

**1 March 2009, N°67****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 130 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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**March 2009 Watchlist****Conflict Risk Alerts**

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Sudan

**Conflict Resolution Opportunities**

Sudan

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## CENTRAL AFRICA

➡ **Burundi** Parliament 13 Feb endorsed new electoral commission members. FNL leader Agathon Rwasa 6 Feb announced group was seeking registration as political party, also dismissed speculation over FNL internal dissent. Tensions continue to focus on dragging FNL disarmament; FNL reiterated call for govt to improve facilities.

- [“Burundi MPs approve new electoral commission”](#), AFP, 13 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°53, [Burundi: Restarting Political Dialogue](#), 19 Aug. 2008.

➡ **Central African Republic** President Bozizé 5 Feb ordered creation of monitoring committee relating to agreements reached at Inclusive National Dialogue (IND) in Dec, including pilot DDR process. Rebel groups MLCJ, FDPC, UFR 16 Feb issued joint declaration threatening to resume violence in protest at Bozizé’s perceived failure to implement IND consensus. FDPC 21 Feb briefly occupied northern town of Batangafo, warned of further attacks. In northwest, unidentified rebels 12-13 Feb launched simultaneous attacks in Bossembélé, freeing 19 Sudanese detainees; clashes between Runga, Gulus ethnic groups forced thousands across Chadian border. Army 25 Feb reported LRA fighters crossed from DRC into CAR, several rebels killed in ensuing clashes.

- [“Rebel group attacks African town, frees prisoners”](#), AP, Feb. 14, 2009
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°55, [Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue](#), 9 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Chad** Fears recent rebel coalition-building and possible ICC arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir could lead to increased rebel attacks, but rebels’ capacity to organize major assault still doubtful. Authorities 2 Feb banned opposition CPDC from holding planned remembrance ceremony for member missing since Feb 2008 coup. Unconfirmed reports of early-Feb clashes around northern city Yarda between opposition MDJT and govt troops. Belgium 20 Feb filed lawsuit against Senegal to force trial of former President Habré at ICJ for crimes against humanity during 1980s.

- [“Sudan court decision may prompt new Chad fighting”](#), Reuters, 10 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°144, [A New Conflict Resolution Framework](#), 24 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Democratic Republic of Congo** 5-week joint Rwandan-DRC offensive against FDLR rebels in N Kivu ended 25 Feb with formal ceremony in Goma; thousands had crossed back end month and withdrawal to be complete early March; Rwanda’s President Kagame pledged to continue cooperation. Reports on military success mixed. Joint command claimed FDLR weakened but not destroyed; over 90 rebels killed, 140 surrendered. Alternative reports FDLR dispersed, suffered few casualties, re-occupying positions as Rwandan troops depart; Human Rights Watch reported over 100 civilians killed in retaliatory attacks since operation’s launch. CNDP rebels,

following Jan deal with govt, 5 Feb announced transformation to political party; PARECO Mai Mai militia followed suit 6 Feb. CNDP integration with govt troops progressing, but concerns over inadequate monitoring. 5 of 7 members of national assembly oversight committee resigned end month, on request of ruling APM coalition, and after publicly criticising operation in the east. Withdrawal of Ugandan troops from northeast postponed late-Feb reportedly pending further talks between President Kabila and Uganda’s Museveni, as criticism of the joint offensive against LRA rebels continued to mount: some 900 civilians reportedly killed in backlash attacks since operation’s launch in Dec. MONUC under fire by NGOs for failure to defend civilians in east and northeast. Egypt, Bangladesh announced readiness to contribute troops to 3,000 authorised reinforcement for MONUC.

- [“More than 40 Hutu rebels killed in Congo air raid”](#), AP, 13 Feb. 2009.
- [“Rwandan rebels elude joint offensive in east Congo”](#), Reuters, 11 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Conflict Risk Alert: DR Congo, 27 Jan. 2009 and Africa Report N°140, [Four Priorities for Sustainable Peace in Ituri](#), 13 May 2008.

➡ **Rwanda** Following continued diplomatic pressure from Kinshasa, Kigali early month announced ousted leader of DRC’s CNDP rebels Nkunda, arrested in Rwanda 22 Jan, would be extradited to DRC; joint committee established 6 Feb to monitor conditions for his return. Thousands of Rwandan troops withdrew from DRC following 25 Feb completion of anti-FDLR operation in DRC with withdrawal due to be complete early March; completion came despite 10 Feb call from Rwandan parliamentarians for extension of operation amid fears over continued FDLR presence. Former army chaplain Emmanuel Rukundo convicted by ICTR for role in 1994 genocide.

- [“Deal is reached on Congo rebel”](#), *New York Times*, 7 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Uganda** Speculation continued over potential surrender of senior LRA commanders and ICC indictees Okot Odhiambo and Dominic Ongwen, after Jan unconfirmed reports they were ready to disarm with 120 fighters in S Sudan; men failed to turn up at assigned UNMIS meeting points over month. President Museveni 10 Feb promised them amnesty in Uganda, despite ICC status. Kampala, UN traded accusations over Ugandan-led LRA military operation in DRC: UN USG Holmes in early-Feb visit to northeast DRC stressed scale of violence; Museveni stressed MONUC’s failure to prevent civilian deaths. Withdrawal of Ugandan troops from DRC again postponed late-Feb. Janet Museveni, MP and Museveni’s wife, brought into cabinet as minister for Karamoja region; finance minister replaced in 17 Feb cabinet reshuffle seen to consolidate president’s position ahead of 2011 elections.

- [“Uganda’s Museveni fires finance minister”](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.
- [“U.S. aided a failed plan to rout Ugandan rebels”](#), *New York Times*, 6 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°146, [Northern Uganda: The Road to Peace, with or without Kony](#), 10 Dec. 2008.

## HORN OF AFRICA

➡ **Ethiopia** Jan troop withdrawal from Somalia continued to reverberate. Unconfirmed reports Ethiopian troops sporadically

crossing back (see Somalia); govt denies, while Somali al-Shabaab angrily demanded total withdrawal. UN said 10,000 refugees crossed from Somalia since Jan. Senior member of opposition OFDM Bekele Jirate, jailed Nov for alleged links with armed OLF, released on bail 4 Feb. At least 45 reported dead in fighting between army and ONLF 15-20 Feb. Tens of thousands displaced after early month clashes around southern town Moyale between Borana, Gheri groups.

▪ ["Ethiopia troops 'back in Somalia'"](#), BBC, 3 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Ethiopia/Eritrea** Eritrean President Afwerki 21 Feb rejected 13 Feb Libyan, AU offer to mediate with Ethiopia over border dispute – offer welcomed by Ethiopian PM Meles. Asmara 28 Feb reported 2 killed in restaurant bombing in Haikota, western Eritrea; as yet unconfirmed.

▪ ["Eritrea rejects mediation on Ethiopia border row"](#), Reuters, 21 Feb. 2009

➡ **Kenya** Parliament 13 Feb rejected constitutional amendment to create tribunal on 2007 post-election violence as MPs object over risk of unfair trials. Delay rules out possibility of its creation by 1 March, date Waki Commission report stipulated for suspects to be referred to ICC. Lead objector MP Gitobu Manyara accused govt of blackmailing MPs in effort to force bill's passage. PM Odinga announced deadline extended by 2 months, but mediator Kofi Annan 24 Feb stressed preparedness to pass suspects to ICC if tribunal not created within "reasonable" timeframe. UN special rapporteur Philip Alston following 10-day investigation mission 25 Feb presented report to govt detailing systematic arbitrary killings by police since 2007 and calling for firing of police chief and attorney general; govt rejected findings.

▪ ["UN condemns executions carried out by Kenyan police"](#), *Guardian*, 25 Feb. 2009.

