

A monthly bulletin by **Crisis Group** on current and potential conflicts around the world

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**5 January 2009, N°65**

### 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 135 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](mailto:crisiswatch@crisisgroup.org).

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Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories  
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### Conflict Resolution Opportunities

Burundi  
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Somalia

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## CENTRAL AFRICA

- ➡ **Burundi** Remaining rebel group Palipehutu-FNL at 4 Dec regional summit in Bujumbura agreed to remove “illegal” ethnic reference in name before transitioning to political party and implement 2006 peace deal, including ceasefire, demobilisation; govt agreed to release all political prisoners. Fragility of deal quickly underscored when FNL late month called for extension of 31 Dec transition deadline, citing govt failure to provide demobilisation facilities. CNDD-FDD buildings, symbols attacked over month in apparent retaliation to ongoing repression of opposition, civil society groups by govt.
- [“Burundi government, rebels commit to peace”](#), Reuters, 4 Dec. 2008.
  - For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°53, [Restarting Political Dialogue](#), 19 Aug. 2008.

- ➡ **Central African Republic** 10-day inclusive talks between govt, opposition and APRD, UFDR rebel groups ended 20 Dec with new peace accord that would create consensus govt to govern prior to 2010 presidential elections, legislative elections for 2009, demobilisation and reintegration of rebel groups, monitoring commission. Some hailed deal as breakthrough, but amid caution over remaining key details and implementation. Govt late month began reinforcing southern border as UN warned Ugandan LRA rebels based in north east DRC advancing towards CAR.
- Comment by Daniela Krosiak (Crisis Group), [“Pour un dialogue en Centrafrique”](#), *Le Monde*, 18 Dec. 2008.
  - [“CAR peace talks strike pact for consensus government”](#), Reuters, 18 Dec. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°55, [Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue](#), 9 Dec. 2008. The risk of wider violence in CAR remains at a critically high point because both the regime and the opposition forces continue to see armed conflict as the ultimate solution to the ongoing crisis. The formal dialogue between the government and its opponents has created the possibility of genuine democratization, but it must be closely focused on the organisation of elections in 2010 and negotiation of a credible transitional justice mechanism if a sustainable peace process is to be secured.

- ➡ **Democratic Republic of Congo** Situation in Orientale Province deteriorated sharply: up to 500 killed, villages looted, thousands displaced by suspected LRA rebels fleeing 14 Dec military operation by DRC, S Sudan, Uganda to root out rebels from Garamba National Park. In east, Oct CNDP ceasefire largely held, but increasingly tenuous end Dec: talks in Nairobi between govt, CNDP hit deadlock 21 Dec as CNDP refused to recommit to ceasefire and threatened to advance into UN buffer zone, citing incursions by army and Rwandan Hutu FDLR. Talks earlier stalled over CNDP leader Nkunda’s “national ambitions”. Negotiations set to resume 7 Jan. DRC, Rwandan FMs early Dec agreed joint plan to combat FDLR. UN expert panel 12 Dec alleged DRC, Rwandan support for eastern rebel groups amounted to “proxy war”. EU 8 Dec failed

to approve EU bridging force, as requested by UNSG Ban Ki-moon, ahead of UN reinforcements. UNSC 22 Dec renewed MONUC mandate.

- [“Congo rebels threaten action as peace talks flounder”](#), Reuters, 21 Dec. 2008.
- [“Congo warlord has wide ambitions”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 21 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°140, [Congo: Four Priorities for Sustainable Peace in Ituri](#), 13 May 2008.

- ➡ **Rwanda** Théoneste Bagosora, former de facto national army chief, convicted 18 Dec by ICTR for genocide and crimes against humanity, but acquitted of conspiring genocide prior to 1994. 2 other senior military officials also sentenced. UN expert panel 12 Dec reported evidence of extensive military, financial assistance by Rwanda to DRC’s eastern CNDP rebels, denied by Kigali. Kigali 4-5 Dec agreed with Kinshasa on joint military plan to demobilise DRC-based Rwandan Hutu FDLR.
- [“Rwanda genocide mastermind jailed”](#), BBC, 18 Dec. 2008.
  - [“Rwanda denies UN panel charge it aids Congo rebels”](#), Reuters, 16 Dec. 2008.

- ➡ **Uganda** Uganda, with DRC, S Sudan forces 14 Dec launched joint air and ground operation on LRA rebel bases in DRC’s Orientale Province – reportedly followed months of preparation amid LRA rebel leader Kony’s repeated failure to conclude peace deal. Rebels fled attack, reportedly killing hundreds in their wake and moving towards CAR. UN 22 Dec issued statement in support of the joint operation, while U.S. official acknowledged U.S. technical support. LRA strongly condemned and vowed to retaliate.
- Comment by Jon Greenwald (Crisis Group), [“Laying Ghosts and Making Peace”](#), *AllAfrica*, 18 Dec. 2008.
  - [“Lord’s Resistance Army uses truce to rearm and spread fear in Uganda”](#), *Times*, 16 Dec. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°146, [Northern Uganda: The Road to Peace, with or without Kony](#), 10 Dec. 2008. The Juba peace process is likely to fail unless the Ugandan government and the international community redirect negotiations. If the violence is to end, LRA leader Joseph Kony and his commanders must be put under pressure and given incentives to disarm. Completion of the peace process also requires the government to address the marginalisation of Northern communities.

## HORN OF AFRICA

- ➡ **Chad** UN 13 Dec reported peacekeeping force replacing EUFOR March 2009 in Chad/CAR to be reduced from 6,000 to 4,900 troops, after President Deby expressed opposition to size. UFDD rebel chief Nouri 16 Dec declared 5 rebel groups agreed on political transition scheme in case of successful toppling of govt, including independent judiciary and free elections to be organised within 18 months; said other rebel groups likely to join soon. Opposition leader Yorongar 8 Dec returned to Chad after 9-month exile in France. Reports 3 Dec that former president Habre, currently on trial in Senegal for war crimes and crimes against humanity, launched legal action with ECOWAS court against Senegalese court.
- [“Chad rebels agree to political transition plan: member”](#), AFP, 17 Dec. 2008

- "Future UN force in Chad whittled down to 4,900", AFP 12 Dec. 2008
- "Chad: the forgotten crisis", *Telegraph*, 12 Dec. 2008
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°144, *Chad: A New Conflict Resolution Framework*, 24 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Ethiopia** ONLF 22 Dec claimed some 50 killed, 50 wounded in govt attack on village in south east. Main opposition leader Medeksa, pardoned after imprisonment following 2005 election, sentenced to life 30 Dec.

- "Ethiopian army 'killed' villagers", BBC, 22 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Kenya** President Kibaki and PM Odinga 17 Dec agreed to establish tribunal for post-election violence, meeting Waki Commission on Post-Election Violence deadline. Tribunal to be in place by 1 March; will have special status outside Kenyan courts' jurisdiction. Agreement also includes police reforms. Parliament 16 Dec passed constitutional review act disbanding Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) in line with Waki report, 17 Dec formed constitutional review committee. Kibaki signed bill 24 Dec replacing ECK with new interim body. ECK announced intention to challenge ruling, staff protested loss of jobs. 31 Dec deadline for party registration under July Political Parties Act saw only 30 of some 168 parties in compliance; remaining face closure. Kibaki 2 Jan approved new media law despite U.S., international media concerns over potential to curb press freedom.

