



CRISISWATCH

Tracking Conflict Worldwide

CrisisWatch is our global conflict tracker, a tool designed to help decision-makers prevent deadly violence by keeping them up-to-date with developments in over 80 conflicts and crises, identifying trends and alerting them to risks of escalation and opportunities to advance peace.

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September 2020

Global Overview

SEPTEMBER 2020

The latest edition of Crisis Group's monthly conflict tracker highlights deteriorations in September in nine countries and conflict areas as well as improved situations in **Somalia**, **Afghanistan** and **Libya**.

Tensions in the **Taiwan Strait** spiked amid heightened Chinese military activity and a senior U.S. official's visit to Taiwan.

In **Uganda**, political rivalries ran high ahead of the general elections in early 2021, with restrictions on free speech and ruling-party primaries marred by deadly violence.

In **Lebanon**, the new prime minister-designate resigned after failing to form a government as the country faces deepening political polarisation.

In **Colombia**, deadly unrest erupted in the capital Bogotá and other cities after a video emerged of police abuse.

Looking ahead to October, CrisisWatch warns of six conflict risks.

Azerbaijani and **Armenian** authorities called on their local populations to prepare for war after major clashes along the front line in the **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict zone left dozens of military personnel killed on both sides in late September. The fighting, which constitutes the severest military escalation since the 1994 ceasefire, could worsen in coming weeks.

In **Côte d’Ivoire**, pre-electoral tensions rose as the Constitutional Council confirmed President Ouattara’s candidacy but excluded several prominent candidates, creating an explosive climate ahead of the vote scheduled for 31 October.

Meanwhile, both **Guinea** and **Bolivia** face high-stake presidential elections which could spark violence around their respective 18 October votes.





Robert
Malley

President & CEO

 Rob_Malley

PRESIDENT'S TAKE

Crisis Group Turns Focus to Risk of Electoral Violence in the U.S.

In his introduction to this month's edition of [CrisisWatch](#), our President Robert Malley reflects on Crisis Group's decision to focus on the risk of violence surrounding the upcoming U.S. elections.

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Latest Updates

Africa

➔ Nile Waters SEPTEMBER 2020

Negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan on filling and operation of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) remained largely stalled. U.S. early Sept announced suspension of around \$130mn in aid to Ethiopia over latter's completion of first phase of filling of GERD's reservoir and "lack of progress" in tripartite talks. At UN General Assembly, Egypt's President Sisi 22 Sept warned against extending negotiations indefinitely, and Ethiopia's PM Abiy 25 Sept said Ethiopia had "no intention" of harming Sudan and Egypt and remained committed to African Union-led talks.

→ Burkina Faso SEPTEMBER 2020

Jihadist insurgency and counter-insurgency operations continued to fuel intercommunal tensions across country, notably in east where jihadists gained ground. Army early Sept launched large-scale counter-insurgency operation in all three regions in north, but jihadists, mainly from Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (JNIM), continued to target military and volunteers fighting alongside security forces (VDPs). In Sahel region's Soum province, suspected JNIM insurgents 11 Sept ambushed new elite regiment on Gaskindé-Djibo axis, killing four soldiers. Suspected JNIM insurgents next day attacked VDP unit in Boukouma area, wounding at least two VDPs. Local sources reported military 18 Sept killed about 40 civilians in operation in Tin Akoff area in Sahel region's Oudalan province. In North region, JNIM 11 Sept attacked VDP unit near Tangaye commune, killing at least one and wounding many. In Centre North region, suspected jihadists 12 Sept stopped trucks coming from Kaya city, Sanmatenga province, in Tafogo, Namentenga province, and seized their shipment. Unidentified assailants 19 Sept ambushed military unit on Bourzanga-Namsiguia road, Bam province, death toll unknown. In East region, jihadist violence and counter-insurgency operations by VDPs continued to fuel tensions between Fulani and Mossi communities. VDPs 1 Sept reportedly abducted member of Fulani community on road between Fada (Gourma province) and Pama (Kompienga province). Suspected jihadists 17 Sept killed three VDPs in ambush on Fada-Nagré axis, Gourma province; in retaliation, VDPs same day killed three Fulanis in area. Jihadist groups also expanded in hitherto safe areas of East region. In Gnagna province, jihadists 15 Sept briefly kidnapped five NGO workers, and next day burned primary school in Bilanga area. Islamic State (ISIS) militants 15 Sept briefly occupied Tansarga town in Tapoa province, ransacking and burning several public buildings. Intercommunal and jihadist violence remained high in Boucle du Mouhoun region in west. In Barani commune, unidentified assailants 16 Sept killed two sons of Fulani Cheikh; suspected jihadists next day killed Dogon chief of Pellin 2 village, and day after killed at least one civilian in Pampakuy village. Ahead of presidential election scheduled for 22 Nov, several candidates late Sept submitted their candidacy, including President Kaboré 29 Sept.

