

1 April 2009, N°68

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.

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March 2009 Trends



Deteriorated Situations

Central African Republic (p.2)
Guinea-Bissau (p.4)
Kenya (p.2)
Madagascar (p.3)
North Korea (p.5)
Northern Ireland (p.9)
Sierra Leone (p.4)
Sri Lanka (p.6)
Sudan (p.3)



Improved Situations

Burundi (p.2)
Guadeloupe (France) (p.10)



Unchanged Situations

Afghanistan (p.5), Algeria (p.12), Armenia (p.8), Azerbaijan (p.8), Bahrain (p.11), Bangladesh (p.6), Basque Country (Spain) (p.9), Belarus (p.9), Bolivia (p.10), Bosnia (p.7), Cameroon (p.3), Chad (p.2), Chechnya (Russia) (p.8), Colombia (p.10), Côte d'Ivoire (p.4), Cyprus (p.9), Democratic Republic of Congo (p.2), Ecuador (p.10), Egypt (p.12), Ethiopia (p.2), Georgia (p.8), Guinea (p.4), Haiti (p.10), India (non-Kashmir) (p.6), Indonesia (p.7), Iran (p.11), Iraq (p.11), Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories (p.11), Kashmir (p.6), Kazakhstan (p.4), Kosovo (p.8), Kyrgyzstan (p.5), Lebanon (p.11), Liberia (p.4), Macedonia (p.8), Mali (p.4), Mauritania (p.12), Moldova (p.9), Morocco (p.12), Myanmar/Burma (p.7), Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) (p.9), Nepal (p.6), Niger (p.4), Nigeria (p.4), North Caucasus (non-Chechnya) (p.8), Pakistan (p.6), Philippines (p.7), Rwanda (p.2), Serbia (p.8), Somalia (p.3), Syria (p.11), Taiwan Strait (p.5), Tajikistan (p.5), Thailand (p.7), Timor-Leste (p.7), Turkey (p.10), Turkmenistan (p.5), Uganda (p.2), Ukraine (p.9), Uzbekistan (p.5), Venezuela (p.10), Western Sahara (p.12), Yemen (p.11), Zimbabwe (p.3)

April 2009 Watchlist



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CENTRAL AFRICA

➡ **Burundi** Tentative positive developments over month. President Nkurunziza in 3, 13 March decrees created new electoral commission following some controversy over membership; opposition, govt MPs expressed support for new commission members. Some 3,000 of a reported 21,000 FNL fighters assembled at Rubira 16 March to begin long-delayed FNL demobilisation. Interior Minister 18 March announced FNL's transition to political party contingent on effective separation of political and military branches; also warned political parties against "illegal" meetings ahead of 2010 elections. Leader of opposition MSD party Alexis Sinduhije and head of Net Press freed from jail.

- "Burundi ex-rebels start to disarm", BBC, 17 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°53, *Burundi: Restarting Political Dialogue*, 19 Aug. 2008.

➡ **Central African Republic** Fears for deterioration in security as Dec National Dialogue agreement continued to unravel. Rebel FDPC elements infiltrated Bangui, prompting deployment of French troops in capital from 1 March; rebel MLCJ 3 March announced it had taken up arms; almost 200 FDPC, APRD combatants left Bouar DDR site 2 March. CPJP called for dissolution of Jan 2008 govt, accused govt forces of 20 March attack on troops in north. At 7 March meeting, Libyan leader Qaddafi, in apparent sign of support for rebels' growing frustration, handed Bozizé letter from UFR, MLCJ, FDPC demanding adherence to Dialogue recommendations. Clashes between govt forces, rebel and vigilante groups continued in northwest; UN reported 28,000 displaced since fighting intensified across north in Jan. UN force MINURCAT for CAR/Chad took over EUFOR responsibilities 15 March (with bulk of forces in Chad). CPJP spokesperson 9 March warned fighting could resume post-handover.

- "Les rebelles centrafricains reprennent les armes", AFP, 3 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°55, *Central African Republic: Untangling the Political Dialogue*, 9 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Chad** Spokesperson for new rebel coalition UFR 23 March condemned ICC arrest warrant for Sudanese President Bashir and formation of new Chadian centralised military command, stoking fears of resurgence in attacks. Fresh reports Darfur-based rebel group JEM re-supplying in Chadian camps along Sudanese border. Interior Minister Bachir shot and wounded 6 March, reportedly by civil servant; no motive given. Official handover ceremony from EUFOR to UN MINURCAT for eastern Chad/CAR held 15 March: 3,000 troops deployed of an authorised 5,200, to be supported by 2,000 EU troops remaining until end 2009.

- "U.N. takes over Chad force amid growing Darfur fears", Reuters, 15 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°144, *Chad: A New Conflict Resolution Framework*, 24 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Democratic Republic of Congo** In N Kivu: rebel FDLR attacks on civilians increased and 30,000 were newly

displaced as rebels reoccupied several positions vacated following completion of joint Rwandan-DRC operation and clashed with armed forces. Peace deal between Kinshasa and ex-rebel CNDP signed 23 March on CNDP's transformation into political party, integration of troops. Leader of parliament Vital Kamerhe resigned 25 March following dispute with ruling PPRD party over authorisation of N Kivu joint operation. TV stations banned from covering 16 March boycott by several MPs of National Assembly opening session, 3 activists briefly detained amid fears over state repression. UNSC, UK, Belgium, France imposed new or extended targeted sanctions on 5 senior FDLR leaders early month. Withdrawal of Ugandan troops from northeast began 16 March. 12 villagers killed, 40 others kidnapped 19 March in further attacks by suspected LRA rebels around Dungu.

- "Congolese flee new Hutu attacks", BBC, 20 March 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** DRC-Rwandan FMs met in Kinshasa 27-28 March for talks on future of bilateral relations; called for meetings at head of state level and between justice ministers to resolve "complexities" surrounding extradition from Rwanda of former leader of ex-rebel CNDP, Nkunda. Minister for state protocol Rose Kabuye returned to Paris for pre-trial hearings regarding accusations of involvement in Rwandan genocide. Joseph Mpambara sentenced in Dutch court 23 March for torture during 1994 genocide.

- "Delays in rebel leader's case", *New York Times*, 11 March 2009.

➡ **Uganda** Kampala, seeking to document military successes ahead 16 March withdrawal from DRC, claimed several LRA captured, including 4th in command, and another killed in S Sudan; no independent verification. Ugandan and DRC presidents met at border town 4 March, agreeing to increase security and energy cooperation. UN envoy Chissano held talks with MPs to garner support for restarting stalled dialogue with LRA command. African Peer Review Mechanism 23 March stressed that graft, dominance of executive threaten Uganda's democratic gains.

- "Ugandan troops begin Congo pull-out – military", Reuters, 16 March 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** Opposition UDJ party accused govt of seeking to weaken opposition ahead of 2010 elections; chair Birtukan Mideksa still under arrest. Ogaden independence group ONFL claimed 70 govt troops killed and key Ogaden town Mustahil captured following fighting from 4 March; govt initially denied, later said key ONFL leaders captured during fighting. PM Meles held talks 14 March with heads of Puntland, Somaliland on cooperation against Ogaden rebels.

- "Ethiopia ONLF rebels 'seize town'", BBC, 9 March 2009.

➡ **Kenya** 2 prominent activists documenting police violence, Oscar Kamau King'ara and Paul Oulu, murdered 5 March, sparking protests amid widespread accusations of police responsibility. Followed information-sharing meeting between the 2 men and UN rapporteur Philip Alston ahead of Alston's

25 Feb report on police violence; 15 activists have since fled or in hiding. U.S. FBI offered to support investigation. Hundreds rallied in Nairobi demanding resignation of police commissioner: 1 killed, 3 police later arrested over death. Events added to mounting tensions in coalition govt over response to Alston report, risk of ICC trials for post-election violence suspects, PNU dominance in govt. ODM faction 3 March called on PM Odinga to renegotiate power-sharing accord. Kofi Annan arrived 11 March in effort to restart inter-party talks, 31 March at Kenya conference in Geneva stressed growing frustration at pace of reforms.