- "Secret list: now Kibaki and Raila sign pact", *Daily Nation*, 17 Dec. 2008
- "Kenya police face reform after scathing accusations", Reuters, 11 Dec. 2008
- "Kenya's election violence revived killer gang", Reuters, 4 Dec. 2008

➡ ⚡ **Somalia** Resignation of President Yusuf and Ethiopian troop withdrawal fuelled fears of Islamist ascendancy, govt collapse and increasing violence, but also possibly removed key obstacles to inclusive peace. After criticising peace deal signed by TFG and Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) as too clan-based, President Yusuf mid-Dec tried to sack PM Nur Hassan Hussein and name new PM Guled. But parliament 15 Dec voted Hussein sacking illegal, 16 Dec unanimously endorsed Djibouti peace agreement, 17 Dec voted to impeach Yusuf as obstacle to peace. IGAD 21 Dec announced sanctions on Yusuf; following international pressure Yusuf 29 Dec resigned. Elections due within 30 days, parliament speaker Madobe named interim president. Deadly violence continued in Mogadishu and elsewhere between Al-Shabaab and govt/Ethiopian troops and between Islamist militias, intensifying following Yusuf's resignation. Despite U.S. pressure, UNSG Ban 16 Dec ruled out UN peacekeeping mission to Somalia; suggested bolstering AMISOM. AU 22 Dec agreed to keep its peacekeeping force in Somalia for further 2 months; also urged Ethiopia to delay troop withdrawal until further AU troops deployed. Ethiopia late Dec/early Jan started troop withdrawal. UNSC 2 Dec renewed June resolution giving navies right to pursue pirates into Somali waters; 16 Dec approved resolution allowing countries to pursue Somali pirates on land with TFG permission. Sharp Dec reduction in piracy incidents reported.

- Comment by Fabienne Hara and Zachary Vertin (Crisis Group), "New U.S. Moves Ill-Advised, Counter-Productive", *AllAfrica*, 26 Dec. 2008.

- "Somalia's fate unclear after leader quits", *New York Times*, 29 Dec. 2008.
- "Somali president quits, Islamist groups clash", Reuters, 29 Dec. 2008.
- "US Somalia peacekeeping idea hits resistance at UN", Reuters, 18 Dec. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Report N°147, *Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State*, 23 Dec. 2008. Somalia's transitional government is collapsing but the announced withdrawal of Ethiopia's army at year's end may provide a chance for an inclusive political process if Western and other powers fundamentally revise their approach to a political solution.

➡ **Somaliland** Govt 4 Dec offered use of ports for antipiracy efforts. President Riyale 24 Dec expressed concerns over security implications of troop withdrawal from Somalia in meeting with Ethiopian PM Meles.

- "Somaliland offers ports for anti-pirate operations", Reuters, 4 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Sudan** Tensions running high ahead of imminent decision by ICC judges on President Bashir arrest warrant request for genocide, war crimes; fears indictment may lead to unravelling of Darfur peace initiative, undermine CPA implementation. ICC Prosecutor Moreno-Ocampo 3 Dec briefed UN on likely January decision on warrant. Despite some figures in NCP urging govt to cooperate with ICC, Bashir 17 Dec said no suspects to be handed over. Qatari peace initiative continued to stall despite govt support: JEM delegation in Qatar 1 Dec to discuss, but undecided whether to participate; SLA leader al-Nur 2 Dec repeated vow to boycott talks unless govt militias disarmed, attacks end; SLM 14 Dec rejected initiative. Several killed in mid-month inter-ethnic clashes in Darfur. UN official 3 Dec accused JEM of recruiting refugees in eastern Chad; also expressed concern about spread of weapons, politicisation of refugee camps. Govt mid-Dec reported JEM build-up, imminent attacks near western border targeting major cities in Sudan; denied by JEM. Several hundred Ethiopian UNAMID troops arrived in Darfur 16-19 Dec. Govt 7 Dec said troops deployed in South Kordofan against suspected rebel attack, allegedly JEM. In move to ease tensions, govt 14 Dec agreed to withdraw troops from Abyei after 12 Dec dispute between army and police caused thousands to flee. Written arguments presented 18 Dec by govt, SPLM to Abyei Arbitration Tribunal, agreed to in June 2008.

- "Southern Sudan calls for an end to military build-up", *East African*, 13 Dec. 2008.
- "Council backs idea to indict Sudan leader", *New York Times*, 3 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°145, *Sudan's Southern Kordofan Problem: The Next Darfur?*, 21 Oct. 2008.

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

➡ **Zimbabwe** Talks on formation of unity govt remained deadlocked, while signs that President Mugabe preparing to appoint new govt without opposition MDC leader Tsvangirai mounted: Mugabe late month unilaterally sacked 12 cabinet ministers; state press 3 Jan reported new govt to be in place by mid-Feb. Late month talks between Mugabe and MDC



faction leader Mutambara prompted speculation over possible alliance. Tsvangirai 19 Dec threatened to quit unity govt talks unless authorities release activists and MDC supporters detained in continuing state repression, earlier stressing range of political issues still unresolved. Several arrested for alleged coup plot appeared in court 29 Dec with visible signs of torture. Mugabe issued defiant statements claiming cholera epidemic "over" – despite continuing deaths – and at 20 Dec annual ZANU-PF conference pledging to "never surrender" Zimbabwe, in further tirade against foreign enemies. U.S. late Dec threatened to suspend all aid if Mugabe included in any power-sharing govt, called along with Australia, France for Mugabe to step down. South Africa's President Mottlanthe 13 Dec stopped short with call for speedy formation of govt. EU 8 Dec extended sanctions against Mugabe regime supporters with visa bans for further 11 Zimbabwean officials. Acute food shortages and rapid spread of cholera amid collapse of basic services, with over 1,500 killed by cholera in month and growing number of cases across country's border.

- Comment by Francois Grignon (Crisis Group), ["Kick Mugabe and Tsvangirai Out, Get a New Team"](#), *East African*, 20 Dec. 2008.
- ["Mugabe defiant as pressure builds"](#), *Mail & Guardian*, 20 Dec. 2008.

Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°56, [Ending Zimbabwe's Nightmare: A Possible Way Forward](#), 16 Dec. 2008. A possible route to end Zimbabwe's nightmare is to quickly establish a non-partisan transitional administration to prepare for new presidential elections in eighteen months and address the disastrous humanitarian and economic conditions now facing the country.



## WEST AFRICA

➡ **Cameroon** Rebel group Bakassi Freedom Fighters 12 Dec threatened to renew attacks on oil vessels if no negotiations opened within 15 days. 9 activists, 2 journalists arrested and reportedly beaten 10 Dec by police in crackdown on hundreds-strong rally by farmers protesting corruption in agriculture ministry.

- ["Bakassi rebels give ultimatum"](#), *AfricaNews*, 12 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** In sign of further dissidence within military, group of ex-rebel Forces Nouvelles soldiers raided Bouaké prison 12 Dec, freeing FN detainee and 20 others. Large-scale, violent protests held in Abidjan prison 13 Dec in separate incident over prison overcrowding. 700 soldiers reportedly deployed to western cocoa growing region amid continuing, sporadically violent, land tensions. Govt and FN 22 Dec signed fourth political accord to integrate rebels into national army over 2 years. World Bank 15 Dec promised \$120m in aid, to focus on infrastructural development in northern rebel heartland.

- ["Ivory Coast prison protest ends"](#), *BBC*, 14 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°139, [Côte d'Ivoire: Ensuring Credible Elections](#), 22 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Guinea** Death of President Conté 22 Dec followed hours later by bloodless coup led by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara and group of junior officers from new political grouping, National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), sparking fears over impact on national and regional stability.

Camara announced replacement of senior military command and local officials, appointed civilian Kabine Komara as PM of new transitional govt, pledged elections for 2010 and to tackle rampant corruption – meeting with apparently significant popular support. Several senior politicians, including ex-PM Souré, and military leaders backed coup despite early signs of disunity. Army in show of force launched armed raids on residency of 2 senior Conté aides 28-29 Dec. U.S. condemned coup; AU 29 Dec suspended Guinea's membership, threatened sanctions and demanded return to constitutional order. Senegalese President Wade 23 Dec endorsed new leadership. CNDD delegation end Dec visited Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone to solicit support.