→ Mali SEPTEMBER 2020

Military junta which toppled President Keïta took steps to keep firm control over transition, while violence persisted in centre and north. Military junta National Committee for the Salvation of the People (CNSP) early Sept held talks with opposition and civil society groups including M5-RFP coalition in capital Bamako; tensions surrounded talks, with M5-RFP accusing CNSP of sidelining movement. CNSP 12 Sept announced 18-month transition before return to civilian rule and unveiled transition charter, which M5-RFP rejected, arguing some of its key provisions, notably possibility to appoint soldier as transition president, did not reflect discussions. Regional body Economic Community of West African States 7 Sept issued ultimatum to appoint civilian transition leaders by

15 Sept, later pushing deadline to 22 Sept. Junta 21 Sept appointed retired General Bah N'Daw as transition president and Colonel Assimi Goïta, head of the CNSP, as VP. N'Daw 27 Sept appointed former FM Moctar Ouane as PM. Meanwhile, jihadist and communal violence persisted in centre and north. In centre, suspected jihadists overnight 3-4 Sept ambushed army convoy in Nara area, Koulikoro region, killing ten soldiers. Unidentified assailants 9 Sept killed four soldiers in Alatona area near Niono town, Ségou region. In Mopti region, series of incidents took place: unidentified gunmen 4 Sept fired at humanitarian vehicle in Bandiagara district, suspected members of Dogon militia Dana Ambassagou 9 Sept killed Dogon chief accused of collaborating with jihadist groups in Bamba commune, and suspected jihadists 29 Sept ambushed army convoy along Douentza-Boni axis, killing at least two soldiers. In north, French Barkhane convoy 5 Sept hit roadside bomb in Tessalit area, Kidal region, leaving two French soldiers dead. Members of two Tuareg clans 9 Sept exchanged gunfire in Ber commune, Timbuktu region, and several mortar shells same day fell near UN mission (MINUSMA) camp in same area.

➔ Niger SEPTEMBER 2020

Amid persistent jihadist violence, independent body accused army of engaging in enforced disappearances. Independent body National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) 4 Sept accused “uncontrolled” army elements of forcibly disappearing over 100 men in Inates and Ayorou areas of Tillabery region in March-April; alleged exactions followed major jihadist attacks in area that left 160 soldiers dead in Dec-Jan; Defence Minister Issoufou Katambe 11 Sept denied soldiers’ responsibility. Islamic State (ISIS) 17 Sept claimed Aug attack that killed six French humanitarian workers and two Nigerien guides in Tillabery’s Kouré national park near capital Niamey. Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Boko Haram faction led by Abubakar Shekau (JAS) early Sept reportedly clashed in Diffa region in south east. Amid insecurity, govt 25 Sept prolonged state of emergency in Diffa, Tahoua, and Tillabery regions. In Agadez region in north, unidentified gunmen 12 Sept attacked military outpost on Arlit-Assamaka axis killing two national guards. Libyan forces affiliated with eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar mid-Sept arrested opposition figure Mahmoud Salah – who in Aug launched “politico-military” group near Niger-Libya border – and transferred him to Niamey. Rainy season peak brought flooding across country, leaving at least 71 dead. Judge in Niamey 29 Sept ordered provisional release of three human rights defenders arrested in March after taking part in protest and charged with “manslaughter”, “complicity in damaging public property” and “arson”; NGO Amnesty International next day called on authorities to drop all charges against them.

