

CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts
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February 2016 – Trends

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Afghanistan](#), [Chad](#), [Korean Peninsula](#), [Mozambique](#), [Somalia](#), [Turkey](#),
[Venezuela](#), [Zimbabwe](#)

↑ Improved situations

March 2016 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Turkey](#), [Venezuela](#)

☰ Conflict resolution opportunities

[Colombia](#)

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.

Table of Contents

AFRICA	3
Central Africa	3
Horn of Africa.....	4
Southern Africa.....	6
West Africa	7
ASIA	10
North East Asia.....	10
South Asia	10
South East Asia	13
Pacific.....	16
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	17
Balkans.....	17
Caucasus.....	17
Eastern Europe.....	18
Western Europe/Mediterranean.....	20
Central Asia	20
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.....	22
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA.....	24
Eastern Mediterranean	24
Gulf	25
North Africa.....	27

Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Burundi** President Nkurunziza gave indications he was ready to make concessions to resolve political crisis amid international pressure: after meeting Nkurunziza, UNSG Ban 23 Feb announced govt would hold political dialogue with opposition, lift media restrictions and release 2,000 prisoners. EU FMs 15 Feb said they were ready to strengthen economic sanctions against instigators of rights violations. Presidents of South Africa, Mauritania, Senegal, Gabon and Ethiopia visited Bujumbura 24-27 Feb; govt confirmed willingness to engage in dialogue, South African President Zuma 27 Feb said AU would send 100 human rights and 100 military monitors. Violence continued: gunmen 21 Feb killed two people; one person killed in grenade attack at market in Bujumbura 22 Feb.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“Burundi: Time for Tough Messages”](#), 24 Feb. 2016.
- [“Retour sur la visite de la délégation de haut niveau de l’UA”](#), RFI, 28 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) launched fourteen attacks in Far North; 79 killed, some 175 injured. BH 6 Feb burnt Ndjinouba village in Hile-Alifa commune killing five people; double suicide bombing in Nguetchewe 10 Feb killed ten and injured 43; BH killed seven and burnt three churches in Idoua (Mayo Tsanaga) same day; double suicide bombing 19 Feb in Meme (Mora area) killed 25 and injured 115. Fifteen BH fighters killed 1 Feb in unsuccessful attack on Rapid Response Brigade (BIR) Achigachia base. Govt reported army operations in Nigeria 11-14 Feb and 23-24 Feb killed 162 BH fighters in Goshi and 92 in Kumche; several military personnel also killed. Security forces reported 59 BH fighters arrested during month, including 21 in Minawao refugee camp.

- [“Why Boko Haram is the world’s deadliest terror group”](#), Mail & Guardian, 17 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Central African Republic** National Election Authority (ANE) 20 Feb provisionally announced former PM Touadéra winner of peaceful 14 Feb presidential runoff with 63% of vote. Anicet-Georges Dologuélé, runner-up with 37%, accepted result 20 Feb. Touadéra’s campaign director 22 Feb said president would focus first on disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and repatriation (DDRR) and restructuring armed forces. ANE 23 Feb announced results of 14 Feb legislative elections; 46 districts elected MPs in first round, second round to be held 27 March. AU observer mission noted transparent elections with some logistical problems. Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) attacks continued; three killed, over 59 abducted in ten raids. Ex-Seleka faction Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) 8 Feb handed captured LRA commander Okot Odek to U.S. forces; U.S. 12 Feb said another LRA commander defected near SE Pangbayanga. UNSC 9 Feb adopted Resolution 2264 maintaining MINUSCA military and police ceiling at 12,830 and adding 68 corrections officers.

- [“Newly elected Central African Republic leader faces hard realities”](#), *New York Times*, 21 Feb. 2016.

↓ **Chad** Civil unrest and police crackdown worsened ahead of 10 April presidential vote. Ruling Mouvement patriotique du salut (MPS) 9 Feb named Déby presidential candidate; Déby said if re-elected he would reintroduce two presidential term limit and move to federal system. Govt 13 Feb announced MP Albert Pahimi Padacké from SW as new PM. Opposition MP Ngarledji Yorongar 27 Feb announced candidacy for presidential vote. Starting early Feb police cracked down on frequent anti-govt protests. Youth marches began 15 Feb against 13 Feb rape for which sons of FM and generals arrested; one boy killed. Civil society created “ça suffit” platform calling for *villes mortes* national strike protesting Déby’s fifth term bid; declared illegal by govt, observed in major cities 24 Feb.

- [“Chad cities go quiet in protest against president’s fifth term bid”](#), *Newsweek*, 25 Feb. 2016.

➔ **DR Congo** Opposition alliance *Front citoyen 2016* 10 Feb retracted call for demonstrations, but called instead for *villes mortes* national strike 16 Feb to pressure President Kabila not to stay in power beyond constitutional limit; call largely heeded in Kinshasa, Bukavu and Goma. Authorities continued to repress protesters; at least 35 people arrested before and during strike, opposition politician Martin Fayulu briefly detained 15 Feb. Electoral commission (CENI) stirred into action: mid-Feb announced tender for providing material with which to update voter register; 11 Feb announced election of 21 provincial governors to replace special commissioners would take place 26 March. Following agreement late Jan, MONUSCO and Congolese armed forces (FARDC) resumed cooperation, with primary targets Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia and Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) rebels.

- [“Opération ville-morte massivement suivie à Kinshasa”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 17 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Rwanda** UN group of experts report leaked early month cites evidence of Rwandan military recruiting and training Burundian refugees to oust Burundian President Nkurunziza. U.S. envoy for Great Lakes region 11 Feb echoed report; President Kagame and FM Louise Mushikiwabo denounced allegations.

- [“U.S. says Rwanda may be stoking conflict in neighboring Burundi”](#), *Bloomberg*, 11 Feb. 2016.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Ethiopia** Federal govt continued crackdown on largely peaceful protests in Oromia region; security forces 12 Feb fired on bus killing four, 15 Feb clashed with armed men believed to be local militia, govt reported seven officers killed. PM Hailemariam Desalegn 23 Feb said violence in Oromia instigated by Eritrea and other foreign forces, vowed “decisive” response; Communication Minister Getachew Reda 28 Feb claimed opposition parties also involved. Eritrean soldiers early Feb reportedly abducted some 80 miners, killed one in northern Tigray region; miners released to Ethiopia 27 Feb.

- [“Ethiopia says Oromia crackdown claims are ‘lies’”](#), *BBC*, 22 Feb. 2016.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°117, *Ethiopia: Governing the Faithful*, 22 Feb. 2016.

Ethiopia’s struggle with domestic religious radicalisation has shifted toward top-down intervention, a policy that has contained violence but is generating new risks. Political

accommodation and compromise are vital to defuse faith-based radicals' opposition to what they perceive as overly secular rule by the dominant party.

➔ **Kenya** Somalia PM Sharmarke briefly detained 20 Feb at Nairobi airport for security protocol breach; Somali govt demanded apology. Gunmen 21 Feb attacked police facility in Hindi, Lamu county; no casualties reported. Communal violence included: Illchamus community raiders 4 Feb attacked Tugen (Kalenjin) herders in Baringo county, three killed, hundreds of livestock taken; cattle raiders 5 Feb killed at least six in Samburu county. Govt 21 Feb started talks with Ethiopia and South Sudan on disputed border demarcation.

- ["Somali Prime Minister detained in Nairobi"](#), Standard Digital, 21 Feb. 2016.

⚡ **Somalia** Al-Shabaab upped terrorist attacks and recaptured locations across south-central Somalia: attacked and recaptured several towns in Lower Shabelle, Bay and Jubaland regions, including 8 Feb temporary occupation of Marka and 16 Feb attack on Afgoye, locations lost by Al-Shabaab in 2012. Local clan militia, AMISOM and Somali National Army regained control of some towns from Al-Shabaab in Middle Shabelle during month. Kenya govt claimed its 8 Feb airstrike killed Al-Shabaab Intelligence Chief Mohammed Karatey, denied by Al-Shabaab 18 Feb. Al-Shabaab 26 Feb launched complex attack involving gunmen accompanying vehicle-borne explosives on Mogadishu hotel popular with govt officials and MPs opposite presidency killing at least 30; Al-Shabaab suicide bomber and car bomb 28 Feb hit two locations in Baidoa, Bay region, killing at least 30; suicide bomber 2 Feb detonated on board passenger plane, only bomber killed. AMISOM troop contributing countries 28 Feb held summit in Djibouti to reinforce military operations against Al-Shabaab after months of setbacks. Two killed 1 Feb in anti-govt protest in Puntland's Bari region; police same day raided home of Bari governor Gallan on suspicion of instigating protest.

- Abdul Khalif and Cedric Barnes, ["Somalia: Why is Al-Shabaab Still A Potent Threat?"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 11 Feb. 2016.

➔ **South Sudan** Peace deal implementation made some progress: President Kiir 11 Feb appointed Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) leader Riek Machar first VP and began movement of govt forces 25km away from Juba, both in accordance with deal. Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) 23 Feb announced agreement on implementation of transitional security arrangements, including SPLA-IO forces arrival in Juba. Constitutional amendment process suspended 21 Feb with most contentious issues to be managed through "Boundaries Commission" called for by Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). At least eighteen killed 17 Feb in fighting inside UNMISS civilian protection camp in Malakal; armed civilians and individual govt forces subsequently burnt down much of camp which hosts tens of thousands.