- ["Guinea junta names civilian prime minister"](#), *Reuters*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- ["Military coup succeeds easily in Guinea"](#), *New York Times*, 25 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°52, [Guinea: Ensuring Democratic Reforms](#), 24 June 2008.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Authorities 2 Dec announced arrest of suspected mastermind of 23 Nov assassination attempt on President Vieira, navy Sergeant Alexandre Tchama Yala – nephew of opposition PRS leader Kumba Yala – outside country; 8 others reportedly detained. Govt 6 Dec banned all public demonstrations in wake of attack. At 2 Dec ECOWAS security meeting, neighbours pledged to provide technical assistance to G-B and called on UNSG Ban to increase funding for security training.

- ["Bissau coup suspect held in 'neighbouring country'"](#), *Reuters*, 4 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°142, [Guinea-Bissau: In Need of a State](#), 2 July 2008.

➡ **Liberia** Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) named perpetrators and "persons of interest" set to appear before commission for role during 1999-2004 conflict. But TRC dealt early blow by President Johnson-Sirleaf's failure 18 Dec to make appearance in response to allegations of her role in conflict; her office reportedly objected to public hearing, inadequate security. Some 200 escaped from UNMIL-guarded maximum security prison in Monrovia 1 Dec; majority still at large. UNSC 19 Dec voted to renew arms embargo, sanctions on key figures in civil war and mandate of expert monitoring panel.

- ["Liberia's President Sirleaf sets conditions for testifying before the Truth Commission"](#), *VoA*, 19 Dec. 2008.
- ["Special police body team to help in Liberia's prison break"](#), *Afrol News*, 12 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Mali** In first significant challenges to April ceasefire, rebels allegedly belonging to rogue Tuareg militia group ATNMC 20 Dec attacked military outpost at Mauritanian border, leaving up to 20 dead; 2 others killed in 2 Jan attack on PM's home in northern city of Gao. President Touré 14 Dec called on northern Tuareg rebels to lay down arms and commit to fresh talks.

- ["Tuareg rebels raid Mali military post-army source"](#), *Reuters*, 20 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Niger** Circumstances of 14 Dec disappearance of UN envoy Fowler and aide outside Niamey still unclear: Tuareg MNJ splinter group FFR initially claimed responsibility but later retracted, while Niger FM in contradiction to UN statements

alleged Fowler conducting unofficial visit to local gold mine.

- "Conflicting claims over missing U.N. envoy to Niger", Reuters, 16 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Nigeria** Supreme Court 12 Dec ruled to uphold legitimacy of President Yar'Adua's April 2007 election, ending protracted challenge by opposition candidates. Yar'Adua followed with pledge to speed up electoral reforms and 17 Dec appointed new ministers to replace 20 sacked 29 Oct; critics remain sceptical over pace of reforms. Former Edo State governor Igbinedion 18 Dec sentenced with \$30,000 fine for corruption in office; anti-corruption commission lodged appeal amid allegations courts seeking to protect governors from jail. Police 23 Dec dismissed former anti-corruption chief, Nuhu Ribadu, from service for indiscipline and insubordination. In Niger Delta (ND), Technical Committee submitted report to Yar'Adua 1 Dec, recommending increased investment and release of militant leader Okah; militant groups said speedy implementation would bring end to armed struggle. ND tensions continued to simmer: several foreign workers, senator's mother kidnapped over month; military's arrest of militant leader, Sobomabo Jackrich 28 Dec provoked threats of renewed militant violence. 17 killed in separate community clashes 8, 9 Dec in Imo and Rivers States.

- "Nigerian state pays for peace in oil fields", *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 2008.
- "Nigeria poll challenge dismissed", BBC, 12 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°54, *Nigeria: Ogoni Land after Shell*, 18 September 2008.

➡ **Sierra Leone** Charles Margai, leader of opposition PMDC, 22 Dec announced talks with leading SLPP suggesting coalition deal may follow.

- "Margai may strike deal with SLPP", *Concord Times*, 23 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°143, *Sierra Leone: A New Era of Reform?*, 31 July 2008.



## Asia/Pacific

### CENTRAL ASIA

➡ **Kazakhstan** Around 400 demonstrators clashed with security forces 16 Dec, protesting housing crisis, calling for resignation of regional authorities, commemorating 1986 student protests crushed by Soviet forces. Protest leader jailed 15 days. Correspondent for weekly newspaper "Taszhargan" stabbed 30 Dec in Almaty by unknown assailant. Senate 2 Dec ratified agreement allowing U.S. and NATO forces emergency use of Almaty airport for Afghanistan operations.

- "Kazakh state budget 2009: desperate for cash", *Times of Central Asia*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- "Clashes between protesters and the police in central Almaty", Ferghana.ru, 17 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Planned 16, 24 Dec Muslim opposition protests cancelled; organizers alleged threats of arrest, authorities' refusal to grant permission. 7 opposition parties 22 Dec met to discuss possible unification to defeat govt. Govt early Dec suspended BBC, RFE/RL broadcasts; BBC broadcasts

resumed 17 Dec, govt 8 Dec said RFE/RL off air until it agrees to govt censorship of content. Rights activists criticised harsh sentences and cited biased investigation against alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir radicals jailed late Nov for 1 Oct protests in southern town Noorkat. UN 1 Dec appealed for \$20m emergency aid package for Kyrgyzstan in response to energy crisis, rising food prices, declining remittances.

- "Kyrgyz restores BBC programming", AP, 17 Dec. 2008.
- "Controversy over Kyrgyz protest sentences", IWPR, 12 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Tajikistan** President Rakhmon appealed for more foreign aid, citing decreased aluminium and cotton prices. Govt, public protested recent violent murders of Tajik migrants in Russia. Unannounced, temporary early Dec border closure by Uzbekistan caused tensions; Uzbekistan later in month cut gas supplies to Tajikistan by 45%, doubled price of gas.

- "Tajik village shares fears of migrants", *New York Times*, 27 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Govt reported over 90% turnout at 14 Dec elections for new, larger parliament; critics claimed turnout much lower. 123 deputies voted in, new elections to be held in 2 districts. Activist groups claimed elections sham, citing presence of only 1 party, all state-approved candidates. 2 dissidents denied registration as candidates; Russian mobile phone company allegedly cut off some activists' phone services at request of govt; ethnic minorities not represented. At 10 Dec UN Human Rights Council review, participant countries called for improved Turkmen rights, media freedom. 6 Dec prison amnesty saw release of 1 political prisoner and some 390 others. Govt 1 Jan redenominated currency, causing public anxiety over prices, and removed image of former President Niyazov from most banknotes; followed Dec move by parliament to remove Niyazov references from national anthem.

- "As officials tout success of Turkmen elections, public apathetic", RFE/RL, 15 Dec. 2008.
- "Turkmen voters doubt elections will make any difference", RFE/RL, 13 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Uzbekistan** 28 women detained by police early Dec for religious extremism, allegedly regional leaders of Hizb ut-Tahrir; relatives say detainees abused in custody, Hizb ut-Tahrir group 20 Dec staged protests at Uzbek Embassy in London. Human rights groups, U.S. urged govt to release political prisoners on UN human rights day. Early Dec proposed constitutional amendments to increase number of deputies in parliament criticised for blocking independent candidates.

- "Uzbek party reform less than it seems", IWPR, 23 Dec. 2008.

### NORTH EAST ASIA

➡ **North Korea** Six-Party Talks resumed 8 Dec, stalled quickly after Pyongyang continued to reject proposals for monitoring of nuclear samples at Yongbyon by foreign inspectors. Talks ended 11 Dec without agreement. Japan continued refusal to provide energy aid until abduction issue resolved, prompting NK to refuse to recognise Japan's presence at Talks. NK 1 Dec imposed operating restrictions on Kaesong inter-Korean industrial project, terminated SK tourism to Kaesong and shut down inter-Korean train in protest of South's policy towards North.

