

1 April 2008, N°56**Board of Trustees****CrisisWatch:**

- summarises briefly developments during the previous month in some 70 situations of current or potential conflict, listed alphabetically by region, providing references and links to more detailed information sources (all references mentioned are hyperlinked in the electronic version of this bulletin);
- assesses whether the overall situation in each case has, during the previous month, significantly deteriorated, significantly improved, or on balance remained more or less unchanged;
- alerts readers to situations where, in the coming month, there is a particular risk of new or significantly escalated conflict, or a particular conflict resolution opportunity (noting that in some instances there may in fact be both); and
- summarises Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers that have been published in the last month.

CrisisWatch is compiled by Crisis Group's Brussels Research Unit, drawing on multiple sources including the resources of our some 140 staff members across five continents, who already report on some 60 of the situations listed here. Comments and suggestions can be sent to crisiswatch@crisisgroup.org.

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Zimbabwe

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Crisis Group

Crisis Group is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 140 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict. Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, Crisis Group produces regular analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers, and backed up with high level advocacy. Crisis Group is co-chaired by former European Commissioner for External Relations Lord Patten of Barnes and former U.S. Ambassador and Boeing Vice President, International Relations, Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering, and its President and Chief Executive is former Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans.



Africa

CENTRAL AFRICA

➤ **Burundi** Government said 2 March FNL rebel leaders to return in May to finalise Sept 2006 peace agreement, after talks suspended July 2007; truce monitoring to resume Apr. Progress undermined by 14 March FNL accusation army killed 5 commanders. Simultaneous Bujumbura grenade attacks 8 March targeted 4 recent defectors from ruling CNDD-FDD including former leader Hussein Radjabu's sister and former National Assembly VP Alice Nzomukunda, no casualties. Parliamentary stalemate continued, with 5 March dissolution of FRODEBU group and appointment of CNDD-FDD Irene Inankuyo as Assembly first VP. 17 FNL rebels, 1 soldier, 2 civilians reported killed in 29 Feb-1 March clashes.

- ["Investigate attacks on opposition"](#), Human Rights Watch, 12 Mar. 2008.
- ["Burundi says rebels ready to move on peace deal"](#), Reuters, 2 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°131, [Burundi: Finalising Peace with the FNL](#), 28 Aug. 2007.

➤ **Central African Republic** Major cross-border attack 29 Feb by Chadian army reported: 4 killed, 6 villages razed, some 3,000 fled to Chad. Rebel Popular Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy (APRD) said 5 soldiers, 1 rebel killed in 4-5 March fighting. UN reported 150 abducted in early March raids on remote border towns – 55 children, 40 adults remain missing; amid reports Ugandan LRA leader Joseph Kony moved to CAR (see Uganda). Unidentified gunman killed woman in Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) ambulance 10 March, forcing MSF drawdown. Some 200 French soldiers in north eastern Birao transferred to EU peacekeeping force 8 March, formally launching CAR EUFOR deployment.

- ["Gunmen hold 55 children abducted in CAR – U.N."](#), Reuters, 28 Mar. 2008.
- ["Northern CAR faces violence from all sides"](#), VOA, 21 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°136, [Central African Republic: Anatomy of a Phantom State](#), 13 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Democratic Republic of Congo** Focus shifted to west, as government violently suppressed separatists in Bas-Congo: some 100 killed in 3 weeks, including many civilians; figures disputed. The early-March police clashes in Luozi with supporters of ethno-religious Bundu dia Kongo (BDK) movement quickly spread; MONUC took week to send peacekeepers. Government banned BDK 21 March. Eastern peace fragile: Mai Mai faction PARECO withdrew from Goma peace deal commissions 28 March as General Nkunda's CNDP rebels promised to rejoin ceasefire commission following Feb walk-out. 15 March disarmament deadline for Hutu FDLR rebels passed; government threatened forcible disarmament, UN Security Council expanded sanctions (see Rwanda).

- ["Kinshasa unable to disarm FDLR rebels – analysts"](#), IRIN, 17 Mar. 2008
- ["Congo rebels rejoin truce panel after massacre row"](#), Reuters, 4 Mar. 2008.

- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°133, [Congo: Bringing Peace to North Kivu](#), 31 Oct. 2007.

➤ **Rwanda** Rwandan Hutu FDLR rebels in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) called for talks 14 March with Tutu-led government, following threat of increased UN sanctions. Rwanda and ICTR signed 4 March agreement: convicts to serve sentences in Rwanda, not Tanzania.

- ["Rwandan armed groups in eastern DR Congo must surrender – Security Council"](#), UN News, 13 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Uganda** Government-LRA peace talks moved haltingly toward completion, with LRA leader Joseph Kony reportedly en route end-March to Ri-Kwangba, DRC-Sudan border base, to sign final agreement. Penultimate agreement signed 26 March. Kony reportedly moved to Central African Republic (CAR) mid-month, violating ceasefire, amid reports of early March attacks on CAR towns (see CAR) and contact with main Chadian rebel leader Gen. Mahamat Nouri. Stalemate over ICC arrest warrants deepened as Kony vowed not to complete deal unless lifted: President Museveni suggested 11 March would ask ICC to "withdraw our complaint", with final deal and if LRA faced traditional justice, rejected immunity guarantee. LRA delegation met ICC registry officials 10 March in Hague; ICC said procedural issues discussed.

- ["South Sudan: rebel Kony to sign peace deal in bush"](#), Reuters, 28 Mar. 2008.
- ["Uganda's LRA rebels welcome President Museveni's ICC comments"](#), VOA, 12 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°46, [Northern Uganda Peace Process: The Need to Maintain Momentum](#), 14 Sept. 2007.

HORN OF AFRICA

➤ **Chad** Peace agreement signed with Sudan 13 March; scorned by Chadian and Sudanese rebel groups. Agreement, to be monitored by "contact group" of African FMs, came as Chad accused Sudan of 12 March cross-border rebel attack; further accusations by both sides 22 March. EU peacekeeping force (EUFOR) formally operational from 17 March; 1 soldier killed in 3 March clash with Sudanese troops. President Deby reported 6 March some 700 killed in early Feb rebel assault on N'Djamena; subsequent state of emergency lifted 15 March. Opposition leader Ibni Mahamat Saleh still missing. At least 8 political detainees remain in custody. Rally of Forces for Change leader Timane Erdimi reported 13 March met with government negotiator on peace talks, threatened 16 March to attack southern oil-rich Doba region if France, U.S. failed to pressure Deby to launch all-inclusive dialogue.

- ["Chad rebel says gov't contacted him for talks"](#), Reuters, 21 Mar. 2008.
- ["Chad rebels dismiss peace accord"](#), BBC, 14 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Ethiopia/Eritrea** Over 700 UNMEE peacekeepers temporarily relocated from Eritrea to home countries. UNSG Ban Ki-moon said Eritrea placed UNMEE in untenable situation. Ethiopian-Eritrean forces 17 March reportedly clashed Tigray, Ethiopia; 5 Eritrean, 2 Ethiopian deaths unconfirmed. 13 March bus bomb in north Ethiopia killed 8; government blamed Eritrea – Asmara dismissed accusations.

- [“Security Council calls for Eritrea’s full cooperation for blue helmets’ relocation”](#), UN News, 14 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°48, [Ethiopia and Eritrea: Stopping the Slide to War](#), 5 Nov. 2007.

➡ **Kenya** Implementation of 28 Feb power-sharing deal to resolve post-election crisis progressed, but government crackdown, violent clashes continued. 3 killed, some 300 arrested in mid-March Mount Elgon army operation against Sabat Land Defence Forces – militia fighting government over land claims since Dec 2006. Inter-community clashes in some districts: 15 killed in Lakipia West early March. Parliamentarians 18 March unanimously approved Feb deal, but talks between supporters of President Kibaki and PM-designate Odinga hit deadlock 25 March over coalition cabinet size and composition. 7-member (3 foreign, 4 Kenyan) commission to investigate election sworn in 14 March. 19 March UN report cited excessive use of force by police, failure of state to protect citizens during crisis, stressed accountability. Rights groups accused pro-government, opposition politicians of helping finance and organise violence. 4 March agreement proposed Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, also constitutional reform roadmap.

