

CrisisWatch

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

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Belgium](#), [Burundi](#), [Côte d'Ivoire](#), [Libya](#), [Pakistan](#), [Tunisia](#), [Turkey](#), [Western Sahara](#)

↑ Improved situations

[Colombia](#), [Syria](#)

April 2016 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Chad](#), [Libya](#)

☰ Conflict resolution opportunities

[Colombia](#), [South Sudan](#), [Yemen](#)

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** Violence increased while govt, under international pressure, made cosmetic concessions to opposition but continued repression. Gunmen killed three officials during month including two from ruling party; two army officers also shot dead 22 March in separate incidents in Bujumbura. New wave of army defections 24 March. One soldier died in Muzinda military camp 28 March after reportedly trying to kill other soldiers; army claimed it was suicide. Two grenades thrown at police bus in Bujumbura 29 March, seven injured. Govt freed 158 political prisoners, suspended around fifteen arrest warrants, reauthorised one local NGO and reopened two radio stations, but police arrested opposition activists including on 9 March Nadebu party president Hugo Haramategeko. EU 14 March suspended direct budget support to govt, but will maintain humanitarian aid, 29 March said it will cut funding to Burundi's peacekeeping contingent in Somalia. Ruling party 10 March claimed Rwandan President Kagame behind plot to destabilise Burundi. Security services 7 March arrested man they claimed to be Rwandan spy; Rwanda 17 March denied allegation. Former Rwandan minister, arrested Dec 2015 for spying, died suddenly in Bujumbura prison 31 March. UN 22 March said 474 people killed in political violence since April 2015. UNHCR 4 March said over 250,000 Burundians have fled to neighbouring states.

➡ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) attacks in Far North declined amid ongoing military operations. BH 5 March killed two local security committee members in Ganse; 8 March killed four civilians near Kolofata; 19 March killed two civilians near Amchide. Security forces prevented four suicide bombings during month, while two soldiers were killed and four injured in three IED incidents. Army 25 March caught two girls with explosives strapped to them in Limani, Far North. Military court 23 March sentenced 89 BH insurgents to death. BH insurgency worsening fragile political situation in Far North: protests took place during month against prefect and gendarmerie chief in Mokolo where deadly robberies are widely attributed to local gendarmerie; three gendarmes under investigation.

➡ **Central African Republic** Constitutional court 1 March validated President Touadéra's Feb election victory. Touadéra 10 March formed political secretariat to define priorities for forthcoming govt. France 30 March confirmed gradual withdrawal of Sangaris military mission by end of 2016. Constitutional court 14 March invalidated Feb legislative elections results for ten districts, citing irregularities. Second round legislative vote 31 March saw low voter turnout. Fighting in villages near central Bambari early month killed at least twelve. LRA and other armed groups in SE killed two, abducted twenty in three attacks during month. International Criminal Court 21 March convicted Congolese former rebel Jean-Pierre Bemba of war crimes and crimes against humanity, judging him responsible for abuses committed by his militia in CAR 2002-2003.

➡ **Chad** Protests against regime and govt repression continued raising concerns for potential violence around 10 April presidential election. Constitutional council 7

March validated fourteen presidential candidacies. Govt 19 March banned demonstrations except electoral campaigning. Police 21-23 March arrested several civil society leaders for calling for anti-Déby marches; all charged with “attack on public order”. Civil society coalitions called for national strike to protest arrests, strike widely observed 29 March.

New Crisis Group Africa Report N°233, *Chad: Between Ambition and Fragility*, 30 March 2016. Ahead of Chad’s presidential election on 10 April popular discontent is rising amid a major economic crisis, growing intra-religious tensions and deadly Boko Haram attacks. The regime that portrays itself as spearheading the fight against regional jihadism could see all sorts of violent actors gain influence at home if it pursues exclusionary politics and denies its people a viable social contract.

➡ **DR Congo** Political crisis continued with no significant progress toward dialogue, and elections planned for Nov increasingly likely to be delayed. Electoral commission (CENI) 18 March said it could not organise presidential and legislative elections for Nov 2016 as planned due to extensive voter roll update, matter will likely be referred to constitutional court; ruling coalition insists on need for dialogue, opposition continues to refuse, but apparently willing to meet AU mediator Edem Kodjo. G7 group of opposition parties 30 March announced it would back ex-Katanga Governor Moïse Katumbi as presidential candidate if he runs. Indirect elections of provincial governors held 26 March in all but one of 21 newly established provinces after CENI and courts rejected most opposition candidacies. Ruling coalition claimed victory in fifteen provinces, including four created by division of mineral-rich former Katanga province. In South Ubangi province, governor election delayed due to contested election of provincial assembly president. Final results to be published 12 April. In further sign of shrinking free speech, govt 11 March closed La Voix du Katanga radio and television station. UN attack helicopters 24 March engaged Allied Democratic Force (ADF) rebels. UNSC 30 March extended MONUSCO’s mandate for one year, rejecting govt’s appeal to downsize mission.

➡ **Republic of Congo** Govt cracked down on opposition protests after President Sassou Nguesso won 20 March presidential election with 60% of vote; constitutional court to validate results. Govt 20-23 March shut down telephone, internet and SMS services; opposition said communications blackout intended to prevent election monitoring. Police 20 March fired tear gas at activists protesting voting irregularities. Plainclothes police 23 March attacked one journalist from Le Monde, two from AFP, seized passports and equipment. Police 25 March prevented opposition announcing their own vote count, fired tear gas at supporters and arrested some ten opposition activists. Opposition candidates 26 March called for peaceful protests and national strike, strike widely observed 29 March. French President Hollande 26 Feb said elections “not credible”.

➡ **Rwanda** Over a dozen armed men in DR Congo military uniforms 23 March entered Rwanda from DRC, attacked army base in Rubavu district, one attacker killed. Former Rwandan minister, arrested Dec 2015 in Burundi for spying, died suddenly in Bujumbura prison 31 March (see Burundi).

Horn of Africa

➡ **Djibouti** Ahead of 8 April presidential elections, armed opposition Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD-armé) 13 March reportedly attacked army convoy in Obock region, six soldiers injured. Attack by armed forces on illegal fishing boat 14 March left one Somaliland coastguard killed; govt apologised.

➡ **Eritrea** Govt 18 March released four Djibouti prisoners of war captured in border skirmish June 2008, reportedly following Qatari mediation.

➡ **Kenya** Ugandan police 8 March briefly arrested two Kenyan Independent Electoral and Boundary Commission officials on disputed Migingo Island in Lake Victoria; Ugandan police 12 March assaulted two local Kenyan officials. Communal violence continued including: Pokot and Marakwet communities clashed 22-24 March in Elgeyo-Marakwet county, at least four killed, dozens of livestock taken; Aulihan and Abudwak communities 25-27 March clashed in Garissa county, at least one killed; Degodia community 26 March attacked Gabra herders in Marsabit county, two killed; Gabra 29 March killed three Degodia.

➡ **Somalia** U.S. and clan militias both intensified anti-Al-Shabaab operations in south-central, while insurgents tried to capture territory further north. Al-Shabaab 3 March attacked Somali Federal Government (SFG) defence minister's convoy near Kismayo, no casualties reported; 7 March detonated bomb outside Beledweyne airport, at least six injured; 14 March seized Garacad port town from boats in Puntland; 31 March killed at least six in suicide attack in Galkayo. Puntland forces 16-20 March pushed back insurgents, reportedly killing 55. Al-Shabaab 20 March attacked Somali National Army (SNA) base in Lower Shabelle region, claimed to have killed 74 soldiers and seized nine vehicles; SNA claimed only six soldiers killed. U.S. claimed that its 5 March strikes on Al-Shabaab training camp in Ras, Hiraa region killed 150 militants; 8 March provided air support to SNA attack on Al-Shabaab base in Awdigle, Lower Shabelle region. Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) reportedly killed 34 Al-Shabaab militants, seized weapons near Ras Kamboni, Lower Juba region in 19 and 20 March attacks. Somali National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) 22 March arrested 24 suspected Al-Shabaab members in Mogadishu IDP camp. Some 28 reportedly killed 1-2 March in Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a militia infighting over cooperation with Galmudug Interim Administration (GIA). GIA and Puntland forces clashed over grazing land 13 March, eleven killed. Gunmen 30 March killed at least two Turkish citizens and four Somalis in Mogadishu.