- "Six-Party Talks drag on with no agreement yet", *Joongang Daily*, 11 Dec. 2008.
- "North Korea clamps down on border crossings as rift with South worsens", *Los Angeles Times*, 1 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°62, *After the North Korea Nuclear Breakthrough: Compliance or Confrontation?*, 30 Apr. 2007.



**Taiwan Strait** In further sign of increased cross-Strait cooperation, top negotiating officials at 20-21 Dec summit signed economic agreements promising \$19m in Chinese aid for Taiwan companies operating on mainland, support for greater links between banks across Strait by allowing Taiwan banks upgrade representative offices on mainland to full branches. After 31 Dec comments by Hu Jintao noting China ready to support Taiwan's membership of international organizations, reports 2 Jan that Beijing will allow Taiwan to join World Health Assembly under name "Chinese Taipei". 15 Dec first regular daily nonstop flights began between mainland and Taiwan.

- "China's self-interested support for Taiwan", *Wall Street Journal*, 22 Dec. 2008.
- "Taiwan and China restore air links", *New York Times*, 15 Dec 2008.

## SOUTH ASIA



**Afghanistan** Traditional winter lull in Taliban attacks less evident amid relatively mild weather. Continued costly attacks on ISAF supply lines in both Afghanistan and Pakistan raised pressure to find alternate routes. Pakistan security forces blocked Khyber pass route 30 Dec-2 Jan to intensify operations against militants. France 14 Dec hosted conference for Afghanistan and neighbours, EU to emphasise regional cooperation; Iran absent. UN envoy Kai Eide 17 Dec said UNAMA budget to double. U.S. 20 Dec announced ISAF troop increase by up to 30,000; could double U.S. ISAF deployment. 20 police killed in Taliban attack on home of local govt chief in Musa Qala 31 Dec.

- "U.S. to widen supply routes in Afghan war", *New York Times*, 31 Dec. 2008.
- "NATO materiel threatened in Pakistan", *Washington Post*, 19 Dec. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°85, *Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy*, 18 Dec. 2008. Corruption and lack of political will in Afghanistan have prevented the comprehensive police reform which is essential to combating lawlessness and popular disillusionment. Too much emphasis is still placed on using the police to fight the insurgency rather than crime.



**Bangladesh** Largely peaceful 29 Dec polls yielded decisive victory for Awami League (AL), with 230 of 300 seats amid 70% turnout. 2-year state of emergency lifted 17 Dec in advance of polls. Full campaigning began 12 Dec after caretaker govt lifted restrictions on rallies. BNP, which won only 29 of 300 parliamentary seats, initially announced would protest some irregularities in polls, but 1 Jan accepted defeat. AL-led alliance to hold commanding majority in parliament with 262 seats; BNP MPs yet to take oath of office but indicate they will work with new govt even as ongoing post-poll violence between AL

and BNP supporters killed 4. AL head Sheikh Hasina and govt due to be sworn in 6 Jan. Supreme Court 19 Dec ruled jailed candidates may contest polls.

- "Secular party wins landslide victory in Bangladesh", *New York Times*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- "Bangladesh lifts emergency rule", BBC, 17 Dec. 2008.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°84, *Bangladesh: Elections and Beyond*, 11 Dec. 2008. Bangladesh's 29 December election will not return the country to civilian rule unless those with a stake in the vote – including the international community – ensure all registered parties contest credible, peaceful polls.



**India (non-Kashmir)** Parliament passed strict new anti-terrorism laws in wake of Nov Mumbai attacks, including provisions for 6-month detention without bail. Pakistani official said 31 Dec Lashkar-e-Tayyaba members detained in Pakistan had confessed to planning Nov attacks. No charges filed yet as Pakistan awaiting evidence from India; Delhi provided 5 Jan. Islamabad refuses to extradite, citing absence of extradition treaty. After formal request by India, UNSC 11 Dec added Jamaat-ud-Dawa, front organisation for LeT to list of terrorist organisations subject to sanctions. 5 killed, some 50 injured in 1 Jan blasts in Guwahati hours before visit by home minister; police said separatist ULFA rebels suspected.

- "India's governing party fares well at polls, despite siege", *New York Times*, 8 Dec. 2008.
- "Terror attacks traced to two from Pakistan", *New York Times*, 4 Dec. 2008.



**Kashmir** Continued escalations in tensions between India and Pakistan in wake of Nov Mumbai attacks: Pakistan announced redeployment of some troops from tribal areas to Line of Control and international border, but both sides stressed did not want war. Reported airspace violations by Indian aircraft 12-13 Dec, but President Zardari explained as "technical incursion". Indian FM Mukherjee 22 Dec called Pakistani militants "greatest danger to peace and security" in world. Although composite dialogue put on hold, New Delhi and Islamabad shared information on nuclear programs 2 Jan in rare goodwill gesture. Phased elections in Indian-administered Kashmir, which began 17 Nov, ended 24 Dec with 60% overall turnout amid heavy security crackdown and clashes between security forces and separatists.

- "A good vote in the angry valley", *Economist*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- "Shadow cast over Kashmir peace process", *Financial Times*, 14 Dec. 2008.



**Nepal** Parties made appointments to Constituent Assembly committees, but deferred deadline for appointing chairs. Deadlock over army integration continues. PM Prachanda vowed to investigate Maoist trade unionists' 21 Dec attack on offices of Himalmedia, publishers of *Nepali Times*. UN called on govt to investigate enforced disappearances during conflict; issued report 19 Dec of 170 disappearances 2001-03 in Bardiya district alone, the vast majority at hands of state security forces.

- "U.N. urges Nepal to probe 170 war disappearances", Reuters, 19 Dec. 2008.
- "Nepal PM threatens party pullout", BBC, 8 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°156, *Nepal's New Political Landscape*, 3 July 2008.



➡ **Pakistan** UK PM Brown visited Islamabad 14 Dec, noted 75% of UK terror attacks have link to Pakistan and pledged \$9m in counter-terrorism assistance to country. Founder of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, militant group believed linked to Nov Mumbai attacks, placed under house arrest by Pakistani authorities 11 Dec after sustained Indian pressure. At least 6 attacks on NATO supply depots near Peshawar in first 2 weeks of month. Khyber Pass briefly closed 30 Dec-2 Jan amid intensified Frontier Crops operations in Khyber agency targeting militants; forces claimed over 70 arrested, some reports indicated targets simply fled elsewhere. Bombing near Shiite mosque in Peshawar market 5 Dec killed some 30. 4 killed in continued ethnic violence in Karachi 2 Dec; reported 40 killed since outbreak late Nov. 34 killed in 28 Dec suicide attack on polling centre during National Assembly by-election in Buner agency, NWFP.

- [“Taliban hit Pakistan town that fought back”](#), *New York Times*, 28 Dec. 2008.
- [“PM offers pact to stop Pakistan exporting terror”](#), *Guardian*, 15 Dec. 2008.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°160, [Reforming the Judiciary in Pakistan](#), 16 Oct. 2008.

➡ **Sri Lanka** Govt announced 2 Jan capture of de facto LTTE capital of Killinochchi after months of fierce fighting and heavy casualties; estimated 250-300,000 civilians displaced and trapped in shrinking area of LTTE control. Suicide attack on air force HQ 2 Jan killed 2, directly after President's speech claiming “unparalleled victory” over Killinochchi. UNSG representative expressed “increasing concern” about the inadequate supplies of food, medicine, emergency shelter and sanitation materials for the displaced and called on govt to allow access for additional humanitarian relief and humanitarian personnel. Killings and disappearances continued in Eastern Province amid deepening divisions between TMVP factions.

- [“Sri Lankan troops capture Tamil Tiger stronghold”](#), *Financial Times*, 2 Jan. 2009.
- [“Sri Lankan army pushing for end to 25-year war against Tamil rebels”](#), *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 2008.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°159, [Sri Lanka's Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict](#), 15 Oct. 2008.