- Comment by Andebrhan Giorgis (Crisis Group), [“Kenya: Only a Fragile Start”](#), Mail & Guardian Online, 16 Mar. 2008.
- [“Despite Kenya peace deal, ethnic tensions simmer”](#), Reuters, 25 Mar. 2008.
- [“Cabinet dispute”](#), *Daily Nation*, 26 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°137, [Kenya in Crisis](#), 21 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Somalia** Islamist-led insurgency escalated outside Mogadishu, with hit-and-run attacks on key strategic towns – 11 killed 30 March in Buulo Burte attack, 7 soldiers killed in 26 March Jowhar raid; humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate. In Mogadishu: some 20 killed as Ethiopian troop shelled Bakara market 29 March after presidential compound mortared during President Yusuf meeting with Ethiopian FM Seyoum; 25 March police station attack killed 5. U.S. air strike 3 March against “known al-Qaeda terrorist” in southern town Doblely killed up to 6, prompted hundreds-strong anti-U.S. demonstration there. Unmanned U.S. drone crashed Lower Shabelle 28 March. U.S. formally designated militant al Shabaab and aliases foreign terrorist organisation, said al-Qaeda affiliate, 18 March. Al Shabaab commander said 20 March U.S. designation promotes unity, recruitment. PM Nur Hassan Hussein said 12 March willing to talk to al Shabaab and other opposition, as part of national reconciliation plan to be headed by UN envoy Ould-Abdallah. PM held first official meeting with Hawiye clan elders in Mogadishu 24 March. Rival groups continue to fight over checkpoint control in, around capital, 5 March attack killed 6.

- [“Somalia’s government teeters on collapse”](#), *New York Times*, 29 Mar. 2008.
- [“Somali militants hinder humanitarian aid”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Somaliland (Somalia)** Somaliland created 6 new provinces 22 March ahead of April elections, redraw boundaries of disputed Sool and Sanaag. Puntland VP accused Somaliland of “fomenting war”. Somaliland President Riyale pardoned 78 prisoners from neighbouring Puntland. [“Somaliland president names new provinces, pardons war prisoners”](#), Garowe Online, 22 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Sudan** North-South tensions flared and West Darfur situation remained precarious, despite 13 March peace agreement with Chad. Up to 70 killed in 1 March clash between southern army (SPLA) and Misseriya in contested Abyei border region; SPLA accused Khartoum of backing Misseriya. Fresh clashes reported 16, 20 March; hundreds displaced. Darfur peace process further faltered as Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebels 16 March requested 1-on-1 peace talks with government, in snub to other Darfur rebel factions, though later backed down. JEM reported countering major army assault 18 March in West Darfur; UN humanitarian chief in Sudan Ameerah Haq 3 March accused group of blocking access to some 20,000 trapped by fighting. 20 March UN report called army’s destruction of villages during deadly Feb Darfur attacks “deliberate” military strategy; army denied. UN Darfur envoy Jan Eliasson and AU counterpart Salim Salim urged donor nations 18 March to rapidly deploy peacekeepers to region. EU peacekeeping force in Chad (EUFOR) soldier reportedly killed 3 March at army checkpoint as soldiers accidentally crossed into Sudan; Khartoum demanded \$40,000 compensation for 4 nomads alleged killed by grenade while moving soldier’s body. 20 south Sudanese reported killed by Ugandan gunmen early March. 3 drivers of WFP-contracted trucks killed in 2 incidents in southern Sudan, 22, 24 March; 4 water engineers working for UNICEF counterpart abducted in north Darfur 20 March.

- [“Rising tension in Abyei as clashes displace hundreds”](#), IRIN, 24 Mar. 2008.
- [“Sudan accused over Darfur strikes”](#), BBC, 20 Mar. 2008.
- [“Darfur rebels demand one-on-one peace talks”](#), Reuters, 16 Mar. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°50, [Sudan’s Comprehensive Peace Agreement: Beyond the Crisis](#), 13 Mar. 2008. Sudan’s North-South peace remains at risk and Darfur unsolvable unless 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) parties and the international community actively recommit to its implementation. A crisis over the CPA at end-2007 was settled, but the underlying problems still threaten the deal. International policies should no longer be bifurcated between the CPA and Darfur. Sudan’s conflicts are outgrowths of a common set of national problems.



SOUTHERN AFRICA




➡ **Angola** Last active faction of secessionist Front for the Liberation of the Cabinda Enclave (FLEC) reportedly killed 3 soldiers, 1 foreign worker in separate attacks in oil-rich Cabinda region 3 March. Group demanded resolution of Cabinda’s status, vowed ongoing fight against “domination” and Luanda-controlled foreign investment. Government dismissed FLEC claims; suggested attack criminal. Government 20 March announced plan to disarm civilians of civil war firearms.

- [“Deadly attack’ in Angola enclave”](#), BBC, 7 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Comoros Islands** Government troops, backed by AU forces, moved in to rebel Anjouan island 25 March; restored control quickly and with little resistance. Anjouan appeal court president Abdou Cheikh sworn in as island’s interim president 31 March; elections in 2-3 months. Government said 3 rebels killed, 10 wounded; reported earlier deadly clashes mid-month. Self-proclaimed Anjouan leader Col. Mohammad Bacar fled to French island Mayotte; sought asylum. Government demanded extradition to face trial;

1,000 in anti-French protests in Moroni 26 March. Bacar still in French custody pending deportation decision. Comoros earlier accused Paris of supporting Anjouan separatist bid, after French helicopter crashed outside Anjouan capital Mousamoudou 19 March.

- [“Court dismisses case against Comoros rebel leader”](#), AFP, 29 Mar. 2008.
- [“Battles on Comoros rebel island”](#), BBC, 25 Mar. 2008.

   **Zimbabwe** Flawed presidential, parliamentary and municipal elections held 29 March. Early results disputed: risk of escalated repression, unrest – but also opportunity for change, with reports as CrisisWatch went to press that Mugabe under pressure from close associates to resign and/or negotiate transfer of power. Independent monitoring group, Zimbabwe Election Support Network, 31 March projected opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) candidate Tsvangirai to receive 49.4%, Mugabe (ZANU-PF) 41.8%; if no candidate receives 50%, run-off required. Mugabe vowed 30 March to treat early MDC victory claims as coup; blocked electoral commission from issuing presidential results. MDC said would not accept Mugabe victory. Parliamentary results released in batches, with MDC/ZANU-PF neck and neck at time of press. Justice Minister Chinamasa lost seat. Vote marred by extensive pre-ballot manipulation: government intensified opposition harassment, abuse of state resources, politicisation of food aid throughout month; 21 March threatened crackdown on post-election “Kenya-style” protests. Electoral Act amended 17 March to allow police in polling stations, reversing Jan reforms to protect against voter intimidation. Police, army chiefs warned would salute only Mugabe, but other senior security officials indicate more moderate positions privately. Mugabe approved law forcing foreign firms to sell controlling stake to indigenous blacks; authorised public sector pay rises; handed out farming implements; urged consumer price cut. U.S., EU election observers, most Western media barred. SADC mission reported vote “peaceful and credible”, but 2 mission observers rejected as “deeply flawed”.


- [“Elections leave desperate Mugabe clinging to power in Zimbabwe”](#), *New York Times*, 1 Apr. 2008.
- [“Mugabe warns over Kenya-style violence”](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 21 Mar. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°138, [Zimbabwe: Prospects from a Flawed Election](#), 20 Mar.