- [“Outrage at killing of Kenya rights activists”](#), Reuters, 6 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°137, [Kenya in Crisis](#), 21 Feb. 2008.

➡ **Somalia** President Sharif on inaugural tour mid-month to 4 regional states, reportedly securing assistance in govt, military capacity building. Cabinet 10 March endorsed Sharif’s call for installation of Sharia Law; now passes to parliament. Sharp upsurge in tensions between al-Shabaab and pro-govt Islamic group Ahlu Sunna Waljamaca; 11 killed in fierce fighting from 15 March as latter took control of Wabho, north of Mogadishu; 6 more killed in central Bay region late month. Interior Minister wounded, guard killed in 26 March bombing attack and 8 killed in fighting between police and al-Shabaab 30 March, as violence continued in Mogadishu. Al-Qaeda 20 March urged Somalis to rise against “apostate” Sharif govt. Govt 20 March formally called on UNSC to deploy peacekeepers, raising tensions in Mogadishu and amid signs of intra-govt divisions. AMISOM bolstered by 3rd Ugandan battalion late month; fears of corresponding surge in al-Shabaab attacks fuelled by reports group increasing arms imports. Several piracy attacks over month but levels still down since 2008.

- [“Somali President courts insurgents”](#), *Washington Post*, 12 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°147, [Somalia: To Move Beyond the Failed State](#), 23 Dec. 2008.

➡ **Sudan** Khartoum in response to 4 March decision by ICC pre-trial chamber to issue arrest warrant for President Bashir, for crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur (excl. genocide), expelled 13 international aid groups (along with 3 national groups); UN warned of rapid deterioration in conditions and security within Darfur IDP camps. Reports indictment causing tensions at senior level of Bashir’s National Congress Party. Govt moved to rally public support for president, while Bashir undertook defiant visits to Eritrea, Egypt, Qatar late month (none party to ICC). Pro-ICC sentiment brutally repressed: university protests in Delinj (S Kordofan) and Khartoum met with open fire, beatings, arrests. PNC opposition leader Al-Turabi released 9 March from 2-month detention. JEM 20 March suspended participation in Qatar peace talks until humanitarian ban lifted. UNSC meetings 6, 20 March failed to adopt resolution on response to ICC; Arab League and Africa Union (AU) urged UNSC to authorise deferral. AU late month announced conference for June to discuss indictment and members’ possible withdrawal from ICC. Rtrd General Scott Gration appointed new U.S. Sudan envoy.

- Comments by Fouad Hikmat (Crisis Group), [“Hard Road to Peace after ICC Indicts Bashir”](#), *East African*, 6 March 2009.
- [“Warning as humanitarian crisis deepens in Darfur”](#), *Guardian*, 24 March 2009.

- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°145, [Sudan’s Southern Kordofan Problem: The Next Darfur?](#), 21 Oct. 2008.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

➡ **Madagascar** President Ravalomanana 17 March handed power to military, which installed opposition rival Rajoelina as new president, after dissident troops allied to Rajoelina replaced military head and seized the (unoccupied) presidential palace. Almost daily pro-Ravalomanana protests held in Antananarivo from 23 March, leaving at least 34 wounded. New leader endorsed by Constitutional Court 17 March under pressure from military. Rajoelina, at 34, 6 years too young to take office under constitution, named new “transitional” govt 31 March (Ravalomanana party excluded), promised elections within 2 years, cancelled much-condemned Daewoo agriculture contract. Ravalomanana in 25 March statement vowed to return to power, travelled to Swaziland to rally support. International response overwhelmingly critical: regional leaders, U.S., EU denounced takeover as coup d’état; U.S., Norway suspended non-humanitarian aid; AU 20 March suspended Madagascar’s membership, SADC followed suit 30 March.

- [“Roots of turmoil”](#), openDemocracy, 23 March 2009.
- [“Scramble to shore up Madagascar rebellion”](#), *Financial Times*, 20 March 2009.

➡ **Zimbabwe** Newly formed coalition govt 19 March unveiled \$5b socio-economic recovery plan (STERP), later raising to \$8.5b, calling for injection of foreign aid and removal of economic sanctions. Australia, Sweden, others resumed broad aid; U.S., EU leaders agreed to enhance humanitarian assistance and support to key social sectors (“humanitarian-plus”), but stressed targeted sanctions will remain in place and broader support held back until clear progress on implementation of power-sharing, genuine governance reforms, release of political detainees. IMF 25 March deferred resumption of financial assistance. Rights activist Jestina Mukoko and MDC agriculture minister appointee Roy Bennett released on bail, Mukoko bearing signs of torture; dozens of activists still detained. Tsvangirai 27 March called on police to arrest those responsible for forcible seizures of privately-owned farms, reflecting language in STERP document and change in govt policy. Some visible improvements on ground with several schools opening for first time in over a year, but UN reported humanitarian situation remains dire, with most hospitals still closed and cholera cases continuing to rise. Tsvangirai’s wife killed and Tsvangirai injured in car crash 6 March; MDC said investigations revealed crash accidental.

- [“Fragile signs of hope emerging in the gloom of Mugabe’s rule”](#), *New York Times*, 19 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°56, [Ending Zimbabwe’s Nightmare: A Possible Way Forward](#), 16 Dec. 2008.

WEST AFRICA

➡ **Cameroon** Unidentified armed group kidnapped 6 foreign oil workers off Bakassi peninsula 14 March; govt announced release 16 March, independent sources denied. Former national airlines company head Paul Ngamo Hamani 17 March charged with embezzling over \$250m, as President Biya continued anti-corruption campaign.

- [“Les six expatriés enlevés toujours pas libérés”](#), AFP, 17

March 2009.

➡ **Côte d'Ivoire** President Gbagbo, PM Soro and facilitator Burkinabe President Compaoré met in Ouagadougou 16 March, but still no date set for presidential poll. Electoral Commission again extended voter registration deadline, to end-March: UNOCI reported 5.8m voters of eligible 8m registered. Opposition Movement of Future Forces leader Innocent Anaky arrested mid-month after broadcasting call for Gbagbo's overthrow. IMF agreed \$565m loan, wrote off \$3bn national debt.

- Comment by Rinaldo Depagne (Crisis Group), "[Peace Deal Runs into Dead End](#)", allAfrica, 9 March 2009.
- "[New voter roll delay for I. Coast election](#)", AFP, 16 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°139, [Côte d'Ivoire: Ensuring Credible Elections](#), 22 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Guinea** Coalition group Forces Vives early month submitted proposal to ruling junta for elections in late 2009: ruling CNDD agreed 28 March to hold legislative elections 11 Oct, presidential poll 13 Dec, but doubts persist over commitment to transition to civilian rule. Former PM Souaré and 2 ex-mines ministers arrested 23 March after junta ordered 4 former ministers to repay \$5m allegedly embezzled under previous administration. International Contact Group on Guinea met for 2nd time 16 March: called on govt to negotiate with Forces Vives to establish transitional govt, confirm electoral timetable. EU same day proposed talks with junta on resuming EU aid, conditional on steps to restore rule of law.

- "[Ex-ministers arrested in Guinea](#)", BBC, 24 March 2009.

Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°58,
[Guinea: The Transition Has Only Just Begun](#), 5 March 2009. National and international pressure is

urgently needed to ensure a return to civilian rule in Guinea, a country rich in natural resources but struggling to come to terms with the legacy of 50 years of dictatorship.



➡ **Guinea-Bissau** Military chief Tagme na Wai and 5 officers killed in explosion in military HQ 1 March; President Vieira shot dead hours later by soldiers loyal to na Wai. Military announced constitution would be respected and National Assembly head Raimundo Pereira sworn in as interim president 3 March. Bissau reportedly calm. Parties 1 Apr announced elections for 28 June, 60 days beyond deadline prescribed in constitution to provide time for accrual of funds. José Zamora Induta appointed as interim army chief 14 March; connections to PM Gomes raised fears over continued military influence in politics. Gomes 16 March announced intention to contest next presidential polls. National and military commissions established to investigate killings; latter arrested 3 high-ranking soldiers late month.

