedonia); said violence intended to destabilise Kosovo. Macedonian authorities arrested 23 Kosovars in connection with incident fighting; Kosovo condemned any involvement by Kosovars; police mid-month raided several houses, including families of those accused of taking part. Relatives of those killed/arrested in Kumanovo incident 20 May rallied in Pristina demanding information. Prosecutor 7 May charged 32 with terrorism and ties with Islamic State and al-Nusra. European Commission 30 April approved Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

- ["Kosovars seek handover of rebels killed in Macedonia"](#), RFE/RL, 20 May 2015.

⚡ **Macedonia** Against backdrop of deepening political crisis, shootout between police and gunmen prompted increasing concern over stability. Eight police and ten gunmen killed and almost 40 injured 9-10 May in Kumanovo, ethnically mixed town 40km north of Skopje, in region that saw heavy fighting during 2001 insurgency. Authorities said operation responded to information on "armed group" that "infiltrated" from neighbouring state planning "terrorist acts"; said some gunmen were involved in April seizing of police station. Slain included one ethnic Albanian, nine Kosovars. 30 people charged with terrorism-related offences, including eighteen Kosovo, eleven Macedonian, one Albanian nationals. UN, NATO and EU urged calm. Opposition accused govt of using operation to create diversion from wire-tapping scandal and opposition's ongoing release of recordings allegedly made by govt and revealing its interference in press, judiciary and elections, as well as massive corruption. Opposition (social democratic party) leader Zoran Zaev indicted 1 May for wiretapping and "violence against representatives of the highest state bodies" but not yet arrested. Western ambassadors 11 May criticised govt failure to investigate alleged abuses, questioned its commitment to democratic principles. Interior and transport ministers and intelligence chief resigned 12 May, but tens of thousands joined protests in Skopje 17 May demanding govt resign; PM Gruevski organised pro-govt rally 18 May. Opposition and pro-govt supporters maintaining camps in front of govt and parliament respectively; small numbers of civil society members staging independent anti-govt protests around Skopje daily. EU seeks to mediate compromise in negotiations between four main political parties, as tension rises.

- ["A perfect political storm brews in Macedonia"](#), Reuters, 11 May 2015.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Representatives of Armenia and Iran met 24-25 May to discuss defence cooperation. Prosecutor general 4 May released opposition activists detained for “planning mass disorder” ahead of 24 April genocide centennial.

- [“Trying to break free of economic dependence on Russia?”](#) Eurasianet, 18 May 2015.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Clampdown on opposition continued ahead of June European Olympics in Baku. Baku court 14 May extended journalist Khadija Ismayilova’s pretrial detention despite rights organisations’ calls for her release; court 6 May sentenced leading opposition figure Faradj Kerimli to six and a half years’ prison on drugs charges; Kerimli’s lawyer said charges fabricated. European Parliament VP 12 May called on govt to release jailed activists.

- [“EU lawmakers call on Baku to free critics ahead of European games”](#), RFE/RL, 12 May 2015.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** NK de facto authorities 3 May held “parliamentary elections”. Russian and Azerbaijani FMs 25 May met to discuss NK, said time to reach agreement.

- [“West and Azerbaijan denounce Nagorno-Karabakh ‘elections’”](#), EurActiv, 4 May 2015.

➔ **Georgia** Parliament 9 May approved new cabinet following series of resignations and reshuffle. De facto president of breakaway republic Abkhazia 18 May appointed retired Russian General Anatoly Khurylov as army chief of staff, in move seen by some as signalling Moscow’s increasing control following Nov 2014 “alliance and strategic partnership”. EU Eastern Partnership summit in Riga 21-22 May recognised increased trade cooperation between Georgia and EU but did not grant visa liberalisation. U.S. and Georgian militaries 11 May began joint exercises aimed at bolstering cooperation between Georgia and NATO; Russia criticised move.