2008. The international community needs a contingency plan ready ahead of flawed elections in Zimbabwe on 29 March that could precipitate a violent crisis. The AU, with international backing, should be ready to offer mediation on power-sharing to produce a transitional government with a reformist agenda. If the region's leaders again recognise an illegitimate government, internal economic disintegration and a potentially violent struggle over President Mugabe's succession could continue.

WEST AFRICA


 **Cameroon** Rights groups claimed government under-reported deaths, arrests during late Feb protests against fuel hike and President Biya's plan to extend 25-year rule. 100 alleged dead, over 2,000 in detention. Opposition Social Democratic Front late March vowed further protests. EU Presidency 27 March issued declaration condemning

violence, urging democratic approval of constitutional changes.


- [“How long can Cameroon's Biya rule?”](#), BBC, 17 Mar. 2008.
- [“Cameroon activists say riots kill more than 100”](#), Reuters, 5 Mar. 2008.

 **Côte d'Ivoire** President Gbagbo reiterated possible election postponement beyond June, citing disarmament delays in north. 3 Forces Nouvelles (FN) disarmament centres transferred from ONUCI to government control, marking start of FN reintegration process; 118 ex-rebels surrendered weapons mid-month. Pro-government militia Greater West Resistance Forces (FRGO) head demanded government deliver promised demobilisation payouts to 1,000 fighters after pay plan halted, threatened unrest. 1 civilian killed in 24-25 March army riots over soldier murder in western towns Duekoue, Guiglo following demands for security improvements. Police forcefully dispersed 1,500-strong protest against rising food prices in Cocody, Yopougon 31 March.

- [“State returns, slowly, to rebel north Ivory Coast”](#), Reuters, 13 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°127, [Côte d'Ivoire: Can the Ouagadougou Agreement Bring Peace?](#), 27 June 2007.

 **Guinea** Former Haitian PM Latortue to mediate between President Conté, civil society leaders amid growing frustration over living costs, service delivery. Protesters blocked roads, attacked expat houses 11 March following power outages. Conté selected ally Tibou Kamara to head national media body in move seen as further attempt to isolate PM Kouyaté.


- [“Fears of strikes and unrest”](#), IRIN, 26 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Africa Briefing N°49, [Guinea: Change on Hold](#), 8 Nov. 2007.

 **Guinea-Bissau** President Vieira 26 March postponed March legislative elections until 16 Nov; said delay due to financial constraints. UNSG Ban Ki-moon 20 March praised security sector reform progress since G-B added to Peacebuilding Commission agenda.

- [“La Guinée Bissau reporte ses législatives, faute d'argent”](#), APA, 10 Mar. 2008.

 **Liberia** 17 former UNMIL contractors arrested after attacking UNMIL staff, vehicles 11 March. Police 20 March seized 30,000 ammunition rounds near Sierra Leone border. Special Court for Sierra Leone officials said witnesses testifying against ex-Liberian President Charles Taylor subject to intimidation, death threats. First census in 24 years conducted 21-23 March.

- [“Death threats” to witnesses against Liberia's Taylor](#), Reuters, 20 Mar. 2008.

 **Niger** Rebel group Mouvement des Nigériens pour la Justice (MNJ) announced release of 25 hostages 10 March, but continued attacks. 1 civilian killed in assault on uranium truck, 14 March; 3 soldiers killed, 1 abducted in 16 March attack on Banibangou military post. Government 10 March suspended Radio France Internationale (RFI) for 3 months after broadcasting support for jailed RFI correspondent Moussa Kaka.

- [“Government suspends RFI ...”](#), Reporters Sans Frontières, 13 Mar. 2008.
- [“Tuareg-led rebels say freed 25 prisoners in Niger”](#), Reuters, 10 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Nigeria** Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) faction leader Henry Okah and aide Edward Attata 6 March charged with gun-running, terrorism and treason; face death penalty. MEND demanded access to Okah, threatening legal action. Delta attacks continued: 1 killed in 19 March shooting on oil industry security ship; at least 2 soldiers killed 21 March in naval base explosion, claimed by MEND. Government announced new anti-terrorism police force to be deployed Kano, Port Harcourt, Lagos, Abuja. Public hearing on electricity crisis revealed some \$50m lost in payments to fake companies under last administration. President Yar'Adua announced domestic gas industry development plan; experts sceptical. 2 ministers forced to resign 25 March over corruption in health ministry.

- "Nigeria looks to solve power crisis", *Financial Times*, 13 Mar. 2008.
- "Nigerian oil delta under threat of new violence", *Mail & Guardian*, 12 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°135, *Nigeria: Ending Unrest in the Niger Delta*, 5 Dec. 2007.

➤ **Mali** Tuareg rebels 10 March released remaining 22 soldiers held since Aug 2007, but captured 33 more in 20 March raid on military convoy in Kidal region. Clashes reported on 13, 22 March; 8 killed by landmines late month. Government announced 4 members of Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat (GSPC) captured in north 1 March. Libya began peace talks with Tuareg, government parties separately 26 March.

- "Mali rebels holding new group of soldiers hostage", AP, 23 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Senegal** Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) rebels briefly kidnapped 16 villagers in Bissine, G-B border, 16 March. Police beat protesters, arrested 24, in 30 March food price riots.

- "Senegal police raid TV station after prices protest", Reuters, 31 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Sierra Leone** Low turnout reported at 29 March by-elections for 4 seats vacated by appointment of ruling All People's Congress (APC) parliamentarians to cabinet. Regional chairs of APC, opposition parties 6 March demanded deferral of July local elections until boundary concerns addressed. Anti-Corruption Commission arrested 13 officials 6 March. National army began downsizing from 10,000 to 8,500 to increase efficiency; pledged 850 troops to future UN peacekeeping missions.

- "Sierra Leone army to 'downsize': minister", AFP, 14 Mar. 2008.

Asia/Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

➤ **Kazakhstan** Military court 26 March sentenced in absentia President Nazarbayev's former son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev 20 years for coup plot. Astana court 5 March banned Islamic Party of Turkestan (formerly Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, IMU), claiming terrorist organisation.

- "President's ex-son-in-law found guilty of coup plot", RFE/RL, 26 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Kyrgyzstan** Opposition groups 11 March brought court case against Central Election Commission (CEC) for not releasing detailed Dec 2007 election results; CEC said information unavailable. Opposition MPs held "public parliament" session 19 March; declared illegitimate by acting parliament. Unofficial "people's court" held 17 March on 2002 Aksy killings: President Bakiyev, former President Akayev, found responsible for organising, carrying out shootings; Justice Minister Kaiypov said trial illegal.

- "Public trial held on 2002 killings", RFE/RL, 17 Mar. 2008.
- "Kyrgyz opposition queries election figures", IWPR, 12 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Tajikistan** IMF demanded government repay \$47m loans, accused Tajik National Bank of supplying doctored economic data. Supreme Court 11 March labelled Hizb ut-Tahrir "extremist organisation".

- "IMF demands Dushanbe repay nearly \$48 million", RFE/RL, 10 Mar. 2008.

➤ **Turkmenistan** Gas dispute with Azerbaijan resolved 5 March after Baku promised \$45m to pay debt accrued since 1991-92; deal removed obstacle in new trans-Caspian pipeline negotiations.

- "Turkmen, Azerbaijani deal could raise energy hopes", RFE/RL, 6 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°60, *Turkmenistan after Niyazov*, 12 Feb. 2007.

➤ **Uzbekistan** U.S. Ambassador Richard Norland 13 March praised "small but significant" human rights progress. Tashkent permitted ICRC prison visits to resume after 3-year post-Andijon break. Uzbekistan to allow limited U.S. use of Termez airbase for NATO operations in Afghanistan. Turkmen President Berdymukhammedov met President Karimov 10-11 March in first official Tashkent visit; signed cooperation agreements.

- "Amid thaw with West, debate over sanctions intensifies", Eurasianet, 24 March 2008.
- "US may be allowed to use Uzbek military base –NATO", Reuters, 5 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°76, *Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan's Isolation*, 14 Feb. 2008.