▪ ["The Kenya we want"](#), openDemocracy, 3 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Somalia** New President Sheikh Sharif 9 Feb toured Mogadishu, said open for peace talks with groups opposed to Djibouti Agreement, ready to introduce sharia law, form inclusive govt. Sharif 13 Feb appointed Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke as PM – Canadian citizen and Marjeteen sub-clan member, son of president killed in 1969 coup. Choice endorsed by parliament, met with widespread approval apart from Islamist rebels. Sharmarke said he would seek dialogue with Al-Shabaab to end violence, 21 Feb appointed 32-member cabinet; 2 members subsequently resigned due to clan politics. But Al-Shabaab 12 Feb repeated opposition to Sharif, vowed to continue attacking AU forces, and 22 Feb killed 11 AU Burundi peacekeepers in attack on Mogadishu base. Fierce fighting in Mogadishu from 24 Feb between Interim Government of National Unity troops, backed by AMISOM and newly-formed insurgent umbrella grouping, Hizb al-Islam (Islamic Party). Clashes left at least 80 people killed before 27 Feb truce. Reports throughout month Ethiopian troops back in Somalia; Ethiopia denied. Prominent journalist shot dead in Mogadishu 4 Feb by unidentified gunmen; Islamists 12 Feb fired mortar bombs at UN-chartered supply ship, killing 4. In East Africa tour starting 24 Feb in Djibouti, Iranian President Ahmedinejad met Somali PM Sharmarke and pledged to support new govt. Ukrainian tank carrier captured by pirates Sept 2008 released early Feb.

▪ ["The Somali people do not want any more fighting"](#), IRIN, 12 Feb. 2009

▪ ["Somalia sees hope in new leader"](#), ISN Security Watch, 6

Feb. 2009.

▪ For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°147, [Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State](#), 23 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Sudan** Events dominated by long-awaited announcement of ICC arrest warrant for President Bashir and debate over potential to increase insecurity but also prospects for long-term peace; ICC 23 Feb announced decision to be issued 4 March. As unofficial reports indicated positive decision by Pre-Trial chamber judges on Prosecutor's July request for war crimes, crimes against humanity, AU-Arab League 12 Feb lobbied UNSC for Article 16 deferral of indictment; U.S., UK, French opposed. Qatar peace talks opened 10 Feb between JEM, govt – 1st since 2007. Attacks ongoing during negotiations, and talks reportedly stalled 14 Feb over rebel demands for confidence-building measures – prisoner exchange, cessation of attacks on IDPs. Measures included in 17 Feb "Declaration of intent", but no ceasefire, and deal dismissed by other rebel groups. Parties remaining in Doha to put together framework ceasefire agreement before actual peace talks. Following deal, JEM 18 Feb accused govt of air, ground attacks against 2 positions in Jebel Marra – denied by army. Govt 4 Feb announced Muhajiriya taken from rebels after weeks of fighting and mounting UN fears over conditions for civilians; rebels said had voluntarily evacuated. 12 Feb said authorities preventing aid agencies getting supplies to over 100,000 Darfuri civilians; 18 Feb said full UNAMID deployment postponed again to June. Govt 15 Feb announced beginning of investigations into alleged Darfur rights abuses in 2003-04. SPLM/A, govt 15 Feb submitted 2nd round of arguments to Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) on Abyei Boundaries Commission dispute. Some 50 killed, 100 wounded in fresh clashes 24 Feb between SPLM and southern militia in southern town Malakal.

▪ ["Why did Sudan make a deal with Darfur rebels?"](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 Feb. 2009.

▪ ["US, France, UK oppose suspending Bashir Darfur case"](#), Reuters, 13 Feb. 2009.

▪ For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°145, [Sudan's Southern Kordofan Problem: The Next Darfur?](#)

## SOUTHERN AFRICA

➡ **Madagascar** Capital hit by further large-scale protests over month in support of Rajoelina's call for overthrow of President Ravalomanana. But few signs of support from govt or military. Some 30 killed, scores injured when police opened fire on crowd marching towards presidential palace; defense minister resigned in wake. Thousands hit streets again mid and late Feb with sit-ins near key govt ministries. Rajoelina early-Feb named new "transitional govt", sacked from post as capital's mayor, announced aim to seek legal proceedings for Ravalomanana impeachment. UN Assistant Secretary Menkerios visited twice to promote dialogue; first face-to-face talks between leaders held 21 Feb but process fragile with Rajoelina threatening to pull out after president reportedly failed to appear for scheduled meeting.

▪ ["Madagascar armed forces ready to 'fulfil duties'"](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Zimbabwe** Long-awaited unity govt formed early month, but amid continued political repression and serious concerns

over President Mugabe's commitment to power-sharing. MDC leader Tsvangirai sworn in as PM 11 Feb and 61-strong cabinet on 13 Feb. Analysts concerned at dominance of party hardliners over hoped-for technocrats. MDC treasurer and deputy agriculture minister appointee Roy Bennett arrested 13 Feb, later charged with terrorism; hundreds rallied outside Mutare prison in public outcry. Mugabe late month vowed to accelerate controversial land seizures, said govt an interim arrangement, new elections to be held in 2 years. 14 Feb demonstration in Harare of 600 from Women of Zimbabwe Arise forcefully dispersed by police; 5 still arrested, bringing to some 35 the number of activists and MDC detained. International community greeted new govt with caution, with U.S., UK, EU leaders stressing reconstruction funds would only be released when reform benchmarks met, but committing to humanitarian, health, education assistance. Govt 26 Feb called on SADC states for \$2b loan to help collapsed economy.

- ["Zimbabwe politician faces terror charge"](#), *Guardian*, 16 Feb. 2009.
- ["Government sets conditions for lifting Zimbabwe sanctions"](#), Reuters, 13 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°56, [Ending Zimbabwe's Nightmare: A Possible Way Forward](#), 16 Dec. 2008.

## WEST AFRICA

➡ **Cameroon** Chairman of opposition Social Democratic Front (SDF), Fru Ndi, 1 Feb lashed out at composition of electoral commission formed by President and dominated by ruling CPDM members, vowing to obstruct 2011 polls, warning of national "bloodbath". EU 9 Feb issued call for electoral commission's impartiality. FM 19 Feb warned diplomats to stop criticising ELECAM.

- ["Impunity underpins persistent abuse"](#), Amnesty International, 29 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** UNOCI 12 Feb called on govt, electoral commission to formulate timetable for repeatedly delayed presidential elections in 2009. Electoral commission 22 Feb said timetable forthcoming. Former rebel Forces Nouvelles (FN) reportedly yet to begin implementation of Jan agreement to hand administrative control of FN-controlled north to govt. 3 FN troops killed in Man town 1 Feb in further internal FN feud over access to resources.

- ["Three Ivorian rebels killed in feud – witnesses"](#), Reuters, 3 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°139, [Côte d'Ivoire: Ensuring Credible Elections](#), 22 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Equatorial Guinea** Assaultants 17 Feb launched seaborne assault on capital Malabo, reportedly approaching presidential compound; repelled after hours of fighting; 16 arrested. Initially reported as attempted coup, but E-G govt, analysts increasingly stressed militants from Nigeria's Niger Delta responsible, amid growing fears over spread of Delta violence. Dominant Delta group MEND denied; Nigerian FM visited 27 Feb in "solidarity" and reportedly to discuss security collaboration, though Abuja denies attackers Nigerian. E-G's national security minister and 3 senior security officials fired in wake.

- ["16 held in coup effort in Equatorial Guinea"](#), *New York Times*, 19 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Guinea** Leader of newly-installed junta Capt. Dadis Camara at 16 Feb meeting of international, civil society representatives presented 4-step process for transition to civilian rule but set no date for next polls. AU 11 Feb reiterated demand for civilian govt by end 2009. 17 arrested early-Feb for drug-trafficking including 7 soldiers; Dadis Camara called for open debate on backers, implicating police. 15 Feb beating of lawyer triggered 18-19 Feb lawyers' strike over military brutality and impunity. Ousmane Conté, son of ex-president, arrested by junta 24 Feb for drug trafficking.

- ["Guinea junta chief outlines transition steps"](#), AFP, 17 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°52, [Guinea: Ensuring Democratic Reforms](#), 24 June 2008.

➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Former Navy Chief Na Tchuto, implicated in Aug assassination attempt on President Vieira, failed to return from hiding in Gambia for trial as promised 13 Feb. Rwandan Ambassador Joseph Mutaboba appointed as UN envoy to G-B, effective 1 March.

- ["Ex-navy chief vows to return"](#), News 24, 11 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°57, [Guinea-Bissau: Building a Real Stability Pact](#), 29 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Liberia** President Johnson-Sirleaf 12 Feb delivered long-awaited testimony to Truth and Reconciliation Commission after multiple postponements, denied allegations she had solicited financing for former President Taylor's NPFL, though admitted having been a sympathiser.

- ["Liberian president says she was misled in supporting Taylor's rebel movement"](#), VoA, 13 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°148, [Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform](#), 13 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Mali** Nearly 600 Tuareg rebels mainly from Democratic Alliance for Change (ADC) faction laid down arms in 17 Feb ceremony, after ADC 5 Feb committed to Algerian-brokered peace process in north. Army continued late Jan operation against ATMN rebels around Kidal, mid-month claimed all rebel bases destroyed and group forced out of Mali; ATMN denied but Libyan diplomats 16 Feb admitted to giving refuge to group's leader Ag Bahanga "for humanitarian reasons". Despite progress in Tuareg peace process, abductions by terrorist groups underscored continued security risks; authorities late month arrested Islamic preacher in connection with late Jan tourist kidnappings (see Niger).

- ["Nearly 600 Malian rebels disarm in north – radio"](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.
- ["Mali rebel leader takes refuge in Libya: diplomat"](#), AFP, 23 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Niger** Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb 17 Feb claimed responsibility for Dec 2008 abduction of 2 Canadian diplomats near Niamey and 4 European tourists in Mali near Niger border late Jan; said would soon issue conditions for release. Journalist Soussade Ben Ali jailed for 3 months over 13 Jan story alleging irregularities in govt deal with Chinese firm, raising fears over deterioration in media freedoms.

- ["North Africa Qaeda posts photos of Western hostages"](#), Reuters, 19 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Nigeria** Militant group MEND 7 Feb attacked Utorogu gas plant in Delta State, promised further assaults on oil targets to "dispel false sense of peace" in Niger Delta. Several attacks by

unconfirmed groups, pointing to spread eastwards of criminal-militant Delta violence: Agip terminal in Bayelsa State attacked 22 Feb; in eastern Delta's Akwa Ibom State, 3 injured when gunmen 17 Feb fired on Exxon housing compound. Same day, militants widely suspected to be from Niger Delta launched off-shore attack on Equatorial Guinea capital Malabo; E-G govt said attackers quickly repelled. 14 abducted across region as kidnappings continued; local notables increasingly targeted as many expat oil workers vacate insecure areas. Federal Court in Benin, Edo State, sentenced to 5 years 13 Filipinos arrested Nov 2008 for oil theft. Religious violence in Bauchi State 21 Feb saw 11 killed, over 450 displaced following mosque burning. Court 23 Feb removed Olusegun Agagu (PDP) as Ondo State governor, ordered Olusegun Mimiko (Labour Party) to be sworn in.

- ["Nigerian governor imposes curfew after clashes"](#), Reuters, 22 Feb. 2009.
- ["Gunmen in boats attack presidential palace in Equatorial Guinea"](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°54, ["Nigeria: Ogoni Land after Shell"](#), 18 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Sierra Leone** Special Court for Sierra Leone 25 Feb found guilty RUF leader Issa Sesay and 2 senior commanders of war crimes including mutilation, rape, use of child soldiers during 11 year war. Ruling APC party 3 Feb said unidentified army group issued coup threat over alleged govt corruption, favouritism towards president's Limba ethnic group.

- ["Sierra Leone rebel leaders guilty of war crimes"](#), AP, 26 Feb. 2009.



## Asia/Pacific

### CENTRAL ASIA

➡ **Kazakhstan** Economic situation worsening with downgrading of country credit rating and 20% fall of currency against dollar early Feb. Some 300 participated in 21 Feb opposition protest demanding govt, parliamentary resignations over handling of crisis. Govt 26 Feb announced withdrawal from Central Asia power grid to protect its energy supplies. Leading opposition figures 11 Feb urged President Nazarbaev to review murder case of opposition leader Sarsenbaev, killed Feb 2006; requested interrogation of President's former son-in-law Rakhmat Aliev.

- ["Economic crisis is top U.S. security concern"](#), RFE/RL, 13 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** President Bakiyev 3 Feb announced closure of U.S. airbase at Manas, operating since 2001 to supply U.S. Afghanistan operations, after reported Russian offer of \$2.15b aid package. Parliament 19 Feb voted to close base; U.S has 180 days to leave. Opposition critical of govt, claimed Kyrgyz credibility damaged. United Popular Movement opposition bloc 5 Feb announced spring anti-govt protests. Bakiyev 11 Feb announced will seek 2nd term at next elections, slated for July 2010, but possibly 2009. Parliament reportedly proposing legislation restricting internet freedom.

- ["Despite Kyrgyz vote to close U.S. base, Gates explores options to keep it open"](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 20 Feb. 2009.

- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°79, ["Kyrgyzstan: A Deceptive Calm"](#), 14 Aug. 2008.

➡ **Tajikistan** President Rakhmon 2 Feb appointed new interior minister, 1st top official not from Rakhmon's Kulob region since 1991. Observers cited attempt to bolster national unity in face of hostile rhetoric from Russia, Uzbekistan. During late-Feb Moscow visit, Rakhmon reportedly discussing Russian aid, troop presence, hydroelectric investment. U.S. ambassador 6 Feb reported Rakhmon to offer airspace for non-military supplies to Afghanistan; 23 Feb noted Rakhmon "broadly supportive" of resupply shipments through Tajikistan – no agreement yet. Rakhmon in Brussels 9-11 Feb for talks on EU, NATO cooperation including Afghan supply routes. Talco aluminium plant reducing production due to energy crisis; electricity in capital down to 9hrs/day, some regions have none. 19 Feb agreement with Uzbekistan established closer economic ties, debt repayment schedule, water-sharing agreement. IMF 18 Feb offered \$120m loan.

- Comment by Paul Quinn-Judge (Crisis Group), ["Tajikistan On the Pot-holed Road to Failed-State Status"](#), Transitions Online, 19 Feb. 2009
- ["Is Tashkent reaching out to Dushanbe?"](#), EurasiaNet, 26 Feb. 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°162, ["Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure"](#), 12 February 2009. Far from a bulwark against the spread of violence from Afghanistan, Tajikistan is looking increasingly like its southern neighbour – a weak state suffering from a failure of leadership. Its Soviet-era infrastructure is crumbling, it is largely without electricity and its leadership appears unable to confront major economic and social crises. The new U.S. administration clearly views Tajikistan as a possible participant in its plans to create a new supply line for Afghanistan. But Western security priorities will not be reliably served by an incompetent, venal state near collapse.



➡ **Turkmenistan** Czech PM Topolanek visited 13 Feb for talks with President Berdymukhammedov on cooperation, principally energy. President in Iran mid-month to discuss energy deals.

- ["EU puts energy hopes into Turkmenistan 'black hole'"](#), *EU Observer*, 6 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Head of U.S. Central Command Gen Petraeus visited mid-month for talks on Afghanistan supply routes; President Karimov 25 Feb confirmed agreement allowing transit of non-military goods through Uzbekistan. At 4 Feb Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) meeting in Moscow, Uzbekistan expressed reservations on delegation of military units to joint rapid-reaction force.

- ["CSTO summit: rapid deployment forces advance at a snail's pace"](#), EDM, 5 Feb. 2009.