➡  **South Sudan** Initial steps in implementing August 2015 peace deal helped raise prospects for significant progress toward formation of transitional govt of national unity in April. First group of rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) forces arrived in Juba 28 March to prepare for return of their leader, VP designate Riek Machar. Complicating ongoing negotiations with Sudan including over disputed border areas, President Kiir sacked FM Barnaba Marial Benjamin after he wrote that academic from Abyei, claimed by both Sudan and South Sudan, was Sudanese not South Sudanese. Under peace agreement, former political detainees have chosen their leader Deng Alor, from Abyei, to be FM in forthcoming

transitional govt. Sudan 29 March announced closure of border with South Sudan (see Sudan). East African Community (EAC) 2 March accepted South Sudan membership.

➡ **Sudan** Govt and African Union High-Level Implementation Panel (AUHIP) 21 March signed roadmap agreement for how to address multiple conflicts: includes ceasefire, talks on Two Areas (S Kordofan, Blue Nile states) and Darfur, endorsement of National Dialogue (ND). AUHIP head Thabo Mbeki called for opposition to sign, however major opposition groups including National Umma Party (NUP), Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) accused AUHIP of govt bias, rejected agreement. Fighting continued: Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) 7 March claimed it had repelled SPLM-N offensive in S Kordofan, casualties unknown; some 30 SAF, at least three SPLM-N reportedly killed 9-11 March during govt offensives in Two Areas; clashes between SAF and Sudan Liberation Movement-Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM-AW) reportedly continued in Jebel Marra area, Darfur region. Popular Congress Party (PCP) leader Hassan al-Turabi died 5 March; replaced by Ibrahim al-Sanousi. Amid posturing by Sudan and South Sudan to strengthen positions in talks over unresolved post-independence issues, Sudan 29 March announced closure of border with South Sudan.

- Magnus Taylor, ["Hassan al-Turabi's Islamist Legacy in Sudan"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 10 March 2016.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°119, [Sudan's Islamists: From Salvation to Survival](#), 21 March 2016. Sudan's government is in survival mode. As it drifts away from its former radical Islamist ideology toward a new foreign policy pragmatism, Western powers should encourage Khartoum to solve the internal wars that have done so much damage to the country and blocked the normalisation of external relations with this increasingly active player in the Middle East.

➡ **Uganda** Following President Museveni's controversial Feb re-election, police and govt supporters clashed with opposition supporters early to mid-March: soldiers 10-11 March killed at least seven allegedly armed opposition supporters in western Kasese district, fifteen others reportedly killed in west, notably Bundibugyo district. Opposition presidential candidate Amama Mbabazi 1 March filed petition with Supreme Court to challenge election results; court 18 March demanded Electoral Commission hand over tally sheets to Mbabazi; presiding judges 31 March dismissed petition.

Southern Africa

➡ **Angola** Clashes in Cabinda escalated between Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) and govt forces (FAA): FLEC 12 March reportedly ambushed FAA patrol between Dinga and Inhuca, leaving 29 FAA killed; 13 March reportedly ambushed FAA convoy between Quissoqui and Caio Tembo, ten FAA and three FLEC killed; 16 March ambushed FAA patrol between Boma Lubinda and Chivovo, seven FAA killed. FLEC 29 Feb reported killing four FAA soldiers near Micuma, Buco-Zau region. FLEC 22 March called all "Western expatriates" to leave Cabinda. President Dos Santos, in power since 1979, 11 March announced he would retire from politics in 2018, generating speculation over succession. Court 28 March jailed seventeen activists for "acts of rebellion" with sentences ranging from two to over eight years.

➡ **Mozambique** Rebel group Renamo continued attacks on civilian vehicles including: 5 March opened fire on bus in Manica province, killing two; 23 March reportedly separately opened fire on same bus twice, leaving two wounded; 29 March reportedly opened fire on govt convoy in Manica province, injuring three police. Police 28 March reported seizing weapons from Renamo HQ and home of leader Afonso Dhlakama in Maputo. Dhlakama 8 March refused dialogue with President Nyusi until govt cedes power in six central and northern provinces and organises international mediation. In concession to Renamo, Nyusi 3 March replaced police chief Jorge Khallau who led interventions to neutralise Dhlakama including Oct 2015 disarming of his bodyguards. Over 11,500 reported to have fled to Malawi since military operations to disarm Renamo began in Tete province Oct 2015; govt denies allegations of human rights violations by security forces.

➡ **Zimbabwe** Former VP Joice Mujuru 1 March launched Zimbabwe People First (ZPF) party. Security forces and alleged ZANU-PF proxies subsequently upped violence including disruption of rallies, intimidation, abductions and assaults. Amid persistent ZANU-PF factionalism, individuals associated with G40 faction supporting Grace Mugabe used disciplinary processes to disempower VP Emmerson Mnangagwa's allies; War Veterans Minister Christopher Mutsvangwa and wife Senator Monica Mutsvangwa suspended from party. President Mugabe early-March admitted over \$13bn in state revenue from Marange Diamond fields missing, confirming long-standing domestic and international allegations.

- Piers Pigou, "[Zimbabwe Deep in Limbo](#)", *Sunday Independent*, 6 March 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°118, [Zimbabwe: Stranded in Stasis](#), 29 Feb. 2016.

West Africa

➡ **Burkina Faso** Security incidents involving Kogl weogo vigilante groups reported throughout month. Authorities 10 March arrested nine Kogl weogo around eastern Fada N'Gourma, 16 March charged them with torturing alleged cattle thief: in response hundreds of Kogl weogo blocked roads in and around Fada city and demanded govt release detainees; showdown ended with Kogl weogo giving up demands. Govt upped regional counter-terrorism efforts, including with joint operation with Malian forces along border 22 Feb-6 March; G5 Sahel group (Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad) 4 March recommended each member create rapid intervention forces.

⬇ **Côte d'Ivoire** In unprecedented terrorist attack, gunmen 13 March shot dead sixteen civilians on beach and in hotels in Grand-Bassam, 40km east of Abidjan; three gunmen and three security forces also killed. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility; four alleged accomplices (three Malians and one Ivorian) arrested 20 March in Abidjan, two Malians also arrested 25-26 March in northern Mali. Intercommunal clashes 24-25 March between Fulani herdsmen and Lobi farmers in Bouna (NE) quickly escalated; at least twenty killed (including twelve Burkinabe), some 1,500 fled to Burkina Faso.

➡ **Guinea** Infighting in opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) continued: UFDG VP Amadou Bah Oury 2 March challenged his early-Feb exclusion by party president Cellou Dalein Diallo and demanded reinstatement; Diallo 11 March rejected plea. Opposition 21 March said Electoral Commission's 21 Feb postponement of local elections violated Aug 2015 political agreement.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Tensions between President Vaz and ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) persisted, focused on Jan parliamentary decision to end mandates of fifteen pro-Vaz PAIGC dissidents. Vaz 9 March pleaded for political solution following failed late-Feb and early-March attempts at dialogue. Both sides launched legal attacks: Vaz-appointed public prosecutor confirmed 18 March indictment of leading Vaz adversary Carmen Pereira for misuse of state funds; court 9 March annulled May 2015 re-election of leading PAIGC dissident MP Braima Camara as Chamber of Commerce assembly president. UNSC and AU Peace and Security Council 7 and 16 March urged courts to resolve political standoff. Armed forces chief of staff General Biague na Ntan 3 March hinted civilians were attempting to buy influence in military and warned harsh punishment for coup plotters, amid reports a dozen soldiers were detained allegedly in connection with weapons trafficking. Police 14 March reported arrest of four Bissau-Guinean radical Islamists Jan and Feb.

➡ **Mali** UNSC delegation 4-6 March visited to assess implementation of June 2015 Bamako peace agreement; encouraged signatories to accelerate process and expressed support for local peace initiatives. Peace agreement follow-up committee mandated to implement Bamako accord made no progress at seventh session 9-10 March. Local Tuareg and Arab communities and security forces held reconciliation meeting 12 March in Gargando, Timbuktu region. Rebel alliance Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) held peace forum 28-31 March, without presence of govt and pro-govt armed groups. Mali and Burkina Faso forces with support from French Operation Barkhane undertook joint operation 22 Feb-6 March to secure border areas against jihadists. Jihadist group Ansar Eddine claimed responsibility for three attacks on MINUSMA troops near Kidal and Tessalit 5 March and one on FAMA in Macina. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) claimed responsibility for 21 March unsuccessful attack on EU Training Mission HQ in Bamako. Security forces 31 March reportedly arrested suspected jihadi leader Souleymane Keita.