- [“Reshuffled cabinet wins confidence vote”](#), Civil Georgia, 9 May 2015.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Caucasus Emirate’s (CE) Sharia judge Magomed Suleymanov, from Dagestan, reportedly elected new CE leader. Suleymanov known to oppose Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), however other developments suggest IS growing in popularity: prominent Dagestani moderate Islamist preacher Nadir Abu Khalid went to Syria and swore allegiance to IS leader Baghdadi, after having been under house arrest for eight months, allegedly falsely accused; leader of CE’s Ingushetia sector also swore allegiance to IS. Leader of Ingushetia Yunus-Bek Yevkurov 17 May said insurgency “defeated” in republic, only fourteen insurgents left. Several militants and police killed in security incidents in Dagestan during month. Police temporarily detained parishioners of Salafi mosque in Buynaksk 8 and 18 May. Deputy imam of Salafi mosque in Makhachkala detained for allegedly keeping illegal weapon. Controversial wedding of 17-year-old girl to district police chief generated widespread condemnation, debate, prompting Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov to encourage men to restrict their wives access to social media.

- [“Chechnya’s Kadyrov calls for WhatsApp ban for wives”](#), BBC News, 19 May 2015.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Ukraine** In strategy change viewed as initiated by Moscow, separatist leader Oleg Tsarev 20 May announced “Novorossiya” project to create new state from Russian border to Moldova “frozen”; many separatist supporters denounced move as betrayal by Moscow. Followed high-level diplomatic exchanges between Moscow and West including meetings between President Putin and U.S. Sec State Kerry 12 May, German Chancellor Merkel 10 May. Separatist social media sites claimed Kremlin responsible for death in ambush of separatist commander and Novorossiya supporter Alexei Mozgovoy on 23 May, while top separatist officials blamed Ukrainian special forces. Month saw further violations of Feb Minsk ceasefire with intensified shelling, continued fighting with evidence of Russian involvement, including use of heavy weaponry. U.S., NATO and Ukraine 13 May condemned Russian military build-up in Crimea, called for stop to “deliberate destabilisation” of east. Parliament 19 May adopted law allowing govt to suspend debt repayments as foreign debt restructuring is negotiated; Moscow said it will adopt “tough position” if Ukraine fails to repay \$3 billion loan. International observers expressed concern at govt plans to suspend some key human rights, including right of movement in separatist-controlled areas.

- [“Novorossiya’ falls from Putin’s vocabulary as Ukraine crisis drags”](#), *WSJ*, 29 May 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.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

↑ **Cyprus** Reunification talks, mediated by UN Special Rep Espen Barth Eide, resumed 15 May between Republic of Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades and President of Turkish Cypriot north Mustafa Akinci, who agreed to meet twice a month. Confidence-building measures initiated same day: Anastasiades gave coordinates of 28 minefields in north; Akinci announced Greek Cypriots no longer required to fill in visa forms at border crossings. Leaders 28 May announced agreement on five steps including opening of more crossing points and interconnecting electricity grids.

- [“Cyprus peace talks resume with confidence-building measures”](#), Reuters, 15 May 2015.

➔ **Turkey** Govt-PKK peace process remains stalled in run-up to 7 June parliamentary elections. Amid increasing antagonism between parties, ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) adopted increasingly hardline rhetoric in attempt to regain votes from Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Polling shows Pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) at 9.5%-10.5%; if it fails to pass 10% threshold to enter parliament, consequences for peace process could be significant. PKK 3 May cancelled General Congress of the KCK (Union of the Communities of Kurdistan), called for in March by jailed leader Öcalan to discuss possible disarmament, citing govt failure to advance peace process. Two bombs exploded 18 May in HDP offices in Adana and Mersin provinces. Govt condemned violence; HDP leader suggested AKP behind attack. Govt jet 16 May shot down Syrian helicopter it alleged violated Turkish airspace. U.S. and Turkey launched long-anticipated joint train-and-equip program for Syrian rebels.