- Casie Copeland, ["South Sudan's Peace Needs More than Tents and Generators"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 23 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Sudan** Govt 16 Feb accepted African Union High Implementation Panel (AUHIP) invitation to 16-18 March Addis Ababa meeting with armed opposition groups; same day announced indefinite extension of National Dialogue (ND). Govt "dry season" campaigns in "Two Areas" (S Kordofan and Blue Nile states) continued with aerial bombing and ground offensives involving Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and locally re-

cruited militia. Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) 17 Feb claimed it killed sixteen govt soldiers in attack, one SPLM-N member also killed; 21 Feb claimed it killed 200 govt soldiers during govt offensive in Blue Nile state; govt did not confirm military casualty figures, latter figure believed to be inflated. SPLM-N 26 Feb claimed it killed 23 govt soldiers during ambush of logistical convoy in S Kordofan state. Some 40 opposition representatives, including former ruling National Congress Party (NCP) notables Dr Ghazi Salahuddin Atabani and Al-Tayyib Mustafa, 23 Feb announced formation of Future Forces of Change (FFC) political coalition, largely comprising parties that quit National Dialogue process.

- ["Khartoum extends national dialogue process"](#), Sudan Tribune, 18 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Uganda** President Museveni re-elected 18 Feb in mostly peaceful presidential elections with some 60% of vote; poll marred by irregularities including late delivery of voting materials to some constituencies in and around Kampala. Main opposition candidate and runner-up Kizza Besigye briefly arrested multiple times during and after vote amid protests against alleged govt vote-rigging; held under house arrest during week following election. Police reportedly searched Besigye's Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) party HQ 22 Feb, arrested eight FDC members for alleged plans to incite violence. Six killed 27 Feb in violence around western Bundigubyo town after dispute related to announcement of local election results.

- ["Uganda's Museveni looks to fourth decade in power"](#), AFP, 16 Feb. 2016.

Southern Africa

➔ **Angola** Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) 18 Feb announced return to full-scale hostilities following series of reported attacks against govt forces (FAA): FLEC 7 Feb ambushed FAA patrol in Chivoco, Massabi region, three soldiers killed, four injured; 12 Feb ambushed FAA troops in Buco Zau region, five soldiers and one FLEC killed.

- ["Flec anuncia regresso à via militar em Cabinda"](#), VOA, 18 Feb. 2016.

↓ **Mozambique** Opposition Renamo early Feb rejected talks with President Nyusi, arguing Renamo leader Dhlakama's safety could not be guaranteed. Renamo 8 Feb said it would block roads in Sofala province; clashes and attacks on civilian vehicles left several dead and injured, security forces 19 Feb resumed armed escorts for civilians along 100km section of EN1 highway into Sofala. Renamo gunmen 15 Feb shot dead ruling Frelimo party judge Manecas da Silva and secretary in Sofala. Military operations to disarm Renamo militants in Tete province continued to generate refugee flows; over 6,000 have reportedly fled into Malawi amid calls for investigations into alleged executions and sexual abuses by security forces.

- ["Armed escorts re-introduced on Save-Muxungue road"](#), *Agência de Informação de Moçambique*, 19 Feb. 2016.

↓ **Zimbabwe** Tensions worsened between rival factions of ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) pitting First Lady Grace Mugabe against VP Emmerson Mnangagwa. Mnangagwa ally Prosecutor General Johannes Tomana arrested and charged 2 Feb with interfering in case of four defendants ac-

cused of trying to firebomb Grace Mugabe's dairy farm late-Jan; accused are linked to military intelligence, traditional Mnangagwa allies. Grace Mugabe 12 Feb accused war veterans and security chiefs of disloyalty to President Mugabe, exacerbating tensions with security elements aligned to Mnangagwa. Extraordinary ZANU-PF politburo meeting 17 Feb failed to avert further fracturing within party; three Mnangagwa-aligned provincial party chairpersons rejected efforts to suspend them by rivals allied to first lady's G40 faction; Grace Mugabe ally Mandi Chimene said War Veterans Minister Christopher Mutsvangwa – a key Mnangagwa ally – and his executive would be removed from leadership of National Liberation War Veterans Association. Police thwarted Mutsvangwa's efforts to convene extraordinary meeting in Harare and 18 Feb violently suppressed war veterans' gathering. Mugabe 19 Feb railed against factionalism, castigated Mutsvangwa and defended G40; reportedly curtailed first lady's rallies in bid to appease security elements.

- ["Zimbabwe police fire water cannon to break-up war veteran protest"](#), Reuters, 18 Feb. 2016.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°118, *Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis*, 29 Feb. 2016.

Zimbabwe has not escaped its chronic crisis. Infighting over who will succeed the ailing 92-year-old President Robert Mugabe is stifling efforts to tackle insolvency, low rule of law, rampant unemployment and food insecurity. Zimbabwe needs international help to recover, but what it needs most is a leadership willing to act on much-needed reforms.

West Africa

➔ **Burkina Faso** Security concerns remained following mid-Jan terrorist attack in Ouagadougou; militants 5 Feb released Australian woman abducted same day as attack, husband still captive. Former member of Presidential Guard (RSP) Moussa Nébié aka "Rambo", one of alleged orchestrators of Sept 2015 coup and 22 Jan attack on Yimdi arms depot, and two civilians arrested 21 Feb in Côte d'Ivoire and extradited to Ouagadougou. FM Alpha Barry 22 Feb expressed gratitude for extradition. Ivorian govt 22 Feb confirmed former President Compaoré's Ivorian citizenship, precluding possibility of his extradition to Burkina. PM Thiéba 5 Feb made first address to National Assembly, received vote of confidence. Clash narrowly avoided in Sapouy 18 Feb between police and vigilante groups "Kogl weogo", known for helping govt tackle insecurity and accused of rights abuses.

- ["Fin de partie pour 'Rambo', ancien putschiste du RSP et proche de Diendéré"](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 22 Feb. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°116, *Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II*, 7 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Côte d'Ivoire** President Ouattara 5 Feb reiterated Ivorians will no longer be sent to International Criminal Court (ICC), noting national justice system has capacity to prosecute them; statement followed late-Jan start of ICC trials of former President Gbagbo and youth leader Charles Blé Goudé. Pro-Gbagbo officers Anselme Séka Yapo, Brunot Dogbo Blé and Séry Daleba sentenced to life 18 Feb for murder of former junta leader and President Gueï during 2002 failed coup. Prisoners in main Abidjan prison (MACA) rioted 20 Feb; one guard and ten prisoners, including infamous gangster Yacouba Coulibaly, aka "Yakou the Chinese", killed.

- [“Procès Gueï : Dogbo Blé et Séka Yapo condamnés à la prison à vie”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 18 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Guinea** Tensions increased within leading opposition Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG), pitting supporters of party President Diallo against those of party VP Bah Oury. UFDG 4 Feb banned Bah from running for party leadership following his 24 Jan return from exile in France after presidential pardon of his 2011 conviction for attack on President Alpha Condé’s residence. Violence erupted 5 Feb between Bah and Diallo supporters at UFDG HQ in Conakry, one journalist shot dead. Authorities 6 Feb launched investigation into journalist’s death, arrested twenty militants, primarily Diallo supporters. EU Electoral Observation Mission 11 Feb released report on 11 Oct 2015 presidential elections noting legal and technical framework for elections suffered serious shortcomings.

- [“Enquête ouverte après la mort d'un journaliste dans des violences politiques”](#), AFP, 6 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Guinea-Bissau** Crisis continued within ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC): in contradiction of late-Jan court ruling, different Bissau judge 8 Feb cancelled National Assembly leadership’s decision to deprive fifteen PAIGC dissidents of their mandate. Assembly leadership rejected decision but cancelled planned 15-25 Feb parliamentary session citing legal uncertainty. Consultations organised by President Vaz and joined by international officials including ECOWAS mediator and former Nigerian President Obasanjo 11 Feb failed to resolve dispute; assembly head Cipriano Cassama and PAIGC boycotted talks over presence of dissident PAIGC members.

- [“Face à l'impasse politique, la communauté internationale exaspérée”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 11 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Liberia** Political tensions grew as opposition Movement for Progressive Change (MPC) 15 Feb threatened legal action against govt for alleged arbitrary detention of party leader Simeon Freeman. Police 8 Feb barricaded Freeman’s home and threatened him over rumours he accused govt of creating death squad to kill ten people, mainly politicians. Police 29 Feb fired tear gas to disperse crowd demanding release of activist Vandalark Patricks.

- [“MPC threatens gov’t with legal pursuit”](#), *New Dawn*, 15 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Mali** Tensions rose 2 Feb when hundreds of pro-govt militia arrived at rebel stronghold Kidal; violence avoided with talks between rebel alliance Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) and pro-govt militia. Leaders 6 Feb jointly announced reduction of pro-govt militia in Kidal and establishment of joint city patrols; both groups underlined commitment to Bamako peace agreement, but said Oct 2015 Anéfis pacts were “best tool” for peace. Govt, CMA and pro-govt armed groups 26 Feb jointly stated need to boost peace agreement implementation and announced peace forum in Kidal 27-30 March. Violent jihadi groups remain serious threat with increased attacks against international and govt forces (FAMA) throughout month including: car bomb attack 5 Feb near MINUSMA building in Timbuktu, one soldier killed, two soldiers and two civilians wounded; MINUSMA camp attacked 12 Feb, six peacekeepers killed,

30 wounded. Banditry targeting NGOs and local violence added to widespread insecurity, including NGO vehicle attacked 1 Feb near Timbuktu.