➡ **Niger** President Issoufou re-elected with 92.49% of vote in peaceful second round election 20 March; opposition boycotted poll over allegedly rigged first round, demanded Constitutional Court reject results. Opposition leader Doudou Rahama arrested 15 March after calling on supporters not to vote for Issoufou; opposition Coalition for Change (COPA) accused regime of trying to muzzle opposition, called for Rahama's release. Doctor of imprisoned opposition leader and runner-up in first round vote Hama Amadou detained 16-19 March for "spreading false news" about his patient. Court 29 March provisionally released Amadou. After Electoral Commission published provisional results 22 March, Issoufou called for roundtable with opposition. Though skeptical, COPA opposition coalition 29 March declared itself willing to engage in dialogue with regime. Security situation precarious: Boko Haram 16 March attacked security forces in Bosso, Diffa region, killed one and wounded two; 30 March ambushed army near Diffa town, killed six soldiers; alleged al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

(AQIM) assailants same day attacked police station in Dolbel, Tillabery region near Burkina Faso border, killed three police.

➡ **Nigeria** Despite govt repeating claims that Boko Haram (BH) defeated, violence continued, albeit at lower rate. BH insurgents 14 March stormed Mussa village in Askira/Uba local govt area, Borno state, killing at least fifteen. Two female suicide bombers 16 March attacked mosque in Ummamari village near Maiduguri, killing at least 22. Army reported scores of insurgents killed, over 100 hostages freed, several villages reclaimed in operations during month. Clashes between Fulani herdsman and farming communities continued in Benue state; after hundreds reportedly killed in Agatu area late Feb, at least fifteen killed 17 March in Tombo village, Buruku local govt area. In Niger Delta, suspected pirates 17 March attacked army patrol in Abonema, Rivers state killing two soldiers; at least five killed 19 March during repeat state and federal constituency elections in Rivers state. Gunmen kidnapped and killed army colonel in Kaduna state 27 March amid spike in kidnappings in several states. In ongoing anti-corruption drive, court 7 March arraigned former chief of defence staff, Ret Air Chief Marshal Alex Badeh, for diverting 3.97bn naira (about \$19.5bn).

Asia

North East Asia

➡ **China/Japan** Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party 16 March passed resolution urging govt to consider seeking international arbitration over China's drilling activities in East China Sea (ECS), specifically its unilateral exploration of Chunxiao gas field, citing China's breach of 2008 agreement to jointly develop gas field. Japan expanded ECS surveillance network around disputed islands; new radar observation station on Yonaguni Island went online 28 March. Chinese FM Wang Yi 8 March said future of China-Japan relations does not "allow for optimism"; Japanese FM Fumio Kishida 11 March said enhancing dialogue with China a priority. During 15 March phone call Chinese and Japanese FMs agreed to closely coordinate implementation of UNSC resolution against North Korea; call was first exchange between them since Nov 2015.

➡ **Korean Peninsula** UNSC 2 March unanimously adopted Resolution 2270, drafted by U.S. and China, initiating further sanctions against DPRK, including: mandatory inspections of cargo to/from DPRK, blacklisting of ships, total arms embargo, ban on selling aviation/rocket fuels, embargoes on DPRK's coal, iron ore, gold and rare earth exports. Philippines 5 March impounded blacklisted North Korean freighter; at least five other vessels denied entry at Russian and Chinese ports. ROK and U.S. 7 March began largest ever joint military exercises; DPRK called them "nuclear war moves", threatened pre-emptive nuclear strike, fired short-range missiles off east coast 3, 21 and 29 March; 18 March medium-range ballistic missile. Leader Kim Jong-un 4 March said country's nuclear warheads "need to be ready for use at any time"; 9 March that DPRK had miniaturised nuclear warheads to fit on ballistic missiles; 11 March asked scientists to continue nuclear tests; 10 March announced all inter-Korean agreements on economic cooperation and exchange projects nullified, vowed to liquidate South Korean assets in DPRK. UN envoy 17 March requested UNSC meeting on joint military exercises. Obama 16 March issued executive order formally enacting UN and U.S. sanctions; China said it opposes unilateral sanctions. Chinese and Russian FMs issued joint press statement saying they would not recognise DPRK as nuclear weapon state.

South Asia

➡ **Afghanistan** Taliban 5 March announced it would not participate in direct talks with govt until all preconditions have been met, including foreign troop withdrawal, release of Taliban prisoners, removal of Taliban names from UN sanctions list. President Ghani addressing parliament next day warned Taliban must "choose whether they want peace or war". Hizb-e-Islami insurgent group representatives 17 March met with High Peace Council, maintained demands for foreign troop withdrawal and "establishment of legitimate Islamic system". Ghani 5 March issued long-awaited constitutional decree on electoral reform to enable release of international financial assistance urgently needed for elections to be held in Oct. Afghan and Pakistani border forces 6 March exchanged mortar and rocket fire across border in Nangarhar province.

Clashes between rival Taliban factions led by Mullah Akhtar Mansour and Mullah Mohammad Rasool in Herat's Shindbad district 10 March reportedly resulted in 100 deaths. Over a dozen security forces killed in clash with Taliban in Uruzgan province in south 29 March; two police and several insurgents reported killed in fighting in Balkh province in north 30 March; Herat provincial officials reported some 100 militants killed during security operation to regain control of Shindand district late month. Thirteen Taliban killed 23 March in Ghazni province during clash with security forces. Multiple suicide attacks included: attack near Indian consulate in Jalalabad 2 March killing two; attack in Kabul 5 March reportedly killed three people. In Helmand province, ten Taliban and three police killed in attack on govt buildings 9 March. New commander of NATO and U.S. forces in Afghanistan 22 March issued formal apology for 2015 Kunduz hospital bombing. UN SRSG Nicholas Haysom 15 March warned UNSC that Afghan govt's survival in 2016 "will be an achievement".

➡ **Bangladesh** First round of local elections 22 March saw at least eleven killed and over 500 reported injured in election-related violence, reportedly including by Awami League (AL) supporters who, fearing local party losses, attacked police taking ballot boxes; opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) contested local polls despite alleging widespread rigging ahead of vote. BNP leader Khaleda Zia and son Tarique Rahman won chair and senior vice-chair positions respectively in uncontested BNP internal elections 7 March. At 19 March triennial national council meeting between BNP leaders to discuss reforms and elect council, Zia pledged BNP would, if voted to office, introduce "new govt model" for better balance of power between PM, cabinet, and parliament; called for transparency in appointments to constitutional bodies. Ahead of meeting, party leaders considered revising party manifesto to explicitly reject "extremism and religious militancy", in apparent bid to counter criticism of having turned a blind eye while in govt. Court 30 March issued arrest warrant for Zia and 27 other BNP officials over role in instigating firebomb attack during opposition blockade Jan 2015; court 10 March cleared BNP acting Sec Gen and 25 other members of BNP-led 20-party alliance of arson charges over alleged election-related violence in Jan 2014. Shia doctor hacked to death in Jhenaidah district of Khulna Division 15 March, Christian man stabbed to death north of Dhaka 22 March; Islamic State reportedly claimed both attacks. Raids on suspected Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) cells continued, including paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion's arrest of five alleged JMB members 13 March in Dhaka. Supreme Court 8 March upheld International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) death penalty for senior Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) member Mir Quasem Ali, believed to be party's main financier. ICT 15 March issued death warrant for JeI chief Motiur Rahman Nizami.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** In continued clashes between security forces and Maoists, eight suspected Maoists 1 March killed during raid on rebel training camp in Sukna. Officials reported seven police killed in Maoist landmine attack in Chhattisgarh 30 March.

➡ **Kashmir** Pakistani investigation team 27 March arrived in India to investigate 2 Jan militant attack on Indian airbase in Pathankot in Punjab near Pakistani border killing seven Indian soldiers; followed Indian FM's 17 March announcement during South Asian Associated for Regional Cooperation Council of Ministers meeting of agreement with Pakistan Foreign Affairs Advisor Sartaj Aziz that Pakistan would send

investigation team. Indian defence minister 1 March accused Pakistani non-state actors of responsibility for attack, said “no non-state actor from there [Pakistan] can function smoothly without the state’s support”. Pakistan interior minister 8 March confirmed his govt had informed Indian authorities of ten suspicious men crossing border from Pakistan 3 March; Indian security forces reportedly killed three of them. Pakistan officials summoned Indian ambassador 25 March protesting illegal entry of suspected Indian spy captured in Baluchistan province 24 March. Clashes between Indian soldiers and rebels continued including two suspected rebels killed in gun battle NW of Srinagar 18 March. Indian army 3 March said three suspected Kashmiri rebels killed during gun battle in Tral; hundreds of residents shouting pro-freedom slogans attempted to reach site of clash, police fired tear gas to disperse them.