- "[Guinea-Bissau's president, army chief killed](#)", Reuters, 2 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°57, [Guinea-Bissau: Building a Real Stability Pact](#), 29 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Liberia** Police charged lawyer, several retired soldiers with conspiracy 10 March, accusing group of planning "illegal" demonstration over President Johnson-Sirleaf past support for the National Patriotic Front during civil war.

- "[Anti war crimes advocate, others charged](#)", *Daily IJ*, 10 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°148,

[Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform](#), 13 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Mali** Tuareg rebellion remained at apparent ebb but no concrete progress in peace process. Leader of dominant rebel group ATMN, Ibrahim Ag Bahanga, residing in Libya, continued to reject involvement in Algeria-brokered talks.

- "[AU head Gaddafi tells Tuareg rebels to disarm](#)", Reuters, 15 March 2009.

➡ **Niger** New faction FPN early month split from main Tuareg rebel group MNJ declaring willingness to negotiate with govt; 2nd Tuareg group to renounce MNJ rebellion since Jan. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb mid-month released Malian driver captured with Canadian UN envoy Fowler and aide in Dec, said would exchange 6 remaining hostages for release of Muslims detained in Europe. Unidentified gunmen 6 March killed 10 north of Niamey in possible conflagration of land tensions. President Tandja late month announced he would seek re-election for (currently unconstitutional) 3rd term in Dec, if called to by public.

- "[Mali holds suspect in Niger kidnapping](#)", AFP, 24 March 2009.

➡ **Nigeria** 19 opposition parties late month announced they had united to challenge ruling PDP in 2011 elections, charging govt with widespread failures and running one-party state. Cabinet 11 March accepted proposals from govt-appointed Electoral Reform Cttee, but controversially rejected recommendation to transfer to judiciary president's power to appoint electoral commission head; opposition and civil society leaders allege that without the measure electoral reforms cosmetic. Violence in Niger Delta continued with several attacks by main militant group MEND. Reports of gunmen raping theft and hijack victims. Govt yet to respond to 1 Dec technical cttee report on Delta crisis. Police 18 March reported Shiite group Islamic Movement of Nigeria running youth training camps at HQ in Zaria; group denied. Former governor of oil-producing Ondo State arrested 4 March over alleged embezzlement during office; promptly granted bail.

- "[Nigerian militants 'rape women'](#)", BBC, 16 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°54, [Nigeria: Ogoni Land after Shell](#), 18 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Sierra Leone** Simmering tensions between opposition SLPP and ruling APC members erupted in violence 12 March in southern Gendema during local council by-election in Pujehun district; sparked further clashes in Freetown 13, 14, 16 March; SLPP HQ partly destroyed, at least 17 injured, 3 women reportedly raped. Party radio stations accused of stoking violence closed down. President Koroma 17 March warned of crackdown on those responsible.

- "[17 hurt in Sierra Leone political violence](#)", Reuters, 14 March 2009.



Asia/Pacific

CENTRAL ASIA

➡ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbaev 11 March said Kazakhstan can weather financial crisis, govt has \$18 bn anti-crisis program. 7-country Collective Security Treaty

Organization (CSTO) grouping, controlling major supply route to Afghanistan, 20 March agreed to help NATO forces.

- [“Ex-Soviet group pledges NATO help on Afghanistan”](#), Reuters, 20 March 2009.

➡ **Kyrgyzstan** Political tensions rose after death of former head of presidential administration Medet Sadyrkulov 13 March. Govt investigators attributed death to car accident; opposition claimed govt assassination, amid reports Sadyrkulov moving closer to opposition after breaking with regime in Dec, had complained of surveillance. Death seen as blow to prospects of organized opposition to President Bakiyev, Ak Zhol party, and signal of escalating power struggle; political tensions stoked further by rumours of president’s health problems. Ahead of late-month anti-govt demonstrations, opposition claimed intimidation, including 3 March attack on leading journalist, 9 March arrest of opposition leader Jekshenkulov for murder. Govt, opposition held talks 10 March but opposition pulled out of follow-up talks, announced protests. Heavy security presence deployed for 27 March demonstrations across country; turnout low, protests mostly peaceful. Parliament 20 March approved 23 July date for early presidential elections. Bakiyev 4 March said ready for proposals from U.S., but govt next day reiterated decision to close Manas U.S. airbase. Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan 4 March signed border cooperation agreement, including Kyrgyz rental of disputed territory.

- [“Early presidential vote declared amid growing political scandal”](#), EurasiaNet, 19 March 2009.
- [“Deadly Kyrgyz crash leaves cloud of intrigue”](#), RFE/RL, 16 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°79, [Kyrgyzstan: A Deceptive Calm](#), 14 Aug. 2008.

➡ **Tajikistan** Electricity rationing reportedly eased early month following resumption of Uzbek, Turkmen supplies, however govt appeals for aid signal scale of difficulties imposed by financial crisis, energy shortages. Russia sending humanitarian deliveries; Asian Development Bank 20 March announced \$40mn grant. U.S. 21 March announced \$10mn assistance to improve security along Afghan border. Uzbekistan reportedly demanding full payment of \$18mn debt before restoring gas exports from current 50% supply. Work on rail connection between Dushanbe and Afghan border officially launched 19 March. President Rakhmon signed new religious law 25 March, U.S. criticized as “restrictive”.

- [“Rogun dam a hot topic as Tajiks make it through another winter of shortages”](#), EurasiaNet, 13 March 2009.
- For latest report see: Crisis Group Asia Report N°162, [Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure](#), 12 Feb 2009.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Iran 5 March threatened to sue Turkmenistan if it does not receive compensation for Jan 2008 suspension of gas exports to Iran, allegedly over disagreement on price. President’s late-March Moscow visit ended without expected centrepiece agreement on construction of gas pipeline linking northeast Turkmenistan with Caspian.

- [“Ashgabat wonders whether Russia still has deep pockets”](#), EurasiaNet, 26 March 2009.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Reports emerged 23 March that U.S. in talks with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan on possible bases, including return to Karshi-Khanabad (K2) air base, closed in 2005 following Andijan massacre; denied by U.S.. Followed early-month agreement to participate in NATO supply routes. Amid

modest signs of thaw in relations, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan 6 March agreed to restore air links.

- [“Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan confirm new supply routes”](#), EDM, 5 March 2009.

NORTH EAST ASIA

➡ **North Korea** Rise in tensions after N Korea 12 March announced plan to launch communications satellite between 4-8 Apr; prompted outcry from ROK, Japan, U.S. that Pyongyang preparing to test rocket for long-range ballistic missile. Tokyo vowed to shoot down any missile threat to Japan, while U.S. Sec State Clinton 11 March warned U.S. had “range of options” and threatened to refer to UNSC. 2 other members of 6-Party Talks, China and Russia, showing less public concern, and some analysts stressed wisdom of measured response. ROK 18 March expressed fear NK would exploit attention to mount limited border attack. NK 2 March met U.S.-led UN command at border for 1st high-level talks in 7 years, later threatened to fire on ROK commercial flights during upcoming U.S.-ROK military exercises, causing some flights to be diverted. NK 17 March said will no longer accept humanitarian food assistance from U.S. 2 U.S. journalists detained 21 March for illegally entering NK.

- [“N Korea ‘places missile on pad’”](#), BBC, 26 March 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°91, [North Korea’s Missile Launch: The Risks of Overreaction](#), 31 March 2009. A tough response to North Korea’s provocative rocket launch would likely result in the demise of the talks to end its nuclear program and could risk a potentially devastating war, damaging to South Korea, Japan and the world economy.