NORTH EAST ASIA


➤ **China (internal)** Protests began in Lhasa 10 March marking anniversary of failed 1959 uprising against Chinese government, turned violent 14 March as protestors attacked Han Chinese and Hui Muslims in city. Escalation prompted deployment of thousands of police to region, hundreds of detentions, as unrest spread to Tibetan-populated areas of Gansu, Sichuan, Qinghai provinces. Beijing launched propaganda campaign highlighting Tibetan aggression, shut down foreign media access to region. Tibetan government in exile claimed 140 killed in related violence; Beijing said 22. Government admitted shots fired on protesters 16 March in Aba, Sichuan province, killing 4.

- "660 held in Tibetan uprising, China says", *New York Times*, 27 Mar. 2008.
- "Thrashing the Beijing road", *Economist*, 19 Mar. 2008.

➤ **North Korea** Tensions increased amid inflammatory rhetoric and military activity: Pyongyang 30 March threatened to reduce


South to “ashes” after South Korea military chief Kim Tae-young 26 March said Seoul would launch pre-emptive strike on suspected DPRK nuclear weapons site if Pyongyang preparing attack. Moves followed declaration by U.S. envoy Christopher Hill 19 March that DPRK not ready to make complete nuclear declaration; Pyongyang insisted declaration already complete, accused Washington of delaying progress. Seoul threatened 26 March economic cooperation at risk, voted 27 March for UN Human Rights Council resolution condemning abuses by DPRK; in apparent response, DPRK expelled 11 South Koreans from Kaesong industrial park, next day test-fired ship-to-ship missiles off western coast. South Korea media 31 March reported frequent DRPK jet fighter flights near DMZ.

- “North Korea test-fires missiles in ongoing show of truculence”, *Washington Post*, 29 Mar. 2008.
- “South Korea, US begin military drills”, AP, 2 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°73, *South Korea’s Election: What to Expect from President Lee*, 21 Dec. 2007.


 **Taiwan Strait** Nationalist Party candidate Ma Ying-jeou won 22 March presidential elections with 58% vote, promised to improve Chinese relations; concurrent referendums on UN membership failed to surpass 50% turnout threshold. Chinese Premier Wen 31 March invited Taipei to hold talks on economic cooperation and possible peace agreement. China voiced concern 26 March at disclosure ICBM parts accidentally included in 2006 U.S. arms shipment to Taipei.

- “Missile parts sent to Taiwan in error”, *New York Times*, 26 Mar. 2008.
- “Taiwan’s Ma wins election”, Reuters, 22 Mar. 2008.


SOUTH ASIA

 **Afghanistan** Attacks on mobile phone towers in south followed Taliban demand they be shut down at night to prevent tracking of insurgents. Norwegian Kai Eide, former UN special envoy for Kosovo, named new UN envoy to Kabul. U.S. VP Dick Cheney visited mid-month, called for greater ISAF troop contributions from NATO allies. Canadian parliament voted 13 March 198-77 to extend mission in Kandahar until 2011 on condition NATO reinforce equipment and personnel by 1,000 troops. UN reported conflict killed 8,000 in 2007, including 1,500 civilians. Gunmen killed 5 NGO workers clearing mines in Balkh province 23 March. UNSC extended UNAMA mandate 1 year.




- “Taliban declare war on mobile phone firms”, IWPR, 6 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°145, *Afghanistan: The Need for International Resolve*, 6 Feb. 2008.

 **Bangladesh** Caretaker government indicated dialogue with political parties may begin early Apr. Election Commission reform talks remain stalled pending resolution of BNP leadership dispute. U.S. government listed Islamist group Harkatul Jihad as terrorist organisation. Senior leaders from BNP and AL demanded release of Khaleda and Hasina before 26 March Independence Day; AL 30 March threatened mass hunger strike if Hasina not released before 5 Apr.


- “Govt to sit with parties early April”, *Daily Star*, 25 Mar. 2008.
- “Politics heats up ahead of Bangladesh anniversary”, Reuters, 24 Mar. 2008.

 **India (non-Kashmir)** Supreme Court ordered new probe into 2002 Gujarat Hindu-Muslim riots, set up 5-member investigation team to report within 3 months. Police killed at least 17 Maoist rebels in Chhattisgarh jungle clash 17 March, and 8 in Jharkhand 1 Apr. Unidentified militants killed 7 Hindi-speaking settlers in Guwahati, Manipur, 8 March.


- “India orders new inquiry into 2002 clashes”, *New York Times*, 27 Mar. 2008.

   **Nepal** 10 Apr Constituent Assembly polls present risk of violence, yet also significant potential if unity government follows. Maoists accused of using force and intimidation to disrupt rival parties’ campaigns; several cases of reported Maoists interference in rallies. 1 candidate killed 18 March; dozens injured in election-related violence. Other parties also engaged in misconduct; 8 Maoist party workers killed. UNMIN, OHCHR, others expressed concern over violations of poll-related human rights. 3 leading party leaders signed joint pledge 30 March, committed to hold elections in free and fair environment. 810 election observers on location for polls. Daily anti-Chinese demonstrations by Tibetans held from 10 March in capital, where clashes broke out with police; several hundred protesters detained, vast majority only for brief period. 2 killed in bomb attack on Birtnagar mosque 30 March, Hindu extremist group Nepal Defence Army claimed responsibility.

- “UN warns Nepal on detention of Tibetan protesters”, Reuters, 25 Mar. 2008.
- “Stop intimidating voters, UN tells Nepal parties”, Reuters, 22 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°72, *Nepal: Peace Postponed*, 18 Dec. 2007.

 **Pakistan** President Musharraf called 17 March parliamentary session to swear in legislators, 1 month after polls. PPP’s Yousaf Raza Gilani sworn in as PM 25 March, heading PPP, PML-N, ANP coalition government; in first official move, ordered release of former chief justice Iftikhar Chaudhry and 9 other judges sacked and detained by Musharraf. Coalition parties support new approach to terrorism – law enforcement, political reform, dialogue with non-hardline militants – complicating relations with U.S. PPP and PML-N leaders told visiting U.S. senior envoys John Negroponte and Richard Boucher 25 March that policy on all issues, including counter-terrorism and Musharraf’s presidency, to be decided by parliament. In 29 March speech to parliament, Gillani said would repeal Frontier Crimes Regulation governing FATA. Grave insecurity continued: 31 died in twin bombings in Lahore 12 March; attack followed bombing of city’s Naval War College 4 March killing 4. 15 March attack on Islamabad restaurant killed 1, suspected targeted attack on FBI personnel. In tribal areas: 42 killed in Darra Adamkhel 2 March as local jirga ending. 20 dead in missile attack on militants near Wana 16 March; U.S. drones suspected.

- “Moderates hold key in Pakistan”, *New York Times*, 26 Mar. 2008.
- “Musharraf is quickly losing his grip on Pakistan”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 Mar. 2008.
- “After the mullahs”, *Economist*, 19 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°74, *After Bhutto’s Murder: A Way Forward for Pakistan*, 2 Jan. 2008.

 **Sri Lanka** TMVP party, Tamil armed group nominally led by LTTE renegade Col. Karuna, won 70% of vote in 10 March local

government elections in east, first to take place in more than a decade. Refusing to disarm and running in formal electoral alliance with government party, TMVP accused of intimidation, including forced recruitment of candidates; polls also marred by absence of candidates from main opposition parties, worried about security. In 16-18 March visit, EU troika raised "serious concerns" about reports of human rights abuses, said reconsidering trade preferences. Tamil National Alliance MP, K Sivanesan, killed 6 March in roadside attack on his car.

- "EU warns Sri Lanka trade depends on rights record", Reuters, 19 Mar. 2008.
- "Ex-Tamil Tigers win local polls", BBC, 11 Mar. 2008.
- "State responsibility for "disappearances" and abductions in Sri Lanka", Human Rights Watch, 6 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°146, *Sri Lanka's Return to War: Limiting the Damage*, 20 Feb. 2008.