➡ **Nepal** Constitution-related negotiations between mainstream and Madhesi parties remained stalled, no progress on disputes on state boundaries. In coalition of Madhesi parties, disagreements continued over strategy and form of further protests; public confidence in parties eroded in Tarai region. Supplies of petrol in Kathmandu normalised mid-March; shortages of diesel and cooking gas continued. Former PM Sher Bahadur Deuba elected new Nepali Congress president 7 March, triggering discussions on possible change of govt. PM KP Oli continued regional diplomatic efforts, visiting Beijing 20-27 March, signing bilateral transit transport agreement 21 March granting Nepal access to China’s ports; visit an effort to counterbalance trade dependence on India. Nepal Army announced former Maoist combatants integrated into its forces to be deployed in UN peacekeeping missions beginning July 2016; 85 of 1,420 ex-Maoist combatants to participate initially. Post-earthquake reconstruction efforts remain delayed due to political disputes, lack of policy framework or feasibility studies by National Reconstruction Authority (NRA); NRA CEO under investigation for alleged corruption in previous role as head of national Town Development Fund.

⬇ **Pakistan** Over 70 people killed and at least 300 injured in suicide bomb attack on park in Lahore 27 March; victims included many families celebrating Easter. Attack claimed by Pakistani Taliban faction Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JA) which said it was targeting Christians. Amid criticism of inadequate security, PM Sharif called for better coordination on part of security services against terrorism; military and intelligence agencies conducted raids following attacks, killing five suspects and arresting more than 600. Violent protests against execution of Mumtaz Qadri, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer’s murderer, in Islamabad, with thousands of Islamist activists besieging parliament and destroying public property, ended 30 March with govt reportedly agreeing not to amend blasphemy law, to show no leniency to those imprisoned on blasphemy charges, and to release non-violent demonstrators. At least 31 killed in insurgent attacks throughout month, including in Peshawar, Mohmand Agency and Sibi districts. Dozens of suspected insurgents also killed by security forces during month, including in N Waziristan, Karachi, Punjab and Balochistan. Security forces 10 March reportedly arrested fourteen members of Afghan Taliban near Quetta. Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar 2 March ordered investigation into allegations that Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) party received Indian funding and weapons; former Karachi mayor Mustafa Kamal next day accused MQM party leader of ties with Indian intelligence. Supreme Court 11 March rejected request by paramilitary Rangers to establish separate police structure and one year extension of special policing powers in Sindh province.

➡ **Sri Lanka** MPs 9 March approved resolution for parliament to act as “Constitutional Assembly” tasked with drafting new constitution. President Sirisena continued moves to strengthen hold over Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) including appointing Mahinda Amaraweera as UPFA Sec Gen 8 March. Despite Sirisena’s threats to suspend MPs attending opposition events from party, rally by “joint opposition” with former president Rajapaksa and over 40 SLFP MPs 17 March in Colombo drew large crowds. During speech in Washington FM Samaraweera 25 Feb said govt willing to consider participation of international actors implementing UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) resolution, while former Army Commander and Regional Development Minister Sarath Fonseka 10 March endorsed international participation in war crimes investigation; however, Sirisena 18 March again rejected involvement by foreign judges. UNHCHR 10 March said release of land held by military, reviewing cases of security detainees and resolving disappearances must accelerate. Sirisena 14 March presented deeds for additional 700 military-occupied acres of land to owners in Valikamam North division of Jaffna peninsula. Three-week hunger strike by fourteen Tamil detainees held under Prevention of Terrorism Act ended 11 March after Attorney General Dept officials assured them that magistrate’s court would file charges soon. Amid growing economic pressure, Central Bank governor 17 March confirmed govt in negotiations with IMF for \$1.5bn loan.

South East Asia

➡ **Indonesia** Suspected members of armed wing of Free Papua Movement 15 March attacked highway project in Papua’s Puncak municipality, killing four construction workers and kidnapping two; govt said construction project would continue, with extra security. Solomon Islands raised concerns about human rights violations in Papua at UN Human Rights Council in Geneva 18 March. Jakarta police chief Gen Tito Karnavian sworn in as country’s head of counter-terrorism 16 March. Rights activists called on parliament to reject proposed revisions to anti-terrorism law including detention without trial for up to three months.

➡ **Myanmar** MPs 15 March overwhelmingly elected Aung San Suu Kyi confidant Htin Kyaw as president, with retired Lt-Gen Myint Swe and Henry Van Thio becoming VPs. Htin Kyaw and Henry Van Thio both National League for Democracy (NLD) nominees, both seen as Suu Kyi proxies; Myint Swe selected as nominee by military bloc, seen as military hardliner. Legislature 24 March approved President-elect’s eighteen nominees for 21 ministries without discussion; list includes Suu Kyi, who will hold four portfolios: foreign affairs, education, energy and president office. Others include technocrats, NLD leaders and some members of other political parties. Htin Kyaw sworn in as president 30 March, spoke of need for democratic constitution. Speaking at Armed Forces Day 27 March, marked with 10,000 military personnel parading in Naypyitaw, commander-in-chief said military must remain a political force. Work continued on peace process at procedural level, particularly on joint ceasefire monitoring mechanisms at national and state/region levels. Situation remains unstable in many areas, with new clashes causing significant displacement. Fighting in N Shan state between Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and govt forces continued. Arakan Army claimed to have killed over 30 govt troops in clash in N Rakhine state 3

March. Kachin Independence Organization (KIO) late Feb announced re-establishment of additional brigade in N Shan state. Political tensions surfaced in Rakhine as president-elect's nomination on 29 March of member of minority NLD bloc, rather than dominant Arakan National Party (ANP) bloc, as state's chief minister gave perception of side-lining main political party ANP, which won majority of state seats in Nov 2015 elections. UN reported some 25,000 displaced Rohingya Muslims who fled sectarian violence in 2012 returned from camps to original communities in past twelve months – most to villages adjacent to camps; 120,000 still in camps. U.S. State Dept reported Rohingya Muslims continue to face persecution.

➡ **Philippines** Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) leader Murad Ebrahim 7 March said MILF will uphold Mindanao peace process ahead of May elections, appealed to international supporters of process to influence new govt to implement 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB); warned about growing frustration over Congress's failure to pass Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) leading to fringe militant groups allying with Islamic State (IS) to establish stronghold on southern islands; said MILF working to dissuade IS-allied militants from launching attacks. Senator Ferdinand Marcos Jr., author and sponsor of alternative to BBL, 24 March said implementing peace process best deterrent against IS influence in Philippines. Clashes continued between military and Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters in Datu Salibo, Maguindanao. Two New People's Army (NPA) bomb attacks 20 March wounded four soldiers and two civilians in Bicol region. Military confirmed Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militant Radullan Sahiron, wanted by U.S. for \$1 mn, injured in 18 March firefight with govt security forces in Patikul. One ASG reported killed 23 March in MILF ambush. ASG reportedly kidnapped ten Indonesian sailors late month. IS-linked Ansaru'l Khilafah Philippines 17 March released video purporting to show beheading of man working for police.

➡ **South China Sea** U.S. intelligence chief 8 March said China has capability to provide basic self-defence in Spratlys, though no Chinese navy/coast guard ships permanently based there, and China has paused land reclamation since Oct. Mayor of Sansha City (administrative unit for all SCS islands claimed by China) 11 March said civilian flights to disputed Woody Island to begin within twelve months; followed late Feb announcement of plans for Chinese power grid management station on island, and U.S. report that China had deployed fighter jets to island. U.S. Navy 1-6 March conducted "routine operations" in eastern SCS; officials emphasised operations neither show of force nor formal confrontation. Philippines and U.S. 18 March announced deal opening four Philippine air bases and one army camp to U.S.. Chinese FM Wang Yi 8 March said China exploring possibility of establishing SCS littoral states cooperation mechanism. EU 11 March released statement calling on SCS claimants to resolve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, expressing concern about deployment of missiles on islands. U.S. Army 15 March reported plans to stockpile materials in Vietnam, Cambodia, other Pacific countries to enable quicker deployments. Malaysian defence minister said 14 March he would coordinate pushback with Australian, Vietnamese and Philippine counterparts to ensure China would not militarise Spratly Islands. Chinese coast guard vessel forcefully intervened 19 March when Indonesian fisheries ministry ship arrested Chinese fishermen off Natuna Islands; Indonesia refused Chinese demands that it release the eight fisher-

men, said they would be prosecuted. Indonesian maritime security official 23 March said China's actions had created "new ball game" in SCS.