➡ **Taiwan Strait** Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao 5 March announced readiness to open talks with Taiwan to “create conditions for ending the state of hostility”. China 14 March agreed in principle to allow Taiwan to take part in World Health Assembly as observer. Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council 14 March urged China to scrap 2005 anti-secession law authorising use of force on Taiwan, saying it was irrelevant following improved relations.

- [“China offers Taiwan peace talks”](#), BBC, 5 March 2009.

SOUTH ASIA

➡ **Afghanistan** Independent Election Commission 4 March confirmed 3 month delay in presidential elections, now to be held 20 Aug; cited logistical, security concerns. Despite opposition objections, Supreme Court 29 March ruled President Karzai should stay in office between end of his term (21 May) and inauguration of new leader. U.S. President Obama 27 March unveiled new Afghan policy, including deployment of further 4,000 U.S. troops to train Afghan security forces. Iran participated in 31 March international Afghanistan conference in The Hague. High level of violence continued: 5 killed in Helmand province blast 19 March, including former Helmand intelligence chief and current MP; 11 killed, 28 wounded in 16 March Helmand suicide bombing. ICRC, military officials warned of increase in attacks over coming months as further U.S. troops deployed.

- Comment by Paul Quinn-Judge (Crisis Group), [“The Risk to U.S. Supply Lines”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 11 March 2009.

- [“Barack Obama sets out new strategy for Afghanistan war”](#), *Guardian*, 27 March 2009.
- [“Afghan panel rejects Karzai decree for early elections”](#), *New York Times*, 4 March 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°89, [Afghanistan: New U.S. Administration, New Directions](#), 13 March 2009. Jihadi extremism in Afghanistan cannot be defeated unless the Obama administration adopts new political, economic and military policies empowering Afghan civilian institutions. Afghanistan will only become a resilient state if moderate forces and democratic norms are strengthened. Only when citizens perceive the state as legitimate and capable of delivering security, good governance and rule of law, will Afghans be able to resist jihadi pressures and overtures.



➡ **Bangladesh** Govt 2 March announced final death toll from Feb mutiny by border patrol force Bangladesh Rifles (BDR): 74 dead, including 56 officers. Police 3 March arrested suspected mutiny leader, over 200 additional BDR members detained during March. Human rights groups raised concerns over deaths, possible torture of 4 detained BDR personnel. Govt 21 March said will disband BDR, create new border force. Opposition (BNP) leader Khaleda Zia and many army officers criticised govt handling of mutiny. Govt 12 March said some of arrested had links to Islamist group Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh.

- [“Four BDR mutineers died in custody: official”](#), AFP, 24 March 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°84, [Bangladesh: Elections and Beyond](#), 11 Dec. 2008.

➡ **India (non-Kashmir)** 2 killed, 16 wounded in 18 March West Bengal blast, no claim of responsibility. Suspected Maoist rebels 19 March killed local hardline Hindu nationalist party leader in Orissa, site of 2008 Hindu-Christian violence. Unidentified gunmen 24 March killed Assam newspaper editor in state capital Guwahati.

- [“Orissa Hindu activist shot dead”](#), BBC, 19 March 2009.

➡ **Kashmir** Trial of surviving gunman from Nov 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack started 23 March; gunman said he is from Pakistan. 2 alleged Indian Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (LeT) militants also on trial in same case, accused of scouting for attack. Indian, Pakistani troops 21 March exchanged fire across LoC. 17 LeT militants, 5 troops killed in 5-day Shamsbari forest clashes along LoC late month; army 14 March killed 5 LeT militants in Srinagar clash.

- [“Mumbai attack trial begins, gunman says from Pakistan”](#), Reuters, 23 March 2009.

➡ **Nepal** Little progress on army integration: in response to national army recruitment, Maoist army 2 March called for applicants to fill thousands of vacant positions in its own ranks. Supreme Court ordered both armies to halt new recruitment, Maoists stopped 10 March. Defence Minister Thapa 16 March ordered 8 army generals to retire, but Supreme Court 25 March halted order. During 19 March visit to Nepal, UNHCHR Navi Pillay called for justice for war victims, end to impunity. Tharu ethnic group strike from 2 March paralysed Tarai region; called off 14 March after govt agreed to replace term ‘Madhesh’ with ‘Tarai-Madhesh’ in interim constitution.

- [“War without bloodshed”](#), *Economist*, 26 March 2009.

- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°163, [Nepal’s Faltering Peace Process](#), 19 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Pakistan** President Zardari 16 March agreed to reinstate Supreme Court Judge Iftikhar Chaudhry, sacked by ex-President Musharraf Nov 2007. Opposition (PML-N) leader Nawaz Sharif mid-month led thousands on “long march” through country, demanding Chaudhry’s reinstatement; frequent clashes with police, hundreds detained. Chaudhry officially reinstated 21 March. Supreme Court 31 March lifted Nawaz Sharif’s ban on holding elected office; reinstated Shahbaz Sharif as Chief Minister of Punjab. Gunmen 4 March attacked Sri Lanka cricket team in Lahore: 6 police, 2 civilians killed, 5 players injured. Govt 7 March said Pakistani militant groups likely responsible; Lashkar-e-Tayyaba militants 6 March denied involvement. At least 70 killed, 125 injured in Khyber agency mosque suicide bombing on 27 March. Missile strike killed 8 in S Waziristan 1 March. Military-dictated peace deal signed with tribal militants in Bajaur Agency 10 March. Gunmen 30 March attacked, captured Lahore police academy, retaken by security forces shortly after; 18 killed, Pakistani Taliban chief Baitullah Mehsud claimed responsibility.

- Comment by Robert Templer (Crisis Group), [“Call in the Police \(but Please Help them First\)”](#), Foreign Policy: The Argument, 27 March 2009.
- [“Why Pakistan’s president gave in”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 18 March 2009.
- [“Pakistani tribe signs pact to cooperate with officials”](#), *New York Times*, 9 March 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Report N°164, [Pakistan: The Militant Jihadi Challenge](#), 13 March 2009. Following the recent upsurge of jihadi violence, dismantling extremist Sunni-Deobandi groups must be the core of Pakistan’s counter-terrorism policy. Their continued patronage by the military and ability to hijack foreign policy impedes the government’s ongoing efforts to govern and pursue regional peace. The international community, particularly the U.S., must reverse course and help strengthen civilian control over all areas of governance.



➡ **Sri Lanka** Heavy govt-LTTE fighting in northeast continued, hundreds killed as LTTE launched counterattacks throughout month. Humanitarian situation remains desperate for some 150,000 civilians still trapped in region. Govt 5 March announced 2 safe routes for civilians; but govt shelling of declared safe zones continued, while LTTE reportedly forcibly recruiting civilians, killing many trying to flee. UN estimates more than 60 civilians killed per day, some 3,500 dead, 8,500 wounded since late-Jan. UNHCHR Navi Pillay 13 March accused both sides of committing war crimes. Govt 17 March rejected EU’s call for immediate ceasefire. Suspected LTTE suicide bombing in Akuresa 10 March killed 14, critically injured govt minister Wijesekera. PM Rajapaksa 9 March appointed ex-LTTE no. 2 “Karuna” as integration minister.

- Comment by Lakhdar Brahimi (Crisis Group), [“A Slaughter Waiting to Happen”](#), *International Herald Tribune*, 20 March 2009.
- [“U.N. rights official fears war crimes in Sri Lanka”](#), *New York Times*, 13 March 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°159, [Sri Lanka’s Eastern Province: Land, Development, Conflict](#), 15 Oct. 2008.

Crisis Group Conflict Risk Alert: Sri Lanka, 9 March 2009. The humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka's northern Wanni region is rapidly becoming a catastrophe. An estimated 150,000 civilians are trapped in an ever shrinking space, forcibly held back by the LTTE and exposed to Sri Lankan military attacks. Thousands have already been killed or wounded, and tens of thousands face death or injury due to fighting and lack of food, water and medicine. International leadership, particularly the U.S., India and the UN, must act now.