SOUTH EAST ASIA

➡ **Indonesia** At least 5 killed in attack by unidentified mob on Aceh Transition Committee (KPA) office in Atu Lintang, Aceh, 1 March. 9 detained in Manokwari, West Papua, 13 March for flying Papuan Morning Star flag during protest against terms of Special Autonomy. 1 killed in clashes between refugees from Timor-Leste and locals in Atambua, East Nusa Tenggara 23 March.

- "Central government must allow Aceh to sustain hard-won peace", *Jakarta Post*, 3 Mar. 2008.
- "Five die in attack on office of former Aceh rebels", Reuters, 2 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Myanmar/Burma** UN envoy Ibrahim Gambari 18 March told UNSC his 6-10 March visit yielded "no tangible results". Gambari met opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi but not military chief Than Shwe, while government rejected call for international monitoring of May constitutional referendum. Gen. Shwe gave rare public speech 27 March, claiming would hand over power to victors of planned 2010 elections. Visit by Thai PM Samak 14 March focused on trade and cooperation, noting democracy an internal matter. "Generation 88" group called on voters to reject constitution in May referendum. All Burma Monks Alliance called 19 March for nationwide student boycott of state-run exams.

- "UN envoy disappointed after latest visit to Myanmar", Reuters, 19 Mar. 2008.
- "Myanmar monks call for boycott of religious exams to protest military rule", AP, 19 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°144, *Burma/Myanmar: After the Crackdown*, 31 Jan. 2008.

➡ **Thailand** Car bomb exploded in front of CS Pattani hotel 15 March, killing 2; hotel had been considered "neutral ground" for meetings between government and local Muslim figures. Former PM Thaksin entered not guilty plea in real estate deal corruption case 12 March. Current PM Samak appointed army chief Anupong Paochinda head of Internal Security Operations Command (ISOC) 25 March; mandate includes focus on southern insurgency.

- "Ousted Thai PM appears in court", BBC, 12 Mar. 2008.
- For most recent report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°140, *Southern Thailand: The Problem with Paramilitaries*, 23 Oct. 2007.

➡ **Timor-Leste** Rebel Amaro da Costa, alias Susar, surrendered to police custody 2 March; 6 other rebels implicated in 11 Feb attacks on President Ramos-Horta and PM Gusmão surrendered 22-23 March. Government talks with lead rebel Gastão Salsinha aimed at his surrender continued. State of emergency extended for 30 days from 23 March. Ombudsman report listed 8 incidents of police and military abuse since imposition of emergency. Ramos-Horta discharged from hospital 19 March. PM Araújo announced 31 March that assistance to Salsinha a criminal offence.

- "Timor rebel's surrender talks", *Australian*, 25 Mar. 2008.
- "Harsh spotlight on Timor forces", *Age*, 15 Mar. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°148, *Timor-Leste's Displacement Crisis*, 31 Mar. 2008.



For Timor-Leste to avoid future conflict in future, it needs to do more to solve the problem of its displaced population. The government plan to promote the return of IDPs provides no money for non-infrastructure elements, such as bolstering security, livelihood support, reconciliation and social safety nets. The strategy does not address options for rebuilding properties subject to ownership disputes and overlooks the need to bring the authors of the 2006 violence to justice.

Europe

BALKANS

➡ **Albania** Parliament approved Gazemend Oketa as defence minister after Mediu resigned 17 March over 15 March weapons depot blast near Tirana killing 24. Continued deadlock over electoral reforms: opposition Socialist Party proposed proportional system; ruling Democratic Party welcomed, small parties remain opposed.

- "Albania minister quits over blast", BBC, 18 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Bosnia & Herzegovina** 5 members of Muslim Wahhabi movement allegedly planning attacks Catholic, EUFOR targets arrested in Sarajevo, Bugojno 20 March. Sarajevo state court evacuated after false bomb threat 20 March. Croatian parties issued joint statement 14 March, demanding implementation of 5-year-old law ensuring proportional ethnic representation, veto powers in national government. PM Spiric 31 March threatened to resign over police reforms after parliamentary joint defence and security committee rejected drafts. EU troops searched Karadzic family homes 27 March.

- "Ethnic Croats feel sidelined in Bosnia, leaders say", Reuters, 20 Mar. 2008.
- "BiH parliament gives police reform another chance", SEE Times, 19 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°180, *Ensuring Bosnia's Future: A New International Engagement Strategy*, 15 Feb. 2007.

➡ **Kosovo** Violence in Mitrovica and Serb efforts to partition underscored fragility of post-independence situation. UNMIK, KFOR forces 17 March conducted operation to remove demonstrators occupying Mitrovica regional court, arrested

53 and attempted transfer to Pristina. Well-organised Serb protestors attacked troops – gunfire, grenade attacks left 1 UN police dead, up to 180 police and protesters injured. UNMIK forces briefly withdrew, returned to north 19 March. Belgrade 16 March proposed to UNMIK “functional division” of Kosovo, suggesting control of institutions in Serb-dominated areas; Pristina rejected. Up to 300 Serb officers continue Kosovo Police Service boycott. Belgrade claimed takeover of northern 50km of Kosovo railway. 36 countries recognised Kosovo since 17 Feb independence declaration including Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria. Belgrade 20 March denounced U.S. decision to provide military assistance to Kosovo. UN and EU continue to discuss transition to EULEX mission; no comprehensive plan agreed.

- Comment by Sabine Freizer (Crisis Group), [“Reassuring Kosovo’s Serbs”](#), *Guardian*, 20 Mar. 2008.
- [“Serbia says Kosovo partition key to peace”](#), AP, 27 Mar. 2008.
- [“Worst still to come”](#), ISN Security Watch, 18 Mar. 2008.

Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°47, [Kosovo’s First Month](#), 18 Mar. 2008. The first month of independence has mostly gone well, but violence in Mitrovica showed that the opponents of independence can still threaten the new state and that there is a risk that Serbian-inspired partition will harden and Kosovo become a frozen conflict. More countries should recognise Kosovo’s independence quickly and the UN and NATO should seek to effectively cooperate in reshaping their northern presence.



➡ **Macedonia** FM Milososki threatened 24 March to end name dispute negotiations if Athens vetoed Macedonia’s NATO entry. EU Enlargement Commissioner Rehn urged resolution and political, economic reforms. Democratic Party of Albanians rejoined government coalition 24 March 10 days after withdrawal amid minority rights row.

- [“UN mediator offers last proposal in name dispute before NATO summit”](#), SEE Times, 26 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Serbia** Coalition government collapsed: President Tadic dissolved parliament 13 March after PM Kostunica resignation 8 March, citing failure to reach common positions on Kosovo independence, future EU relations. Early parliamentary elections scheduled for 11 May. DS Deputy Leader Sutanovac 31 March accused PM Kostunica and Kosovo Minister Samardzic of planning Feb violent riots in Belgrade. In address to UNSC 11 March FM Jeremic called for extension of UNMIK mandate but ruled out embargo against Kosovo. UNMIK spokesman Ivanko called on Belgrade to stop interference in Kosovo north. Recall of ambassadors from countries recognising Kosovo continued.

- [“Is more positive line on ICTY in the offing?”](#), IWPR, 14 Mar. 2008.
- [“Uncertain Serbia faces key poll”](#), BBC, 10 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°46, [Serbia’s New Government: Turning from Europe](#), 31 May 2007.

CAUCASUS

➡ **Armenia** Severe internal crisis with police crackdown 1-2 March on protest against 19 Feb presidential election results: 8 dead and at least 100 detained including MPs, opposition figures. State of emergency lifted 21 March, but police prevented daily peaceful rallies and continued arrests, intimidations. In 17

March emergency session, parliament approved constitutional changes to allow government restriction of mass gatherings. Constitutional court 9 March rejected opposition claims of rigged elections. 4 of 5 parties in parliament signed coalition agreement ahead of 9 Apr PM Sarkisian inauguration as president.