- [“Turkish electoral outcome hinges on pro-Kurdish party”](#), Deutsche Welle, 23 May 2015.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** Chinese President Xi first official visitor 7 May following President Nazarbayev's landslide re-election in April; said China's Silk Road economic belt program will incorporate Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol economic program, launched Nov 2014. Leaders travelled together to Moscow 8 May to mark Victory Day.

- ["China's Silk Road in the spotlight as Xi heads to Kazakhstan"](#), *Diplomat*, 8 May 2015.

New Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°74, [Stress Test for Kazakhstan](#), 13 May 2015. Kazakhstan's wish for stability and continuity trumps the will for political change, but without economic reform, full ethnic equality and a political succession plan, it risks becoming another brittle post-Soviet state vulnerable to external destabilisation.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** President Atambayev 21 May signed law to join Russia-sponsored Eurasian Economic Union. New PM Sariev approved by parliament 29 April; earlier Atambayev signed election law raising participation cost for parties ten-fold, to approximately \$85,000, allowing only voters with submitted biometric data to cast vote. Parliamentary committee 19 May sent to plenary controversial bill requiring "politically active" NGOs with foreign funding to register as foreign agents. UN HCHR 26 May called on parliament to review and ensure it does not restrict civil society work; Human Rights Watch urged parliament to reject it. Anti-corruption efforts continued: brother of former Osh mayor Melis Myrzakmatov arrested for fraud 5 May, Ata Meken MP Karganbek Samakov arrested for corruption 15 May. Former Ata-Jurt leader Kanchybek Tashiev's conviction for attempting overthrow of govt in Oct 2012 overturned 10 May.

- ["Kyrgyzstan ascends EEU, Kazakh-Kyrgyz border to open in fall"](#), *Tengrinews*, 25 May 2015.

⚠ **Tajikistan** Former special forces (OMON) commander Gulmurod Khalimov, who disappeared 23 April, featured in Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) video 27 May saying he had joined group, criticising govt and threatening to bring jihad to Tajikistan. Amid growing concerns about intensified Taliban fighting in N Afghanistan near Tajik border, Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) sent 2,500 Rapid Reaction Force troops to border area for exercises 12-20 May. Court late April jailed ten alleged members of banned Islamic group in Sughd region.

- ["Tajikistan special forces chief Gulmurod Khalimov 'joins IS'"](#), *BBC*, 28 May 2015.

➔ **Turkmenistan** Media reports suggested military exercises being conducted in southern Lebap province on Afghan border. Following reported discussion with Austrian President Fischer on rights abuses during Vienna visit, President Berdymukhammedov 16 May granted amnesty to 1,200 prisoners. Parliament reportedly considering scrapping age limit for president; state media reported parliament speaker 29 May saying constitutional commission considering extending presidential term from five to seven years.

- ["Turkmenistan grants amnesty to 1,200 prisoners"](#), *RFE/RL*, 16 May 2015.

➔ **Uzbekistan** On tenth anniversary of Andijan massacre, U.S. urged govt to uphold domestic and international obligations on rights and religious freedom. Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) flags reportedly hung in Bukhara early May; propaganda leaflets found late April in Parkent district, prompting anti-terrorist operation.

- ["What happened 10 years ago in Andijan"](#), *Diplomat*, 13 May 2015.