SOUTH EAST ASIA

➤ **Indonesia** Tensions remain high in Aceh ahead of 9 Apr legislative, presidential elections. Another Partai Aceh supporter found murdered in Nagan Raya 20 March; perpetrators unidentified. Widespread concerns raised late month about poor Central Electoral Commission preparations for national elections, potential for fraud. Polls show President Yudhoyono's Democrat Party in lead. Low-level violence continued in Papua's Puncak Jaya district with 2 civilians, 1 soldier killed in attacks blamed on group led by Goliath Tabuni.

- "Indonesia's election", *Economist*, 24 March 2009.

Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°90, **Indonesia: Deep Distrust in Aceh as Elections Approach**, 23 March 2009. Tensions in Aceh are high before 9 April elections and are likely to continue thereafter unless distrust between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian military (TNI) is addressed. Civil society can help get the peace process back on track, by demanding accountability from GAM and the TNI, and getting citizens to demand more from elected officials.



➤ **Myanmar/Burma** Senior U.S. State Dept official met with govt, opposition figures late March in new capital Naypyidaw. NLD urged U.S. talks with ruling junta. U.S. govt said Myanmar policy review, announced Feb, still underway. UN arbitrary detention working group 24 March said NLD opposition leader Suu Kyi's detention violates international, Burmese law. UN Human Rights Council 27 March passed resolution condemning rights violations, urging political prisoner release. Govt blamed 27 March Rangoon explosion on 2 dissident groups; alleged bomber sole casualty.

- "Burmese junta squeezes opposition", openDemocracy, 18 March 2009.
- "U.S. Diplomat, Burmese Official Meet", *Washington Post*, 26 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°161, *Burma/Myanmar After Nargis: Time to Normalise Aid Relations*, 20 Oct. 2008.

➤ **Philippines** Mid-month military operation failed to free 3 ICRC workers abducted Jan in Jolo by Abu Sayyaf faction. Kidnappers demanding withdrawal of troops from Jolo; govt 28 March withdrew some 800 troops, but kidnappers threatened to behead one captive unless remaining 1,500 withdrawn by 31 March; govt imposed state of emergency on Jolo following passing of deadline. Presidential adviser Avelino Razon announced new model for peace process at "First International Solidarity Conference" on Mindanao 14 March. Clashes between govt, MILF guerrillas continued in central Mindanao, with 20 rebels, 7 soldiers killed 28 March

in Maguindanao, and 11 rebels, 1 soldier killed 31 March in North Cotabato. 11 rebels, 4 soldiers, 2 civilians killed during 31 March clash between communist New People's Army and military in Bukinon.

- "Philippines officials plead with rebels on captives", *New York Times*, 31 March 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°88, *The Philippines: Running in Place in Mindanao*, 16 Feb. 2009

➤ **Thailand** Puea Thai, main opposition party and ally of ousted PM Thaksin, 11 March filed censure motion against PM Abhisit and 5 others, including interior, finance, foreign ministers; all survived vote. Thousands of Thaksin supporters began sit-in protest outside Govt House 26 March. PM Abhisit approved deployment of 4,000 additional paramilitary rangers to South to improve community relations in insurgent strongholds. Govt 17 March approved strategic plan to improve justice system in South; Abhisit asked officials to explore possibility of using Sharia law in area. 4 militants killed by security forces in 30 March gun battle in South. 25 March standoff between Thai, Cambodian troops on disputed border area ended peacefully next day.

- "Call to boost troop numbers in South", *Bangkok Post*, 14 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°82, *Thailand: Calming the Political Turmoil*, 22 Sept. 2008.

➤ **Timor-Leste** Govt 4 March announced 28 to stand trial, charged 27 Feb in connection with Feb 2008 attempted assassination of President Ramos-Horta. Govt, UN 27 March announced start to transition of responsibility to national police.

- "Ramos-Horta suspects to stand trial", AFP, 4 March 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°87, *Timor-Leste: No Time for Complacency*, 9 Feb. 2009.



BALKANS

➤ **Bosnia** Peace Implementation Council (PIC) appointed Austrian diplomat Valentin Inzko High Representative, EU Special Representative 13 March; reaffirmed 26 March that Office of High Representative (OHR) to remain until Bosnia completes 5 objectives, 2 conditions set by PIC Feb 2008. Constitutional amendment on Brčko district passed by parliament 26 March, providing for district's access to constitutional court; legislation fulfils one of PIC's requirements for OHR closure.

- Comment by Chris Patten (Crisis Group), "Get Tough to Break Bosnian Deadlock", *European Voice*, 26 March 2009.
- Comment by Morton Abramowitz and Daniel Serwer, "Bosnia: What Is to Be Done?", GlobalSecurity.org, 9 March 2009.

Crisis Group Europe Report N°198, **Bosnia's Incomplete Transition: Between Dayton and Europe**, 9 March 2009. The EU should become the central international player in Bosnia, with a Special Representative taking over the responsibilities – without the 'Bonn powers' – of the Office of the High Representative (OHR) which should be closed this year.



➡ **Kosovo** Serbian President Tadic and Kosovo FM Hyseni exchanged accusations at UNSC 23 March; Hyseni reiterated Kosovo call to end UNMIK mandate, Tadic stressed UNMIK should stay to implement UNSCR 1244, 6-point plan. UNSG Ban reported stable security situation, recommended small UNMIK presence, particularly in Mitrovica. Some 150 Kosovo Serbs blocked entrance to court in Mitrovica 2 March in protest against EULEX mission, forcing first trial there to be conducted under UNMIK law; 200 Serbs prevented Kosovo Police, EULEX officials from meeting in Leposavic 5 March. 3 bombs exploded 3 March in Mitrovica, no injuries. NATO Sec Gen de Hoop Scheffer 4 March stated KFOR will remain in Kosovo, responding to speculation about troop reductions; Spain 22 March announced withdrawal of all 600 troops from Kosovo by end-summer.

- "Bogdanović meets with EULEX chief", B92, 19 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°196, *Kosovo's Fragile Transition*, 25 Sept. 2008.

➡ **Macedonia** Presidential, local elections passed off without incident, seen as marking important break following June 2008 election marred by violence, fraud. Campaigning began 1 March; OSCE 16 March noted reports some public administration workers under pressure to vote for ruling VMRO DPMNE party. Following 22 March polls domestic monitors said vote generally fair, OSCE said election met most international standards, though some irregularities in vote counting, and voter register needs revision. VMRO DPMNE candidate Ivanov led with 35% of votes, main opposition SDSM candidate second with 20%; two now face 5 Apr runoff vote. Greece 3 March issued travel warning for citizens going to Macedonia after nationalist graffiti found on Greek tourist buses in Ohrid; Macedonia said Greece overreacting.

- "Poll suggests low Macedonian turn-out", Balkan Insight, 31 March 2009.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°52, *Macedonia's Name: Breaking the Deadlock*, 12 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Serbia** Some 1,000 nationalists demonstrated in Belgrade 25 March, on 10th anniversary of NATO bombing; 30 arrested, 7 injured following clashes with police. Pristina banned Serbian officials from entering Kosovo without official approval: Serbian parliamentarian group visit cancelled 16 March, Belgrade mayor and President Tadic adviser prevented from entering 23 March.

- "Seven injured, 30 arrested at anti-NATO protest", B92, 25 March 2009.

CAUCASUS

➡ **Armenia** Former President Ter-Petrosian 1 March addressed first opposition rally since Oct, commemorating 1-yr anniversary of clashes between security forces, opposition. Rally passed without incident; opposition claimed turnout 100,000, authorities said 10,000. Opposition Armenian National Congress 15 March nominated Ter-Petrosian as candidate for 31 May Yerevan mayoral elections; Heritage Party 23 March announced support. Following increasing pressure on fixed exchange rate, Central Bank 3 March let dram float against dollar: initially depreciated 30%, causing panic-buying, price increases.

- "Ter Petrosian to run for mayor of Yerevan", EurasiaNet, 16 March 2009.

- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N° 48, *Armenia: Picking up the Pieces*, 8 Apr. 2008.