## SOUTH EAST ASIA

➡ **Indonesia** President Yudhoyono 9 Dec signed controversial anti-pornography bill. Critics fear bill will encourage religious vigilantism, but constitutional review of bill likely. Communal violence flared 9 Dec in Masohi, central Maluku, after reports Christian teacher insulted Muslims; no confirmed deaths but 67 houses burned. 2 arrested in Papua for their role in earlier peaceful pro-independence demonstration. Muchdi, former intelligence (BIN) deputy director, acquitted 31 Dec on charges related to 2004 death of human rights lawyer Munir; President Yudhoyono vowed to find murderers.

- [“Indonesia's leader vows to solve murder case”](#), *Financial Times*, 1 Jan. 2009.
- [“Politicians divided on new Islamic coalition”](#), *Jakarta Post*, 19 Dec. 2008.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°81, [Indonesia: Pre-Election Anxieties in Aceh](#), 9 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Myanmar/Burma** UNSG Ban, in 5 Dec “Friends of Myanmar” meeting, expressed “growing frustration” at political process in Myanmar, but said visit to country unlikely. UN envoy Gambari reportedly encouraging greater economic engagement; U.S. announced \$5m in new humanitarian aid to Myanmar 10 Dec. Sar Dar Win, daughter of former dictator Ne Win, released after 6 years' imprisonment.

- [“UN mulls reengaging Burma with more aid”](#), *Washington Post*, 28 Dec. 2008.
- [“U.S. to provide \\$5 mln more for Myanmar relief aid”](#), Reuters, 11 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°161, [Burma/Myanmar After Nargis: Time to Normalise Aid Relations](#), 20 Oct. 2008.

➡ **Philippines** Govt 2 Dec appointed Rafael Seguis chair of reconstituted peace panel for Mindanao; MILF dismissed prospect of quick return to talks. Fighting between MILF rebels and govt forces flared again 7-8 Dec on Sulu and Basilan; 10 reported killed. Thousands marched on Manila streets 12 Dec in protest of President Arroyo's renewed moves towards “charter change”. Gunmen fired on WFP delivery truck in Lanao del Sur, killing driver.

- [“Filipino Christian vigilantes get set for battle”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 Dec. 2008.
- [“Thousands march against Arroyo in Manila”](#), Reuters, 12 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°83, [The Philippines: The Collapse of Peace in Mindanao](#), 23 Oct. 2008.

➡ **Thailand** 2 Dec constitutional court ruling dissolved PPP, 2 other coalition parties in charges related to 2007 vote-buying controversy. Court's decision barred executive members of the parties from politics for 5 years, removing PM Somchai from politics. PAD protests ended; Bangkok airports reopened next day. After smaller parties joined opposition Democrat Party to form new govt, parliament 15 Dec elected Democrat leader Abhisit Vejjajiva to PM post. Abhisit forced to hold postponed first session of parliament at Foreign Ministry 30 Dec after thousands of “red shirt” supporters of former PM Thaksin blockaded parliament.

- [“Thai PM switches venues to avoid protests”](#), *Financial Times*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- [“Thailand's winds shift, setting a political boss adrift”](#), *New York Times*, 17 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°82, [Thailand: Calming the Political Turmoil](#), 22 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Timor-Leste** Judiciary appointments council declined to renew contract of Court of Appeal judge who wrote Nov finding that aspects of govt's 2009 budget related to oil income expenditure illegal; move raised concerns over independence of judiciary. FRETILIN continued threats it would withdraw from parliament if budget approved, believing withdrawal would trigger early elections. UN special envoy for human rights of IDPs noted in mid-month visit that causes of 2006 violence not yet addressed.

- [“East Timor still on brink of anarchy: report”](#), Reuters, 23 Dec. 2008.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°148, [Timor-Leste's Displacement Crisis](#), 31 March 2008.



## BALKANS

➡ **Bosnia** Tensions rose between political leaders and international officials, and progress on implementation of 8 Nov landmark Prud reform agreement between 3 main parties stalled. High Representative Lajcak 5 Dec told UNSC Bosnia's EU integration efforts stagnating due to nationalist politics; 30 Dec called on all parties to make European integration priority in 2009. 3 main parties 22 Dec agreed on parliamentary initiative to revise constitution, including Prud implementation and progress on census law. National War Crimes Strategy adopted by Council of Ministers 29 Dec. Republika Srpska (RS) PM Dodik criticised by international community 1 and 12 Dec for "intolerant" remarks against prosecutors and internationals probing alleged RS govt corruption. Mosque in southeastern RS burnt down 7 Dec shortly before Muslim Eid holiday; cause of blaze unclear.

- "Stop criticising us', envoy to Bosnia leaders", Balkan Insight, 15 Dec. 2008.
- "Lajčak: RS must be serious partner", B92, 11 Dec. 2008.
- "Brankovic concedes FBiH cabinet needs reshuffle", SEE Times, 2 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Kosovo** After 6-month delay, UNSC-approved EU rule of law EULEX mission deployed 9 Dec throughout Kosovo; followed 2 Dec protest in Pristina against EULEX neutrality on Kosovo's status. 1,400 international, 500 local staff deployed; expected to expand to 1,900 and 1,100 respectively by spring. Despite previous doubts over feasibility, some 200 deployed in Kosovo Serb North, including at border with Serbia. Confusion remains about implementation of UN's 6-point plan which Kosovo govt continues to reject. UN plan foresees technical negotiations with Kosovo and Serbia in 2009. Several violent incidents in Mitrovica, including 4 Dec damage to UNMIK, KFOR vehicles; 30 Dec stabbing of Serb youth, 2 Albanian suspects arrested by KPS; Kosovo Albanian shops torched; 1 explosion 2 Jan against Kosovo Serb café; followed by more Kosovo Albanian shop burning, injuring 6.

- "Thaci says Kosovo backs EU mission, not six-point plan", RFE/RL, 23 Dec. 2008.
- "Kosovo PM: No more parallel structures", Balkan Insight, 9 Dec. 2008.
- "EULEX deployment under way", B92, 9 Dec. 2008.
- "Feith: Priština rules Kosovo", B92, 3 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Macedonia** New Macedonian representative in name talks with Greece, Jolevski, met with UN mediator Nimetz 5 Dec. Greece and Macedonia continued to trade accusations over responsibility for unresolved name row; but EU FMs 8 Dec declared Macedonia should agree to mutually acceptable name. Macedonian, Greek representatives scheduled to meet at ICJ 19 Jan for proceedings brought by Macedonia 17 Nov on violation of 1995 Interim Agreement.

- "France warns Macedonia over 'name row'", Balkan Insight, 9 Dec. 2008

➡ **Serbia** Police in Presevo 26 Dec arrested 10 former Kosovo Liberation Organization (KLA) members, suspected of

kidnapping, murdering during June-October 1999 conflict, prompting 28 Dec protest by ethnic Albanians. Serbian army chief of staff Ponos dismissed 30 Dec by President Tadic over differences with Defence Minister. Finance ministry 10 Dec cut double wages for Serb public servants in Kosovo; will get 50% supplement instead. ICTY Chief Prosecutor Brammertz 12 Dec presented generally positive report to UNSC on Serbia's cooperation, but with Mladic and Hadzic still at large EU Council of Ministers 8 Dec said full ICTY cooperation needed to begin implementation of Interim Agreement. .

- "Preševo: Albanians protest KLA arrests", B92, 28 Dec. 2008.
- "EU ministers praise Serbia, but Dutch remain unmoved", B92, 8 Dec. 2008.

## CAUCASUS

➡ **Armenia** PACE Monitoring Mission 18 Dec criticised slow progress of investigation of March post-election violence, threatened to lift Armenian PACE voting rights. Trial of 7 opposition members accused of instigating March violence, including ex-FM Arzumanyan, started 19 Dec. President Sarkisian and Russian Gazprom chief Miller 1 Dec inaugurated gas pipeline from Iran.