- [“Le calme à Kidal après l'accord CMA-Gatia”](#), RFI, 11 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Niger** Tensions heightened ahead of 21 Feb presidential elections: during opposition rallies security forces 2-3 Feb clashed with supporters of opposition candidate Hama Amadou. Police 9 Feb arrested Amadou supporter and famous singer Hamsou Garba and detained her for one week for allegedly inciting civil disobedience, fuelling opposition accusations of gov't's authoritarian drift. Govt 13 Feb accused opposition of planning to tamper with votes after customs officer seized 20,000 ballots with Amadou's name checked; Amadou's party argued ballots were to show militants how to vote, accused gov't of trying to undermine his credibility. Presidential vote held peacefully 21 Feb; opposition parties 23 Feb threatened to reject results and accused gov't of rigging vote. CENI published results 26 Feb: Mahamadou Issoufou won 48.45% but will face Amadou, who won 17.76%, in run-off elections 20 March. Presidential coalition easily won parliamentary majority. Boko Haram attacks slowed in Diffa region but security situation remained precarious; OCHA 8 Feb reported some 2 million Nigeriens face food insecurity.

- Jean-Hervé Jezequel, [“Élection présidentielle au Niger : un climat sous tension, des lendemains incertains”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 19 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Nigeria** Gov't reported further gains in fight against Boko Haram (BH) including: troops 3 Feb reportedly killed over 100 BH insurgents and freed some 1,000 people held by BH in Boboshe, Garidawaji and Mamawari villages, Borno state; army 18 Feb said troops ambushed and killed scores of insurgents near Sambisa forest, Borno state. President Buhari 28 Feb said BH no longer a threat to Nigeria's security. BH continued attacks in Borno state, including 9 Feb suicide bombing in displaced persons' camp in Dikwa, some 60 killed. Over 100 killed in clashes between Fulani herdsmen and indigenous farmers in four locations in Agatu area, Benue state throughout month; Buhari 27 Feb ordered investigation. Clashes erupted 12 Feb between rival cult groups, Icelanders and Sailors, in Omoku, Rivers state, at least fifteen killed; soldiers and militants exchanged fire 22 Feb in Ogoni area of Rivers state, casualties unconfirmed. Amid concerns of possible unrest in region, gov't 15 Feb announced extension of Presidential Amnesty Program for former Niger Delta militants to 2018. Unknown militant group, Niger Delta Avengers, 21 Feb claimed it was responsible for blowing up Forcados terminal pipeline 14-16 Jan in Delta state; warned of further attacks on oil installations until gov't addresses grievances. Federal anti-graft agency Economic and Financial Crimes Commission continued investigations; 21 Feb said former chief of defence staff Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh and former air force chief Air Marshal Olusola Amosu arrested and under interrogation over arms procurement fraud.

- [“Young bombers kill 58 at Nigerian camp for those fleeing Boko Haram”](#), *New York Times*, 10 Feb. 2016.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan (East China Sea)** Japan Air Self-Defence Force 31 Jan launched new unit of ten F-15 fighters as part of efforts to defend Ryukyu/Nansei islands, which include disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. Chinese navy 24 Feb commissioned advanced missile frigate to East Sea Fleet. Commander of U.S. Pacific Command late Jan said U.S. would defend Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in case of attack by China, in accordance with treaty obligations. Chinese media 15 Feb reported fleet of F-22 Raptors, suspected of belonging to U.S., had flown across ECS.

- [“In East China Sea Beijing tests Japan’s resolve”](#), *Manila Times*, 5 Feb. 2016.

↓ **Korean Peninsula** DPRK 7 Feb announced launch of earth observation satellite from Sohae launch site, violating UNSC ban on ballistic missile tests. Rocket used has potential range of 12,000km, U.S. reported twice payload of previous rocket test. Launch prompted international condemnation including from UNSC. U.S. 25 Feb submitted draft resolution to UNSC including “unprecedented sanctions” against DPRK, with vote scheduled for 1 March; reported China and U.S. agreed on strong and united international response to Pyongyang’s provocations. ROK 10 Feb ordered shut-down of Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC), reporting intelligence suggesting 70% of DPRK’s KIC earnings funnelled into nuclear weapons program. DPRK retaliated expelling all ROK nationals, freezing ROK firms’ assets, announcing plans to put complex under military control; also vowed to disconnect its three hotlines with south. China 17 Feb proposed simultaneous denuclearisation talks and replacement of existing armistice agreement with peace treaty; ROK, U.S. said progress on denuclearisation must come first. U.S. intelligence chief 9 Feb reported DPRK has expanded Yongbyon nuclear enrichment facility and restarted plutonium production reactor, could obtain plutonium within weeks; also stated low yield of DPRK’s 6 Jan hydrogen bomb inconsistent with successful detonation of a thermal nuclear device. U.S. imposed new sanctions against DPRK, also stepped up military deployment to ROK. ROK and U.S. began talks on deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) missile defence system; Chinese FM 12 Feb voiced concerns, saying THAAD exceeds defence needs of Korean Peninsula; U.S. stressed it does not aim to undermine Chinese security interests. ROK media 10 Feb reported DPRK had executed Army Chief of Staff Ri Yong-gil. ROK intelligence reported Kim Jong-un ordered intensification of preparations for terrorist attacks against ROK, urged lawmakers to pass new counter-terrorism bill.

- [“North Korea rocket launch: Pyongyang faces UN sanctions and a planned new missile defence system”](#), *Independent*, 7 Feb. 2016.

South Asia

↓ **Afghanistan** Fighting continued to worsen ahead of proposed talks between gov't and Taliban early March. Officials 20 Feb reported Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) pulled out of Helmand’s Musa Qala district after dozens of police and soldiers

were killed across province mid-month. Several police killed in heavy fighting in Sangin district 14 Feb. Badakhshan provincial governor 18 Feb reported Jurm and Yamgan districts completely under Taliban control. MPs from Baghlan province 3 Feb said Sept 2015 deal between Dand-e-Ghori regional govt and Taliban led to increased insecurity in N Afghanistan and Baghlan. CEO Abdullah 5 Feb said continued NATO troop support for ANSF essential. U.S. National Intelligence Director 10 Feb warned Afghanistan at “serious risk of political breakdown” in 2016; UN 14 Feb reported 2015 saw highest number of civilian casualties recorded since 2009. Taliban splinter group 6 Feb released video calling new Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour puppet of Pakistani intelligence agency, declared nationwide military campaign against Mansour. Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) representatives from Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and U.S. met in Islamabad 6 Feb, discussed Afghan peace process; Afghan officials 23 Feb said govt expects to meet with Taliban early March. At least 26 people killed in two separate suicide bombings 27 Feb in Kumar province and Kabul; Taliban claimed responsibility for Kabul attack. Five ICRC staff kidnapped 16 Feb in Ghazni province, released three days later. President Ghani 9 Feb approved mass media law seeking to promote freedom of speech, but prohibiting content contrary to Islam, offensive to other religions, or defamatory.

- [“Afghan peace process: Desperation versus strength”](#), Al Jazeera, 22 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Bangladesh** Political atmosphere remained relatively calm, however govt continued to target opposition and dissenting voices. Fifteen opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami activists sentenced 2 Feb to life imprisonment over alleged political violence in 2013; over 100 BNP leaders including acting secretary general indicted mid Feb over violence during BNP blockade early 2015. BNP 12 Feb announced it will contest local elections 22 March, and hold party national council also in March. Awami League (AL) parliamentarians and PM Sheikh Hasina’s son Sajeeb Wazed Joy 6 Feb urged prosecutors to try *Daily Star* Editor Mahfuz for treason, after he publicly apologised for publishing stories about then-opposition leader Hasina’s alleged corruption; international press freedom organisations called on govt to end Mahfuz’s harassment. Editor of pro-BNP newspaper arrested in bomb blast case. Suspected Islamist militants 21 Feb fatally stabbed Hindu priest near Panchagarh; Islamic State claimed responsibility, however police said militant group Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) behind attack, arrested four. Police launched several raids on suspected extremist hideouts, recovering large amounts of weapons and explosives. International Crimes Tribunal 2 Feb sentenced two to death for alleged crimes during 1971 independence war. Relations with Pakistan deteriorated further; Pakistan embassy official detained for several hours 1 Feb for “suspicious movement”; Pakistan responded by detaining Bangladeshi embassy official for same amount of time; ambassadors to both countries were summoned by foreign ministries following incident.

- [“Isis claims responsibility for killing of Hindu priest in Bangladesh”](#), *Guardian*, 21 Feb. 2016.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Home Minister Rajnath Singh 19 Feb said govt ready for talks with Maoists “if they give up violence without any condition”. In continued clashes between security officials and Maoists, four Maoists reportedly killed 19 Feb in Taimara valley, Jharkhand; *jawan* killed in attack in Kanker district 12 Feb. Suspected Maoists reportedly blew up office block in Jharkhand’s Jamui district 15 Feb. Five killed in Jat protests demanding quotas in affirmative action system 20-22 Feb in

Haryana state, more than ten million in Delhi left without water for three days after protestors sabotaged key canal. Nine students at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University charged with sedition after organising protest.

- [“Centre ready for talks with Maoists: Home Minister Rajnath Singh”](#), PTI, 19 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Kashmir** Indian home minister 3 Feb said govt would continue working with Pakistani investigation into 2 Jan attack on Pathankot air base in Indian Punjab; said Islamabad had to show “sincerity and take action against terrorists operating from its soil”. Anonymous security official 8 Feb reportedly said Pakistani investigation team found “nothing dubious” in homes, madrasas and phone records of Jaish-e-Mohammad members blamed by India for attack. Pakistan’s National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 1 Feb urged govt to avoid “encouraging” support to Kashmiri militants. Addressing Pakistan-administered Kashmir parliament 5 Feb, PM Sharif said solution “lies in dialogue” with India. Leader of militant group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba/Jamaat-ud-Dawa warned Sharif not to “betray the Kashmiri cause”. Nine reported killed including civilians in three-day gun battle between militants and security forces in India-controlled region after gunmen 21 Feb attacked bus carrying police. Five suspected militants and two soldiers killed during gun battle 13 Feb in Kupwara near Line of Control. One killed during clashes between Pakistan People’s Party and Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) activists 13 Feb in Kotli district of Pakistan-administered Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Authorities imposed curfew in Indian-controlled areas 15 Feb amid calls by separatist groups to protest death of teenage boy and women during demonstrations against Indian rule.