➡ **Thailand** Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) 29 March released final constitution draft, including National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) proposals for NCPO-appointed 250-member senate during five-year transition period following 2017 general election. Six senate seats are reserved for senior military and police officers. Critics, including members of Pheu Thai and Democrat parties, described five-year transition as ploy for NCPO to retain power following general election. National Legislative Assembly 10 March approved amendments to interim constitution to stipulate that majority of ballots cast, rather than majority of voters, necessary for approval of constitution in referendum scheduled for early Aug. Deputy PM 1 March said only govt-sanctioned debates supervised by Election Commission permitted to discuss draft constitution ahead of referendum. NCPO continued to crack down on critics; Pheu Thai Party politician detained 26 March by army for three-day "attitude adjustment". Month saw increase in violence in southernmost provinces, including at least ten attacks in Yala and Narathiwat provinces 13-14 March in which one defence volunteer was killed and ten people injured. At least 40 insurgents 13 March seized hospital in Cho Airong, Narathiwat province and used it as base to attack adjacent army camp, wounding seven rangers. Three police killed, six wounded in ambush in Rangae, Narathiwat 29 March; Pattani rocked by several explosions 30-31 March, one person killed.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➡ **Bosnia** President of Republika Srpska (RS) entity Milorad Dodik sparked outrage by expressing admiration for former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, who was found guilty by International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague 24 March of genocide over 1995 Srebrenica massacre and sentenced to 40 years' jail. ICTY 31 March acquitted former Serbian deputy PM and ultra-nationalist Vojislav Seselj of charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity during Balkans wars in early 1990s.

➡ **Kosovo** Opposition MPs continued to disrupt parliament sessions with tear gas early month, including 4 March voting in of Hashim Thaçi as president 4 March; protests continued outside parliament. Masked assailants threw Molotov cocktail at president's office 12 March. Parliament held first undisrupted session of 2016 on 15 March, as opposition boycotted. Opposition repeated calls for early elections. Opposition 25 March announced it would postpone protest planned for next day against election of Thaci as president.

➡ **Macedonia** Senior U.S. official visited Skopje early March to check implementation of June 2015 agreement to end political crisis. EU mediator reported talks on media reform ahead of June elections had halted. Constitutional Court closed session mid-month, approved cancellation of law which would have prohibited president from pardoning individuals accused of vote-rigging in 2013 election despite protests and EU calls to fight impunity in election-related offences. Special Prosecution into crimes by senior officials late March announced investigations into five people suspected of destroying surveillance equipment, and into former secret police chief and several others suspected of acts of torture. Electoral commission report leaked 17 March said half a million names (out of 1.8mn on electoral role) need further verification. Court 25 March sentenced six people for fighting alongside Islamist groups in Syria or recruiting others.

Caucasus

➡ **Azerbaijan** Baku court 15 March sentenced opposition adviser Mammad Ibrahim to three years' prison on hooliganism charges; Ibrahim said charges politically motivated. Thirteen human rights/opposition activists among 148 prisoners released as part of presidential amnesty 17 March; EU and OSCE called for release of remaining political prisoners. Journalist Rauf Mirkadirov, jailed in Dec 2015 for spying, in case he said was politically motivated, also released early. Supreme Court 28 March commuted sentence of human rights lawyer Intigam Aliyev, convicted in 2015 on charges including tax evasion. Azerbaijan held joint air force exercises with Turkey during month.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Armenia and Azerbaijan exchanged accusations of ceasefire violations during month. Azerbaijan reported its army fired on Armenian positions in NK 10 March, claiming over ten Armenian soldiers killed; N-K authorities denied Azerbaijani claims that their forces were targeting civilians in Aqdam area, accused Azerbaijani forces of violating ceasefire and denied sustaining losses. Baku reported two Azerbaijani soldiers killed by Armenian army 27 March, Armenia denied, said Azerbaijan attacked villages.

➡ **Georgia** Russian Deputy FM mid-month said Moscow disliked increasing anti-Russian rhetoric in Tbilisi, Kremlin's patience "has limits". Commander of NATO Supreme Allied Command Europe Gen Philip Breedlove during late-March visit warned of Russia's "aggressive game in world politics" and called for Georgia to further enhance partnership with NATO and U.S.. Thousands joined protests 6 March against govt plan to purchase natural gas from Russian-owned Gazprom.

➡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Twenty masked men 9 March attacked group of journalists including Norwegian and Swede, and two Russian activists from human rights group Committee to Prevent Torture (CPT), near Chechnya's border with Ingushetia, beating them and burning a minivan. CPT head Igor Kalyapin hit and pelted with eggs by masked mob in Grozny centre 16 March. Kremlin condemned attacks but denied link to Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov. President Putin 25 March appointed Kadyrov as acting head of Chechnya until Sept elections, two days after hundreds of thousands gathered in Grozny to support Kadyrov on thirteenth anniversary of adoption of Chechen Constitution. Ingush Salafi preacher Khamzat Chumakov survived another car bomb attack in Nasyr-Kort 11 March, four wounded in attack. Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for 29 March attack near Makhachkala in Dagestan, killing one and injuring two police; another explosion killed one officer in Tabasaran district 30 March. Authorities 15 March detained fourteen members of banned Islamic group Nurcular in Dagestan. Russia's National Antiterrorism Committee 17 March detained three IS-linked militants in Dagestan's western region Khasavyurt; militants confessed to ties with IS, revealed explosives cache. Leader of Dagestan's Lezgin national movement Sadval (Unity) Nazim Gadzhiev found dead 21 March in Makhachkala. Chechen authorities 18 March obliged young people aged 14 to 35 to fill out "spiritual-moral questionnaires" stating religious affiliation, self-identified clan and responsible relative. Parliament of Adygea 23 March suspended direct elections of chief executive.

New Crisis Group Europe Report N°238, *The North Caucasus Insurgency and Syria: An Exported Jihad?*, 16 March 2016. Russia's North Caucasus insurgency has gone relatively quiet, as Moscow crushed militants and many left to fight in Syria and Iraq. But longstanding grievances remain and the war may only have widened, as evidenced by the bombing of a Russian airliner in Egypt and the emergence of new groups swearing allegiance to IS in Russia itself.

Eastern Europe

➡ **Moldova** Constitutional Court 4 March ruled that president should be elected by popular vote, not by parliament. Current President Timofti, whose term expired 23 March, to stay on as acting president until direct presidential elections.

➡ **Ukraine** Crisis of confidence in political leadership intensified, with increasing discussion on who will replace unpopular PM Yatsenyuk, facing ongoing calls to resign despite surviving Feb no-confidence vote. Leading candidate is current speaker and close associate of President Poroshenko Vladimir Groysman. Fending off calls for snap elections, Poroshenko 23 March urged parliament to approve new PM and cabinet by 29 March, no agreement reached by month's end. Crisis prompting growing concern among Ukraine's international partners over commitment to reforms needed to secure \$1.7bn IMF assistance. European Commission President Juncker 17 March said EU would formally propose visa-free travel for Ukrainian citizens, two days after Ukrainian parliament passed anti-corruption bill requiring officials to declare their assets online. Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin, apparently dismissed by president in Feb, resumed his duties 16 March; parliament voted to fire him 29 March. Ukrainian military volunteer Nadia Savchenko, held in Russia since June 2014 on charges of calling in artillery strike that killed two Russian journalists, sentenced 22 March to 22 years' jail; Ukraine extended sanctions on Russian individuals and institutions, called for new EU sanctions. In east, exchanges of gunfire and artillery continued along the line of separation, with Ukrainian army reporting several casualties. Throughout month both sides accused the other of using large-calibre weapons in defiance of Minsk agreement. OSCE special monitoring mission officers continue to report regular obstruction of their work by both sides, and patchy implementation of agreement to withdraw heavy weapons from front line. Minsk and Normandy group consultations on the conflict continued without substantive progress or result, including talks in Paris 3 March, at which sides failed to agree on elections in separatist entities. U.S. and EU extended sanctions on individuals and entities benefitting from Russian annexation of Crimea.

- Paul Quinn-Judge, ["Ukraine's Eastern Separatist Leaders Turn on Each Other"](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 1 March 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°79, [Russia and the Separatists in Eastern Ukraine](#), 5 Feb. 2016.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

⬇ **Belgium** 32 people killed and over 300 injured by two suicide bomb attacks at Brussels airport and on metro in Brussels 22 March; both attacks claimed by Islamic State (IS). Three attackers also killed in explosions, one suspect remains at large, several arrested over suspected involvement in attack and with Europe-wide network linked to IS in Syria. Attacks followed capture in Brussels 18 March of Salah Abdeslam, suspect in Nov 2015 Paris attacks, and 15 March raid, also in Brussels, in which another Paris attacks suspect killed.