- "No answers for March 1 violence", EurasiaNet, 5 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N° 48, *Armenia: Picking up the Pieces*, 8 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Parliament 19 Dec overwhelmingly approved constitutional amendment removing presidential term limit, scheduled referendum for 18 Mar. Govt banned BBC, Voice of America, RFE/RL from broadcasting on national FM frequencies. Decision heavily criticized by EU, OSCE and wider international community. Turkish FM Babadjan during 1 Dec Baku visit said rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey could help solve Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

- "Azerbaijan bans RFE/RL, other foreign radio from airwaves", RFE/RL, 30 Dec. 2008.
- "Azerbaijani parliament approves referendum on presidential term limit", RFE/RL, 26 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°50, *Azerbaijan: Defence Sector Management and Reform*, 29 October 2008.

➡ **Chechnya (Russia)** 2 militants, 2 Russian servicemen killed in 17 Dec fighting at Grozny apartment building. Security forces killed 2 militants near Kerla-Yurt village 3 Dec. Hundreds rallied in Grozny 29 Dec to protest court's granting of parole to Russian Colonel Budanov, convicted in 2000 for murdering Chechen girl and seen as symbolic of Russian abuses.

- "Chechnya voices anger over murderer's release", Reuters, 29 Dec. 2008.
- "Four killed in Chechnya clash - agencies", Reuters, 17 Dec. 2008.

➡ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Violence continued over month: in Dagestan, 5 police left dead in separate attacks 1 and 2 Dec; blast in Khasavyurt 3 Dec killed civilian; nephew of Dagestani Salafis leader Mogomed Kebedov killed by police 4 Dec; head of Chokh local administration Salim Salimov and his nephew abducted 3 Dec; Major General Valery Lipinsky, deputy commander of the North Caucasus Interior Ministry forces, shot and killed 29 Dec near capital Makhachkala. In



Ingushetia, former police officer fatally shot in Nazran 4 Dec; 2 rebels, 1 police dead after 6 Dec standoff at Nazran hotel; interior ministry said 12 rebels killed, numerous weapons seized in 24-25 Dec operation in Chechen border region. Violence continued in North Ossetia, 2 police fatally shot near capital Vladikavkaz 1 Dec; former mayor of Vladikavkaz, Kazbek Pagiyeu, and driver shot dead by unknown gunmen 29 Dec.

- "Militant actions shake up Dagestan", North Caucasus Weekly, 11 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°192, *Russia's Dagestan: Conflict Causes*, 3 June 2008.

- ➡ **Georgia** Fragile security situation around conflict zones. South Ossetia: shots fired 10 Dec at OSCE monitors near administrative border. EU Monitors 13 Dec criticized Russian re-deployment to disputed Perevi village; troops remain in village. Shots allegedly fired at Georgian police checkpoint in Ganmukhuri village 4 Jan from Abkhazia, Abkhaz deny involvement. Further round of Georgian-Russian Geneva talks 17-18 Dec focused on conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms. OSCE 22 Dec announced early 2009 pullout after Russia blocked mandate extension; diplomatic efforts to keep mission to begin with new OSCE chair Greece. Parliamentary war inquiry commission 19 Dec released report confirming govt claims that Russia started aggression. In further cabinet reshuffle, President Saakashvili replaced foreign, defence, education ministers. Prominent UN Ambassador Irakli Alasania resigned 4 Dec. Republican Party and New Rights Party 8 Dec announced new opposition political alliance; former PM Nogaideli 3 Dec inaugurated new opposition party. NATO FMs 2 Dec agreed closer cooperation, offered "Annual National Program" for Georgia, but not membership action plan (MAP).
- "Talks on Russian-Georgian conflict now 'fully on track,' UN envoy reports", UN News, 19 Dec. 2008.
  - "Saakashvili takes the stand", EurasiaNet, 2 Dec. 2008.
  - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°51, *Georgia: The Risks of Winter*, 26 November 2008.

- ➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Minsk Group co-chairs 4 Dec urged Armenia, Azerbaijan to finalise "comprehensive agreement" in coming months; called for withdrawal of snipers from border. 1 Azeri soldier killed, 1 wounded in 26 Dec ceasefire violation.
- "Skepticism on a potential Karabakh settlement in 2009", EurasiaNet, 24 Dec. 2008.
  - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War*, 14 Nov. 2007.

## EASTERN EUROPE

- ➡ **Belarus** Justice ministry 17 Dec registered opposition movement Za Svobodu after its forth attempt to gain official registration. Police 10 Dec arrested 4 activists promoting Human Rights Day in Hrodna; 2 further detained for flying historical national flag in Brest. Opposition politicians banned from travel 10 Dec protested in front of Minsk presidential office. Ahead of new regulations in Jan, 2,000 small business owners in 16 Dec rally, tens of thousands of market vendors on strike 10 Dec. IMF late Dec gave Belarus \$2.5bn loan to help deal with financial crisis fallout.
- "Student activist in Belarus vows to seek justice internationally", RFE/RL, 16 Dec. 2008.

- ➡ **Moldova** Opposition Liberal Party collecting signatures protesting against closure of independent Pro TV station, after authorities indicated rejection of license renewal. President Voronin 3 Dec rejected EU proposals to lower election threshold for parties to win seats in parliament ahead of next year's parliamentary vote.

- "Protests in Moldova over possible closure of independent TV station", RFE/RL, 17 Dec. 2008.

- ➡ **Ukraine** Political tensions cooled as leaders of pro-Western coalition 10 Dec announced agreement to renew ties, called off early elections. Amid ongoing dispute with Russia over gas payments and 2009 prices, Gazprom cut gas supplies to Ukraine 1 Jan. Russia said European customers not jeopardized, but 4 EU countries reported declines in gas flows. Russia 2 Jan accused Ukraine of stealing gas intended for Europe; Ukraine denied.

- "From heroic to farcical", *Economist*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- "Ukraine's leader urges political unity", BBC, 15 Dec. 2008.

## WESTERNEUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

- ➡ **Basque Country (Spain)** Powerful blast hit Basque TV broadcaster EITB 31 Dec in Bilbao; ETA made warning call one hour before. Bombing followed continued wave of arrests of ETA leaders, including 8 Dec arrest in France of Aitzol Irionda, suspected successor to ETA leader Txeroki, arrested in Nov. Spanish police 16 Dec detained 4 ETA activists in San Sebastian. Police reported ETA suspected of killing Spanish businessman 3 Dec in Azpeitia. Elections for Basque regional govt to be held 1 Mar.
- "Spain warns of attacks after latest ETA arrest", AP, 9 Dec. 2008.

- ➡ **Cyprus** Ongoing negotiations saw discussions over foreign relations, structure of federal government. Turkish Cypriot leader Talat 9 Dec sent letter to UNSG Ban, accusing Greek leader Christofias of blocking advancement of talks. UNSC 12 Dec renewed UNFICYP peacekeeping mission mandate by 6 months to 15 June.
- Comment by Hugh Pope (Crisis Group), "Time for EU-Turkey 'Urgency' Article", *Wall Street Journal*, 15 Dec. 2008.
  - "Cypriot leaders take on-going UN-backed peace process forward", UN News, 16 Dec. 2008.
  - For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°194, *Reunifying Cyprus: The Best Chance Yet*, 23 June 2008.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°197, *Turkey and Europe: The Decisive Year Ahead*,



15 Dec. 2008 Turkey is entering a critical year, in which its prospects for EU membership are at make or break stage. There was extraordinary progress in Turkey between 2000-2004, but national reform has slowed since. Both Turkey and EU member states need to recall how much they have to gain from each other and quickly reverse the downward spiral.