➡ **Azerbaijan** Controversial constitutional amendments ending presidential term limits overwhelmingly approved in 18 March referendum. Opposition said official 71% turnout figure fabricated, real turnout less than the 25% required for valid vote; cited "mass violations" of election laws. Council of Europe 19 March warned amendments violate 2002 commitments, could cause suspension of delegation, loss of membership. Russian FM Lavrov in Baku visit 12 March denied reports of Jan arms transfer from Russia to Armenia; FM Mammadyarov said Azerbaijani investigations into alleged incident continuing. Parliament 10 March passed amendments to media laws; watchdogs said threat to media reform.

- "Taking a step toward monarchy?", EurasiaNet, 19 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°50, *Azerbaijan: Defence Sector Management and Reform*, 29 Oct. 2008.

➡ **Chechnya (Russia)** Video footage emerged 5 March of Chechen claiming he was commissioned by President Kadyrov to kill émigré in Norway. Kadyrov 20 March issued new invitation to exiles to return home. Sulim Yamadayev, Kadyrov opponent and brother of émigré shot dead in Moscow Sept, assassinated in Dubai March 28. European Court of Human Rights 12 March ruled Russia must pay damages to families of 13 Chechens presumed dead after 2001, 2003 raids. Rights groups condemned President Kadyrov's 28 Feb defence of honour killings of 7 women.

- "As hit men strike, concern grows among Chechen exiles", RFE/RL, 12 March 2009.

➡ **North Caucasus (non-Chechnya)** Rebel attacks continued: in Dagestan, 1 police killed 18 March as car came under fire; Russia 21 March announced end of 3-day operation against militants near capital, with 16 militants, 5 police killed. Security forces killed 4 rebels during 19 March gun battle in Kabardino-Balkaria. In Ingushetia, village head in Nazranovskiv region killed 2 March; 1 person killed by 3 March bomb blast outside home of former governor Zyazikov; 6 police killed, 2 injured attempting to defuse bomb 5 March in Nazran. Ingushetia governor Yevkurov 13 March said need to drive out corruption to tackle insurgency; 5 March declared amnesty for officials returning money stolen from gov; 12 March reportedly said ready to declare amnesty for militants not involved in grave crimes, ready for "dialogue" with rebels. Unified Russia won local parliamentary elections 1 March; opposition claimed elections rigged.

- "Russian region tries new tactics to quell insurgency", Reuters, 13 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°192, *Russia's Dagestan: Conflict Causes*, 3 June 2008.

➡ **Georgia** Political tensions increased ahead of major opposition protests planned for 9 Apr, with 13 parties now demanding President Saakashvili's resignation. Tensions escalated dramatically with 23 March arrest of 9 opposition Democratic Movement-United Georgia (DMUG) members for illegal weapons possession. DMUG leader Nino Burjanadze claimed gov persecution, but gov 25 March released footage of DMUG officials discussing possibility of civil war to oust Saakashvili. Govt 24 March arrested 2 men allegedly discussing plan to assassinate Saakashvili 9 Apr. Rising political

temperature coincided with speculation over possibility of renewed conflict with Russia, with increasingly hostile rhetoric between Moscow and Tbilisi and 20 March intelligence chief's report that Russia attempting to create instability in Georgia. Meanwhile NATO FMs 5 March announced restoration of full diplomatic links with Russia, despite Russia's continued presence in breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia (SO) in violation of Aug peace plan. Russia 20 March confirmed setting up military bases in Abkhazia, SO, further solidifying presence. 2 mines exploded on SO administrative border with Georgia 29 March killing 1 police, injuring 8.

- "Arrests target ex-rose revolution leader's party", EurasiaNet, 25 March 2009.
- "Georgian leaders assess external, internal threats", RFE/RL, 10 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°51, *Georgia: The Risks of Winter*, 26 Nov. 2008.

➡ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs in region 27 Feb-3 March in bid to organise meeting between Armenian, Azerbaijani presidents to discuss Minsk Group proposals. Co-chairs 6 March condemned 26 Feb ceasefire violations occurring during OSCE monitoring mission. French co-chair Fassier in Yerevan 3 March said both Armenian and Azeri communities of NK should join negotiation process 'at some point'. 28 Feb defection of 3 Armenian soldiers serving in Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani side prompted debate in Armenia over harsh army conditions.

- "Azerbaijan, Russia agree to disagree on arms transfer and more", EurasiaNet, 12 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°187, *Nagorno-Karabakh: Risking War*, 14 Nov. 2007.

EASTERN EUROPE

➡ **Belarus** EU FMs 16 March agreed to suspend travel ban on 40 Belarusian officials for further 9 months; 20 March approved inclusion of Belarus in EU's new Eastern Partnership program, aimed at strengthening relations with 6 former western Soviet republics. Some 4,000 joined peaceful 25 March opposition rally in Minsk. Russia 6 March approved \$500 mn loan to Belarus.

- "EU approves 'ambitious' partnership for Belarus, other ex-Soviet neighbors", RFE/RL, 20 March 2009.

➡ **Moldova** EU 20 March announced Eastern Partnership (EP) program, to include Moldova (see Belarus); senior official 25 March reiterated country's discontent, said Moldova as member of EU Stability Pact should get faster EU integration. Kremlin hosted 18 March talks between President Voronin, Transdniestrian leader Smirnov. Parties agreed Russian peacekeeping force in Transdniestria could be replaced by international mission following peace deal. Follow-up talks cancelled by Voronin after Transdniestria 24 March imposed ban on 1 U.S., 2 EU diplomats, in retaliation to EU's extension of travel ban on Transdniestrian officials until 2010. Gas supplies disrupted after 1 Apr pipeline blast in Transdniestria; cause uncertain. Polls show Voronin's Communist party lead ahead of 5 Apr elections for new parliament, which will select Voronin's successor.

- "Moscow moves to draw Moldova, Transdniestrian leaders back into fold", RFE/RL, 18 March 2009.

➡ **Ukraine** Ukrainian cooperation with EU on investment plan to modernize gas pipeline condemned by Kremlin 23 March as "unfriendly act" against Moscow; Russia broke off talks with Ukraine, threatened to review EU ties. Early-month threats by Moscow to cut gas to Ukraine lifted after Ukrainian state gas company Naftogaz paid for Feb deliveries 2 days before 7 March deadline. Naftogaz HQ earlier raided by security services (SBU) 4 March, part of investigation into alleged gas theft by President Yushchenko-loyalist SBU; PM Tymoshenko later requested parliament to suspend investigation. Parliament 3 March voted to sack FM Ohryzko for mishandling policy; Yushchenko 17 March appointed Ohryzko to National Security and Defence Council. Yushchenko 18 March said still hoping to agree with IMF on conditions for loan disbursements; 30 March announced economy shrank 25-30% yr-on-yr in Jan-Feb.

- "Call for urgent Ukraine reform", *Financial Times*, 31 March 2009.
- "The next Iceland?", *Transitions Online*, 23 March 2009.

WESTERN EUROPE/MEDITERRANEAN

➡ **Basque Country (Spain)** 1 March regional poll produced 1st non-nationalist Basque govt since 1980. Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) won 30 seats, Basque Socialist Party (PSE) 25, People's Party (PP) 13. Power-sharing deal between PSE and conservative PP agreed 30 March. PSE leader Patxi Lopez to be regional head. 2 suspected ETA members arrested 5 March for Dec killing of businessman involved in Basque-Madrid rail link; 44 charged 23 March with ETA membership; 8 arrested 31 March for ETA-linked violence. Suspected ETA bomb attack 26 March on house in Amorebieta – no injuries.

- "A new landscape", *Economist*, 5 March 2009.

➡ **Cyprus** Talks on prospective agreement making slow progress. Greek Cypriot President Christofias and Turkish Cypriot leader Talat 5 March agreed to set aside thorny issue of property to maintain momentum in talks. Discussed EU issues on 11, 24 March; "relative progress" reported at latter meeting. Christofias 23 March said potential loss by Talat's party in Apr parliamentary elections could have negative impact on peace negotiations. Talat 6 March suggested may not stand for re-election as president in 2010 if no progress on settlement.