Latin America

↓ **Colombia** 37th round of negotiations between govt and FARC continued amid most serious crisis yet triggered by 22 May suspension of FARC's five-month-old unilateral ceasefire. Suspension followed 21 May govt air raid in Guapi (Cauca) that left at least 26 guerrillas dead, including one former member of FARC's negotiating team; attack also displaced some 400 inhabitants. Violence accelerated with military operations in Antioquia and Chocó; leader of 18th FARC front killed in latter. FARC bombing 24 May in Tumaco (Nariño) left one police officer dead, two wounded. Guarantor countries Cuba and Norway 27 May called on parties to continue negotiations on remaining agenda items, including definitive bilateral ceasefire. Delegations informed 29 May about progress in implementing joint humanitarian demining pilot in Briceño (Antioquia). Earlier, in sign of continued commitment to peace process, President Santos 20 May named FM María Ángela Holguín and well-connected businessman Gonzalo Restrepo to negotiating team. Long-expected position swap between Defence Minister Juan Carlos Pinzón and Colombian ambassador to U.S. Juan Carlos Villegas officially announced 19 May. Govt peace commissioner Sergio Jaramillo 13 May confirmed Santos consulted U.S. about Simón Trinidad, high ranking FARC leader serving 60-year sentence in U.S., joining talks. Santos 11 May confirmed he authorised late-April meeting in Havana between ELN leader Gabino and FARC leader Timochenko. ELN Central Command 17 May rejected responsibility for landmine incident in Convención (Norte de Santander), offered localised ELN ceasefire to facilitate enquiry. National Drug Council 14 May endorsed Health Ministry recommendation to suspend controversial aerial coca spraying program.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“Colombia Peace Process: Lurching Backwards”](#), 26 May 2015.
- Javier Ciurlizza and Sabrina Hervé, [“La mala imagen de Santos y sus salidas”](#), Razón Pública, 18 May 2015.
- [“Bullet proof”](#), *Economist*, 30 May 2015.

➔ **Guatemala** President Pérez Molina 21 May purged cabinet amid corruption scandals and nationwide protests demanding end to corruption. Intelligence chief, energy and environment ministers and deputy interior minister were removed, interior minister resigned. Despite changes pressure on president mounted: president of national bar association 25 May joined civil society leaders calling for his resignation. UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CIGIC) and attorney general's office struck another blow against criminal organisations within state with 20 May arrest of sixteen high-level officials of Guatemalan Institute for Social Security for allegedly carrying out fraudulent contracts; includes central bank chief and head of social security agency. VP Roxanna Baldetti resigned 8 May following mid-April corruption scandal unveiled by CIGIC involving her private secretary; attorney general's office secured judicial order prohibiting her from leaving country. Constitutional judge Alejandro Maldonado named new VP.

- [“Guatemala president shakes up cabinet amid probes and protests”](#), *WSJ*, 21 May 2015.

➔ **Haiti** Electoral Provisional Council (CEP) 20 May announced some 70 candidates had filed to run in long-delayed Oct presidential elections, including last-minute submission by Laurent Lamothe, former PM and close ally of President Martelly. Amid

CEP review of candidate qualifications, controversy surrounding Lamothe and other former government officials unable to obtain parliamentary “clean bill of health” audit report; Lamothe denied allegations of mismanagement of funds while minister of planning/FM. CEP 15 May announced 1,517 candidates for Aug Chamber of Deputies and Senate elections; First Lady Sophia Martelly’s candidacy denied 13 May partly due to lack of audit report and partly allegation she voted in previous election despite being a dual citizen, prohibited under Haitian law. UNSG 14 May proposed 22% cut to MINUSTAH’s budget; along with restructuring of MINUSTAH, raises concerns sharp cuts in number of peacekeepers before elections could yield potential security vacuum jeopardizing polls. Massive wave of deportation of Haitian illegal immigrants continued: Bahamas late April announced plan to deport 290 Haitians; Dominican Republic denied extension of program to legalise Haitian migrants.

- [“Former Haiti PM Lamothe among 70 vying to become president”](#), *Miami Herald*, 20 May 2015.