- ➡ **Turkey** Group of over 200 Turkish intellectuals launched online petition calling on govt to apologise for Armenian genocide – PM Erdogan denounced move. Police 17 Dec arrested up to 30 suspected al Qaeda members in Istanbul. Kurdish politician Leyla Zana sentenced to jail for 10 years for spreading PKK propaganda, has appealed. Blast outside AKP office in Istanbul 1 Dec left 6 injured; further small blast 8 Dec outside party office in Van. 3 soldiers killed, 17 injured in

24 Dec attack by PKK in Cizre. Army again hit PKK targets in northern Iraq 16 Dec, 27-28 Dec, as Ankara urged Baghdad 15 Dec to implement 3-phase plan to fight PKK militants. First 24-hour Kurdish-language TV station, TRT 6, launched 1 Jan.

- ["Turkish PM scorns Armenia apology"](#), BBC, 17 Dec. 2008.



## Latin America / Caribbean

- ➡ **Bolivia** Constitutional referendum to be held 25 Jan after National Electoral Council appointment 20 Dec ensured quorum. Tensions increased ahead of vote: state prosecutor 2 Dec arrested several opposition officials accused of instigating Sept violent demonstrations; opposition prefects said will "renew protests" against govt. 3 Dec Unasur report called Sept Pando department killing of 20 mainly pro-govt supporters a "massacre"; opposition criticised report as politically motivated.
  - ["Bolivia violence was massacre, says regional report"](#), Reuters, 3 Dec. 2008
  - ["Detienen a opositores"](#), BBC, 2 Dec. 2008.
  - For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°18, [Bolivia: Rescuing the New Constitution and Democratic Stability](#), 19 June 2008.

- ➡ **Colombia** 8 police killed in 5 Dec suspected ELN rebel attack in Arauca province; govt late month announced major U.S.-backed 2009 offensive against ELN. FARC 21 Dec announced unilateral release of 6 hostages, including ex-senator, to lay basis for hostages-for-prisoners talks with govt; President Uribe 22 Dec ruled out involvement of foreign govts in hostage negotiations. Congress 18 Dec preliminarily passed bill on constitutional reform referendum allowing Uribe to run again in 2014 but not 2010: debate to continue when Congress re-convenes March 2009.
  - ["Uribe, lejos del tercer mandato consecutivo"](#), AFP, 18 Dec. 2008.
  - ["Anuncian ofensiva contra el ELN"](#), BBC, 17 Dec. 2008.
  - For latest report, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°29, [Correcting Course: Victims and the Justice and Peace Law in Colombia](#), 30 Oct. 2008.

- ➡ **Ecuador** Further suspected FARC rebel camps found early month in north-east, govt protested Colombia's lack of border control. Govt 13 Dec defaulted on US\$ billions of "illegitimate" foreign debt.
  - ["Ecuador wants 'big' discount in debt restructuring, Correa says"](#), Bloomberg, 13 Dec. 2008.

- ➡ **Haiti** Hundreds of ex-president Aristide supporters clashed with police in 16 Dec Port-au-Prince demonstrations. MINUSTAH 8 Dec announced increased security in key cities during Dec/Jan.
  - ["Aristide supporters clash with police in Haiti"](#), *Miami Herald*, 16 Dec. 2008.
  - For latest report, see Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Report N°28, [Reforming Haiti's Security Sector](#), 18 Sept. 2008.

- ➡ **Nicaragua** Political situation still deadlocked after opposition accused ruling Sandinista party of fraud in Nov municipal elections. Congress paralysed throughout month, unable to approve 2009 budget; President Ortega 30 Dec passed heavily modified budget by decree, condemned by opposition

as "akin to coup d'état". Opposition 4 Dec failed in bid to get Congress to declare elections invalid. U.S., EU partially suspended aid until crisis resolved; U.S. 16 Dec said further sanctions possible if no solution in 90 days.

- ["Tenso fin de año en Nicaragua"](#), BBC, 30 Dec. 2008.
- ["Nicaragua, sin presupuesto"](#), *El País*, 19 Dec. 2008.
- ["Nicaragua's Ortega defiant after US, Europe yank aid"](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 5 Dec. 2008.



➡ **Venezuela** National Assembly 18 Dec preliminarily approved Feb 2009 referendum on abolition of presidential term limits, final approval expected Jan; opposition criticised as "anti-democratic". State prosecutor 11 Dec charged opposition leader Manuel Rosales with corruption, he claimed politically motivated. President Chávez 27 Dec announced nationalisation of privately held gold mines to supplement state income loss from falling oil prices.

- ["Socialism with cheap oil"](#), *Economist*, 30 Dec. 2008.
- ["Chávez impide tomar posesión a los gobernadores opositores"](#), *El País*, 19 Dec. 2008.
- ["Venezuela term-limit vote gets initial approval"](#), AP, 18 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Report N°27, [Venezuela: Political Reform or Regime Demise?](#), 23 July 2008.



## Middle East / North Africa

### EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN



➡ **Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories** Israel launched massive air raid on Gaza 27 Dec and ground incursion 3 Jan, leaving over 500 Palestinians reported dead; Hamas rocket fire in response struck deep into Israel. Ongoing hostilities risk further escalation. Israeli assault followed intensified Palestinian rocket fire and increase in cross-border fighting, before and after 19 Dec expiration of six-month ceasefire. Many Hamas security personnel, some senior leaders, many civilians among dead. 4 Israelis killed by rocket attacks, 1 soldier in ground incursion. Egypt refused calls, including by Hizbollah, to open Rafah border, conditioning re-opening on Palestinian Authority (PA) control; some ambulances, wounded crossed. Israeli action drew mass protests across much of Muslim world, many Western countries. UN, EU, U.S. and Russia 30 Dec called for immediate ceasefire, but U.S. said Hamas to halt rocket fire first. Arab League 31 Dec demanded immediate end to Israeli military operations, blockade. UNSC debate 31 Dec ended without vote on draft resolution – meeting again 5 Jan. Israel 15 Dec released 224 mainly Fatah prisoners to West Bank. PA President Abbas 16 Dec called for resumption of Hamas-Fatah talks stalled by Nov Hamas boycott. Hardline Israeli settlers rioted in Hebron after Israeli police evicted 250 settlers from disputed building 4 Dec.

- ["Israeli attack splits Gaza; truce calls are rebuffed"](#), *New York Times*, 4 Jan. 2009.
- ["Thousands in Lebanon, Turkey protest Gaza attack"](#), AP, 4 Jan. 2009.

Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°26, [Ending the War in Gaza](#), 5 Jan. 2009.



Urgent international action must help deliver an immediate ceasefire in Gaza to protect civilians, limit political damage and avoid a further catastrophe. Third parties viewed as credible and trustworthy must push both sides to end this before the toll escalates. There are signs important actors – European in particular, the U.S. far less so – have learned from the experience of the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war that time is of the essence. Devising a ceasefire acceptable to both sides is not beyond reach.

➡ **Lebanon** With Lebanese parliamentary elections due mid-2009, Christian leader Michel Aoun visited Damascus 3-7 Dec, met with Syrian President Assad. President Suleiman hosted further national dialogue talks among rival political factions; committee on national defence strategy to be formed. Army 26 Dec found and dismantled 8 Katyusha rockets near southern town Naqura aimed toward Israel. Lebanon 28 Dec said Israeli planes violated airspace (see Israel/OPT). Hizbollah leader Nasrallah 28 Dec condemned Israeli attack on Gaza; criticised Egypt for not opening Rafah border. Suleiman backed calls for emergency Arab summit. Protests across country from 29 Dec. Moscow mid-month offered to give Lebanon 10 MIG-29 fighter jets – no response from Beirut. Unconfirmed reports 10 Dec that Shaker Absi, fugitive leader of al-Qaeda-linked group Fatah Islam, killed or captured in Syria; new leader, Abdel Awad, named. UNSC 17 Dec extended investigation into 2005 assassination of former PM Rafiq Hariri to 28 Feb, with UN tribunal expected to start up 1 March.