- "Is this the year Cyprus reunites?", *European Voice*, 12 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°194, *Reunifying Cyprus: The Best Chance Yet*, 23 June. 2008.

➡ **Northern Ireland** Return of violence feared as dissident Republicans mounted attacks on security forces. 7 March Real IRA gun attack on Massereene British army barracks County Antrim killed 2 soldiers, injured 4, including 2 civilians. First killing of British army personnel in NI since 1997, roundly condemned by all parties. Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Officer shot dead 10 March in Continuity IRA gun attack in Craigavon, County Armagh – 1st ever murder of PSNI Officer, 1st police killing since 1998. Attacks came days after PSNI Chief Hugh Orde announced undercover British military intelligence forces being redeployed to NI amid fears of imminent attack, and warning that dissident threat highest since 1998. Thousands protested against killings 11 March in Belfast, Derry, Newry. 11 arrested for attacks, with small-scale violence in Craigavon 14 March during arrests. 17 year old charged 24 March with PSNI Officer murder; another man

charged 25 March; 3rd charged with withholding information 26 March. 1 charged 27 March with British soldier murders.

- [“Unshakeable believers in the power of the bullet”](#), *Sunday Tribune*, 15 March 2009.
- [“Cowen says governments ‘steadfast’ after attacks”](#), *Irish Times*, 9 March 2009.

➡ **Turkey** Ruling AKP victorious in 29 March local elections, but by diminished margin. 5 killed, tens injured in election-related clashes. President Gul in Iraq 23-24 March urged joint action against PKK (see Iraq). Air strikes on PKK bases in north Iraq 12 March. FM Babacan 8 March said U.S. recognition of Armenian genocide would impede Turkey-Armenia reconciliation. Court 2 March allowed prosecution against organisers of Dec petition for apology over WWI Armenian massacres, overturning earlier rejection; prosecutors still need justice minister permission to proceed with case. 56 indicted 11 March in “Ergenekon” alleged coup plot case, bringing total on trial to over 140. Discovery of human remains in southeast led to several arrests for alleged security force killings of Kurds in 1990s, including active colonel 25 March. 5 arrested 7 March, 1 on trial 20 March for allegedly planning separate attacks on PM Erdogan at election rallies in Adana, Tekirdag. 3 suspected PKK members arrested Istanbul 21 March.

- [“AK Party wins Turkish vote but reforms less clear”](#), Reuters, 29 March 2009.
- [“Turkey’s Gul makes landmark visit to Iraq”](#), AFP, 24 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°197, [Turkey and Europe: The Decisive Year Ahead](#), 15 Dec. 2008.



Latin America / Caribbean

➡ **Bolivia** Opposition prefects 4 March asked for President Morales to be charged over promoting corruption in state oil and gas company. Mob 9 March attacked indigenous opposition presidential candidate Víctor Hugo Cárdenas’s house, accused of being “traitor to his race”. Senate yet to approve new electoral law, opposition claims gives unfair advantages to ruling MAS party; MAS supporters in 31 March La Paz demonstration demanded passing.

- [“Prefectos enjuician a Morales”](#), BBC, 4 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°18, [Bolivia: Rescuing the New Constitution and Democratic Stability](#), 19 June 2008.

➡ **Colombia** Govt 3 March announced army killed top FARC commander “Gaitán” in Feb clash. 5 soldiers killed in suspected FARC explosion 7 March in Cundinamarca department; 4 soldiers, 2 rebels killed in 24 March Guaviare department clash. Suspected FARC urban attacks continued: 7 March pipeline bombing cut off water supply to 300,000 Villavicencio residents. FARC mid-month launched “armed strike” in several departments; increased attacks on public transportation and road infrastructure. FARC released last foreign hostage, held since 2007. To encourage FARC desertions, govt 5 March asked for suspension of arrest warrants for 2 influential deserting rebel commanders. President Uribe 8 March ordered army to step up fight against new illegal armed groups (NIAGs), likely

in response to NIAGs recent expansion, increased violence against civilians.

- Commentary by Markus Schultze-Kraft (Crisis Group), [FARC en 2009: “¿Renacimiento político ‘inducido’ como oportunidad para la resolución del conflicto?”](#), UN Periódico, 8 March 2009.
- [“In strategic shift, Colombia’s FARC targets cities”](#), *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 March 2009.

Crisis Group Latin America and Caribbean Report N°30, [Ending Colombia’s FARC Conflict: Dealing the Right Card](#), 26 March 2009. To end Colombia’s half century-long conflict, President Uribe’s government needs to complement military measures against FARC with a political negotiation strategy. Peace negotiations could be facilitated by external actors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, Brazil or Chile.



➡ **Ecuador** Relations with Colombia further strained after Colombia Defense Minister Santos 5 March called March 2008 airstrike across Ecuadorian border “legitimate defense”. President Correa 6 March announced increase in security forces along Colombian border. Opinion polls indicate Correa likely to win Apr presidential elections.

- [“Se reaviva la tensión entre Colombia y Ecuador”](#), Infolatam, 5 March 2009.

🏠 **Guadeloupe (France)** Union leaders 4 March suspended general strike, in effect since late Jan, after deal reached with govt on lowering energy prices.

- [“Unions suspend 44-day-old strike in Guadeloupe”](#), AP, 4 March 2009.

➡ **Haiti** Party of ex-president Aristide, Lavalas, said will seek legal challenge to Provisional electoral council’s Feb rejection of all Lavalas candidacies for Apr senate election; UNSC Haiti delegation 14 March expressed support for Lavalas inclusion. UNSG Ban, Bill Clinton called on increased international aid for Haiti following early month visit. 5 March violent Cabaret municipality demonstrations over slow govt recovery efforts following 2008 hurricane destruction.

- Commentary by Mark Scheider (Crisis Group), [“Help Haiti keep Drugs out of the Country”](#), *Miami Herald*, 7 March 2009.
- [“Jean-Bertrand Aristide remains potent force in Haiti”](#), *Miami Herald*, 2 March 2009.

Crisis Group Latin America and Caribbean Briefing N°19, [Haiti 2009: Stability at Risk](#), 3 March 2009. Since the April 2008 riots the country’s socio-economic situation deteriorated, fuelling the population’s discontent. Haiti’s government needs to establish a broad national consensus, securing the support of parliament, donors and civil society, and the executive and legislative branch relationship needs to improve.



➡ **Venezuela** President Chávez continued seizures in food, farming industries: 4 March took over privately-owned U.S., Venezuelan rice processing plants, accused of ignoring govt price controls. National Assembly 18 March passed law placing key infrastructure – including ports, airports – under central govt control; previously administered regionally, often by Chávez opponents; opposition said amounted to “coup d’état”. Attorney general 19 March called for arrest of opposition leader Manuel Rosales, accused of corruption; thousands of

opposition supporters protested decision in Maracaibo.

- “Feeding frenzy”, *Economist*, 12 March 2009.
- For latest report 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 Netanyahu sworn in as PM 31 March at head of coalition govt with Labour, far right Yisrael Beiteinu, orthodox Jewish Shas parties; controversial right-winger Avigdor Lieberman appointed FM. Netanyahu pledged to negotiate with Palestinians, but avoided commitment to 2 states. U.S. Sec State Clinton 3-4 March met Israeli, Palestinian leaders, emphasised support for 2-state solution. Cairo talks on Palestinian national unity govt began 10 March; adjourned 19 March amid disagreements on commitment to PLO agreements with Israel, composition of govt. Hamas-Israel talks in Cairo on captured soldier Gilad Shalit ended 19 March without deal. Israel arrested 10 Hamas leaders including MPs in W Bank 19 March. Sporadic rocket fire from Gaza throughout month drew retaliatory strikes from Israel, killing 4 Islamic Jihad members 4-5 March; Hamas criticised rocket fire in 12 March statement. 2 militants killed in airstrike near Gaza-Israel border 31 March. Palestinian shot dead in Jerusalem 5 March after driving bulldozer into police car. 2 Israeli police killed 15 March near W Bank settlement. Car bomb defused in Haifa 21 March, claimed by previously unknown group. Far right Jewish march in Israeli Arab town Umm al-Fahm sparked clashes between heavy police presence and protesting locals.