### NORTH EAST ASIA

➡ **North Korea** Tense month following late-Jan announcement by Pyongyang voiding political and military agreements with South (ROK), invalidating western sea boundary, putting South military on high alert in Yellow Sea. Speculation rose concerning possible planned NK missile test; Pyongyang 25 Feb claimed launching "satellite" instead. ROK press 17

Feb reported NK operating small uranium enrichment plant west of Yongbyon. At start of inaugural trip abroad to Asia 15 Feb, U.S. State Sec. Clinton signalled "great openness" if NK denuclearises, readiness to help with food, energy assistance; but warned days later in Tokyo any missile test "unhelpful" for improving relations with U.S. NK leader Kim Jong-il told Chinese visitor NK still committed to 6-Party denuclearisation process; 6-Party working group met 19-20 Feb in Moscow on NE Asia peace and security mechanism, agreed peninsula should be denuclearised. Stephen Bosworth, former Seoul Ambassador, appointed U.S. special envoy to replace Christopher Hill; due to visit Six-Party capitals early Mar.

- "S. Korea's Lee urges N. Korea to resume talks", AP, 1 Mar. 2009.
- "N. Korean insists it will launch 'satellite'", Digital ChosunIlbo, 25 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°62, *After the North Korea Nuclear Breakthrough: Compliance or Confrontation?*, 30 Apr. 2007.

➡ **Taiwan Strait** Taipei mayor invited Shanghai mayor to "twin-city forum" in May to discuss increased cooperation between 2 cities. Directors of China and Taiwan's Palace Museums met 15 Feb to discuss staff exchanges; no agreements concerning name issue, exchange of collections but further discussions expected.

- "China, Taiwan explore cultural exchange", *Financial Times*, 15 Feb. 2009.

## SOUTH ASIA

➡ **Afghanistan** President Karzai 28 Feb decreed change to presidential polls date, to be held before 21 May end of his term. Move came just after Independent Election Commission had announced long-expected presidential election delay from May to August 2009. U.S. President Obama 17 Feb authorised increase in U.S. troop presence by roughly 50% with 17,000 new troops to be deployed by summer 2009. 8 gunmen, suicide bombers attacked Justice, Education ministries in Kabul 11 Feb with 3-hour gun battle, 20 killed. New U.S. Afghan-Pakistan envoy Richard Holbrooke met President Karzai on 14 Feb, announced Afghan participation in U.S. strategic review. UN 3 Feb reported 2,100 civilians killed in 2008, up 40%.

- "Afghan President moves up August elections", *New York Times*, 28 Feb. 2009.
- "UN says 2,100 civilians killed in Afghanistan in 2008", Reuters, 3 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°85, *Policing in Afghanistan: Still Searching for a Strategy*, 18 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Bangladesh** Members of paramilitary border patrol force Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) led violent mutiny at their Dhaka HQ 25 Feb, taking hostage some 130 senior military officials and killing over 70; many still missing as *CrisisWatch* went to press. Move came after BDR members blocked from presenting PM Hasina with pay and staffing demands, including removal of military officials from BDR posts. Mutiny spread to barracks across country even as some Dhaka BDR guards handed over weapons 26 Feb. Military 27 Feb reiterated support for govt as latter promised tribunals to fast-track mutiny cases, easing fears of coup. Parliamentary work stalled for 17 days as opposition BNP continued complaint over seating arrangements until 19 Feb. Cross-party committee 31 Jan said

would review all ordinances issued by caretaker govt (CTG). PM Hasina 4 Feb said Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to be re-organised to run "without political interference".

- "Soldiers rebel against officers at BDR HQ", *New Age*, 26 Feb. 2009.
- "PM wants ACC reconstituted", *Daily Star*, 5 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°84, *Bangladesh: Elections and Beyond*, 11 Dec 2008.

➡ **Kashmir** Pakistan made formal admission 12 Feb that Nov 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks planned in part on Pakistani soil, said 8 suspects identified, 6 in custody awaiting related prosecution. Welcoming move, India said more needed to be done. India charged surviving gunman on charges related to Nov Mumbai attacks, along with 35 Pakistanis including serving army officer, members of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba. Charges included waging war on India.

- "35 Lashkar men from Pakistan in charge sheet", *Hindu*, 26 Feb. 2009.
- "CIA helped India, Pakistan share secrets in probe of Mumbai siege", *Washington Post*, 16 Feb. 2009.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Indian police 25 Feb formally charged sole surviving gunman from Nov Mumbai attacks with murder and waging war against India (see Kashmir). 5 police dead in 2 Maoist attacks in Maharashtra, 1 Feb and Bihar, 10 Feb. 13 Special Operations Group personnel injured 16 Feb in Maoist landmine blast in south Orissa.

- "India police die in Maoist clash", BBC, 2 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Nepal** Army integration moved forward: PM Prachanda 12 Feb, in Maoist anniversary address, told troops they were now under AISC command, not Maoist. Army integration committee (AISC) 5 Feb authorised immediate release from cantonment of some 4,000 disqualified Maoist combatants. Army chief Gen. Katwal 23 Feb reiterated army will follow all "lawful" govt orders. Visiting U.S. Asst. State Sec. 12 Feb said Maoists will remain on U.S. terrorist exclusion list until they reject terrorism "in word and deed". PM's personal secretary 9 Feb injured in Kathmandu shooting. Controversial Maoist MP and Terai leader Matrika Yadav 11 Feb resigned from Constituent Assembly, re-established CPN (Maoist) party with other defectors, alleging Prachanda had betrayed revolution, neglected Terai plains.

- "PLA now under AISC, not Maoist party: PM Dahal", Myrepublica.com, 12 Feb. 2009.
- "Talk 'army integration' behind closed doors: Martin", Myrepublica.com, 2 Feb. 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°163, *Nepal's Faltering Peace Process*, 19 Feb



2009. Despite successful elections and a lasting ceasefire, Nepal's peace process is facing its most severe tests yet. The constitution-writing process is finally getting under way, but major parts of the peace deal remain unimplemented. Parties must face up to the need for reform and reconnect with voters. The international community must recognise the fragility of the process and stick with it. Allowing parts of the peace agreements to drift into abeyance will threaten the entire process.

➡ **Pakistan** Supreme Court 25 Feb barred opposition (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif and brother from holding office. Thousands of PML-N supporters protested in Lahore and Rawalpindi,

objecting to ruling they alleged was politicised: court ruling based on a “kidnapping” conviction handed to Sharif after he sought to block Musharraf’s 1999 coup. President Zardari ordered PPP provincial governor to administer Punjab, core of PML-N support, for 2 months, raising tensions further. In Swat valley, militants 24 Feb announced “indefinite ceasefire”; announcement came week after deal with govt to introduce sharia courts in area, but federal govt yet to finalise deal, which elicited significant concern from international partners. U.S. missile strikes in area continued amid apparent expansion targeting camps run by Maulana Fazlulah. 25 killed in S Waziristan missile strike 14 Feb. Geo TV journalist covering Swat peace deal shot dead 18 Feb. 25 killed in bomb attack on funeral procession in Dera Ismail Khan 20 Feb. After meetings with FM Qureshi and Afghan FM in Washington 24-26 Feb, U.S. State Sec. Clinton pledged regular trilateral meetings.

- “Obama expands missile strikes inside Pakistan”, *New York Times*, 20 Feb. 2009.
- “Islamic law instituted In Pakistan’s Swat valley”, *Washington Post*, 17 Feb. 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°160, *Reforming the Judiciary in Pakistan*, 16 Oct. 2008.

↙ **Sri Lanka** Govt ignored calls for humanitarian pause in fighting and rejected 23 Feb offer by LTTE for ceasefire without laying down arms. Conditions for some 200,000 civilians trapped by fighting grew desperate, as govt offensive met with stiff LTTE resistance. Medical facilities, supplies virtually non-existent, food and water critically low; attacks even in govt-declared safe zone. Human Rights Watch estimated 2,000 dead, 5,000 wounded since early Jan fall of Killinochchi. Despite Tiger efforts to block civilians from fleeing area of fighting, some 35,000 succeeded in reaching govt camps in Vavuniya. UN humanitarian chief John Holmes expressed concerns over camp conditions after govt-led tour 20 Feb, urged respect for humanitarian law by both sides. SL govt 12 Feb rejected naming of special envoy by UK, former defence minister Des Browne. 28 killed, 90 wounded in LTTE suicide bombing 9 Feb near Vishvamadu as civilians were being screened by military; 2 LTTE aircraft shot down in Colombo air raid 20 Feb, 1 crashing into tax office, killing 2. 21 Sinhala farmers shot dead in eastern village by LTTE gunmen.