- Comment by Sabine Freizer (Crisis Group), [“Combustible Caucasus”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 13 Mar. 2008.
- [“Troubled Armenia protests continued”](#), *Economist*, 27 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Journalist Agil Khalil of opposition newspaper *Azadliq* hospitalised after 14 March attack by unidentified individuals. *Azadliq* editor Zahid sentenced 4 years on hooliganism charges. President Aliyev pardoned 59 prisoners 18 March; no opposition journalists released.

- [“Attack on journalist prompts fresh concerns about media freedom”](#), EurasiaNet, 20 Mar. 2008.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°191, [Azerbaijan: Independent Islam and the State](#), 25 Mar. 2008. The government’s policy of controlling all religious life and harsh treatment of some independent Islamic communities risks radicalising peaceful groups. The tough approach is justified by citing a need to combat extremism and prevent terrorism. The government should respect the religious rights of independent groups and include them in a broad debate on state and religion.



➡ **Chechnya (Russia)** Major rebel attack in Urus-Martanovskiy district 19 March left 9 dead, including 1 civilian. 2 police killed by bomb explosion in Alleroi village 24 March.

- [“Nine killed in Chechnya firefight – Russian agencies”](#), Reuters, 20 Mar. 2008.

➡ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Low-level violence continued: in Ingushetia, bomb explosions in Nazran 24 March, at police checkpoint 21 March. Senior police officer shot dead in Nazran by unidentified gunman 14 March. President Zazikov appointed new PM, ministers after 12 March dismissal of government. In Dagestan, 3 militants killed in arrest attempt 27 March in Dagestanskije Ogni. Unidentified gunmen attacked police patrol in Khasavyurt 24 March, 1 dead. Russian police convoys bombed 2, 19 March. Head of local TV station Gadzhi Abashilov shot dead in Makhachkala. Police regained control over 5 sub-power stations 8 March; 300 armed men had occupied, switched back Makhachkala power after cut by Russian operator MRSK citing outstanding payments.

- [“Dagestan adopts new program on ethnic relations”](#), RFE/RL, 7 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Georgia** National Opposition Council 9 March launched mass rally, hunger strike, protesting electoral law reforms, urging release of Nov 2007 protesters. Parliament 12 March approved constitutional amendments to electoral system, cutting number of MPs; opposition denounced, claiming measures preserve government control of parliament but ended hunger strike 25 March. Former defence minister Okruashvili 28 March sentenced 11 years in absentia for extortion. Continued tensions with separatist regions: South Ossetia (SO), Abkhazia issued appeals for international recognition 6,7 March citing “Kosovo precedent”. Tblisi proposed new “2+2+2 formula” for SO negotiations with Tblisi administration in region, de facto

authorities, Russia, OSCE and EU to replace Joint Control Commission. Explosions in SO: car bomb on prosecutor's car 27 March in Tskhinvali killed 1; bomb on peacekeeping patrol in Znauri region 23 March. President Saakashvili 28 March offered new Abkhazia proposal, including free economic zone, VP-post, government representation, veto to Abkhaz-related decisions, security services merger; Abkhaz leader Baghapsh rejected. Tense Georgian-Russian relations: Duma 14 March urged recognition of breakaway regions. Saakashvili 18 March called for "total revision" of Abkhazia peacekeeping format including Russian force presence after Moscow 6 March withdrew from 1996 CIS treaty imposing sanctions on Abkhazia. President Putin warned Georgia over NATO bid after President Bush vowed support 19 March during Saakashvili U.S. visit.

- "Georgia offers separatists deal before NATO summit", Reuters, 28 Mar. 2008.
- "Opposition calls off hunger strike", EurasiaNet, 26 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°189, *Georgia: Sliding towards Authoritarianism?*, 19 Dec. 2007.

↙ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Worst violations of 1994 ceasefire in years: Armenian, Azeri forces clashed at border 4-9 March leaving up to 16 soldiers, 2 civilians dead. UN General Assembly adopted Azerbaijan-drafted resolution 14 March calling for "immediate, complete and unconditional" withdrawal of Armenian forces; OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs opposed resolution as "unbalanced". Armenian President Kocharyan threatened 20 March to recognise region.

- "Rice doubts any solution soon in Nagorno-Karabakh", Reuters, 12 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War*, 14 Nov. 2007.

EASTERN EUROPE

↘ **Belarus** Tensions with U.S.: Foreign Ministry 7 March demanded exit of U.S. ambassador, recalled envoy from Washington in dispute over Nov 2007 economic sanctions, travel bans. Embassy stopped issuing visas 21 March, cut staff after 25 March accusations of U.S. spy ring. Police violently dispersed 2,000-strong rally marking independence anniversary 25 March; detained some 30 journalists 27-28 March after cartoons insulting President Lukashenka.

- "Lithuania slams Belarus arrests", BBC, 26 Mar. 2008.
- "U.S. embassy cuts staff amid diplomatic row", RFE/RL, 26 Mar. 2008.

↘ **Moldova** PM Vasile Tarlev resigned 19 March to "offer new people the chance to work for the well-being of the country". President Voronin 12 March said Moldova will not join NATO if Russia accepts its sovereignty over Transdnistria.

- "Moldova wants big power to guarantee its neutrality", Reuters, 11 Mar. 2008.
- "Under the West's radar", Transitions Online, 10 Mar. 2008.

↘ **Ukraine** Gazprom and Kiev signed gas deal 13 March after 50% supply cut 3-4 March. 3 former police officers sentenced to prison for 2000 murder of investigative journalist Gongadze.

- "Gazprom and Ukraine work out details of deal to keep Russian natural gas flowing", *International Herald Tribune*, 13 Mar. 2008.

WESTERNEUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

↘ **Basque Country (Spain)** Former municipal legislator Isaias Carrasco of Socialist party shot dead by suspected ETA member in Mondragon 7 March. Bomb explosions at Calahorra police station 21 March, near Azpeitia 30 March.

- "ETA is blamed for a killing in Spain that curtails election campaigning", *New York Times*, 8 Mar. 2008.

↘ **Cyprus** President Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat met 21 March in Nicosia under UN auspices; agreed to open Nicosia Ledra border crossing, set up working groups, technical committees to prepare formal reunification talks in 3 months. UNSG Ki-moon 26 March appointed interim new special representative Elizabeth Spehar, replacing Michael Møller.

- "Cypriot leaders move forward on reconciliation", AP, 21 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°190, *Cyprus: Reversing the Drift to Partition*, 10 Jan. 2008.

↘ **Northern Ireland (UK)** First minister and head of DUP Ian Paisley 4 March announced resignation. 70 protesters attacked police 25 March in Londonderry.

- "Paisley to drop leadership role in Northern Ireland government", AP, 4 Mar. 2008.

↘ **Turkey** Police crackdown on Kurdish Newroz spring festival rallies 20-25 March left 2 protesters dead in Van and Yuksekova. 10 suspected PKK members killed in army raids 13 March. Artillery, airstrikes across Iraq border 27-28 March (see Iraq). Constitutional court to hear case brought by chief prosecutor Yalcinkaya to ban governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), suspend PM Erdogan, President Gul, 69 party members from politics for 5 years on charges of undermining secularism. Erdogan announced working on constitutional changes to complicate party closures. Human rights campaigner Eren Keskin 21 March sentenced 6 months, under penal code article 301 on denigration of "Turkishness", for criticising army's political influence; government postponed Article 301 amendments 10 March. Wave of arrests of alleged supporters of ultranationalist Ergenekon group: leader of leftist Turkish Workers' Party Dogu Perincek detained 21 March, thousands protested charges against opposition newspaper *Cumhuriyet* editor Ilhan Selcuk in major cities 23 March. Authorities arrested 3 leftist Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front activists 9 March, suspected of terrorist attacks on U.S. companies. Iraq president Talabani 7 March in Ankara pledged cooperation in fight against PKK.