- [“Pakistan probe: No evidence links militant group to Indian air base attack – officials”](#), Reuters, 8 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Nepal** Five-month long blockade on essential supplies imposed by protesting Madhesi parties and groups along Indian border lifted 6 Feb following differences on strategy between parties comprising United Madhesi Democratic Front (UDMF) and increasing protester fatigue. Humanitarian situation eased despite fuel supplies remaining partially disrupted due to thriving black market. Govt began downsizing deployment of security forces across southern Tarai districts. Disputes regarding contentious constitutional provisions – especially key Madhesi demand related to demarcating new federal provinces – remained unresolved. Cabinet 18 Feb announced formation of political committee to discuss provincial boundaries; UDMF rejected decision, blaming lack of prior consultation on committee’s terms of reference. PM KP Oli visited New Delhi 19-23 Feb to help ease bilateral tensions following India’s criticisms of constitution-writing process and unofficial Indian support for blockade; Indian PM Modi reemphasized need for consensus and dialogue to ensure new constitution’s success. Former PM and Nepali Congress (NC) President Sushil Koirala died 9 February; NC general convention to elect new party president scheduled 3-6 March.

- [“Unclear roadmap”](#), *Kathmandu Post*, 29 February 2016.

➔ **Pakistan** Continued attacks against security personnel raised concerns that extremist outfits have regrouped and operating freely; govt early Feb said terrorists being funded externally by “hostile intelligence agencies” to foment instability. Intelligence Bureau head 11 Feb said Pakistani Taliban (TTP) has ties with Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) extremist groups and is coordinating with Is-

lamic State (IS), which is growing in country; Foreign Ministry and Interior Minister denied, said IS has no organised presence in Pakistan. Army 12 Feb reported arrest of 97 suspected al-Qaeda and LeJ militants in Karachi. Attacks in Balochistan included eleven killed 6 Feb in TTP-claimed suicide bombing near military convoy in Quetta; ten members of Balochistan Liberation Army reported killed, twelve arrested 14 Feb in Sibi district raid. U.S. drone strike in Afghanistan's Paktika province 1 Feb reportedly killed eighteen TTP militants. In Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), TTP's Jamaat-ul-Ahrar faction claimed responsibility for two attacks in Mohmand Agency 18 Feb, nine tribal police killed. In other militant attacks, Awami National Party Swabi district councillor and her two children killed in Peshawar 10 Feb, TTP suspected; three police killed 10-12 Feb in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Former Afghan governor Fazlullah Wahidi kidnapped 12 Feb in Islamabad, later freed by police; policeman killed at routine checkpoint search 12 Feb. Punjab Counter-Terrorism Department 17 Feb reported seven suspected TTP and LeJ militants killed in Sheikhpura district; polio worker wounded, two police killed same day in two attacks in Lahore. Country-wide protests 29 Feb following execution of Mumtaz Qadri for 2011 murder of Punjab governor Salman Taseer. International Federation of Journalists reported Pakistan fourth deadliest country in world for journalists in 2015.

- [“Pakistan’s hand in the rise of international jihad”](#), *New York Times*, 6 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Sri Lanka** President Sirisena 4 Feb reaffirmed commitment to implement UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution, however govt position on role of foreign experts/judges remains unclear, despite visit by UNHCHR Zeid 6-9 Feb. Govt 12 Feb launched two-month consultation process on transitional justice mechanisms in Jaffna; following late Jan visit, UN Special Rapporteur on transitional justice Pablo De Grieff issued statement 10 Feb urging longer consultation period and major push to build govt capacity and develop coherent strategy for implementing HRC resolution. Govt's 16 Feb appointment of veteran and pro-devolution Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP, Sirisena's party and part of national govt) politician Reginald Cooray as Northern Province governor widely welcomed by Tamil politicians. Former Army Commander Sarath Fonseka 9 Feb appointed to fill vacant United National Party (UNP, second party in national govt) seat in parliament; decision challenged in court as he was not on UNP list at Aug elections as required by law; Fonseka made minister of regional development 25 Feb. New Attorney General Jayantha Jayasuriya sworn in 11 Feb amid widespread criticism of office's reported blockage of criminal prosecutions and releases of Tamil detainees. MPs from “joint opposition” Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United People Freedom Alliance protested in parliament 9 Feb after speaker's refusal to allow them to sit separately from SLFP. IMF 11 Feb confirmed govt had requested additional support to cover increasingly severe balance of payments difficulties, amid rising opposition to proposed trade deal with India.

- [“Sri Lanka war crimes in the spotlight as UN rights chief visits”](#), IRIN, 9 Feb. 2016.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** Following 14 Jan terror attack, govt drawing up plans for tougher anti-terrorism laws. Australia late Feb issued updated travel advisory warning terrorists could be in “advanced stages” of preparing attacks in Indonesia. Amnesty International-

al annual report criticised govt failure to protect religious minorities; Human Rights Watch 11 Feb reported that local authorities in Subang, West Java have banned activities of Ahmadiyah religious community.

- [“More violence likely for Indonesia as small groups seek to impress Islamic State”](#), *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Myanmar** New five-year legislative term commenced 1 Feb with convening of lower house, and upper house 3 Feb. National League for Democracy (NLD)’s choice of speaker and deputy speaker elected unopposed in both houses: both positions in upper house filled by non-Burmans, while both deputy speakers are non-NLD members. First session of joint Union Legislature 8 Feb decided presidential election process would not begin until 17 March, two weeks before end of current administration’s term 30 March; later brought date forward to 10 March. Lower house 5 Feb appointed former Speaker Shwe Mann – a key ally of Suu Kyi and third most powerful general in old regime – as chair of Legal Affairs and Special Issues Commission. Suu Kyi held third meeting with Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing 17 Feb; reportedly discussed rule of law and peace process. Local media 13 Feb reported Min Aung Hlaing and his deputy extended their terms for five more years. Facebook 1 Feb removed video posted three days earlier by controversial nationalist monk Wirathu dramatising rape and murder of Rakhine girl that sparked deadly anti-Muslim violence in 2012; video had prompted strong criticism from senior NLD member and warning from Ministry of Religious Affairs that it could lead to court action. Further round of clashes erupted between Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and Shan State Army-South (SSA-South) armed groups in N Shan state 7 Feb, displacing several thousand civilians. Meeting of Shan State Joint Action Committee (committee of armed groups and political parties in Shan state) agreed 14 Feb that Shan State Progress Party (SSPP)/SSA-North should mediate talks between belligerents. Lower house 17 Feb discussed emergency motion calling for immediate ceasefire and humanitarian assistance; deputy defence minister reported Myanmar armed forces had begun military intervention to end fighting in area.

- [“Ex-general who led Myanmar from dictatorship leaves mixed legacy”](#), Reuters, 14 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Philippines** Congress went on recess 3 Feb without passing Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), meaning that bill, which is required to implement 2013 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) through creation of autonomous Bangsamoro region, will not be passed before May elections. Chief peace negotiator criticised legislators’ “indifference” and “chronic absenteeism” in the 16th Congress. Following talks in Malaysia 10-11 Feb, govt and MILF issued joint statement expressing disappointment but agreeing to extend ceasefire until March 2017. MILF chief negotiator Mohagher Iqbal warned of frustration and anxiety within MILF; MILF leader Murad Ebrahim 18 Feb also expressed commitment to peace, urged patience and calm among Bangsamoro communities. Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) 26 Feb said that Jan 2015 Mamasapano incident, in which 44 police commandos and eighteen MILF were killed, not only halted passage of BBL but also may have made extremism more attractive to young Muslims. Military 10 Feb reported arrest of top Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) militant Hassan Indal alias Abu Hazam west of Cotabato City. BIFF suspected of responsibility for roadside bombs in Maguindanao killing four people 17 Feb and one soldier 20 Feb. Six suspected BIFF fighters reported killed in

clash with military 16 Feb. MILF 25 Feb announced it was repositioning its fighters in south to avoid “mis-encounters” with army fighting BIFF. Military reported 42 suspected militants claiming links to Islamic State killed during clashes in Lanao del Sur province late month; three soldiers also killed. Military reported clash between Abu Sayyaf Group and Moro National Liberation Front in Sulu 20 Feb, two killed. Six policemen killed in attack by suspected New People’s Army (NPA) rebels in Cagayan 16 Feb. Military reported NPA leader shot dead by soldiers in Bukidnon province 23 Feb.

- [“Government, MILF commit to truce until 2017”](#), *Philippine Star*, 13 Feb 2016.

➔ **South China Sea** Media reported 16 Feb satellite images indicated China has deployed radar system and two batteries of missile launchers on Woody Island in Paracels, over which Vietnam also claims sovereignty; U.S. and Taiwan confirmed deployment, which Washington said increased regional tensions. Chinese FM said deployment “limited, necessary and defensive”. U.S. President Obama 15-16 Feb hosted first U.S.-ASEAN leaders’ summit; joint statement emphasised commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes by legal and diplomatic processes, without resorting to threat or use of force; Vietnamese PM Dung called for greater U.S. involvement against activities changing SCS status quo, urged U.S. to help curb construction of artificial islands and militarisation. Chinese media 2 Feb reported satellite images from Aug and Dec 2015 suggesting Vietnam in process of reclaiming Nanhua reef in Spratlys to build two airstrips; images from Dec show reclaimed area likely destroyed by Typhoon Melor. U.S. think-tank 22 Feb revealed satellite images showing possible deployment of a high-resolution radar on a Spratly island.