- “Sri Lanka closes in on last rebel stronghold”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 Feb. 2009.
- “War on the displaced”, Human Rights Watch, 19 Feb. 2009.
- 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** Increasing pre-poll violence in Aceh: KPA-Bireuen secretary and Partai Aceh provincial legislature candidate shot dead at close range 3 Feb, 2 other KPA members shot dead 12 hours later, and 4th KPA member killed 19 Feb. Governor Yusuf welcomed role of foreign observers.

- “Two members of Aceh Transitional Committee shot by unknown gunman”, *Jakarta Post*, 4 Feb. 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°86, *Local Election Disputes in Indonesia: The Case of North Maluku*, 22 Jan. 2009.

↘ **Myanmar/Burma** NLD, after rare meeting between Suu Kyi and NLD central ctte 16 Feb, issued statement saying sanctions “not beneficial to the country or the people”. U.S. State Sec Clinton, in 17 Feb Jakarta visit, announced Washington reviewing Burma policy in light of inefficacy of sanctions. UN envoy Gambari briefed UNSC 20 Feb on his 7th visit to country, said “no tangible outcome”. Visit included meeting with detained NLD opposition leader Suu Kyi, who reportedly refused to drop preconditions for dialogue with govt. Govt 20 Feb announced release of some 6,000 political prisoners, including 19 political prisoners reportedly freed by govt 21 Feb. Moves followed 5-day visit to country by UN human rights envoy Tomás Quintana.

- “Myanmar’s Suu Kyi meets UN envoy, sticks to terms”, Reuters, 2 Feb. 2009.
- “UN is told of failings on Burma reform”, *Financial Times*, 20 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°161, *Burma/ Myanmar After Nargis: Time to Normalise Aid Relations*, 20 Oct. 2008.

↘ **Philippines** Sri Lankan member of Nonviolent Peaceforce staff kidnapped 13 Feb in Basilan, no group claimed responsibility.

- “MILF: Peace talks not resuming soon”, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 15 Feb. 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°88, *The Philippines: Running in Place in Mindanao*, 16 February 2009. The Philippines government and the MILF should focus on reaching a ceasefire in central Mindanao, especially as a broader settlement of the conflict seems out of reach before the end of the Arroyo administration. As it stands, the sides are too far apart, the potential spoilers too numerous, and the political will in Manila too weak to hope for a negotiated peace any time soon. A ceasefire would be an important achievement in humanitarian terms alone.



↘ **Thailand** Several attacks targeting security forces in South: 4 paramilitary rangers beheaded in 2 separate incidents; 3 bomb explosions targeting security forces killed 3, injured 9 others.

- “Two soldiers beheaded in Thai Muslim south”, Reuters, 20 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°82, *Thailand: Calming the Political Turmoil*, 22 Sept. 2008.

↘ **Timor-Leste** Following 19 Feb appeal by President Ramos-Horta during UNSC debate, UNSC 26 Feb renewed UNMIT mandate without major changes for 1 year, noting situation in Timor “although generally calm, remains fragile”.

- “UN peacekeepers to stay in East Timor”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 Feb. 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°87, *Timor-Leste: No Time for Complacency*, 9 February 2009. A year after President José Ramos-Horta was shot, security is markedly improved but at the cost of an army that is unreformed and increasingly unaccountable. There are worrying signs of disdain for the justice system and civilian control over the army. The government needs to reform the army and police, but they also need to tolerate dissent, be more transparent, and get a grip on corruption.





## BALKANS

➤ **Bosnia** State Investigation and Protection Agency filed report 17 Feb with state prosecutor alleging Republika Srpska (RS) PM Dodik and others implicated in embezzlement, fraud totaling €74m; Dodik claimed attempt to discredit RS. Dodik walked out of 21 Feb meeting between 3 main parties on constitutional reform after disagreement over RS status: wants RS right to secede, rejected by other parties. Brcko Supervisor Gregorian used authority to suspend Brcko District Assembly salaries until they appoint Mayor, Speaker, Deputy Speaker; appointments subsequently made within 5 days; High Representative (HR) Lajcak 20 Feb used Bonn powers to amend criminal code. Decision on new HR still pending. Main Bosniak parties said 13 Feb RS opening of representative office in Brussels unconstitutional. RS authorities ordered by local court 20 Feb to pay €33m to RS Islamic Community for wartime mosque destruction. New charges filed against Radovan Karadzic 18 Feb, including 2 counts of genocide instead of 1. Serbia 26 Feb filed arrest warrants against 19 Bosnians for suspected 1992 war crimes against Yugoslav troops.

- [“The Bosnian Interregnum and its consequences”](#), *EU Observer*, 3 Feb. 2009

➤ **Kosovo** 1st anniversary of independence 17 Feb passed off without incident; celebrations in Pristina, passing of anti-independence, anti-EULEX declaration by parallel Kosovo Serb assembly. EULEX 2 Feb re-established 2 customs points on border with Serbia, burned down following 2008 independence declaration, eliciting several hundred-strong protest 5 Feb; EULEX otherwise maintains low visibility in North. Pristina, Belgrade both ignored UNMIK invitation to technical talks on cultural heritage. Belgrade continued to press for implementation of “6-point plan”. Month saw several Serb protests against new Kosovo Security Force, including up to 3,000 protesting in Mitrovica 10 Feb. 15 Feb grenade blast in Mitrovica – no injuries. Serbian doctors reportedly leaving Kosovo jobs after Belgrade cut Kosovo salary supplement.

- [“A year in the life of Kosovo”](#), *Economist*, 12 Feb. 2009
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°196, [Kosovo’s Fragile Transition](#), 25 Sept. 2008.

➤ **Macedonia** Expectations low ahead of new round of UN-mediated name talks between Macedonia and Greece 11 Feb – 1st in 4 months. Both sides trading accusations prior: Greek FM said Skopje’s attitude provocative; Macedonian PM Gruevski said Greece broke 2003 Thessaloniki summit promise to help neighbours join EU. 11 Feb talks resulted in no new proposal, no discussion of “essential issues”; mediator Nimetz asked both sides to be positive. 6 candidates qualified to run for 22 March presidential election; ruling VMRO-DPMNE candidate ahead in polls.

- [“Macedonia faces challenges, pressure in 2009”](#), *Southeast European Times*, 9 Feb. 2009.
- For background, please see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°52, [Macedonia’s Name: Breaking the Deadlock](#), 12 Jan. 2009.

➤ **Serbia** President Tadic 3 Feb said ready to discuss practical issues concerning Kosovo with UN, but not status and not with Pristina govt. Tadic and FM Jeremic pressed for implementation of “6-point plan” across Kosovo at respective meetings with UNMIK chief Zannier and UNSG Ban. ICTY 11 Feb suspended indefinitely trial of ex-Serb Radical leader Seselj over witness safety concerns. 5 senior officials found guilty by UN War Crimes Tribunal 26 Feb on charges related to Kosovo conflict; ex-President Milutinovic acquitted. 2 grenade blasts in Presevo mid-Feb caused no injuries.

- [“Serbia to talk about Kosovo, not with Kosovo”](#), *BalkanInsight*, 3 Feb. 2009

## CAUCASUS

➤ **Armenia** Umbrella opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK) 9 Feb announced resumption of protests, suspended Oct by opposition leader Ter-Petrosian. 1st rally took place on 1 Mar anniversary of 2008 post-election violence, despite official ban; thousands participated, demanding early elections. Trial of 7 opposition members accused of instigating violence adjourned again. Deputy police chief shot dead 3 Feb outside Yerevan home. Following late-Jan Davos meeting between President Sarkisian and Turkish PM Erdogan, Sarkisian and FM met with Turkish FM Babacan 7 Feb in Munich for talks on normalising relations.