- "Constitutional crisis pits 'Deep State' vs. 'Deep State'", RFE/RL, 26 Mar. 2008.
- "Iraq, Turkey vow to boost ties, act against PKK rebels", RFE/RL, 8 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°184, *Turkey and Europe: The Way Ahead*, 17 Aug. 2007.



Latin America / Caribbean

↘ **Bolivia** National Electoral Court (CNE) 7 March suspended 4 May referendum on new constitution citing insufficient

preparation time. CNE also rejected autonomy referendums initiated by departments; Santa Cruz, Beni departments said would ignore decision.

- “CNE suspende los referendos; Santa Cruz y Beni se resisten”, *Los Tiempos*, 8 Mar. 2008
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°23, *Bolivia’s New Constitution: Avoiding Violent Confrontation*, 31 Aug. 2007.

➡ **Colombia** Colombian airstrike 1 March on FARC camp in Ecuadorian territory sparked regional crisis; at least 20 suspected insurgents killed including FARC number 2 Raul Reyes. Ecuador, Venezuela, Nicaragua cut diplomatic ties; Quito and Caracas sent troops to Colombian borders. Tensions eased at 7 March Rio Group summit: President Uribe said would not repeat actions, apologised to Ecuadorian President Correa, but Quito “deeply concerned” after confirmation Ecuadorian killed in raid; announced 31 March it had sued Colombia in ICJ over cross-border drug crop fumigation, a day after Colombia said Ecuadorian helicopter breached its airspace. OAS resolution 17 March criticised airstrike for violating charter-defined sovereignty rights, reiterated members’ commitment to combat criminal, armed non-state groups. Bogotá alleged Reyes’s computers showed rebel links to Caracas, Quito and FARC seeking “dirty bomb”; authorities found 30kg depleted uranium near Bogotá 26 March. Government to pay \$2.5m reward after second member of FARC secretariat Ivan Rios killed early March by bodyguard. Progress towards hostage exchange: Uribe signed decree 27 March authorising exchange of FARC prisoners for hostages after reports Ingrid Betancourt seriously ill; France said would take in freed prisoners.

- “Colombia offers Farc hostage deal”, BBC, 28 Mar. 2008.
- “Colombia ‘seizes Farc uranium’”, Al Jazeera, 27 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Ecuador** Tense relations with Colombia followed airstrike, death of Ecuadorian citizen (see Colombia). 5 suspected FARC members captured 6 March in border region. Opposition demanded investigation into government-FARC relationship. Constituent Assembly 26 March suspended opposition member Julio Logroño for alleged intent to bribe colleagues to prevent new constitution’s approval.

- “Suspenden a asambleísta”, BBC, 27 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°22, *Ecuador: Overcoming Instability?*, 7 Aug. 2007.

➡ **Haiti** Provisional Electoral Council head Pierre-Louis Aupont installed 6 March. 2 senators dismissed 18 March for alleged dual nationality. MINUSTAH, Haiti National Police increased checkpoints, mounted anti-gang operations to combat kidnappings. Former rebel leader, alleged cocaine trafficker Guy Philippe, again evaded joint U.S., Haiti operation 25 March.

- “U.S. agency fails in new bid to arrest Haiti rebel”, Reuters, 25 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Report N°24, *Peacebuilding in Haiti: Including Haitians from Abroad*, 14 Dec. 2007.

➡ **Peru** PM Castillo 17 March warned Venezuela against providing covert funding for radical leftist groups; call followed arrest of 2 alleged Coordinadora Continental Bolivariana members for importing \$150,000 alleged Venezuelan cash - Caracas

denied. Suspected Shining Path rebels killed police officer in Apurimac River valley 23 March. Shining Path logistics leader Félix Mejía Asencio captured 18 March in Upper Huallaga. 2 alleged FARC members captured 19 March in Iquitos.

- “La región peruana de Puno amenaza con la secesión”, *El País*, 19 Mar. 2008.
- “Peru accuses Venezuela’s Chavez of meddling”, Reuters, 17 Mar. 2008.

➡ **Venezuela** President Chávez criticised domestically for “unnecessary” troop mobilisation to Colombian border (see Colombia); U.S. considering placing Venezuela on terrorism sponsors list for FARC links. UK court 18 March suspended order freezing \$12bn assets of state oil company PdVSA in ExxonMobil dispute. Comptroller-general disqualified 400 opposition candidates from contesting Nov 2008 elections; appeal pending. PSUV party formally established 9 March after Chávez elected its president 2 March. Suspected Guajira cartel head Hermágoras Gonzalez arrested 9 March.

- ““Con PDVSA ganó Venezuela”, BBC, 19 Mar. 2008.
- “US finds possible Venezuela-FARC ties ‘disturbing’”, Reuters, 12 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°19, *Venezuela: Hugo Chávez’s Revolution*, 22 Feb. 2007.

Crisis Group Latin America Reports N°25 & N°26, 14 Mar. 2008. The international community will lose its struggle against drugs unless it changes ineffective, counter-productive policies. *Latin American Drugs I: Losing the Fight*, analyses the Andean region, where coca cultivation and cocaine production are increasing, and the growth of trafficking groups across the Americas and Europe. *Latin American Drugs II: Improving Policy and Reducing Harm* examines failing counter-drug policies on both sides of the Atlantic and the political and economic impact of transnational trafficking organisations and anti-narcotics policies in Latin America.




Middle East / North Africa

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

➡ **Israel/Occupied Territories** 5-day Israeli aerial and ground assault in Gaza ended 3 March: at least 110 Palestinians, 2 Israeli soldiers dead. Major NGOs called humanitarian situation worst since 1967; UN condemned Israel’s “disproportionate use of force”. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas suspended participation in peace talks; reversed decision during early-March visit by U.S. Sec. State Rice. In second visit 31 March, Rice said process “moving in right direction”; U.S. said 30 March Israel to reduce West Bank roadblocks, allow 500 Palestinian Authority security forces to deploy in Jenin. Israel 31 March announced further settlement activity in Jerusalem, West Bank. Egypt moved to mediate Gaza ceasefire; efforts continuing. Palestinian resident of Jerusalem shot 8 students in Jewish seminary 6 March. Israeli operation in Bethlehem 12 March killed 4 militants; rocket barrage from Gaza followed. Yemeni initiative to reconcile Hamas and Fatah collapsed. U.S. VP

Cheney held separate talks with PM Olmert and Abbas 23-24 March; accused Hamas of “torpedoing” peace process. Russia renewed proposal to host Moscow talks in May: potential focus on Syria-Israel. Arab League statement at Damascus summit (see Syria) said continued offer of 2002 Arab peace initiative tied to Israel executing commitments.

- Comment by Gareth Evans (Crisis Group), “[Punishing Hamas has backfired](#)”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 Mar. 2008.
- “[US says Mid-East peace on track](#)”, BBC, 31 Mar. 2008.
- “[Bracing for the big one](#)”, *Economist*, 13 Mar. 2008.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°73,  [Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas](#), 19 Mar. 2008. The policy of squeezing Gaza and isolating Hamas has not worked. If trends continue, the worst is imaginable including the collapse of the peace process and, potentially, the conflict’s spread to the West Bank or Lebanon. A new approach is needed if violence is to end and a viable peace process is to be promoted. Though difficult, a different way forward is possible.