- “Not as far-right as it might have been”, *Economist*, 26 March 2009.
- “Palestinians adjourn Cairo talks without govt deal”, Reuters, 19 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°26, *Ending the War in Gaza*, 5 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Lebanon** International tribunal on killing of former PM Hariri opened in the Hague 1 March. Leaders of main national factions met 2 March in 5th round of national dialogue. UK minister 4 March announced resumption of contact with Hizbollah “political wing”. President Suleiman in Paris 18 March rejected direct talks with Israel. Senior PLO official, Fatah member Kamal Midhat among 4 dead in 23 March bombing near Mieh Mieh Palestinian camp; days before, clashes in camp killed 2. Syria appointed first ambassador to Lebanon 24 March, following Dec opening of Beirut embassy.

- “Senior PLO official killed in south Lebanon bombing”, *Daily Star*, 24 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°84, *Nurturing Instability: Lebanon’s Palestinian Refugee Camps*, 19 Feb. 2009.

➡ **Syria** High-level U.S. envoys met FM Muallim in Damascus 7 March for talks on bilateral, regional issues; expressed optimism for future progress. Lebanon opened embassy in Damascus 16 March. Syria 24 March appointed ambassador to Beirut embassy opened in Dec (see Lebanon).

- “With isolation over, Syria is happy to talk”, *New York Times*, 26 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°83, *Engaging Syria? U.S. Constraints and Opportunities*, 11 Feb. 2009.

GULF

➡ **Bahrain** Clashes between security forces and protesters at 6 March demonstration against govt seizure of coast used by fishermen. 22 Shiites arrested Dec, including leading activists, in court 24 March on charges of plotting against state.

- “22 activists speak for 1st time at Bahrain trial”, AP, 26 March 2009.

➡ **Iran** U.S. President Obama’s Iranian New Year message drew guarded response from Iranian leadership. Obama offered Iran “new beginning”, affirmed commitment to diplomacy in 20 March broadcast; Supreme Leader Khamenei said concrete U.S. policy changes needed before Iran responded. U.S. sanctions on Iran renewed for one year 12 March. U.S. envoy Holbrooke held talks with Iranian deputy FM at UN Hague conference on Afghanistan 31 March. Ex-president Khatami 17 March announced withdrawal from June presidential elections; backed moderate former PM Mir-Hossein Musavi, who announced own candidacy 10 March. President Ahmadi-Nejad mid-month criticised parliament for dropping controversial reduction in energy subsidies from budget.

- Comment by Frederic Tellier (Crisis Group), “Dealing with Ahmadinejad”, *Global Post*, 11 March 2009.
- “The tantalising prospect of reconciliation”, *Economist*, 26 March 2009.

➡ **Iraq** Scores killed in series of deadly bomb attacks during month. At least 12 killed 5 March by car bomb, Hilla. Suicide bombings killed 28 police officers and recruits, Baghdad, 8 March; 33 in gathering of tribal leaders, Abu Ghraib, 10 March; 25 in Kurdish funeral, Jalawla, Diyala province, 23 March. Car bomb in Baghdad bus station 26 March killed at least 20. Several dead in numerous smaller attacks across country, many targeting police in Mosul area; suicide bomber hit Mosul police station 31 March, killing 8. Iraqi-U.S. joint operation 28 March arrested Awakening militia leader in Fadil district, Baghdad, sparking armed clashes; at least 3 reported killed. President Jalal Talabani 14 March announced would not seek second term early 2010. During Turkish president’s visit 23 March Talabani called on PKK rebels to lay down arms or leave Iraq. UK troops handed over command of Basra region to U.S. 31 March.

- Comment by Joost Hiltermann (Crisis Group), “The US Exit From Iraq: How to Stay Clear of Danger”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 March 2009
- “At least 32 die in a wave of violence across Iraq”, *New York Times*, 23 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°82, *Iraq’s Provincial Elections: The Stakes*, 27 Jan. 2009.

➡ **Yemen** Tensions between govt and Houthis rebels in northern Saada region rose early month, as rebels accused govt of preparing to escalate conflict. Govt accused Houthis of killing 2 soldiers 6 March; Several killed 6-7 March as Houthis clashed with govt and tribal allies in Ghamr district. 4 S Korean tourists and guide killed 15 March by suicide bomber in Hadramawt region; Korean delegation targeted by second bombing 18

March near Sanaa airport. Al-Qaeda reportedly claimed responsibility. 6 suspected al-Qaeda militants arrested 25 March. Security forces arrested 10 in 28 March operation against militants, Abyan province.

- [“Fears of renewed conflict in north as tensions rise”](#), IRIN, 10 March 2009.

NORTH AFRICA

➤ **Algeria** President Bouteflika launched re-election campaign 19 March, calling for high turnout. Main opposition figures announced boycott of 9 Apr poll. Numerous violent incidents throughout month involving suspected Islamist militants and security forces in east, mainly around Tizi Ouzou, Kabylie region, left several killed from both sides as well as civilians; al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb claimed many attacks. Militants stormed police station near Tizi Ouzou 24 March. 6 al-Qaeda suspects killed, 10 arrested by security forces 26 March in Blida, east of Algiers.

- [“Algerian president rallies for vote”](#), AP, 26 March 2009.

➤ **Egypt** Govt officials mediated between Hamas and Israel, hosted reconciliation talks between Palestinian factions during month (see Israel/OPT). Rafah crossing to Gaza Strip opened 18-20 March for students and medical cases. 29 members of banned Muslim Brotherhood arrested across country 3 March. Brotherhood leader Muhammad Mahdi Akef 26 March announced would step down end 2009.

- [“30 years on, Egyptians at odds over Israel peace”](#), AP, 26 March 2009.
- For background, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa

Report N°76, [Egypt’s Muslim Brothers: Confrontation or Integration?](#), 18 June 2008.

➤ **Mauritania** Libyan leader Qaddafi in Nouakchott 9-12 March for talks with ruling military council, anti-coup opposition. Opposition RFD and FNDD parties denounced Qaddafi’s support for coup leaders; RFD leader Ould Daddah 24 March declared boycott of planned June presidential elections. Military ruler Gen Abdelaziz 29 March announced candidacy in elections, intention to resign from army mid-Apr. AU announced continuation of sanctions 24 March.

- [“Mauritania’s military ruler running for president”](#), VOA, 29 March 2009.

➤ **Morocco** Rabat cut diplomatic ties with Iran 6 March in protest at Iranian official’s comments on sovereignty of Bahrain; foreign ministry also claimed Iran interfering in internal affairs by propagating Shiite Islam. Several arrests late month in govt “morality” campaign to preserve “Sunni Malekite character of Morocco” targeting Shiites, homosexuals; 5 Christian missionaries expelled end month.

- [“Morocco severs relations with Iran”](#), AP, 6 March 2009.

➤ **Western Sahara** UNHCR, WFP mission 18 March began assessment of malnutrition in Sahrawi refugee camps. European Parliament delegation expressed concern for human rights in camps, Moroccan-controlled areas, called for MINURSO mandate to include HR monitoring.

- [“Parlement Européen: L’ONU doit s’occuper des droits de l’homme au Sahara Occidental”](#), *El Pais*, 13 March 2009.

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Advocacy Offices

Brussels	brussels@crisisgroup.org +32 2 502 9038
Washington	washington@crisisgroup.org +1 202 785 1601
New York	newyork@crisisgroup.org +1 212 813 0820
London	london@crisisgroup.org +44 207 831 1436
Moscow	moscow@crisisgroup.org +7 495 455 9798

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