- [“Armenian protesters mark year since deadly riots”](#), *Reuters*, 1 Mar. 2009.

- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N° 48, [Armenia: Picking up the Pieces](#), 8 Apr. 2008.

➤ **Azerbaijan** 18 March national referendum campaign to abolish 2-term limit on presidency began 18 Feb. Baku expressed concern over Russian intentions in Caucasus following 4 Feb Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) decision to set up joint rapid reaction force, and 13 Feb CSTO Sec General statement on Russian, Armenian plans for integrated air defence network. 11 Feb murder of Air force chief prompted fears of internal instability. Turkish FM Babacan in Baku 9 Feb to discuss Turkish-Armenian rapprochement with President Aliyev. News website day.az closed down 19 Feb, reportedly by authorities, later resumed under new ownership, editor.

- [“Shooting kills head of Azeri airforce”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 11 Feb. 2009.

- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°50, [Azerbaijan: Defence Sector Management and Reform](#), 29 Oct. 2008.

➤ **Chechnya** 1 interior ministry officer killed in 9 Feb battle with militants in southeast Vedeno district. Former Grozny deputy major Gilani Shepiyev shot dead 5 Feb in Moscow – 3rd high-profile émigré shot since Sept. Gunman 23 Feb killed 2 police in Urus Maran. Govt reopened kidnap investigation into Russian Colonel Badanov, jailed for 2000 murder of Chechen girl, and whose Jan release provoked outrage in Chechnya. Austrian prosecutors 10 Feb announced investigation of President Kadyrov following complaint from former rebel Israilov, murdered in Vienna Jan; Polish police 22 Feb arrested Chechen for suspected involvement in murder. Another former militant shot dead 27 Feb in Istanbul. Exiled former separatist govt FM, resistance commander Zakayev, rumoured to be setting up armed units, directing attacks in Chechnya and

wanted in Russia for alleged war crimes, said will not return to Chechnya despite invitation to take up govt post.

- [“Economic crisis threatens Kremlin control of North Caucasus”](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.

➡ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Several hundred protested new Moscow-appointed head of Dagestan Federal Tax Service (FNS) office outside Dagestan FNS building 2, 9 Feb. Media cited Moscow attempt to weaken heads of regions; appointee left region 13 Feb. Ongoing clashes included 3 militants killed 5 Feb by security forces near Makhachkala, including newly-appointed Sharia Jamaat leader Emir Muaz; 5, including local official, shot dead 2 Feb in Dagestan; 7 suspected rebels shot dead 11 Feb by police in Kabardino-Balkaria; 4 police, 3 suspected rebels killed 12 Feb by explosion in Nazran; 1 militant killed during 20 Feb operation in Dagestan; senior aide to Ingush chief prosecutor shot dead 24 Feb. Lawyer of murdered opposition website owner Yevloyev’s family mid-Feb cited new evidence Yevloyev’s arrest warrant post-dated death in police custody.

- [“Dagestan’s Sharia Jamaat suffers series of setbacks”](#), *North Caucasus Weekly*, 12 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°192, [Russia’s Dagestan: Conflict Causes](#), 3 June 2008.

➡ **Georgia** Some progress on security arrangements for Abkhazia, South Ossetia (SO): OSCE 12 Feb extended 20-strong unarmed military monitoring mission operating near SO to 30 June – though Russia continues to block extension of OSCE Mission to Georgia, ended Dec. UNSC 13 Feb extended UN Observer Mission in Georgia to 15 June; and in Geneva talks Russia, Georgia 18 Feb agreed on mechanism to prevent SO security incidents, including weekly meetings. SO 9 Feb claimed 2 unexploded Georgian shells landed in Tshkhinvali - Tbilisi denied; 2 OSCE monitors briefly detained in SO 10 Feb. EU monitors reported 40 ethnic Georgians temporarily expelled from their Abkhaz village 26 Feb; Abkhazia denied. Georgia 18 Feb said will send troops to join NATO-led Afghanistan forces. Reports emerging that Russia planning 3 military bases in Abkhazia. Govt troubles continued: Former UN envoy Alasania 24 Feb announced creation of Alliance for Georgia with Republican, New Rightist parties; called for referendum on early election. Finance minister Gilauri appointed PM, following 31 Jan resignation of PM Mgalobashvili. Independent Abkhaz newspaper editor accosted 6 Feb by 3 men, 1 allegedly related to Abkhaz leader; told to stop criticizing leadership. 2 ethnic Armenians arrested Jan still being held on espionage charges.

- [“OSCE stalemated on future of Georgian mission”](#), EurasiaNet, 23 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°51, [Georgia: The Risks of Winter](#), 26 Nov. 2008.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** OSCE 5 Feb optimistic on possibility of resolution of conflict in 2009. Azeri President Aliyev 14 Feb said NK status could be determined only after Armenian withdrawal from 7 occupied districts. 2 Azeri soldiers killed by landmine 20 Feb, another killed in 21-22 Feb ceasefire violations.

- [“OSCE envoy sees ‘good possibility’ for Karabakh peace”](#), Armenia Liberty, 6 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, [Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War](#), 14 Nov. 2007.

## EASTERN EUROPE

➡ **Belarus** Govt 3 Feb signed joint regional air defence system treaty with Russia. After 4 Feb Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) agreement on joint rapid reaction force, Belarus 10 Feb said will not provide combat troops for cooperative security actions. Following 19 Feb visit by EU foreign policy head Solana and 23 Feb EU FM meeting on European Neighborhood Policy, debate over whether Belarus should be included in EU’s proposed Eastern Partnership. Polish Deputy PM visited Minsk 23 Feb. Unauthorized annual Youth Front pro-EU Valentines Day March broken up violently by police.

- [“EU foreign ministers discuss Eastern Partnership”](#), RFE/RL, 23 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Moldova** Parliament voted to hold election 5 Apr. Deputy PM 10 Feb said Russian troops should leave Transdniestria, both countries expect OSCE-led ‘5+2’ negotiations to resume 2009. Russian FM in late-month visit ahead of anticipated March 3-way meeting with Transdniestria leader.

- [“Russia tries to lure Moldova into new Transdniestria format”](#), RFE/RL, 27 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Ukraine** PM Tymoshenko 5 Feb survived no-confidence vote as fiscal, economic problems increasingly apparent. Finance minister resigned 12 Feb over disagreements with PM; country credit ratings downgraded. With IMF disbursements in question after 2009 budget deficit violated loan agreement, govt sent letters to Russia, U.S., others requesting emergency loans. Around 1,000 protested in Sevastopol 21 Feb demanding extraordinary elections. Govt 17 Feb threatened to expel Russian ambassador for anti-govt statements. ICJ 3 Feb ruled on Black Sea islet disputed by Ukraine, Romania, awarding Romania biggest share.

- [“Ukraine’s leaders bicker as economy burns”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 Feb. 2009.

## WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

➡ **Basque Country (Spain)** 9 Feb ETA bomb blast thought to have targeted Ferrovial, construction firm building Madrid-Basque rail link opposed by ETA. No casualties in what was 1st ETA Madrid attack since Dec 2006. Small explosion 23 Feb outside ruling Socialist Party local HQ in Lazkao, following ETA phone warning, also caused no injuries. Supreme Court 8 Feb banned Askatasuna and Democracy 3 Million (D3M) parties from participating in 1 March regional elections due to “ETA links”; 14 Feb protests in Bilbao in response to ruling saw 5 arrests. ETA 27 Feb called elections “anti-democratic”, urged supporters to return blank ballots. ETA suspect arrested 1 March in Billabona prior to regional poll, believed to be planning imminent bomb attack.