- Joost Hiltermann and Didier Leroy, ["Why Belgium?"](#), *New York Review of Books*, 24 March 2016.

➡ **Cyprus** Greek Cypriot spokesperson 8 March said Ankara should recognise Republic of Cyprus and open trade, ports and airports before govt could lift veto on six of Turkey's EU negotiation chapters; statement threatened to complicate Turkey's deal on refugees and accelerated accession talks with EU. Turkey's EU Minister Volkan Bozkır 16 March said "capriciousness" of Greek Cypriot administration should not be

allowed to block EU-Turkey deal. Republic of Cyprus President Anastasiades 17 March backed down following meetings with European Council President Tusk and European Commission President Juncker, said he hoped compromise could be reached at European Council meeting but maintained criticism of Turkey for failing to recognise his govt. Turkish and U.S. FMs meeting in Washington 29 March agreed Cyprus deal could be reached in 2016. Historic Denya Mosque attacked 22 Feb by unknown arsonists; Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot leaders condemned attack. Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akıncı alleged attack was attempt to disrupt peace talks and vowed to punish assailants.

↓ **Turkey** Car bomb 13 March in Ankara killed 36, two attackers also killed; Kurdistan Freedom Falcons (TAK) – ultra-radical Kurdish nationalist offshoot of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) – claimed responsibility for attack, said it was act of revenge for ongoing security operations against PKK in southeastern urban centres. Ankara 14 March conducted heavy airstrikes on PKK camps in northern Iraq, as military operations continued in SE Şırnak, Diyarbakır, Mardin and Hakkâri provinces, with 52 Turkish security forces, at least 40 civilians and at least 25 PKK militants killed 1-29 March; seven police killed in explosion in Diyarbakır 31 March. Justice Ministry 4 March submitted request that parliament lift immunities of pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) co-chairs and three other MPs, following visit of condolence by one HDP MP to family of TAK suicide bomber allegedly responsible for 17 Feb Ankara attack; request likely to stoke further tension in ongoing row between ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and HDP. President Erdoğan 14 March vowed to expand definition of terror to apply to lawmakers, journalists and activists as space for open debate continued to narrow. Istanbul court 16 March arrested three Turkish academics and deported UK academic on charges of terrorist propaganda, following their public declaration entitled "We won't be part of this crime" during 10 March gathering. Islamic State (IS)-linked suicide bomber 17 March attack on Istanbul's İstiklal Street killed three Israeli and one Iranian national and injured 39. IS 8 and 12 March launched strikes from across Syrian border, two killed including one toddler in border province Kilis. EU and Turkey 18 March reached landmark agreement on Syrian refugees, part of deal that includes visa liberalisation and acceleration of accession negotiations for Turkey. EU agreed to grant additional €3bn to Turkey for refugee-related costs until end of 2018.

- Nigar Göksel and Berkay Mandiraci, ["New Turkey-PKK Peace Talks: An Inevitability Postponed"](#), *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, 7 March 2016.

New Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°80, [The Human Cost of the PKK Conflict in Turkey: The Case of Sur](#), 17 March 2016. Around 900 people, including 350 members of the security forces, have been killed in fighting since peace talks broke down last July between the PKK and Turkey. As insurgents mix with civilians and rights are violated, some of the worst affected are ordinary people like those in south-eastern Diyarbakır's district of Sur.

Central Asia

➡ **Kazakhstan** Snap parliamentary elections 20 March passed without incident; Central Election Committee 22 March announced ruling party Nur Otan won 82.2%

votes, reported 77.12% turnout; OSCE said “genuine political choice remains insufficient”.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Amid worsening economic situation, prominent nationalist politicians from south including Adahan Madumarov and Kamchybek Tashiev (leader of Ata Jurt party) 12 Feb formed new nationalist party United Opposition Force of Kyrgyzstan (UOF). Group formation comes against backdrop of mounting protests over economic situation, including rallies held in Aksy, Kerben, Jalalabad and Talas 14 March. Speaking in Osh 17 March President Atambayev reportedly said provocateurs should be stoned. National Security Committee 23 March confirmed authenticity of records confirming opposition’s plans to seize power. Amid accusations, opposition cancelled 24 March mass protest in Osh; two opposition leaders, Bektur Asanov, Kubanychbek Kadyrov and Ernest Karybekov, detained 24-25 March. 27 March local elections in Osh held peacefully with Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) leading poll.

➡ **Tajikistan** Massive military exercise including 50,000 Tajik soldiers and reservists and 2,000 Russian soldiers conducted 15-19 March along length of Afghan border; followed 5 March skirmish between Tajik border guards and Taliban near Panj border post in which one Tajik soldier killed. Tajik border guards early March reportedly prevented infiltration of alleged armed group from Afghanistan near eastern city Khorog.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Tensions with Kyrgyzstan rose as 40 Uzbek border troops and armoured vehicles entered disputed border area 18 March, unilaterally closing a checkpoint on Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in Jalalabad province. Kyrgyzstan responded sending 40 troops, followed by 200 troops on 20 March. Kyrgyz State Border 21 March said number of Kyrgyz and Uzbek troops had been reduced, situation stable. Kyrgyzstan 22 March initiated special intergovernmental Collective Security Treaty Organisation Permanent Council meeting to address tensions. Uzbek troops withdrew 26 March.

Latin America and the Caribbean

📌 🇨🇴 **Colombia** Govt and National Liberation Army (ELN) 30 March announced opening of formal peace talks; six agenda points will be discussed in negotiating tables with “sessions” in five countries: Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador and Venezuela. ELN 20 and 23 March released two hostages, one allegedly after payment of ransom. ELN had continued to carry out violent attacks during month, mostly in NE, with some nine armed forces members killed and two kidnapped; seven guerrillas reportedly killed 14 March in western department Chocó as govt continued retaliatory military operations. Govt and FARC failed to meet self-imposed 23 March deadline to sign a final accord or a bilateral ceasefire as differences emerged between negotiators over document drafted by technical sub-committee, specifically concerning arms abandonment. Social organisations 14 March expressed concern over killing of 29 members of political left across country early-March; victims reportedly include community leaders, land claimants and members of peasant movements. President of left-wing Patriotic Union (UP) party Aída Avella tied killings to potential spoilers of FARC peace process, others, such as analyst Ariel Avila, alleged killings carried out by new paramilitary groups.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“The Colombian Government’s First Official Peace Talks with the ELN”](#), 31 March 2016.
- Javier Ciurlizza, [“Post-conflict in Colombia: The International Potential of Peace”](#), *Open Democracy*, 9 March 2016.

➡ **Guatemala** UN Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers Mónica Pinto mid-March criticised lack of transparency of 10 March appointment of new Constitutional Court by president, Congress, Supreme Court of Justice, lawyer’s association and national university. Pinto also highlighted secrecy surrounding President Morales’s selection of candidates and criticised his appointee, who is one of eighteen magistrates accused by International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) in 2012 of carrying out decisions “contrary to the law... and favourable to criminal networks”. Prosecutors and CICIG continued to pursue corruption cases: former president of Congress during Patriot Party (PP) govt, Gudy Rivera, arrested 9 March on charges of undue pressure against judge in 2014. Cellphone-activated bomb exploded 6 March on bus in San José Pinula municipality, killing two; minister of govt blamed “Barrio 18” gang. Second trial of former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt and his former chief of intelligence opened 16 March on charges of genocide against Ixil people during de facto govt in early-1980s.

➡ **Haiti** Interim President Jocelerme Privert 15 March named govt of newly-appointed PM Fritz Alphonse Jean by presidential order. Move followed late-Feb protests by former PM Evans Paul and his govt and opposition leaders over Fritz appointment, arguing Privert did not respect appropriate procedure under 5 Feb agreement and saying Fritz does not embody national consensus. UNSC 17 March called on stakeholders to implement 5 Feb agreement without delay to resume country’s electoral process. Parliament 20 March rejected program submitted by PM Fritz, preventing formation of his cabinet. Facing deadlock, Privert 22 March selected former presidential adviser Enex Jean-Charles as new PM; senate 25 March ratified Jean-Charles’ general policy statement, govt installed 28 March.