➔ **Mexico** Defence minister 1 May initiated “Operation Jalisco” mobilising 6,000 military forces, federal police and prosecutors in fight against Jalisco Cartel-New Generation. Cartel same day launched series of coordinated attacks, setting fire to banks and petrol stations, using flaming cars and buses as roadblocks at over 30 locations. National Security Commissioner Monte Alejandro Rubido 2 May reported several soldiers killed when Jalisco Cartel-New Generation gunmen shot down army helicopter with rocket-propelled grenade. Cartel also reportedly launched attacks in neighbouring Michoacan, Guanajuato and Colima states. Federal police 22 May killed 42 presumed cartel members on ranch in Michoacán near border with Jalisco, following what authorities described as three-hour gun battle; one police officer killed. Govt human rights commission 26 May said it had launched inquiry, amid questioning from analysts and relatives of dead over lopsided death toll. Authorities 27 May arrested senior Jalisco Cartel-New Generation operative Victor Manuel Garcia Orozco. Campaigning continued ahead of 7 June elections to choose 500 federal deputies, seventeen state legislatures, nine governors and over 300 mayors; three candidates killed during month in Michoacán, Tabasco and Guerrero states.

- [“Mexican rights agency condemns violence, probes shootout”](#), AP, 26 May 2015.

➔ **Venezuela** Foreign reserves at lowest level since 2003 as scarcity of basic goods, including medicines, continued to rise. With organised crime thriving, some 2,000 police and National Guard (GNB) troops deployed 14 May to take back Maracay district from criminals; official reports claim three criminals killed in six-hour battle, 200 arrested; unofficial reports claimed at least ten deaths. Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance 17 May held primary elections in 37 of country’s 81 electoral districts to determine unity candidates for parliamentary elections planned for late 2015; over half a million voted, with Primero Justicia winning most votes. Electoral authority’s (CNE) decision not to use manual voting logs in election raised concerns it might do same in parliamentary elections, making it hard to detect fake votes. Court 13 May banned 22 media owners and editors from leaving country pending trial for defamation after National Assembly President Diosdado Cabello filed libel suit 21 April against media reports alleging U.S. prosecutors were investigating him for ties to drug gangs. *Wall Street Journal* 18 May reported U.S. prosecutors and drug enforcement officers pursuing trafficking cases against several high-ranking Venezuelans, including Cabello.

- [“Venezuela is facing ‘a very serious blow to the regime’”](#), *Washington Post*, 25 May 2015.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** PM Netanyahu 6 May secured deal to form new coalition with 61 of 120 parliamentary seats; FM Lieberman resigned 4 May, announced he will not join new coalition. Palestinian Authority (PA) warned that new govt will “bury” two-state solution, and in mid-May set out conditions for re-entering peace talks, including halt to settlement construction, release of certain prisoners and timeline for peace talks and end of occupation. U.S. President Obama mid-May stated he will not seek to resume peace talks with new govt, instead prioritising smaller goals such as reconstruction in Gaza. Violence in Jerusalem and W Bank continued; Palestinian shot dead by Israeli forces 4 May after being suspected of attempting to stab Israeli security officer in Jerusalem; Israeli border police 20 May shot dead Palestinian man believed to be driving into border patrol officers in E Jerusalem. Amid intense international and domestic pressure, Netanyahu 20 May suspended controversial new defence ministry plan to separate Palestinians and Jews on bus routes running from Israel to W Bank. In Gaza, Salafi jihadists, some claiming affiliation to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), intensified campaign against Hamas; group known as Supporters of the Islamic State in Jerusalem claimed 8 May attack on Hamas base near Khan Younis. Major-General Sami Turge-man, outgoing commander of Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) Southern Command, stated 12 May that Israel and Hamas have “common interests” and that there is no alternative to Hamas rule in Gaza. Militants believed to be members of Islamic Jihad 26 May fired rocket that landed in empty area near Israeli city Ashdod; Israel retaliated striking four targets in Gaza. Clashes erupted 3 May in Tel Aviv’s Rabin Square as thousands protested police brutality toward Israeli Jews of Ethiopian descent.

- [“Hamas denies ISIS gaining foothold in Gaza Strip”](#), *Haaretz*, 14 May 2015.