- [“Chinese missile deployment raises tensions over South China Sea island”](#), *Globe and Mail*, 17 Feb. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°275, [Stirring up the South China Sea \(IV\): Oil in Troubled Waters](#), 26 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Thailand** Critics across political divide criticised draft constitution released late Jan, claiming it is undemocratic; National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) officials suggested critics could face legal consequences if they sow public confusion. PM Prayuth 3 Feb said election will be held in 2017, even if the public rejects the draft in a referendum. Deputy PM 9 Feb told reporters that if draft constitution is rejected in referendum by narrow margin, govt could make minor amendments and then promulgate it. Appointed National Legislative Assembly (NLA) 15 Feb rejected clauses of draft that changed balloting process and placed greater restrictions on who could become PM; endorsed military-dominated “crisis panel” to step in during moments of national crisis and entirely appointed senate. Cabinet 18 Feb asked Constitution Drafting Committee to ensure NCPO retains governing authority, even after general election and empanelling of civilian government, citing need to preserve peace and order. Former PM Thaksin Shinawatra in series of international media interviews late Feb criticised draft constitution and NCPO. Prayuth attended U.S.-ASEAN summit in California mid-Jan; U.S. President Obama urged quick return to civilian rule. Govt announced merger of Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre, interagency unit charged with coordination of social, political and economic initiatives in southernmost provinces, with army-dominated Internal Security Operations Command. Ongoing violence in Deep South included: roadside IED blast 12 Feb killed two soldiers in

Krong Pinang district, Yala; soldier killed in IED attack in Bacho district 17 Feb; car bomb wounded twelve including seven police in Pattani's Muang district 27 Feb.

- ["Twentieth time lucky?"](#), *Economist*, 20 Feb. 2016.

Pacific

➔ **Fiji** Parliament 9 Feb endorsed suspension of three opposition National Federation Party MPs from legislature over auditing dispute. Opposition Sodelpa MPs walked out of parliament 11 Feb in protest over suspension and over proposed changes to parliament's standing orders which it said ignored procedures. Govt declared state of emergency after worst recorded cyclone 20 Feb devastated parts of country, forced tens of thousands to flee homes; over 40 confirmed killed by end Feb.

- ["Fiji opposition walks out, declares parliament 'farce'"](#), Radio New Zealand, 11 Feb. 2016.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Following concerted international pressure, Republika Srpska President Dodik 8 Feb announced controversial planned referendum challenging authority of state judiciary to be postponed. Bosnia submitted formal EU membership application 15 Feb.

- [“Bosnia-Herzegovina faces a long road as it tries to become EU member”](#), DW, 15 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Kosovo** Continued efforts to end political crisis unsuccessful, including 8 Feb meeting between ruling coalition and opposition with EU and U.S. envoys; opposition refused to attend apart from Alliance for the Future of Kosovo leader Ramush Haradinaj, who called for snap elections. Tens of thousands of opposition supporters protested peacefully 17 Feb calling for Aug 2015 agreements with Serbia on association of Serb-majority municipalities, and with Montenegro on border demarcation, to be scrapped, and for govt to step down. Opposition again disrupted parliament 19 Feb, with opposition MPs setting off tear gas in chamber, nine arrested; also set off tear gas during sessions 24 and 26 Feb, when FM and former PM Hashim Thaci was elected president. Opposition supporters protesting outside parliament clashed with police 26 Feb.

- [“Kosovans stage round-the-clock anti-government protests”](#), *Financial Times*, 25 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Macedonia** Parliament 23 Feb voted to postpone elections planned for 24 April until 5 June, following EU and U.S. assessment 21 Feb saying conditions not yet in place for credible elections citing need to clean up electoral roll, agree on media reforms, take measures to separate state and political party activities. Opposition had threatened to withdraw ministers from govt and boycott elections if they were not postponed. Special Prosecution office set up to investigate high-level corruption 12 Feb announced several former ministers and senior officials suspected of organising election fraud in 2013. Constitutional Court 24 Feb voted to discuss annulling provision in law that bars president from granting pardons, seen by opposition as ploy to pardon those announced as suspects by Special Prosecution; decision prompted protests outside court.

- [“Macedonia postpones elections amid battle of nerves”](#), Balkan Insight, 24 Feb. 2016.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Continued increase in military cooperation between Russia and Armenia: Russia reportedly provided \$200mn loan for purchase of Russian arms; Russia and Armenia 23 Feb signed cooperation plan and agreement on unification of anti-aircraft warfare systems. Russian military 20 Feb said it had reinforced its base at Erebuni airport with jets and helicopter. Rights groups said arrest of dissident Vardges Gaspari on charges including insulting police politically motivated.

- [“Putin's newest satellite state”](#), *Forbes*, 24 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Azerbaijan** FM Elmar Mammadyarov 3 Feb said Azerbaijan holding talks with Russian and Turkish officials in bid to mend their deteriorated bilateral relations.

- [“Can Baku broker peace between Turkey and Russia?”](#), Eurasianet, 17 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** U.S. intelligence chief 9 Feb warned Azerbaijan’s military build-up and deteriorating economy raise risk of conflict escalating. Azerbaijan and Armenia continued to trade accusations of ceasefire violations. Baku reported multiple deaths, including: Azerbaijani soldier killed in clash near Armenian border 3 Feb, three Armenian soldiers also allegedly killed; at least five Armenian soldiers killed 12 Feb in clash near N-K. Armenia and N-K de facto officials refuted claims; N-K officials reported Azerbaijani forces 12 Feb killed civilian, and one N-K soldier killed 18 Feb. At OSCE-organised seminar 18 Feb Armenian official said country will move to more active deterrence in dealing with Azerbaijani troops in N-K. OSCE monitoring mission of N-K and Azerbaijan contact line 18 Feb reported no ceasefire violations.

- Magdalena Grono, [“The Shifting Dangers of Nagorno-Karabakh”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 26 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Georgia** Georgian official reported latest round of talks between Russia and Georgia, initially planned for Feb, postponed to mid-March. NATO Sec Gen Stoltenberg 11 Feb reported Georgia making progress in moving toward NATO membership thanks to reforms. Georgian opposition party leader Aleksii Petriashvili 26 Feb injured after being attacked and shot while visiting Tbilisi cemetery.

- [“NATO defence ministers confirm Georgia is moving closer to NATO”](#), NATO, 11 Feb. 2016.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Opposition and rights defenders demanded Kremlin reaction after Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov 31 Jan posted video showing Russian opposition figures Mikhail Kasyanov and Vladimir Kara-Murza in sniper’s crosshairs. In Russian TV interview 27 Feb Kadyrov said he would stand down when his current term expires in April. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for 15 Feb car explosion attack which killed two police officers and one civilian and injured over a dozen in Dagestan’s Derbent district. Some 300 protested arrest of Salafi imam in Derbent 10 Feb. Up to 5,000 protested 1 Feb after officials closed Salafi mosque in Khasavyurt; up to 15,000 gathered for Friday prayer 5 Feb in city’s eastern mosque to discuss Salafi activist arrests and closing of Salafi mosques across Dagestan. Caucasian Knot website reported 258 victims of NC conflict during 2015, half 2014 level. Documentary broadcast on Russian state TV 10 Feb showed Kadyrov saying Chechen agents have infiltrated IS ranks in Syria to gather intelligence; Kremlin did not confirm.

- [“Putin’s Chechen enforcer”](#), *Economist*, 6 Feb. 2016.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** EU 15 Feb lifted most individual sanctions imposed over democracy and human rights, citing “positive trend”, but leaving in place some sanctions and arms embargo and calling for further progress. UN rights envoy early month said “dismal state of human rights has remained unchanged” in country.

- [“EU lifts most sanctions against Belarus despite human rights concerns”](#), *Guardian*, 15 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Moldova** Jan anti-govt protests dwindled, however protests 9 Feb disrupted re-election of new Supreme Court Justice head, accusing him of corruption; protest leaders continue to call for fresh elections. Romania demanded reforms to justice and banking systems and anti-corruption measures as condition of \$65mn loan to Moldova. Parliament 25 Feb voted to keep country on pro-European path, streamline prosecution service including with anti-corruption office; MPs from opposition pro-Russia Socialist Party walked out of session. Grenade thrown at Central Bank governor’s home 1 Feb, no casualties, assailant unknown.

- [“The West is about to lose Moldova”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 19 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Ukraine** Upsurge of artillery exchanges, growing questions from all sides about Minsk’s viability, and further undermining of President Poroshenko’s standing all cast doubt on progress of reform agenda in Kyiv and implementation of Minsk agreements. Military reported escalated fighting in east, including three Ukrainian soldiers killed mid-month, international monitors voicing concern over increased shelling in recent weeks. Separatist leader Denis Pushilin 14 Feb said separatists would push ahead with integration of their republics into Russia as a “counterweight” to Ukraine’s implementation of Minsk; other separatist sources report that unification of the two separatist enclaves is again under preliminary discussion. French and German FMs travelled to Ukraine 22-23 Feb to call for faster reforms and implementation of Minsk agreements. Political chaos in Kyiv intensified; 16 Feb no-confidence vote in govt and PM Yatsenyuk failed, however episode widely seen as undermining President Poroshenko’s credibility, who hours before vote had publicly urged Yatsenyuk to resign. After vote, two factions, Yuliya Tymoshenko’s *Batkivshchyna* and *Samopomich*, both announced plans to leave governing coalition. Poroshenko requested resignation of controversial Prosecutor-General Viktor Shokin. Economy and Trade Minister Aivaras Abromavicius resigned 3 Feb, claiming that close adviser of Poroshenko had tried to impose upon him deputy ministers who were not qualified; ten leading Western ambassadors issued joint statement expressing dismay at resignation. IMF voiced concern at “slow progress in improving governance and fighting corruption”, casting doubt on prospects of IMF-supported program. Power struggles continued in separatist areas, with senior Donetsk leader Alexander Khodakovsky coming out in open opposition to Alexander Zakharchenko and another separatist leader.