➡ **Mexico** Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) 2 March published report saying country is suffering “severe crisis of violence and impunity”; highlighted issue of forced disappearances carried out with “participation, acquiescence or tolerance” of state agents. Govt rejected findings, said problems were “localised”. Speaking at govt-sponsored debate on marijuana use, secretary of govt 8 March said war on drugs based on bad diagnosis, poor strategy and led to major escalation of violence. Secretary of Defence Salvador Cienfuegos 16 March said armed forces should not have entered fully in fight with drug traffickers, said military not prepared to carry out police functions. Guerrero state governor and member of ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) Héctor Astudillo 11 March proposed legalising opium poppy farming for medical use and promoting alternative development by funding roads and crop substitution.

➡ **Venezuela** Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance 7 March unveiled plan for “peaceful, democratic” removal of President Maduro: will seek recall referendum against Maduro, while simultaneously approving constitutional amendment to cut presidential term from six to four years. MUD began campaign of street demonstrations 12 March, with address from National Assembly President Henry Ramos, in bid to force Maduro to resign. MUD added if all attempts fail it would trigger process for electing constituent assembly to rewrite 1999 constitution. Economic and social crisis continued to worsen, with increased shortages of food, medicines and acute shortages of power and water. Electricity Minister Gen Luis Motta Domínguez 12 March blamed El Niño phenomenon for possible collapse of country’s power supply by end-April. Amid escalating violent crime, two dozen illegal miners reportedly killed in Tumere-mo, Bolívar state 5 March, allegedly over control of recently discovered gold deposit. Police and prosecutors 14 March discovered victims’ remains as state governor and other prominent regime figures attempted to discredit story; authorities attributed massacre to fugitive crime boss “El Topo”, but President Maduro blamed paramilitaries allegedly linked to opposition. Court 11 March sentenced editor of independent newspaper El Correo del Caroní to four years’ jail for allegedly defaming wealthy businessman linked to Bolívar state governor accused of corruption. Provincial paper El Carabobeño closed 17 March when supply of newsprint ran out. Opposition-controlled National Assembly 29 March passed political amnesty law but President Maduro reiterated he would not sign it.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➡ **Israel-Palestine** Attacks by Palestinians targeting Israelis continued, increasingly perpetrated in pairs or trios using improvised live arms; attacks since Oct 2015 increasingly being referred to as third intifada, with death toll now standing at nearly 200 Palestinians and 30 Israelis in some 300 incidents. Amid rising domestic criticism of Israeli govt over failure to address attacks, cabinet 10 March decided to continue construction of separation barrier, despite objections from Jewish settlers who would fall on eastern side, and objections from defence establishment on barrier's route. PM Netanyahu 2 March also asked attorney general to examine possibility of expelling Palestinian assailants' families to Gaza. Senior UN envoy Nickolay Mladenov condemned Israeli soldier's "apparent extra-judicial execution" of wounded Palestinian assailant accused of involvement in stabbing attack on Israeli soldier in W Bank 24 March. France led attempts to revive Israeli-Palestinian negotiations: French envoy Pierre Vimont 13 March travelled to Ramallah and Jerusalem to hear parties' views. International conference without parties planned for April, another with parties planned for June; Palestinian officials said they would attend. Germany and France 16 March criticised Israel's decision to appropriate large tracts of land in W Bank; EU said decision raised questions over Israel's commitment to two-state solution. Several rockets fired from Gaza toward Israel 11 March; two Palestinian children killed 12 March in retaliatory Israeli airstrikes. Israel 10 March announced Gazans wishing to leave territory would be permitted to leave via Jordan if they promised not to return for at least one year. Hamas delegation from Gaza permitted to travel to Cairo to meet Egyptian General Intelligence Service. Protests by Palestinian teachers seeking wage increase suspended after Palestinian Authority mid-March agreed to increase salaries with back pay.

➡ **Lebanon** Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries took several measures against Lebanon and Hizbollah following Saudi Arabia's Feb suspension of \$3bn in military aid, reportedly due to Lebanon's failure to condemn Jan attack on Saudi embassy in Iran and "hostile Lebanese positions resulting from the stranglehold of Hizbollah on the State". GCC 2 March designated Hizbollah a terrorist organisation; Saudi interior ministry 13 March warned of "severe penalties" for anyone linked to Hizbollah; throughout month GCC countries expelled dozens of Lebanese citizens over alleged Hizbollah ties. Hizbollah 3 March condemned GCC's terrorist label, blamed Saudi Arabia. Arab League 11 March declared Hizbollah a terrorist group. U.S. officials 8 March warned Saudi Arabia against further economic measures against Lebanon. Parliament failed again to elect new president 2 and 23 March due to lack of quorum; UNSC 17 March urged parties to put country's stability and national interests before partisan politics. Army clashed with suspected militants 10 March near Syrian border, one soldier and eight gunmen killed. Removal of garbage from Beirut suburbs began 19 March, after govt 12 March approved emergency plan to temporarily reopen Naameh landfill. Minister of Justice Ashraf Rifi resigned 21 Feb, accusing Hizbollah of obstructing cabinet's functioning, offending Saudi Arabia and intervening for release

of former minister Michel Samaha, who was released on bail in Jan after being convicted on terror charges.

- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°46, [Arsal in the Crosshairs: The Predicament of a Small Lebanese Border Town](#), 23 Feb. 2016.

➦ **Syria** Russian President Putin 14 March announced Russia would withdraw “main part” of assets that have conducted operations in Syria since Sept 2015; air and naval bases near Syrian coast to remain to continue monitoring “cessation of hostilities” and support fight against “terrorists”. Putin 17 March said Russia could increase military presence “within a few hours” if needed. Despite regular breaches in “cessation of hostilities” which began 27 Feb, violence decreased considerably, with Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) 28 March reporting lowest monthly death toll in four years, 174 civilians killed since 27 Feb. Ceasefire violations included clashes between rebels and Kurdish paramilitaries in Aleppo early March; Russian or Syrian air-strike 7 March killed at least nineteen at market in opposition-held Idlib province; SOHR said 33 killed, mostly women and children, reportedly by Syrian regime air-strikes 31 March in opposition stronghold Deir al-Asafir district south east of Damascus. UN-brokered talks resumed 14 March in Geneva: opposition spokesman 15 March said opposition “not against” direct talks with govt; govt delegation 21 March reiterated Assad’s future not part of negotiations. Decrease in violence enabled return of peaceful anti-regime demonstrations in rebel-held areas. Cessation of hostilities and civilian protests increased tensions between Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and rebels; JN 12 March apprehended and raided U.S. and Turkey-backed faction in Idlib province, sparking days of local anti-JN protests. Kurdish YPG/PYD 16 March announced plan for federal region in N Syria, generating widespread criticism from both regime and opposition and leading to limited clashes between YPG and regime forces in Qamishli 16 March. Attacks against Islamic State (IS) and JN, excluded from truce, continued including six U.S.-led coalition airstrikes near three cities destroying IS positions. Regime forces backed by Russian airstrikes recaptured IS-held city Palmyra 27 March.

New Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°47, [Russia’s Choice in Syria](#), 29 March 2016. Many questions surround Moscow’s surprise announcement of a force reduction in Syria. Yet it clearly enhanced Russia’s leverage over the regime and provided a much-needed dose of credibility to the nascent political process. Avoiding further regional unravelling and spiralling radicalisation, however, and pushing the conflict toward an initial settlement will require further adjustments in Russia’s strategy, including addressing the Assad conundrum.

Gulf

➦ **Bahrain** Police 14 March arrested and detained activist Zainab al-Khawaja on several charges, including tearing up pictures of King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. Hundreds protested against regime in several places 14 March; in some areas police fired tear gas, demonstrators threw petrol bombs.

➦ **Iran** Revolutionary Guards 8 March conducted ballistic missile tests, prompting U.S. and France to threaten new sanctions for what they view as violation of UNSC resolution 2231; Iran’s UN ambassador 23 March denied violation, Russia promised to block new sanctions. Despite U.S. blacklisting of two more Iranian companies con-

nected to missile program 24 March, Revolutionary Guards 28 March said Iran would pursue ballistic missile development. Supreme Leader Khamenei 30 March said missiles key to Iran's future. President Rouhani 6 March argued for removal of ban on media coverage of former President Khatami and for electoral reform to weaken Guardian Council (GC)'s role in vetting parliamentary and Assembly of Experts candidates. GC late March disqualified reformist woman MP Minoo Khaleghi elected in Feb. Govt 26 March denied supporting cyber-attacks against U.S. after New York court 24 March indicted seven Iranians for hacking banks and dam in the U.S.. Rouhani made first visit since becoming president in 2013 to Pakistan 26-27 March.