- [“Car bomb explodes at trade fair center in Spain”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 9 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Cyprus** Peace talks between Greek Cypriot President Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat continued with meetings on property issues; 25 Feb meeting was 20th since fresh talks began Sept 2008. UN envoy Downer 16 Feb underscored commitment of both to finding solution, warned process may be slow. EU Enlargement Commissioner Rehn on 13 Feb visit offered legal, technical assistance to help identify solution. U.S. Senator Durbin, visiting Nicosia, Athens, Ankara

17 Feb, said he senses progress. Christofias 5 Feb said Turkey cannot join EU until it removes troops from N Cyprus.

- ["Rehn: Unique chance to reunify Cyprus in 2009"](#), AP, 13 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°194, [Reunifying Cyprus: The Best Chance Yet](#), 23 June. 2008.

➡ **Turkey** Kurdish protesters mid-Feb clashed with police in Istanbul, several south-eastern Kurdish cities after attempted dispersal of demonstrations marking 10th anniversary of arrest of PKK leader Ocalan – 86 detained in Diyarbakir. Pro-Kurdish DTP head Ahmet Turk sparked row with illegal use of Kurdish in 24 Feb speech to parliament. DTP MP Aysel Tugluk sentenced to 18 months 5 Feb for spreading PKK propaganda. 22 arrested in Istanbul 18 Feb for belonging to Hezbollah terrorist organisation (unconnected to Shiite Lebanese group). Military sources reported air raids on PKK positions in N Iraq 6 Feb; claimed 13 militants killed 13 Feb.

- ["Turkish politician defies law with Kurdish speech"](#), AP, 25 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°197, [Turkey and Europe: The Decisive Year Ahead](#), 15 Dec. 2008.



## Latin America / Caribbean

➡ **Bolivia** New constitution officially enacted 7 Feb; President Morales announced new cabinet, number of ministers increased from 17 to 20. Morales 1 Feb dismissed head of state oil and gas company and close ally Santos Ramírez after he was accused of corruption.

- ["La sombra de la corrupción planea en Bolivia"](#), *El País*, 12 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°18, [Bolivia: Rescuing the New Constitution and Democratic Stability](#), 19 June 2008.

➡ **Colombia** FARC rebels unilaterally released 2 hostages on 3, 5 Feb, both ex-politicians; in addition to 4 hostages released 1 Feb. FARC expressed hope that "gesture" would open hostages-for-prisoners swaps with govt; President Uribe 12 Feb rejected, ordered army to increase military hostage rescue efforts. Rebels still hold 22 hostages for possible swap, and estimated 700 for extortion purposes. Wave of suspected FARC attacks continued: 6 soldiers killed in Bolívar department 9 Feb; 3 soldiers, 4 civilians in Norte de Santander department 12 Feb; 2 civilians in 1 Feb Cali blast. FARC further accused of killing 27 Awa indigenous people in 2 separate Feb massacres; rebels 17 Feb admitted killing 8. Army in 28 Feb Cundinamarca department clash killed 10 FARC rebels, captured 8, including influential leader "El Negro Antonio". Attorney general and public prosecutor 22 Feb ordered investigation of DAS (secret police) following allegations of wiretapping of journalists, opposition members; Uribe 26 Feb cancelled all DAS wiretapping.

- ["Death in the Indian reservation"](#), *Semana*, 20 Feb. 2009.
- ["Colombia's Uribe hardens line on freeing hostages"](#), Reuters, 13 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Ecuador** Govt 7, 18 Feb expelled 2 U.S. embassy officials, President Correa said for conditioning aid on right to veto govt

personnel choices. Ex-govt advisor Ignacio Chauvin arrested 4 Feb, suspected of drug trafficking and meeting ex-FARC Number 2 Raúl Reyes on Ecuadorian territory.

- ["Ecuador expels US Embassy official for 'meddling'"](#), AP, 18 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Guadeloupe (France)** Demonstrations over rising cost of living turned violent as protesters clashed with police. 1 civilian killed in Pointe-à-Pitre 17 Feb; rioters shot at police in following nights. Unrest stemmed from general strike called by trade unions Jan demanding minimum wage increase. Situation largely calmed after France 18 Feb sent 4 military police units, President Sarkozy 19 Feb announced \$730m aid package. Union leaders 27 Feb agreed deal with govt on raised minimum wage; 28 Feb said talks over lowering food, energy prices "going well", strike could end "soon".

- ["Guadeloupe union: Talks smooth, strike could end"](#), AP, 28 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Haiti** Provisional electoral council (CEP) early month rejected all candidacies of Fanmi Lavalas, party of ex-president Aristide, for Apr senate elections. CEP said for "legal reasons"; but raised concerns over fairness, inclusiveness of elections. Candidacy of ex-rebel leader Guy Philippe also rejected. IMF 13 Feb increased Haiti loan by US\$36.6mn; Apr donors conference to be held in Washington.

- ["Haiti's biggest party banned from Senate race"](#), Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Latin America/Caribbean Report N°28, [Reforming Haiti's Security Sector](#), 18 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Venezuela** Proposal to remove term limits for all elected officials, including president, approved in 15 Feb referendum with 54% of vote; high 67% turnout. International observers said elections free and fair, but opposition criticised unfair access to media and opposition leader Manuel Rosales 17 Feb accused govt of "repression and violence" during campaign. President Chávez in victory speech said will run for 2012 re-election, hinted will focus on crime rate and inefficient bureaucracy over coming months. Chávez 1 March ordered army to take control of all private rice processing plants, accused of selling at inflated prices.

- ["Hugo Chávez: tides of victory"](#), openDemocracy, 20 Feb. 2009.
- ["Chávez looks beyond 2013 as he faces serious challenges"](#), *New York Times*, 16 Feb. 2009.
- 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** Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu asked to form govt by President Peres 20 Feb after securing support from far right Yisrael Beitenu party. Netanyahu expected to form coalition with right-wing parties after failure to reach agreement with centrist Kadima. In 10 Feb elections Likud won 27 seats, Kadima 28, Labour 4th behind Yisrael Beitenu. Gaza saw continuing sporadic rocket fire into Israel, Israeli air strikes in response. Hamas, Fatah agreed to

work on forming Palestinian unity govt, release of detainees, at reconciliation meeting in Cairo 26 Feb. Outgoing Israeli PM Olmert's call for release of captured soldier Gilad Shalit to precede Gaza ceasefire agreement endorsed by cabinet 18 Feb; Egypt and Hamas rejected link between release and ceasefire. Israeli authorities early-Feb earmarked West Bank land for expansion of Efrat settlement. Jerusalem municipality 24 Feb confirmed plan to demolish buildings housing up to 1,500 Palestinians.

- "Palestinian rivals talk peace in Egypt", *International Herald Tribune*, 27 Feb. 2009.
- "Coalition poker", *Economist*, 20 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°26, *Ending the War in Gaza*, 5 Jan. 2009.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°84, *Nurturing Instability: Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps*, 19 Feb. 2009. Filled with hundreds of thousands of marginalised and heavily armed Palestinians deprived of basic political rights, Lebanon's refugee camps are a time bomb that needs urgent attention. The problem is compounded by regional and domestic faultlines between Lebanese parties; Palestinians and Israel; Palestinian parties; and Arab states. Lebanon must clarify the refugees' status and improve camp conditions, and both Palestinians and Lebanese should review the approach to camp security.

➡ **Lebanon** Rocket fired from S Lebanon hit Israel 21 Feb injuring 3; responsibility unclear. Israel responded immediately with artillery fire. PM Siniora denounced rocket attack and Israeli response. Huge rally 14 Feb by March 14 alliance for 4th anniversary of former PM Hariri's assassination; one demonstrator killed in clashes with rival party supporters. At large Hizbollah rally 16 Feb commemorating Israel's 2008 assassination of military leader Mughniyeh, Hassan Nasrallah refused to confirm or deny possession of air defence weapons, said Hizbollah has right to use them. Interior minister 11 Feb granted Lebanese citizens right to have sectarian affiliation removed from official documents.