- Paul Quinn-Judge, [“Ukraine’s Eastern Separatist Leaders Turn on Each Other”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 18 Feb. 2016.
- Paul Quinn-Judge, [“Russia’s Mixed Signals on Eastern Ukraine”](#), *New Eastern Europe*, 18 Feb. 2016.
- Magdalena Grono, [“The Not-So-Frozen Conflicts on Russia’s Borders”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 5 Feb. 2016.

New Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°79, [Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine](#), 5 Feb. 2016. A 2015 ceasefire signed in Minsk is largely holding in eastern Ukraine, while the most likely outcome is a brittle, long-term frozen conflict. Nevertheless, Russia is juggling many options, and Minsk remains a vital possible path to resolution. The deal deserves steadfast, sanctions-backed support from the U.S. and EU.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Talks between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders continued; referendum on reunification expected to take place after Greek Cypriot elections, scheduled for 22 May. Meeting between Turkish Cypriot leaders and Turkish govt 8 Feb failed to resolve ongoing dispute over water distribution, threatening to weaken ruling Turkish Cypriot coalition govt chaired by lead negotiator Mustafa Akıncı. Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu 21 Feb reiterated Ankara's support for settlement in Cyprus, predicted agreement would be reached by June 2016.

- ["No resolution in Cyprus water crisis"](#), Hurriyet Daily News, 15 Feb. 2016.

⚠️* **Turkey** Car bomb attack 17 Feb in Ankara killed some 29 high ranking military officials and civil servants; govt 18 Feb blamed attack on armed wing of Syrian affiliate of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG), however radical Kurdish nationalist group Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK), a PKK offshoot, 18 Feb claimed responsibility for attack. Incident further weakened prospects for talks to resume between Ankara and PKK. Violence continued in SE despite Ankara's declaration of successful conclusion of operations in Silopi and Cizre towns 28 Jan and 11 Feb; observers fear fighting will worsen in March. Some 84 security forces and at least 27 PKK militants killed in clashes during month including Ankara bombing. PM Davutoğlu 5 Feb unveiled anti-terror plan calling for aid to those displaced by fighting, reconstruction of devastated communities and economic assistance to SE, but rejecting engagement with pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP) or PKK; plan instead calls for consultations with local Islamist Kurdish parties and NGOs, small Kurdish nationalist parties unaligned with HDP or PKK, and constitutional reform to deliver Kurdish rights demands. Erdoğan 17 Feb signalled he could push for referendum on strengthening his office's powers following 16 Feb decision of main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) to leave committee tasked with drafting new constitution. Turkey started shelling YPG targets in N Syria after group began gaining ground against Turkey-backed rebels late-Jan. Responding to new wave of Syrian refugees fleeing Aleppo fighting, Turkish authorities began building makeshift camps on Syrian side of border. EU 3 Feb finalised €3bn fund to assist Turkey with some 2.7mn Syrian refugees it is hosting in exchange for strengthened Turkish efforts to prevent them travelling on to Europe.

- Jean-Marie Guéhenno, ["Don't Sacrifice Turkey to Save Syria"](#), *Guardian*, 29 Feb. 2016.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** Amid falling oil prices and depreciating currency, ruling Nur Otan party late Jan presented list of candidates for 20 March parliamentary elections; list includes only 33 of party's 83 previous MPs, and including sportsmen, singers and businessmen. PM Masimov and President Nazarbayev 6 Feb met Turkish PM Davutoğlu in Astana, declaring importance of relations with Ankara despite Russian-Turkish tensions. In telephone call with Nazarbaev 8 Feb, President Putin blamed Turkey for tensions. Ethnic tensions erupted into unrest in Zhambyl region in south as crowd stoned houses of ethnic Turks and demanded lynching of ethnic Turkish sus-

pected of killing child during botched burglary; special forces deployed to disperse protesters. Amnesty International annual report warned of worsening human rights situation in the country.

- [“Boy’s killing sparks ethnic tensions in Kazakh village”](#), RFE/RL, 17 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** Protests erupted in Naryn town 27 Jan against proposed cuts to allowances paid to residents/workers of mountainous areas. Protests over state allowances, rising electricity tariffs and introduction of mandatory house and car insurance held in Kara-Jygach, Jalalabad province 10 Feb and in Talas 22 Feb. Osh regional police said fifteen women detained 24 Feb on suspicion of being Hizb ut-Tahrir members.

- [“Kyrgyz police detain women allegedly in banned Islamic group”](#), RFE/RL, 24 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Tajikistan** Russia’s Central Military Command chief late Jan said country’s 201st air base near Kulyab to be downgraded from division to brigade, allegedly to increase mobility. Supreme Court 9 Feb started hearings in trial of thirteen leading members of Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) accused of attempting overthrow govt Sept 2015. Lower house 10 Feb approved 22 May referendum date on constitutional amendment to allow President Rahmon to retain presidency beyond 2020 and decrease lower age limit. During fifth session of EU-Tajik Cooperation Council 16 Feb, EU confirmed \$251mn development aid to Tajikistan until 2020. U.S. govt’s Counterterrorism Partnership Fund reportedly earmarked \$50mn in assistance to Central Asia, named Tajikistan special partner. Human Rights Watch 17 Feb denounced crackdown on political opposition.

- [“Severe crackdown on political opposition”](#), Human Rights Watch, 17 Feb. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°78, [Tajikistan Early Warning: Internal Pressures, External Threats](#), 11 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Turkmenistan** Late-Jan offer by visiting Russian FM Lavrov to assist with protecting Turkmen-Afghan border reportedly rebuffed amid ongoing spat over gas and concerns about Caspian Sea. Govt reportedly to be considering constitutional changes that would allow President Berdymukhamedov to rule for life. Amnesty International annual report criticised repression, continuing torture and rights violations.

- [“Watchdog warns ‘human rights in global jeopardy’”](#), RFE/RL, 23 Feb. 2016.

Latin America and the Caribbean

➡ **Colombia** Negotiators in Havana scheduled to resume talks 2 March to address pending issues on termination of conflict, ahead of 23 March deadline for final agreement. National Liberation Army (ELN) 14-17 Feb carried out some 35 attacks, prompting increased attacks by armed forces. President Santos 8 Feb stated ELN can either support peace or face intensified military response. Govt 18 Feb suspended further visits to Colombia by FARC negotiators, stating they violated terms of travel to country from talks in Cuba including ban on contact with civilians, after FARC negotiators met with local community in town of Conejo, reportedly to provide updates on progress of peace talks. FARC 10 Feb said it would no longer recruit children. U.S. President Obama 4 Feb announced new 2017 “Peace Colombia” aid package to support country while it seeks to consolidate peace with FARC. Police 29 Feb arrested former President Uribe’s son Santiago in Medellín on charges of murder and conspiracy; accused of setting up “Twelve Apostles” paramilitary group in 1990s, Santiago denied any involvement with group.

- Kyle Johnson, [“Mapiripán: una historia reproducida de violencia”](#), *Semana*, 12 Feb. 2016.
- Kyle Johnson, [“La misión de verificación de Naciones Unidas: ventajas y pendientes”](#), *Razón Pública*, 1 Feb. 2016.

➡ **Guatemala** Nine current and former tax revenue agency (SAT) officers arrested 12 Feb after being charged with corruption, in joint operation carried out by International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala and local prosecutors. Representatives and members of firm Aceros de Guatemala also arrested in first corruption allegations made against large private business. Constitutional Court 15 Feb cleared way to enforce limitations for private financing of political campaigns and political propaganda in open media. New Congress President Mario Taracena 11 Feb declared files would be disclosed for public scrutiny about contracts and salaries of Congress staff, in support of investigations into “ghost jobs”. Trials of a former military officer and a former military village commissioner started 1 Feb on charges of using sexual violence as “instrument of war” in early 1980s during civil war, first time this type of crime against humanity brought to court.

- [“MP-CICIG: Aceros de Guatemala sobornó directivos de la SAT por deuda fiscal”](#), *el Periodico*, 15 Feb. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°56, [Crutch to Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala](#), 29 Jan. 2016.

➡ **Haiti** Both houses of parliament, under auspices of Organization of American States (OAS), 5 Feb signed agreement to avert further escalation of political crisis following late-Jan indefinite postponement of presidential elections. Agreement stipulates parliament elect interim president for four-month term; presidential and legislative run-off be held 24 April; and winner of presidential race to be installed on 14 May for five-year term. President Martelly stepped down 7 Feb, parliament 14 Feb elected senate head Jocelerme Privert interim president. Privert 16 Feb opened public consultations to appoint new PM and form consensus govt; 19 Feb announced six candidates running to lead next administration.

- [“Jocelerme Privert is Haiti’s new provisional president”](#), *Miami Herald*, 14 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Mexico** Independent forensic team 9 Feb said physical evidence from Sept 2014 disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa did not support federal prosecutors' conclusion that students' bodies were incinerated there; echoes findings of previous Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) report. Same team 21 Feb alleged federal prosecutors were leaking misinformation, blocking their access to important testimony and evidence. Murders and disappearances reported in Veracruz state throughout month including 8 Feb discovery of two bodies of men reportedly abducted by state police weeks earlier and 9 Feb discovery of body of journalist Anabel Flores Salazar. Three other young people remain missing after state police allegedly turned them over to Jalisco Nueva Generación drug gang in Tierra Blanca; town's police chief and six other officers still in custody following mid-Jan arrest in connection with case. Riot erupted 11 Feb at overcrowded Topo Chico state penitentiary in Monterrey Nuevo León state, some 49 prisoners killed; Governor Jaime Rodríguez attributed riot to rival factions linked to Gulf and Zeta cartels.