➔ **Lebanon** Clashes on NE border with Syria intensified with Hizbollah and Syrian army making major gains against Syrian rebels in Qalamoun mountain range, including taking highest peak in Qalamoun near Tallit Moussa hilltop 13 May, 14-15 May seizing strategic hill overlooking Damascus-Homs highway, consolidating control over entire Jabal al-Barouh mountain range. Hizbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah 5 May stated that Lebanon cannot protect its eastern borders from terror threat, Hizbollah taking responsibility to secure region. Impact of fighting evident in adjacent areas in Bekaa Valley, where military deployments are widespread and sectarian tensions palpable. Amid ongoing parliamentary divisions, PM Salam 5 May warned political stalemate harming economic growth. Former Information Minister Michel Samaha, arrested 2012 on terror charges, sentenced 13 May to four and a half “judicial years” in prison for transporting explosives from Syria to Lebanon.

- [“Why Qalamoun matters for Hezbollah”](#), Al Jazeera, 11 May 2015.

➔ **Syria** Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) 21 May announced it had seized “full control” of ancient city Palmyra in central Syria; govt forces retreated following clashes with IS outside Palmyra 14 May. Rebels escalated campaign against remaining regime strongholds in Idlib province; coalition of rebel forces including Ahrar al-Sham and

Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) captured Mastoumeh village 19 May and Ariha 28 May. Regime counter-offensive launched in Idlib following 25 April rebel victory in Jisr al-Shaghour made little headway. Regime forces 3 May escalated offensive in Ghouta suburbs of Damascus; heavy fighting between rebels and govt forces reported in Maydaa, key supply route into eastern Ghouta. Fierce clashes between IS and regime forces began 6 May in city of Deir az-Zour, eastern Syria. Clashes in Qalamoun border region ongoing (see Lebanon). U.S. special forces 15-16 May mounted raid in eastern Syria near al-Omar oil field, killing IS commander Abu Sayyaf and capturing his wife; dozen militants reportedly killed in raid. U.S. military 3 May denied reports that coalition airstrikes 30 April-1 May killed 52 civilians in Birmahle village, Aleppo province, said those killed were fighters. UN 5 May announced launch of renewed peace talks in Geneva, billed as “low-key consultations” expected to last four-six weeks; 30 armed opposition groups declined invitation to join talks. IS 22 May seized last govt-controlled Iraq-Syria border crossing al-Tanf in Homs province.

- Noah Bonsey, [“There will be no winners in Syria’s war, but there can be an end”](#), Reuters, 5 May 2015.
- [“‘Hundreds’ killed in Palmyra after ISIL takeover”](#), Al Jazeera, 25 May 2015.

Gulf

➔ **Bahrain** Appeals Court 14 May upheld six-month jail sentence against rights activist Nabeel Rajab, found guilty of tweet insulting defence and interior ministries; former MP Khalid Abdul Aal sentenced 27 May to one year prison for insulting Interior Ministry on Twitter. Interior Ministry 10 May said group suspected of terrorist attacks arrested, explosives stockpile seized in Janusan and Sitra.

- [“Bahrain upholds six-month sentence for prominent activist over tweet”](#), Reuters, 14 May 2015.

➔ **Iran** Drafting of final nuclear agreement continued throughout month, advanced despite some backtracking on both sides. U.S. Congress and Senate mid-May passed Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act with large majorities, bill signed into law 22 May by President Obama; Iran agreed to grant UN inspectors “managed access” to military sites. FM Zarif late May said he hoped for final nuclear deal “within a reasonable period of time”, warned against making “excessive demands” on Iran. Trial began 26 May of U.S. journalist arrested July 2014 accused of espionage. Tehran continued to offer support to anti-Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) forces in Iraq and Syria (see Iraq and Syria). Tensions in Persian Gulf continued to escalate: Iranian ships 14 May fired warning shots at Singapore-flagged tanker that allegedly damaged Iranian oil platform; Iran cargo ship reportedly carrying 2,500 tonnes of aid supplies for Yemen diverted to Djibouti 22 May (see Yemen).

- [“Negotiator: Iran agrees to ‘managed access’ to military sites”](#), AP, 24 May 2015.