➔ Burundi SEPTEMBER 2020

Series of deadly attacks targeted ruling party and its youth wing, while govt stepped up crackdown on opposition and ethnic Tutsi minority. Armed individuals launched attacks on members of ruling party CNDD-FDD and its youth wing Imbonerakure in several provinces. Armed group RED-Tabara 15, 18 and 25 Sept claimed several of these attacks, said they had killed at least 29 ruling-party supporters and 30 security forces personnel. Several unclaimed attacks sparked rumours of emergence of new rebel group, and Public African Radio 3 Sept alleged govt enrolled Imbonerakure to commit targeted murders and fake armed group attacks, reportedly to legitimise its monitoring of opposition; President Ndayishimiye 27 Sept denied allegations. Meanwhile, authorities stepped up repression of opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL) members and Tutsi civilians. Imbonerakure, police and national intelligence services 1-21 Sept reportedly arrested over 50 CNL members across country. Notably, security forces 12 Sept arrested 27 CNL members during raid in Muha commune, Bujumbura Mairie province. Imbonerakure 4 Sept also reportedly beat CNL activist to death in Bwambarangwe commune, Kirundo province. Authorities early Sept arrested about 20 Tutsi students and 1 Sept arrested newly elected local Tutsi leader and three others in Mugamba commune, Bururi province. UN Commission of Inquiry on Burundi 23 Sept decried “summary executions, numerous arbitrary arrests and detention, cases of torture and ill-treatment” and “numerous violations of key civil liberties” over past few months. Ndayishimiye next day denied allegations, reiterated call to remove country from UN human rights agenda. Govt mid-Sept set steep conditions for normalising relations with Kigali, including that Rwandan govt extradite suspected perpetrators of 2015 coup attempt against former President Nkurunziza and facilitate refugees’ returns. Meanwhile, group of 507 Burundian refugees in Rwanda 10 Sept returned home.

➔ Cameroon SEPTEMBER 2020

Security forces early Sept confronted Anglophone separatists in North West region’s capital and jihadist attacks persisted in Far North. After Anglophone separatists 1 Sept killed policeman in North West’s capital Bamenda, security forces in following days banned circulation of motorbikes and raided city, killing prominent separatist leader known as General Mad Dog 6 Sept; as part of “Bamenda Clean” operation launched 8 Sept, military carried out house searches, indiscriminate arrests and shootings, killing three civilians 12 Sept and four people including two suspected separatists 22 Sept. Soldiers 15 and 20 Sept killed four civilians in Bafut town, Mezam division. In South West region, Anglophone separatists 14 Sept killed two soldiers and one civilian in Bekora village, Ndian division. Soldiers 22-23 Sept killed six civilians in Tiko town and Lysoka locality, both Fako division. In alleged attempt to counter Anglophone aspirations to autonomy, President Biya 6 Sept scheduled country’s first-ever regional elections for 6 Dec; regional councils to be indirectly elected by local councils currently dominated by ruling party. Opposition leader Maurice Kamto 8 Sept said elections cannot take place “before the resolution of the crisis in the Anglophone region and the consensual reform of the electoral code”. Opposition supporters 22 Sept took to streets across country to demand Biya’s resignation, police used tear gas to disperse protesters in economic

capital Douala and arrested at least 31 people in capital Yaoundé. In Far North, Boko Haram (BH) continued to target civilians and security forces. Notably, BH suicide bombing 1 Sept left seven civilians dead in Kouyapé village, Mayo-Sava division; BH overnight 5-6 Sept killed two soldiers at Toufou army post, Mayo-Tsanaga division; 11 Sept killed six civilians including village chief in suicide bombing in Zeleved village, Mayo-Tsanaga; 9-28 Sept killed at least eight civilians in several villages in Mayo-Sava; overnight 28-29 Sept killed two soldiers in Zeleved village. Military court 21 Sept sentenced four soldiers to ten years in prison and another to two years for killing women and children in Far North in 2015; video of killings had sparked international condemnation in 2018.

➔ Central African Republic SEPTEMBER 2020

Armed group attacks hindered electoral preparations in north west, and persisted in centre and south east.