- [“International silence on Gaza draws local rage”](#), *Daily Star*, 5 Jan. 2009.
- [“Aoun’s goal”](#), Economist Intelligence Unit ViewsWire, 8 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°78, [The New Lebanese Equation: The Christians’ Central Role](#), 15 July 2008.

➡ **Syria** Events in Gaza (see Israel/OPT) overshadowed reports of improving relations between Damascus and West. Thousands, many Palestinian refugees, protested Israeli assault, Egyptian closure of Rafah crossing. President Assad condemned Israeli actions. Damascus suspended Turkish-mediated indirect negotiations with Israel 28 Dec as Turkish PM Erdogan also criticised Israel. Former U.S. President Carter in visit to Lebanon and Syria met with Assad in Damascus 13 Dec. IAEA head ElBaradei in interview published 21 Dec said still waiting for information from both Israel and Syria regarding Al Kibar alleged nuclear site bombed by Israel in Sept 2007.

- [“Syria suspends indirect peace talks with Israel”](#), AP, 28 Dec. 2008.
- [“Where shall I go next?”](#), *Economist*, 11 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°63, [Restarting Israeli-Syrian Negotiations](#), 10 Apr. 2007.

## GULF

➡ **Bahrain** Authorities arrested 14 suspects, all reportedly Shiite, for planning bomb attacks on 17 Dec national day celebrations. Human rights lawyers condemned televised confessions. Police and youths reportedly clashed in Shiite villages near capital Manama.

- [“Bahrain TV airs terror plot confessions”](#), AP, 28 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Iran** UNSC P5 plus Germany 16 Dec held talks with some Arab Gulf states, Egypt, Jordan on Iran nuclear program; expressed shared concern, agreed to continue regular consultations. U.S. President-elect Obama 7 Dec said would use “tough but direct diplomacy” and “carrot and stick” strategy – rejected by senior Iranian officials. Iran condemned Israeli assault on Gaza (see Israel/OPT); demonstrators in Tehran protested Egyptian refusal to open Rafah crossing, stormed UK embassy. U.S. military 14 Dec announced fall in use of allegedly Iranian-supplied explosive devices in Iraq. Authorities 4 Dec confirmed killing of 16 police officers abducted June by militant Sunni group Jundallah in south east. Group reportedly carried out suicide attack killing 4 in Saravan 29 Dec. Authorities 21 Dec shut down Tehran office of human rights organisation run by Nobel Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi. Ahmadi-Nejad 31 Dec presented controversial plan to parliament to cut energy subsidies.

- [“Ahead of election, Iran’s hard-liners crack down”](#), *New York Times*, 4 Jan. 2009.
- [“Six powers consult Arabs on Iran’s nuclear plans”](#), Reuters, 16 Dec. 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** Presidency council 4 Dec approved U.S.-Iraq security pact, which replaces UN mandate for U.S. presence. Strategic framework agreement covering range of bilateral efforts also approved. Govt signed deal 31 Dec to allow remaining UK and Australia troops (some 5,000) to stay until July 2009. Iraq 1 Jan took control of security in Baghdad Green Zone. During 15 Dec surprise Baghdad visit by U.S. President Bush, Iraqi journalist Muntadar Zaidi insulted and threw shoes at Bush. Govt detained Zaidi for trial. Thousands turned out on Baghdad streets demanding his release; brother said Zaidi beaten in detention. Radical Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr reportedly issued statement condemning Israeli assault on Gaza (see Israel/OPT), amid protests in Baghdad. 7 members of minority Yazidi family shot dead 15 Dec west of Mosul. Bombings continued, including suicide attacks at Kurdish restaurant in Kirkuk 11 Dec killing over 50, at tribal lunch south of Baghdad 2 Jan killing at least 23, and targeting Shiite pilgrims in Baghdad 4 Jan with over 30 dead. Turkey continued strikes targeting Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq.

- [“Iraq at the crossroads”](#), BBC, 30 Dec. 2008.
- [“Trying to redefine role of U.S. military in Iraq”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 22 Dec. 2008.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N° 80, [Oil for Soil: Toward a Grand Bargain on Iraq and the Kurds](#), 28 Oct. 2008.

➡ **Yemen** 3 Germans kidnapped by tribesmen 15 Dec in Dhamar region south east of capital Sanaa, released 19 Dec. Member of small Jewish community from Amran province killed 11 Dec; relocation to capital proposed; harassment reportedly increased with Israeli attacks on Gaza (see Israel/OPT). Hundreds stormed Egyptian consulate in Aden 30 Dec to protest role in Gaza blockade.

- [“Jews in north increasingly being harassed”](#), IRIN, 4 Jan. 2009.
- [“Yemeni mediators say 3 German hostages released”](#), AP, 19 Dec. 2008.



## NORTH AFRICA

➡ **Algeria** 2 Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) members killed 13 Dec in reportedly fierce shootout with police in Maghnia, bordering Morocco. 3 other suspected AQIM members killed 21 Dec in police attack on car near western city of Relizane.

▪ [“Algerian army kills 2 Islamists after gun battle”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 14 Dec 2008.

➡ **Egypt** 3 senior MB members charged 17 Dec for forming “jihad group” over pro-Gaza activity and links to Hamas, in move condemned by MB leadership as effort to undermine public sympathy with blockaded Gaza strip. Security Court sentenced 22 for involvement in violent Apr riots in Mahalla el-Kubra sparked by steep food price hikes. Over 50,000 demonstrated across Egypt over Israeli airstrike on Gaza, urging govt to open Rafah crossing: some 40 MB members, at least 1 journalist arrested; clash between Hamas supporters and Egyptian border guards left 2 dead (see Israel/OPT). President Mubarak late month rejected calls to open Rafah crossing. African migrant seeking to cross Israel border shot dead by police early month.

▪ [“Egypt police beat, detain Islamists in Gaza protests”](#), Reuters, 2 Jan. 2008.

▪ [“Egypt remands Brotherhood leader on ‘jihad’ charge”](#), Reuters, 17 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Mauritania** Talks between leaders of Aug military coup and international representatives opened 27 Dec aiming to set date for national elections, address constitutional and military

reform; opposition and civil society leaders boycotted in protest at junta govt. Junta 21 Dec released ousted President Abdallahi from house arrest in effort to stave off EU’s Nov threat of sanctions. International community continued to press for Abdallahi reinstatement, the U.S. mid-month threatening to halt trade benefits from Jan. Security stepped up in capital late month as hundreds rallied to protest Israeli bombings in Gaza and alleged bombing attempt on Israeli embassy.

▪ [“Deposed Mauritania president freed”](#), Al Jazeera, 21 Dec 2008.

➡ **Morocco** Several arrested across country as govt claimed further successes in dismantling terrorist cells: govt 12 Dec said 5 reportedly belonging to “Salafist Jihadist” group detained in Berkane early month on various charges including plotting bank robberies to fund terrorist attacks. Abdellah Ahriz sentenced 18 Dec to 20 years for involvement in 2001 Madrid bombings.

▪ [“Madrid train bomb plotter jailed for 20 years”](#), CNN, 19 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Western Sahara** Christopher Ross 5 Dec confirmed as new UN special envoy, as Morocco and Algeria reasserted positions on WS status: Rabat 4 Dec said ready to resume stalled talks but only from principle of autonomy, while Algeria issued longstanding call for referendum on independence. Human Rights Watch 19 Dec report alleged pro-independence Sahawis subject to extensive repression and abuse by Moroccan authorities, drawing angry response from Rabat. Report also called on Algeria to take responsibility for protecting rights of Algerian-based Sahrawi IDPs.

▪ [“Suppressing rights in Western Sahara”](#), Human Rights Watch, 19 Dec. 2008.

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