➔ **Iraq** Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) mid-May seized Ramadi, last govt stronghold in Anbar province; Iraqi forces launched counter-attack late May led by Iran-backed Shiite “popular mobilisation” militias, U.S. announced it is “expediting” weapons shipments to Iraq, increased airstrikes against IS. At least seventeen troops reportedly killed by IS suicide attacks in western Anbar province 26-27 May. At least five killed in

car-bomb attacks on two Baghdad hotels 28 May, IS claimed responsibility. Dozens of inmates broke out of prison in Al-Khalis 8 May, several guards killed in clashes, IS claimed responsibility.

- [“Menacing ISIS gains in Iraq and Syria”](#), *Financial Times*, 22 May 2015.

New Crisis Group Middle East Report N°158, [Arming Iraq’s Kurds: Fighting IS, Inviting Conflict](#), 12 May 2015. The U.S.-led coalition’s military assistance to Kurdish forces against the Islamic State (IS) is inadvertently accelerating intra-Kurdish fragmentation. The West should coordinate its aid better, build upon Iraqi Kurdistan’s past efforts in transforming its peshmergas into a professional military, and encourage Kurdish coordination with Iraq’s central government in the fight against IS.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** Saudi-led air campaign against Huthis in Yemen continued amid ongoing tensions with Iran (see Yemen). Suicide bombing of Shiite mosque near Qatif in East 22 May left 21 dead; Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) claimed responsibility; tens of thousands joined mass funeral 25 May; four killed 29 May in suicide bomb attack on Shiite mosque in Dammam. Authorities late May imposed sanctions on two top Hizbollah commanders already sanctioned by U.S. for alleged involvement in terrorism. King Salman declined to attend U.S.-Gulf Camp David summit mid-May.

- [“Second Saudi Arabia suicide bombing fuels Isis campaign fears”](#), *Guardian*, 29 May 2015.

↓ **Yemen** Conflict increasingly intractable as it becomes tied to regional Saudi-Iran power struggle. Saudi coalition and Huthi/Saleh bloc feeding cycle of escalating violence: small group of special forces, reportedly Emirati, 4 May landed in Aden raising spectre of ground invasion; in retaliation Huthi-affiliated tribes 5-6 May launched cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia killing several civilians; Saudis responded with intense air raids in Sanaa and Huthi stronghold Saada. Huthi/Saleh bloc gained ground throughout month despite air campaign and blockade, especially in Aden, Taiz and Shebwa. Iran made several attempts to break blockade, including sending ship ostensibly loaded with humanitarian supplies sparking war of words with Saudis; tensions lessened when UN 20 May announced ship would dock for inspection in Djibouti. Five-day ceasefire held 12-16 May; Saudi-led airstrikes resumed 18 May in response to repeated Huthi violations of truce; 27 May killed at least 80 near Saudi border and in Sanaa, deadliest day since strikes began. New UN envoy Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed working to revive negotiations including proposed consultations 28 May but neither side ready for genuine compromise: Hadi govt said Huthi withdrawal from captured territory precondition for negotiations. Saudis 16 May convened GCC-sponsored conference in Riyadh: Yemeni participants called for joint Arab force to oversee Huthi withdrawal from cities, speedy return of govt in exile, provision of anti-Huthi resistance with weapons and logistical support. UNCHR estimated at least 1,037 civilians killed and 2,453 injured 26 March to 20 May.

- [“Air strikes kill at least 80 in deadliest bombings of Yemen war”](#), Reuters, 27 May 2015.

North Africa

➡ **Algeria** Court 8 May sentenced fourteen to prison, fined seven foreign firms \$390mn following guilty verdict in corruption and embezzlement case connected to

highway construction. Former Public Works Minister Amar Ghoul, accused of involvement, retained cabinet post, has not been charged. Trial of banker Abdelmoumen Khalifa, accused of corruption and fraud, began 4 May. Cabinet reshuffle 14 May saw replacement of energy and culture ministers accused of corruption. Some 25 suspected Islamist militants killed late May, FM Ramtane Lamara 21 May said “only remnants of terrorism” remain in Algeria. Crackdown on smuggling along southern borders continued, several hundred reportedly arrested.