- ["Forensic experts reject Mexico's claim that criminals burned missing students"](#), *Guardian*, 9 Feb. 2016.

⚠️* **Venezuela** Major confrontation threatened to exacerbate crisis as govt continues to act in defiance of National Assembly's (NA) prerogatives, arguing acts of legislature are subject to approval by govt-controlled Supreme Court (TSJ). Opposition majority reject govt interpretation, reiterated intention to remove TSJ justices whose late-Dec appointment it regards as unconstitutional. TSJ 12 Feb ruled National Assembly's 22 Jan rejection of President Maduro's mid-Jan economic emergency decree – which gave president sweeping powers to evade congressional oversight – had no legal weight and that decree remained in force. Compounding crisis, ministers and other govt officials summoned to appear before parliament have failed to show up to hearings. Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance began examining constitutional options for Maduro's removal: former MUD presidential candidate and leader of Justice First (PJ) party Henrique Capriles 11 Feb announced preference to activate both recall referendum and constitutional amendment simultaneously, given near-certainty govt would seek to block referendum move. Assembly 17 Feb passed second reading of amnesty law for political prisoners and those in exile subjected to judicial harassment for their political views. Govt prosecutors 15 Feb demanded sixteen-year sentence for Caracas mayor and opposition leader Antonio Ledezma, accused of plotting to overthrow govt. Maduro early-Feb told rally of supporters he was "in rebellion" against opposition plans to pass law granting property rights to beneficiaries of govt housing schemes. Maduro 17 Feb announced series of long-awaited economic measures, including substantial increase in price of petrol and reform of exchange controls including currency devaluation. Humanitarian crisis persisted as Pharmaceutical Federation early-Feb reported 80% of medicines now unobtainable and country owes US\$6bn to overseas suppliers; Health Minister Luisana Mela attributed shortages to "irrational use of medicines". Medical associations and NGOs report country may be facing several hundred thousand Zika cases; govt reports only 5,000.

- Crisis Group Conflict Alert, ["Alert: Venezuela on the Edge"](#), 19 Feb. 2016.
- ["Venezuela under 'economic emergency' as court gives Maduro decree powers"](#), *Guardian*, 12 Feb. 2016.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Tensions in Israel and West Bank increased with early-Feb cluster of Palestinian attacks on Israelis, following several months' decline in attacks. Leading Israeli opposition Labour party 8 Feb endorsed "Separation Plan" calling for completion of separation barrier, avoiding construction outside settlement blocks, transfer of civil powers to Palestinian Authority (PA) over areas beyond barrier and excluding many Palestinian villages-turned neighbourhoods in E Jerusalem from city's municipal boundaries. Following eight attacks in a single day 14 Feb, in which Israeli officials reported five Palestinians shot dead, opposition leader Isaac Herzog said Israel combatting "third Intifada". Israeli forces 15 Feb raided Amari refugee camp in Ramallah leaving 28 Palestinians with gunshot injuries; same day raided Qalandiya refugee camp in W Bank, arrested local Fatah leader. International Quartet (EU, Russia, U.S. and UN) 12 Feb declared it will write report including recommendations on how to move toward two-state solution. PM Netanyahu 10 Feb announced intention to complete construction of separation barrier. Israeli court 4 Feb jailed two Israeli youths for July 2014 murder of Palestinian teenager. Egypt opened Rafah crossing 13-16 Feb, permitting some 2,000 Palestinians to leave. Hamas and Fatah early-Feb discussed possibility of reconciling by forming national unity govt, scheduling elections and implementing Cairo agreement, however talks appear stalled. W Bank teachers went on strike over wages starting 10 Feb; PA deployed police across Ramallah, set up roadblocks; at least twenty teachers arrested 16 Feb, thousands joined protests 23 Feb. UN and PA 11 Feb made joint appeal for \$571m in humanitarian aid to Palestinians. UN special rapporteur on human rights 11 Feb urged Israel to investigate excessive use of force against Palestinians.

- ["Shrill wind from Israel: Does it risk alienating its allies?"](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Lebanon** During raid in Arsal near Syrian border, army 3 Feb killed six gunmen and arrested sixteen suspected militants including Islamic State (IS) commander. Hizbollah 2 Feb reportedly killed at least four al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) members in rocket attack outside Arsal. Hizbollah-affiliated media 8 Feb said IS and JN militants clashed on NE border with Syria. Parliament again failed to elect new president 8 Feb due to lack of quorum, despite Jan breakthrough in presidential race with Christian Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea's withdrawal of candidacy and endorsement of Free Patriotic Movement's Michel Aoun. Former PM and Future Current movement leader Saad Hariri 15 Feb said he remained committed to backing Marada Movement leader Suleiman Frangieh. Saudi Arabia 19 Feb suspended \$3bn in military aid (granted in 2013), reportedly over Lebanon's failure to condemn Jan attack on Saudi embassy in Iran; 23 Feb urged citizens to leave Lebanon. Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk 25 Feb said regular Future-Hezbollah meetings should be suspended. Court 18 Feb indicted fourteen on terrorism charges, including JN commander. Garbage crisis, which began July 2015, continues.

- ["Lebanon's Hariri urges Saudi king not to abandon country"](#), Reuters, 22 Feb. 2016.

New Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°46, *Arsal in the Crosshairs: The Predicament of a Small Lebanese Border Town*, 23 Feb. 2016. The fate of the border town Arsal mirrors Lebanon's many policy failures. The government applies heavy-handed security at the expense of basic services and fair economic opportunities. It should change its policies to become more flexible, accountable and supportive of Syrian refugees – and receive more international help in return.

➔ **Syria** U.S. and Russian-brokered “cessation of hostilities” took effect 27 Feb, allowing UN to increase aid deliveries to some of estimated 1.7mn people living in besieged and hard-to-reach areas. Truce allows for continued attacks against Islamic State (IS) and Jabhat al-Nusra, and both regime and opposition complained of breaches; nevertheless, in first two days violence diminished in much of country. Prior to truce, Russia dramatically intensified airstrikes on areas held by anti-IS opposition in and around Aleppo 2 Feb, prompting opposition representatives to decide against joining proximity talks with regime; UN envoy Staffan de Mistura 3 Feb announced talks on hold. Backed by Russian bombing, pro-regime ground force composed of Syrian army and allied militiamen, Shiite foreign fighters and Iran's Revolutionary Guard quickly gained ground in Aleppo's outskirts. Kurdish YPG, also benefitting from Russian support, also attacked rebels N of Aleppo and made significant gains near Turkish border; Turkey responded with artillery strikes on YPG positions. Despite increased Turkish support to its opposition allies, anti-IS rebels' position in region looking significantly weakened. Pro-regime airstrikes and advances around Aleppo prompted tens of thousands of civilians to flee to Turkish border. IS claimed responsibility for attacks including 21 Feb car bomb attacks in Homs and southern Damascus killing at least 140. International donors 4 Feb pledged over \$10bn to support Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries.

- [“Will cease-fire agreement bring Syrians relief?”](#), CFR, 12 Feb. 2016.

Gulf

➔ **Bahrain** Police 14 Feb clashed with anti-govt protesters in Sitra marking fifth anniversary of 2011 uprising, arrested several; four U.S. journalists arrested for participating in “riot acts”, released after two days. Eleven charged 8 Feb with forming terrorist group, several allegedly trained by Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Iraqi Hizbollah branch. Secular opposition leader Ibrahim Sharif sentenced 24 Feb to one year prison for inciting hatred. Ambassador to UK 5 Feb said Bahrain ready to deploy troops in Syria against Islamic State.

- [“Bahrain protesters clash with police on uprising anniversary”](#), AP, 14 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Iran** Final results of 26 Feb parliamentary and Assembly of Experts elections saw pragmatist candidates dominate in Tehran, taking all 30 contested parliamentary seats. Presidents Rafsanjani and Rouhani received highest number of votes for the Assembly of Experts, 88-member body which will pick next Supreme Leader; two influential hardliners Mohammad Yazdi and Mohammad-Taghi Mesbah-Yazdi lost seats. Conservatives fared better outside capital. Voter turnout reported at 62%. Results come after Guardian Council (GC) disqualified nearly 58% of 12,123 first round candidates for parliament, prompting outcry and behind-the-scenes negotiations led by

President Rouhani and parliament Speaker Ali Larijani. GC reinstated 1,500 candidates, but approved list did not include serious radical republican contenders, and few pragmatic republicans. GC also rejected 472 of 631 Assembly of Experts candidates, including major ayatollahs, all sixteen women, and Hassan Khomeini (pragmatic republican and grandson of Islamic Republic's founder). Nevertheless, former President Khatami and predecessor 21 Feb urged voters to back reformists and moderates. U.S. 18 Feb said Russia's reported plan to sell fighter planes to Iran without UNSC approval would violate UN arms embargo.