- "Najjar: Hizbollah not responsible for rocket attacks", *Daily Star*, 23 Feb. 2009.
- "Divided we stand", *Al-Ahram Weekly Online*, 19 Feb. 2009.

Crisis Group Middle East Report N°83, *Engaging Syria? U.S. Constraints and Opportunities*, 11 Feb. 2009. Constrained by the legacy of a troubled relationship, the Obama administration's first steps will be crucial if the new Syria policy it is preparing is to restore mutual trust without compromising core principles. To build a more fruitful relationship, the Obama administration should consider articulating clear guiding principles, nominate an ambassador and rethink sanctions on the basis of clear policy objectives.

➡ **Syria** President Bashar al-Assad met with U.S. congressional delegations in Damascus 18, 21 Feb, including John Kerry, Senate Foreign Relations Committee head; Kerry said Syria could help achieve Palestinian unity govt. EU external relations commissioner Ferrero-Waldner also met with Assad 16 Feb. Syrian ambassador to U.S. in high-level State Dept meetings 26 Feb. IAEA 19 Feb reported finding new traces of uranium in samples collected from alleged nuclear weapons site Al Kibar in June.

- "Syria, US explore improving ties as Kerry visits", AP, 22 Feb. 2009.

## GULF

➡ **Bahrain** Trial of 35 accused of plot to overthrow state, including leading Shiite rights activists, began 23 Feb. Shiites demonstrated in Manama 20 Dec to call for activists' release. Police patrol attacked with firebombs by mob in Shiite village 27 Feb.

- "Protests in Bahrain over jailed Shiite activists", AP, 20 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Iran** IAEA report 19 Feb stated Iran enriched more uranium than previously disclosed. IAEA officials clarified that discrepancy due to faulty estimates, not concealment; material still requires further enrichment to be used for bomb. IAEA head ElBaradei 17 Feb said Iran had slowed down centrifuge expansion for "political" reasons. Western leaders at Munich security summit 7 Feb expressed readiness to engage with Iran but also to toughen sanctions if no progress achieved. Former president Khatami 9 Feb confirmed candidacy in June presidential elections. Interior Minister Mahsouli in Bahrain 23 Feb affirmed respect for country's sovereignty after Gulf states' outrage at senior official's comments recalling historic Iranian claims; Bahraini FM declared "good relations" in Tehran 27 Feb. 7 Baha'is tried for alleged espionage. Dozens arrested after 23 Feb student protest in Amir Kabir University. Iran launched first space satellite 2 Feb.

- "Iran presidential campaigns off to early start", *Los Angeles Times*, 25 Feb. 2009.
- "Iran cooperation poor, but slows nuclear growth: IAEA", Reuters, 17 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°51, *Iran: Is There a Way Out of the Nuclear Impasse?*, 23 Feb. 2006.

➡ **Iraq** 31 Jan provincial elections saw major gains for PM Nouri al-Maliki's coalition in Basra, Baghdad. Shiite Supreme Islamic Council, Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) lost ground, while Sunni Arab nationalist Hadba party defeated Kurdish rivals in northern Ninewa province. President Obama 27 Feb set out plan to withdraw bulk of U.S. combat troops by Aug 2010; up to 50,000 troops to remain for limited missions until end 2011. Attacks targeted Shiite pilgrims heading to Karbala for Arbain ceremonies – at least 35 killed in 13 Feb suicide bombing; over 20 pilgrims killed in preceding, following days. Numerous attacks during month around Mosul killing police, civilians, U.S. troops. Suicide bombing in Khanaqin 5 Feb killed 15. Iraqi and U.S. military 20 Feb launched joint operation against al-Qaeda in Mosul area, arresting at least 80. Deadlock between Sunni parties over election of parliament speaker continued after IIP candidate failed to win vote by narrow margin. Turkish military 6 Feb reported air raids on PKK bases in north; Kurdistan region president Barzani met Turkish envoy 19 Feb as relations improved.

- Comment by Joost Hiltermann (Crisis Group), "Iraq's Elections: Winners, Losers, and What's Next", openDemocracy, 10 Feb. 2009.
- "Party of prime minister wins in Iraq elections", *International Herald Tribune*, 6 Feb. 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°82, *Iraq's Provincial Elections: The Stakes*, 27 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Saudi Arabia** Shiite pilgrims alleging harassment by religious police clashed with authorities in Medina; protest

spread to Shiite towns in Eastern Province 24 Feb.  
 ▪ [“Rare Shiite protests in Sunni-led Saudi Arabia”](#), AP, 25 Feb. 2009.

➤ **Yemen** Ruling and opposition parties 19 Feb agreed on postponing disputed parliamentary elections for 2 years, electoral and constitutional reforms. Authorities early month announced intensified military operations against al-Qaeda in Marib, Shabwa, Hadramawt regions. President Saleh 3 Feb called on tribal leaders from these areas to cooperate against terrorism. Security officials 8 Feb announced plan to release 176 detainees linked to al-Qaeda. Officials reported several alleged al-Qaeda militants arrested during month.  
 ▪ [“Elections postponed”](#), *Yemen Times*, 25 Feb. 2009.

## NORTH AFRICA

➤ **Algeria** 9 security guards working for state gas company in Jijel area killed in 23 Feb attack claimed by al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). 7 civilians killed in 2 bomb attacks 12 Feb in Tebessa, east of Algiers. Earlier same day President Bouteflika formally announced intention to run for controversial 3rd term in Apr elections. 7 soldiers killed 15 Feb in Tebessa and Boumerdes; security forces reported killing 6 militants. Former AQIM leader Hassan Hattab 9 Feb renewed Jan call to militants to lay down arms on Al Jazeera channel. Authorities 1 Feb reported AQIM leader surrendered, another killed 5 Feb; several militants killed or arrested in operations in Tizi Ouzou region earlier in month.  
 ▪ [“Roadside bombs kill 7 in Algeria”](#), AP, 13 Feb. 2009.  
 ▪ [“Algeria’s Bouteflika formally announces presidential run”](#), *Magharebia*, 13 Feb. 2009.

➤ **Egypt** Bomb attack in historic Cairo area 22 Feb killed 1 tourist, injured at least 20; authorities held 3, blamed isolated

Islamist cell. Ayman Nour, opposition challenger to President Mubarak in 2005 election, released 18 Feb after 3 years in prison. At least 40 members of Muslim Brotherhood detained during Cairo rally in solidarity with Gaza Palestinians 6 Feb. Border with Gaza re-sealed 5 Feb; Hamas official prevented from entering with over US \$9m cash. Border guard killed by suspected human traffickers at Gaza border 6 Feb.

▪ [“Eleven arrested after Cairo market bombing”](#), *Guardian*, 23 Feb. 2009.

➤ **Morocco** Communications Minister Khaled Naciri 25 Feb repeated King Mohamed VI’s Jan call for Algeria to lift 15-year border closure, promised to address Algerian concerns on security cooperation.

▪ [“Morocco seeks open border dialogue with Algeria”](#), *Magharebia*, 25 Feb. 2009.

➤ **Mauritania** AU 5 Feb imposed sanctions on members of ruling military junta. Libyan mediators visited military leader Gen Abdelaziz 11 Feb, deposed president Abdallahi 12 Feb. PM Laghdaf 18 Feb presented plan for democratic transition to European Commission in Brussels. Opposition coalition held rally 19 Feb after junta lifted ban on demonstrations. Regional states, OIC, AU, Arab League discussed Mauritania crisis at Paris conference 20 Feb.

▪ [“Sanctions put on Mauritania junta”](#), BBC, 6 Feb. 2009.

➤ **Western Sahara** New UN envoy Christopher Ross met with Moroccan, Algerian and Polisario Front leaders during 18-25 Feb tour of region; affirmed commitment to Sahrawi right of self-determination, called for mutually acceptable political solution to conflict.

▪ [“UN envoy commits to Saharawi self-determination”](#), AP, 22 Feb. 2009.

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President William J. Clinton, 5 March 2007

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