- [“14 jailed and foreign firms fined \\$390mn in Algeria’s ‘scandal of the century’”](#), Middle East Eye, 8 May 2015.

► **Egypt** Crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood (MB) continued: court 16 May sentenced deposed president and former MB leader Morsi and 105 others to death following conviction for involvement in mass jail break in 2011, attacks on police. MB condemned ruling, called for international community to intervene; UNSG Ban expressed “serious concern”. Court 31 May sentenced rights activist Mahinour el-Masry and two others to fifteen months’ prison for attacking police station. President Sisi 28 May met with U.S. Sec Defence Leon Panetta to discuss regional security. Military operations against militants, including those linked to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL), continued: military 2 May announced 29 militants killed, 133 arrested in N Sinai late April; four soldiers and three civilians killed 13 May in bomb attacks near Rafah; soldier killed 25 May in clash near Sheikh Zuweyid; policeman killed, seven wounded 27 May by roadside bomb. Six convicted Sinai militants executed 17 May, eight sentenced to death 26 May. Army late May said over 500 tunnels to Gaza destroyed during six-month operation; Rafah crossing with Gaza reopened late May after two-month closure allowing Palestinians to return.

- [“Deposed Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi sentenced to death”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 2015.

► **Libya** Fighting continued as UN-led attempts to broker National Unity Govt (NUG) reached standstill amid continued disagreement between factions over proposed political framework unveiled late April by UN SRSG Bernardino León, who 28 May warned Libya on verge of economic collapse. Faction within Tripoli-based General National Congress (GNC) refused to comment on proposal, called for León’s dismissal as lead negotiator. Misrata-based faction called for complete overhaul of proposed framework, pushed for establishment of presidential council and unity govt and for internationally recognised House of Representatives (HoR) to expire in October. Pro-HoR politicians in East insist HoR president retain full control of armed forces, rather than PM’s Council as envisaged under León’s framework. León expected to present new proposal in June. Some UNSC member states including U.S. renewed calls for sanctions on spoilers. PM Thinni late May said he survived assassination attempt in Tobruk. Armed clashes continued. Militants aligned with Islamic State (IS, previously ISIL) claimed responsibility for string of suicide bombings in al-Qubba, Sirte and Misrata late May. EU pushed ahead with plans to launch sea and air mission against human trafficking networks in Libya: European Council 18 May approved establishment of EUNAVFOR MED, EU foreign policy chief Mogherini early-May lobbied UNSC members to support resolution to allow use of force.

- [“Libya on verge of economic collapse, UN envoy warns”](#), Reuters, 28 May 2015.

➔ **Tunisia** Social discontent continued to rise in south where new People and Citizen's Movement (Mouvement du Peuple des Citoyens), launched Dec 2014 by former President Marzouki, gaining popularity. Towns in southern mining basin 20 May announced strike over economy, unemployment. Violent protests including 9 May in El Faouer where local unemployed staged protests to demand jobs. PM Essid 25 May reiterated govt decision to cut salaries of public employees on strike. Two suspects in March Bardo museum attack arrested late May in Italy and near Libya border. Army 14 May killed four suspected jihadists in Jebel Semmama area in NW. Parliament 15 May passed controversial law establishing judicial oversight body; judges said it would undermine their independence. President Essebsi 1 May said cooperation with Libya's Tripoli-based General National Congress (GNC) necessary despite his Nida Tounes party's pro-Tobruk stance. Soldier 25 May killed seven, wounded ten at Bouchacha barracks, attack initially attributed to "psychological distress". President Essebsi visited Washington D.C. late May; U.S. President Obama said committed to success of Tunisia, promoted country to "major non-NATO ally" status.

- ["Rising social tensions test Tunisia's new democracy"](#), Reuters, 12 May 2015.