- Ali Vaez, ["What Iran's Elections Mean for its Future"](#), *Fortune*, 9 March 2016.

➡ **Iraq** Battle against Islamic State (IS) in Anbar (W) and Ninewa (NW) provinces continued. U.S.-led coalition postponed operation to take Falluja in Anbar province as alliance between local tribes, clerics and IS remains solid. Iraqi forces with local support 13 March launched offensive on Hit, NW of Ramadi in Anbar province; operation gained ground but ongoing end-month. Officials said IS launched two chemical attacks 9 and 12 March on Taza town south of Kirkuk city reportedly wounding nearly 600 people. IS rocket attack on U.S. Makhmour base south of Mosul 19 March killed one marine, wounded several. U.S. 25 March said it would increase troops in Iraq, likely to help Iraqi forces retake villages in Ninewa plain. IS suicide bomber 25 March killed at least 41 people at stadium in Iskandariya, Babel province, south of Baghdad. Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr led thousands in ongoing weekly protests in Baghdad calling for govt reforms and for PM Abadi to announce new cabinet line-up; Abadi promised reforms 29 March. U.S. officials late Feb warned of dangers posed by deteriorating condition of Mosul dam. Amid financial crisis Kurdistan Regional Govt (KRG) 11 March restarted oil exports after three-week break.

➡ **Jordan** Security forces 1 March raided suspected Islamic State (IS) cell in northern Irbid, killed seven militants, seized weapons, ammunition and explosives, reportedly foiled planned attack; one security force member killed.

- Joost Hiltermann, ["Jordan: How Close to Danger?"](#), *New York Review of Books*, 29 March 2016.

➡ **Yemen** Ceasefire agreements and commitment to talks in April raised hopes for possible de-escalation of conflict. Saudia Arabia and Huthis early March agreed to halt hostilities along Yemen-Saudi Arabia border and exchanged prisoners, nine Saudis for 109 Yemenis; agreement paved way for wider negotiations. UN envoy 23 March said cessation of hostilities between govt and Huthi/Saleh bloc would begin 10 April, followed by talks in Kuwait one week later. Violence continued elsewhere: anti-Huthi forces 12 March captured territory in southern Taiz area, partially breaking siege on Taiz city, but Huthi/Saleh forces reportedly regained much lost territory late March. Saudi-led coalition airstrike in NW Hajjah governorate 15 March killed 119 civilians, including 22 children. Coalition spokesman 17 March said major combat operations ending soon. Gunmen 4 March attacked nursing home in Aden, killing sixteen civilians. Government forces 12-13 March fought al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Aden's Mansoura district, reportedly regained control of parts of Mansoura 30 March. U.S. 22 March launched airstrike on AQAP training camp near Mukalla, killing over 50 militants, suspected drone strike 30 March reportedly killed four AQAP

militants. Three suicide bombers 25 March attacked checkpoints in Aden killing 26, injuring dozens, Islamic State claimed responsibility.

- April Longley Alley, [“La trágica guerra de Yemen”](#), *Política Exterior*, 8 March 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°167, [Yemen: Is Peace Possible?](#), 9 Feb. 2016.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Army 10 March killed three al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) militants including emir Abou Hatim, in El Oued near Tunisian border and seized significant weapons cache; 21 March killed six suspected militants also in El Oued. Militants 18 March fired grenades at gas plants at In Salah field in Kechba area, Ghardaia province, no reported casualties; AQIM claimed responsibility, army reportedly killed four militants responsible. Police 23 March shot dead militant wearing suicide belt in Maatkas near Tizi Ouzou. Security forces 26 March killed three suspected militants in Tizi Ouzou. Dozens of sub-Saharan African migrants injured in clashes with Algerians in western Bechar 25 March.

➔ **Egypt** President Sisi 22 March convened emergency security meeting, called for complete coordination between army and police after recent uptick in militant attacks in N Sinai, where incidents included: two members of security forces and medic killed in ambush 6 March; roadside bomb killed two police 7 March; at least five soldiers killed in attack on base 16 March; fifteen police killed and three reportedly taken hostage 19 March in attack claimed by Islamic State (IS) affiliate. Security forces registered some successes, including: 20 suspected militants reported killed in airstrike 1 March; fighter jets 9 March targeted IS affiliate training camp, leaving seventeen dead. Egyptian-led committee investigating Oct 2015 crash of Russian passenger plane in Sinai said it was referring case to Egypt's attorney general, giving first indication it suspects plane was brought down intentionally. PM Sherif Ismail 23 March announced cabinet reshuffle, ten new ministers including finance and investment sworn in; govt 27 March presented program of economic and other reforms to parliament, said any spending cuts will be accompanied by protection net for poor. Central Bank mid-March devalued Egyptian pound 15%; move welcomed by many to fight black market trading, but concerns about impact on inflation. Judicial commission 18 March ordered freezing assets of four rights activists, including investigative journalist Hossam Bahgat and lawyer Gamal Eid, on charges they received \$1.5mn from foreign parties; Cairo Criminal Court 24 March postponed decision to 20 April. UN human rights chief 23 March expressed grave concern over prosecutions of human rights defenders and shutdown of civil society.

⬇️🇺🇦* **Libya** UN-backed PM Serraj 30 March arrived by sea in Tripoli after U.S. and several European countries 13 March recognised new Govt of National Accord (GNA) as only legitimate govt without waiting for formal vote of endorsement of Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) and without official backing of country's military factions. Tripoli-based PM Khalifa Ghwell 15 March said he would consider GNA operating in capital illegal, 27 March closed city's airport, allegedly to prevent arrival of GNA members, while Tobruk-based govt 18 March warned that moves to impose

GNA risk deepening crisis. Commanders of armed brigades in Tripoli 23 March rejected GNA and denounced efforts to bring it to capital. Pro- and anti-GNA militias clashed in Tripoli 28 March. UN envoy Martin Kobler 30 March urged “peaceful and orderly handover of power”. Foreign backers of UN process giving contradictory signals: Egyptian President Sisi 17 March urged Western countries to support eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA) of anti-GNA General Haftar, which in late Feb made advances in Benghazi against forces allied to Benghazi Shura Council coalition of Islamist militias; Special Forces from several Western and regional powers allegedly provided support to LNA in Benghazi. New Islamic State (IS) leader in Libya Abdul Qadr al-Najdi 10 March said group gaining strength. Suspected IS militants 14 March attacked water plant 80km from major Sarir oil field. Kobler 17 March said situation “going from bad to worse”, warned of IS expansion.

➡ **Morocco** Govt 7 and 24 March said two suspected Islamic State (IS)-affiliated cells dismantled. Tensions between Morocco and UN over Western Sahara spiked (see Western Sahara).

↓ **Tunisia** At least 50 Islamic State (IS) militants 7 March stormed Ben Guerdane, 30km from Libyan border, attempting to overwhelm key security installations; reportedly called for insurrection of local population, tried to distribute weapons. Several hundred armed forces eliminated around 40 fighters in ensuing battle, ten more (mostly Tunisians) killed over following days; thirteen security personnel and seven civilians died during clashes. Intelligence sources suggest attack long-planned, brought forward after 19 Feb U.S. strike on IS training camp in Libya in which 49 suspected militants were killed, mostly Tunisians. Authorities 22 March reopened border crossings with Libya after two-week closure. President Essebsi 22 March said state of emergency imposed following Nov 2015 bomb attack on bus in Tunis extended for three months.

- Michaël Béchir Ayari, [“L'après Ben Guerdane: 7 pièges à éviter”](#), Al Huffington Post, 9 March 2016.
- Michaël Béchir Ayari, [“Seven Ways to Steady a Tunisia under New Attack”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 9 March 2016.

↓ **Western Sahara** Tensions between Morocco and UN spiked after UNSG Ban early March referred to “occupation” of Western Sahara during visit to Polisario Front-controlled Bir Lehlou in Western Sahara and refugee camps in Algeria. Morocco 8 March accused Ban of bias; hundreds of thousands protested 13 March in Rabat. Morocco 16 March announced \$3mn cut for MINURSO peacekeeping mission; 20 March expelled over 80 civilian MINURSO staff from Western Sahara; next day asked UN to close its military liaison office in Western Sahara; called these decisions “irreversible”. Polisario Front 17 March said Morocco intended to end MINURSO mission, which would hasten “resumption of war”. UN spokesman 28 March said Ban regrets “misunderstanding”, UN remains neutral; Morocco 29 March rejected UN explanation, claimed Ban’s words were premeditated but said it was ready to engage in dialogue with UN.