Armed group Restitution, Reclamation and Rehabilitation (3R) maintained attacks in Ouham-Pendé prefecture in north west as it continued to disperse across region under pressure from UN mission (MINUSCA) operation launched in June. 3R elements 7 Sept kidnapped two policemen near Bang town after locals 5 Sept arrested two 3R combatants and delivered them to security forces; 8 Sept attacked army convoy on Mokondi-Ouali axis, ensuing clashes left 12 combatants dead and five soldiers injured; next day shot at ambulance on Bocaranga-Bouar axis, causing temporary suspension of humanitarian activities in area; sporadic attacks continued until late Sept. Ahead of 27 Dec general elections, electoral authority 16 Sept said voter registration could not be completed on time in three prefectures, including north-western Ouham-Pendé and Nana-Mambéré, due to ongoing violence. Meanwhile, several armed groups remained active in south east and centre. Armed group Unity for Peace in Central Africa 3 Sept intercepted two NGO trucks and tried to extort passengers in Kemba village, Basse-Kotto prefecture in south east. Anti-balaka and ex-Seleka armed groups 6 Sept clashed in Kouki village, Ouham prefecture in centre, leaving one anti-balaka dead; unidentified individuals next day attacked UN convoy transferring suspect, no casualties reported. Suspected armed group Lord's Resistance Army 28 Sept reportedly kidnapped around ten civilians in Likhoua village, Haut-Mbomou prefecture in south east. Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration program made slow progress in centre and centre-east. President Touadéra's national security adviser 13 Sept announced demobilisation of 60 combatants in Nana-Gribizi prefecture, including 53 from armed group Patriotic Movement for Central Africa. Demobilisation of several armed group combatants started in Bria, Haute-Kotto prefecture, with 30 combatants from Popular Front for Central African Renaissance demobilised 16 Sept.

➔ Chad SEPTEMBER 2020

Insecurity persisted in Lake and Tibesti provinces, while courtroom incident raised tensions between govt and judiciary. In Lake province in west, army vehicle 5 Sept detonated explosive device near Kaiga Kindjira outpost, leaving three soldiers dead. Boko Haram (BH) 17 Sept attacked Koulfoua locality, and later same day reportedly ambushed soldiers deployed to site, killing at least ten. Army 24 Sept killed 20 BH insurgents and released 12 hostages in Barkalam and Bilabrim localities. In Tibesti province in north near Libyan border, unidentified gunmen 4 Sept opened fire on intelligence services vehicle in Kouri-Bougoudi area, killing three. Militia from Libyan Koufra town 7-8 Sept reportedly crossed 80km into Chad and ambushed civilians on their way back from Kouri-Bougoudi, reportedly killing one and kidnapping over 30; attackers later released 22 ethnic Tebu captives, but retained several hostages from other ethnic groups. Shortly after court conviction of army Colonel Abdoulaye Ahmat Haroun to five years in prison for murder, members of his family, reportedly “heavily armed”, 17 Sept sprung him from courtroom in capital N’Djamena; security forces later that day recaptured colonel and five suspected instigators of his escape. Incident raised tensions between govt and judiciary, with lawyers and magistrates going on strike late Sept to demand better security for justice professionals. Ahead of 2021 elections, President Déby 23 Sept established committee to revise 2018 constitution.

➔ Democratic Republic Of Congo SEPTEMBER 2020

Armed groups continued to target civilians and humanitarian workers in east, and former President Kabila’s ambition to return to power strained ruling coalition. In eastern Ituri province, armed group Cooperative for the Development of the Congo (CODECO) 4 Sept entered provincial capital Bunia, before withdrawing same day after negotiations with local authorities. Unidentified armed group 8-10 Sept reportedly killed 58 Hutu civilians in Tchabi village, Irumu territory. In North and South Kivu provinces, also in east, civilians and humanitarian workers continued to come under attack. In North Kivu, suspected armed group Allied Democratic Forces 7-23 Sept reportedly killed at least 37 civilians in several villages in Beni territory. Mai Mai militia 16 Sept attacked convoy of World Food Program and NGO World Vision near Mbughavinywa locality, Lubero territory, killing one and abducting two others. In South Kivu, coalition of Mai Mai militias 8-9 Sept reportedly launched offensive against Twirwaneho militia, leaving at least ten dead in Minembwe area, Fizi territory. Unidentified gunmen 21 Sept kidnapped three staff of Irish NGO Concern in Kajembwe village, Uvira territory. In south-eastern Haut-Katanga province, suspected Mai Mai militias 25-26 Sept stormed second largest city