➡ **Lebanon** Deadlock over election of president continued: parliamentary vote postponed 24 March for 17th time, to 22 April. Notion of “unilateral” election, with simple majority vote, gaining traction in anti-Syrian “March 14” ruling coalition; Hizbollah-led opposition considers tantamount to declaration of war. Paramilitary mobilisation drives stepped up – all parties playing active role. Lebanon invited to, but boycotted, 29-30 March Arab League summit in Damascus (see Syria). Fighting between Fatah guerrillas and Jund al-Sham militants 21 March in Ain al-Hilwe Palestinian refugee camp; at least 1 killed. 40-day mourning period for Hizbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh, killed in Damascus car bomb, ended 24 March; leader Nasrallah said UN-mediated negotiations for prisoner swap with Israel to continue. UNSG earlier reported Israel said Hizbollah rearming in south. Report of UN commission investigating 2005 assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri said “network of individuals” involved.

- “[Hezbollah: prisoner swap talks with Israel continue despite Mughniyeh assassination](#)”, AP, 24 Mar. 2008.
- “[Lebanese presidential election postponed again amid continuing deadlock](#)”, AP, 24 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°69, [Hizbollah and the Lebanese Crisis](#), 10 Oct. 2007.

➡ **Syria** 29-30 March Arab League summit in Damascus reflected growing regional rift. Saudi, U.S. pressure increased in lead-up: Riyadh recalled ambassador to Damascus; urged citizens to leave Lebanon after U.S. deployed navy off coast end Feb. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan sent only low-level delegations to summit; Lebanon boycotted; no breakthroughs. Israeli PM Olmert announced, again, 17 March prepared to restart peace talks if Damascus ends support for Hizbollah, Palestinian militant groups; Syrian FM said ready to talk, but did not mention conditions. Security forces fired on Kurds during new year celebrations 20 March in north eastern city Qamishli, killing 3.

- Comment by Peter Harling (Crisis Group), “[Lessons of the Franco-Syrian Fiasco](#)”, *Syria Today*, March 2008.
- “[Scuffle diplomacy](#)”, *Economist*, 29 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°63, [Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations](#), 10 Apr. 2007.

GULF

➡ **Iran** Parliamentary elections 14 March saw conservatives capture over 70% of 290 seats. Double vetting process by interior ministry, Guardian Council, though ultimately qualifying 60% of reformist candidates, restricted them to small increase: losing even Tehran. Turn-out greater than expected: almost 23m. Final results after run-offs next month. Conservatives now face potential split – between President Ahmadi-Nejad and group led by Ali Larijani, former nuclear negotiator. UNSC imposed third round of sanctions 3 March, again demanding suspension of enrichment activity. Tehran rejected further talks with EU’s foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, 5 March. U.S. Treasury 22 March warned financial institutions on transacting with Iran’s central bank. Ahmadi-Nejad received warm welcome in Baghdad in historic 2 March visit – first by an Iranian leader since 1979.

- “[Back to first principles](#)”, *Economist*, 19 Mar. 2008.
- “[UN approves new sanctions on Iran](#)”, BBC, 4 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°51, [Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?](#), 23 Feb. 2006.

➡ **Iraq** Hundreds killed since government mounted operation 25 March against Shiite militias in Basra. PM Maliki initiated crackdown involving some 30,000 Iraqi troops and police; U.S., British forces provided support; President Bush praised action. Fighting appeared to subside after 30 March call by radical Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr for “end to armed appearances”, halt to government raids. Violence in Baghdad left over 100 dead; thousands demonstrated in Sadr City neighbourhood. 3-day curfew ended 31 March, amid bombing of fortified Green Zone – also hit 23 March with at least 15 killed; U.S. said rockets supplied by Iranian Quds Force. Violent clashes set off in Kut, Hilla, Diwaniya – scores dead. Suicide strike in Mosul 23 March killed some 40. Bombing in Karbala 17 March killed over 50. Turkey bombed PKK positions in northern Iraq 29 March; claimed 15 rebels dead. U.S. VP Cheney in mid-month visit: talks held with Kurdish leaders in north, Maliki and U.S. General Patraeus in Baghdad. Presidential council reversed course on important provincial powers law; allowed to pass. Iraqi Christian archbishop found dead in Mosul, 2 weeks after kidnapping. Oil exports and operations in Basra restored end-month after pipelines bombed.

- Comment by Joost Hiltermann (Crisis Group), “[Halabja: The Politics of Memory](#)”, openDemocracy, 14 Mar. 2008.
- “[Conflict between government, al-Sadr show the realities of Iraq](#)”, AP, 30 Mar. 2008.
- “[Iran ‘behind Green Zone attack’](#)”, BBC, 24 Mar. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°72, [Iraq’s Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge](#), 7 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** King Abdullah refused to attend 29-30 March Arab League (AL) summit in Damascus because of Lebanon rift (see Syria). Details of plan to retrain imams, encourage tolerance, revealed 20 March; critics sceptical. U.S. VP Cheney met Abdullah 22 March in Riyadh; regional security issues, stabilisation of oil market discussed. Government said 3 March arrested 28 suspected of trying to regroup al-Qaeda wing.

- “[Saudi ambassador to Arab League will represent his country at Arab summit](#)”, AP, 24 Mar. 2008.
- “[Saudis to retrain 40,000 clerics](#)”, BBC, 20 Mar. 2008.

- **Yemen** Mortar attack 18 March targeting U.S. embassy in Sanaa wounded 13 girls at nearby school and 5 soldiers; al-Qaeda-linked group Yemen Soldiers Brigades claimed responsibility. Both government and al-Houthi Shiite rebels claimed breaches of Feb ceasefire.
 - [“Houthis’ representative warns authority against breaching agreement”](#), *Yemen Times*, 30 Mar. 2008.

NORTH AFRICA

- **Algeria** Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) 10 March demanded release of AQIM members held in Tunisia and Algeria in exchange for 2 Austrian hostages taken in Tunisia 22 Feb. AQIM claimed 9 March it killed 20 Algerian soldiers in eastern province; denied 25 own fighters killed. Security forces reported killed suspected AQIM member planning to assassinate President Bouteflika. 2 journalists jailed after reporting on alleged government corruption. Algeria rejected Morocco’s call to normalise ties and open border, made 2 days after 18 March end of Western Sahara talks.
 - [“Deadline for meeting hostage-taker demands passes without word from captors”](#), AP, 23 Mar. 2008.
 - [“Qaeda in north Africa says kills 20 Algeria troops”](#), Reuters, 9 Mar. 2008
- **Egypt** Some 100 Muslim Brotherhood (MB) members arrested 4, 31 March in ongoing campaign against potential MB candidates ahead of 8 Apr municipal elections: total detained over 840. Under 10% of group’s candidates able to register due to police, administrative obstructions. Thousands protested in 4 governorates; clashed with police. Many opposition, ruling

- National Democratic Party (NDP) candidates also blocked, prompting resignation of 4 NDP MPs. Army ordered to increase bread supply after some 15 killed in violence over chronic food shortages. 33 Palestinians held by Egypt after crossing from Gaza in Jan released; Hamas alleged men tortured.
 - [“Egypt army to tackle bread crisis”](#), BBC, 17 Mar. 2008.
 - [“Egypt steps up Brotherhood sweeps, scores held”](#), Reuters, 4 Mar. 2008.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°61, [Egypt’s Sinai Question](#), 30 Jan. 2007.

- **Morocco** 38 defendants began trial mid-month after Feb arrest for alleged links to terrorist network; critics claim several known moderate Islamists included. 44 members of Islamic group Justice and Spirituality, which lacks legal status to organise public meetings, arrested in pro-Palestine marches 8-9 March in northern town Nador.
 - [“Morocco arrests 44 members of Islamist opposition”](#), Reuters, 10 March 2008.

- **Western Sahara** Fourth round of UN-mediated talks in New York between Morocco and Algeria-based Polisario Front ended without breakthrough 18 March. Algerian media earlier reported Moroccan arms build-up at border, while Rabat condemned alleged Polisario inroads into Tifariti desert region.
 - [“UN-backed Western Sahara talks end with no progress”](#), Reuters, 19 March 2008.
 - For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°66, [Western Sahara: Out of the Impasse](#), 11 June 2007.

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