- Ali Vaez, [“Iran's Battle Lines: What to Expect in the Upcoming Elections”](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 24 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Iraq** Fighting continued in Islamic State (IS) stronghold Fallujah, where Sunni tribesmen and IS fighters clashed 19-20 Feb; fighting reportedly stopped after IS militants detained dozens of civilians, but Iraqi army continued shelling IS on city's outskirts. Humanitarian situation in Falluja remained critical; Anbar province Governor 1 Feb appealed to U.S.-led coalition for supplies. U.S. reported that coalition airstrikes 21 Feb near Fallujah, Mosul, Ramadi and Sinjar hit four IS tactical units; five coalition strikes 27 Feb near Mosul destroyed five fighting positions, other strikes also hit targets near Fallujah, Ramadi, Sinjar. Sunni fighters, backed by Kurdish forces and U.S.-led airstrikes, reportedly retook village from IS in Makhmour district 3 Feb. Officials 8 Feb reported thousands of soldiers deployed to military base near Makhmour district in preparation for operations against IS in Mosul. IS-claimed suicide bombings killed at least 70 in Shiite district of Baghdad 28 Feb, at least 40 in Diyala 29 Feb, and eight security force members at Abu Ghraib checkpoint 29 Feb. Amid popular discontent over govt's failure to implement anti-corruption reforms, PM Abadi 9 Feb said he would reshuffle cabinet to replace political appointees with technocrats; Moqtada al-Sadr endorsed decision and called for massive demonstration in central Baghdad 26 Feb gathering his supporters and civil society activists. Kurdistan Regional Govt's (KRG) President Barzani 2 Feb said he would organise non-binding referendum on independence. With region facing worst financial crisis since 2003, govt plan to cut civil servant salaries by 75% sparked wave of protests, especially in Suleymania province.

- [“Clashes in jihadist-held Iraq city halt after residents seized”](#), AFP, 21 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Jordan** Ahead of 4 Feb donors conference on Syria (see Syria), King Abdullah II said Jordan “at boiling point” as refugee influx – with 635,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan, in addition to over a million other Syrians living there according to govt – putting enormous pressure on social services, infrastructure and economy; called for increased international assistance.

- [“Syria conflict: Jordanians 'at boiling point' over refugees”](#), BBC, 2 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Yemen** Military stalemate persists as disagreement over ceasefire conditions stalls next round of UN talks. Saudi Arabia-backed pro-govt forces early month launched offensive in north to capture territory from Huthis; fighting continues over and around the strategic Fardhat Nihm military base, 70km NE of rebel-held capital Sanaa. UN humanitarian chief 16 Feb criticised all parties for obstructing aid, UN special envoy 17 Feb asked UNSC to push for ceasefire. In south, Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) continued to expand military operations and influence: AQAP early month captured towns in Shebwa and Abyan governorates.

Multiple attacks in Aden, govt's temporary capital: AQAP fighters 8-10 Feb clashed with govt forces; gunmen 16 Feb attempted unsuccessfully to assassinate Aden's governor and security chief; IS claimed 17 Feb suicide bombing that killed at least thirteen army recruits; gunman 22 Feb killed senior army officer. Suspected U.S. drone strike 14 Feb killed IS leader Jalal Belaidi.

- ["The city where war is the best employer: Life in liberated Aden"](#), *Guardian*, 18 Feb. 2016.

New Crisis Group Middle East Report N°167, *Yemen: Is Peace Possible?*, 9 Feb. 2016.

Yemen's outlook is bleak. It is crucial that the opposing blocs and their regional allies commit to a political process to resolve the conflict, but there is no end in sight. The immediate priority should be an agreement on humanitarian aid and commercial goods for areas where civilians are under siege.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** Govt sought to increase involvement in military action against Islamic State (IS) in Syria; U.S. Sec Defence Carter welcomed 4 Feb announcement by spokesman for Saudi-led Arab coalition in Yemen that govt is ready to take part in ground operations in Syria. Defence ministry adviser 13 Feb confirmed aircraft sent to airbase in Turkey; U.S. 16 Feb said Saudi Arabia took part in airstrikes against IS, did not say where. Brigadier General al-Assiri 2 Feb said Yemeni rebels killed or injured 375 civilians in Saudi border regions since Saudi-led military operations in Yemen began March last year (see Yemen). Air force 8 Feb shot down ballistic missile from Yemen. HRW report 14 Feb said evidence indicates Saudi Arabia fired banned U.S.-made cluster munitions in Yemen civilian areas. Govt 22 Feb reportedly put 32 people on trial accused of spying for Iran including 30 Shiite minority members. Protests held 11 Feb in Shia-majority Qatif district over govt's Jan execution of prominent Shia cleric.

- ["Concerns in Saudi Arabia over signs of more military involvement in Syria"](#), *Washington Post*, 22 Feb. 2016.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Parliament 7 Feb overwhelmingly approved constitutional amendments proposed by President Bouteflika; 74 amendments include reinstating two-term limit for president, making Tamazight an official language and banning binationals from senior govt posts. Head of leading human rights organisation and five trade unionists arrested at peaceful meeting early Feb. Defence Ministry reported soldiers 17 Feb killed two suspected terrorists in Douar Bousmail.

- ["Algerian lawmakers pass constitutional reforms, opposition dismiss"](#), Reuters, 7 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Egypt** Hundreds protested outside Cairo security directorate 18 Feb after policeman shot dead civilian; policeman held responsible reportedly detained. Thousands of doctors 12 Feb protested against police abuses following accusations policemen beat two doctors in Cairo 28 Jan. Missing Italian student found dead outside Cairo 3 Feb with signs of torture; interior minister 8 Feb denied allegations security forces responsible. President Sisi 19 Feb told interior minister to crack down on police abuse. In first address to new parliament Sisi 13 Feb praised transition but noted problems including slow economy and extremism. In 24 Feb speech Sisi railed against "unjustified" media criticism of govt, said national unity, not democracy, should be priority. Two suspected

militants killed in police raid in Cairo 3 Feb; police 7 Feb shot dead four suspected members of militant group Afnah Misr near Cairo. Gunmen 16 Feb opened fire on checkpoint in southern Cairo, one policeman killed. Health ministry 17 Feb ordered closure of prominent human rights organisation for allegedly violating permit; prominent rights activist Hossam Bahgat banned from traveling 23 Feb. Court 3 Feb overturned death sentences for 149 Muslim Brotherhood supporters, ordered retrial.

- [“Egypt’s Sisi tells interior minister to crack down on abuses by police”](#), Reuters, 19 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Libya** Efforts to form Govt of National Accord (GNA) remain unsuccessful. To-bruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) 23 Feb postponed by one week vote on slimmed-down cabinet of thirteen ministers plus five ministers of state, presented by Presidency Council 15 Feb after HoR 25 Jan rejected first cabinet line-up. PM-designate Serraj’s renewed nomination for defence minister of Benghazi army commander Mahdi al-Barghathi triggered opposition from supporters in HoR of eastern strongman General Haftar; inclusion of two former senior officials from Qadhafi regime provoked resentment among constituencies in western Libya initially supportive of UN-led mediation, now calling for removal of Serraj and reshuffling of presidential council. Illegal war economy becoming further entrenched amid plummeting state reserves, weakening Libyan dinar black market exchange rate and rising living costs; protesters in Shahat 7 Feb denounced deteriorating living conditions including blackouts, shortages of cash, bread, and fuel; UN humanitarian coordinator 22 Feb said country faces severe medicine shortages. Erratic violence continued. Eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) 23 Feb said it had taken control of Benghazi’s Boatni and Laithi districts and claimed advances in several other areas, despite two LNA MIGs crashing/being shot down over Derna and Benghazi early Feb. U.S. airstrike against suspected Islamic State (IS) training camp near Sabratha 19 Feb killed around 40 people. Clashes between IS affiliates and fighters loyal to Tripoli-based govt from Sabratha and nearby cities left dozens dead over following days, including some eleven security officers beheaded by IS supporters in Sabratha police station. UN human rights chief late Feb reported all sides committing human rights abuses possibly amounting to war crimes.

- Issandr El Amrani, [“How Much of Libya Does the Islamic State Control?”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 18 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Morocco** Govt 19 Feb said ten suspected militants linked to Islamic State including French citizen arrested after 18 Feb raids in Essaouira, Meknes and Sidi Kacem.

- [“Morocco arrests 10 suspected IS militants, including Frenchman”](#), Reuters, 19 Feb. 2016.

➔ **Tunisia** President Essebsi consulted with former and current prominent political figures on how to avoid political crisis, following social unrest 16-22 Jan at level unseen since 2010-2011. Protests called for action on youth unemployment, regional inequalities and clientelism in filling public-sector jobs, also calls for new govt. Amid political pressure from opposition including dissident wing of Nida Tounes party, govt reportedly considering replacing PM Essid. Authorities 4 Feb lifted curfew imposed 22 Jan. Essebsi 21 Feb said state of emergency imposed following Nov 2015 bomb attack on bus that killed twelve in Tunis extended for another month until 22 March. Construction of barrier along border with Libya completed 6 Feb. FM Jhinaoui 14 Feb declared opposition to international intervention against Islamic State (IS) in Libya. U.S. strike on IS training camp in Libya 19 Feb reportedly killed 39 Tunisians, including ex-

tremist leader believed to be behind 2015 Tunis and Sousse attacks. UK announced it will send troops to help stop IS crossing into Tunisia from Libya.

- [“L'état d'urgence prolongé d'un mois”](#), AFP, 21 Feb. 2016.

➡ **Western Sahara** Morocco suspended contact with EU institutions 25 Feb over a Dec European Court of Justice decision to void trade deal because it included disputed Western Sahara territory. EU appealed decision 23 Feb, Morocco believed to have objected to wording of appeal. UN spokesman said UNSG Ban would travel to Moroccan capital and Western Sahara later in year rather than during regional tour planned for March.

- [“Morocco suspends contacts with EU over court ruling on farm trade”](#), Reuters, 25 Feb. 2016.