Lubumbashi, killing at least two policemen and one soldier; govt forces repelled attack, reportedly killing 16 rebels. Meanwhile, Kabila's allies hinted at presidential bid in 2023. Kabila's ex-chief of staff and current party coordinator 14 Sept said President Tshisekedi agreed to make way for Kabila in 2023 in secret clause of power-sharing agreement; Tshisekedi's party immediately denied allegations. For first time since Jan 2019, Kabila next day appeared in Senate, where he holds life seat granted to all former presidents; Environment Minister Claude Nyamugabo 18 Sept said "Joseph Kabila will return to power and we are working on it". After Rwandan Ambassador to DRC Vincent Karega in Aug denied Rwandan involvement in violence in eastern DRC during 1998-2003 war, protesters 4 Sept gathered in Kinshasa to demand his departure and govt 7 Sept said Karega's statement "is not likely to promote good relations between the DRC and Rwanda" (see Rwanda).

➔ Rwanda SEPTEMBER 2020

Relations with neighbouring countries remained tense. President Kagame 6 Sept said "there is still more to do" to improve relations with neighbouring Burundi and Uganda. Burundi govt mid-Sept set steep conditions for normalising relations with Kigali, including that Rwandan govt extradite suspected perpetrators of 2015 coup attempt against former Burundian President Nkurunziza and facilitate refugees' returns. Meanwhile, group of 507 Burundian refugees in Rwanda 10 Sept returned home. After Rwandan Ambassador to DRC Vincent Karega in Aug denied Rwandan involvement in violence in eastern DRC during 1998-2003 war, around 100 Congolese civil society activists 4 Sept gathered in DRC capital Kinshasa calling for Karega's expulsion; police dispersed them with tear gas, reportedly leaving two injured. Kagame 6 Sept accused demonstrators of "attacking the relationship of friendship and brotherhood between our two countries", while DRC govt next day said Karega's statement "is not likely to promote good relations between the DRC and Rwanda". France's top appeals court 30 Sept confirmed Rwandan genocide financier Félicien Kabuga will be handed over to UN tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania for trial.

➔ Eritrea SEPTEMBER 2020

Human rights groups denounced compulsory military training amid COVID-19, while opposition group claimed attack on Eritrean officials in Ethiopia. Govt early Sept sent thousands to infamous Sawa military camp to undergo compulsory military training despite movement restrictions and closures of schools amid COVID-19

pandemic; NGO Human Rights Watch 11 Sept urged govt to reverse decision, citing risk of virus spreading in overcrowded camp, and to end compulsory military training. Eritrean opposition group Eritrean Defence Forces for National Salvation early Sept claimed attack on officials from Eritrea's ruling party Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice in Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa in late Aug, leaving one dead and two injured; if confirmed, incident would be first attack on Eritrean officials in Ethiopia since 2018 peace deal between two countries. In capital Asmara, authorities 4 Sept arrested senior security official Colonel Teame Goitom, who has worked with Eritrean security and intelligence bodies in Ethiopia since 2018, for unclear reasons. President Afwerki 7 Sept received Sudanese delegation led by Sovereign Council's Chairman General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, both sides agreed to bolster bilateral ties and regional peace.

➔ Ethiopia SEPTEMBER 2020

Tigray held regional elections in defiance of federal govt, authorities continued to crack down on opposition, and intercommunal violence left over 100 dead in Benishangul-Gumuz region. In run-up to Tigray's regional elections, Tigray govt 3 Sept said any move to disrupt polls, held despite federal govt's decision to postpone elections due to COVID-19, would amount to "declaration of war"; federal parliament's upper house 5 Sept declared elections unconstitutional and said it would not recognise outcome but PM Abiy 8 Sept ruled out military intervention or punitive budget cuts. Ruling-Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) 9 Sept won 189 out of 190 seats in regional parliament. After health minister 18 Sept told federal parliament's lower house that general elections could be held nationwide if precautions against COVID-19 are in place, lawmakers 22 Sept voted to hold polls in 2021. TPLF late Sept said federal govt's stay in power beyond 5 Oct (constitutional term limit for both houses of parliament) would be "constitutionally illegal" and that Tigray would not comply with any federal laws enacted after that date. In wake of late June-early July violent unrest in Oromia region, federal and Oromia regional prosecutors throughout month filed criminal charges against several opposition leaders including Jawar Mohammed and Eskinder Nega for their alleged role in instigating violence. In Benishangul-Gumuz region in north west, ethnic Gumuz militia early-to-mid Sept reportedly killed up to 140 people, mostly Amhara civilians, in several localities in Metekel zone; violence displaced more than 25,000. Also in Metekel, unidentified gunmen 25 Sept killed at least 15 civilians in Dangur district. In Somali region in east, police 3 Sept opened fire on demonstrators protesting against alleged police mistreatment of their community in Afdher zone, leaving at least nine dead and 39 injured. In Afar region in east, security forces 16 Sept shot and killed three youths in Abala town for allegedly violating COVID-19 restrictions. U.S. early Sept announced temporary suspension of some aid to Ethiopia citing recent completion of first phase of filling of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam without agreement with Sudan and Egypt and "lack of progress" in tripartite talks (see Nile Waters).

- **PODCAST: Hold Your Fire: Ethiopia's Political Crisis**

→ Kenya SEPTEMBER 2020

Political polarisation heightened ahead of 2022 presidential election amid persistent power struggle between President Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto, while Al-Shabaab attacks resumed in north east. Cross-country campaigns by opposition leader Raila Odinga and Ruto drumming up support respectively for and against referendum on constitutional reform – proposed by Kenyatta and Odinga – ahead of 2022 presidential election heightened polarisation between their supporters; ahead of Ruto’s visit to Kisii town, skirmishes 10 Sept broke out between pro-Ruto elements and others opposing his visit, police used teargas to disperse both groups. Meanwhile, police arrested MPs Johanna Ng’eno (from ruling coalition member Kenyan African National Union party) and Oscar Sudi (from ruling Jubilee Party, JP) 7 and 13 Sept respectively on charges of hate speech after they accused Kenyatta of sidelining Ruto within JP; Ng’eno and Sudi’s arrests were met with protests from their supporters. In attempt to break stalemate in Senate over revision of formula to determine share of national revenues received by counties, Kenyatta 15 Sept pledged to increase available revenues for counties by some \$450mn; 12-member special committee, appointed in Aug, 17 Sept agreed on revised formula ensuring no counties will lose money but also benefiting Kenyatta’s home county of Kiambu; Senate same day adopted formula. In Mandera county in north east, suspected Al-Shabaab militants 2-21 Sept launched attacks leaving two soldiers and five militants dead; 23 Sept abducted three civilians near Lafey town. Intercommunal and herder-farmer violence also erupted in several areas. In Turkana county in north west near border with Ethiopia, unidentified assailants 10 Sept ambushed herders at Nakuwa river, leaving four dead; police later that day killed one assailant. Along border between West Pokot and Elgeyo-Marakwet counties in west, two clashes between ethnic Pokot and Marakwet same day left six dead in Chepkokou and Kipchumo. In Nakuru county in south west, ethnic clashes in several villages night of 12-13 Sept left at least one dead and 12 injured. In Migori county in south west, two rival factions of Legio Maria faith 14 Sept came to blows, police intervened using live ammunition; violence reportedly left at least eight dead.

→ Somalia SEPTEMBER 2020

Federal govt and all member states reached long-awaited agreement on electoral framework; Al-Shabaab attacks continued in south, centre and capital Mogadishu. President Farmajo early Sept met with presidents of Puntland and Jubaland federal member states after they distanced themselves from Aug deal between Farmajo and leaders of Galmudug, Hirshabelle and South West states regarding electoral modalities for Nov 2020 parliamentary

and Feb 2021 presidential elections; Farmajo made several major concessions to Puntland and Jubaland; Farmajo and heads of all five federal member states met 13-17 Sept, agreed to indirect electoral framework for 2020-2021 polls. Shortly after reaching deal, Farmajo appointed Mohamed Hussein Roble as new PM following July ouster of former PM Khayre. Parliament approved PM Roble 23 Sept and indirect electoral model 26 Sept. In south and centre, Al-Shabaab 4 Sept abducted some 50 herders in Hiraan region; early Sept withstood army offensives to retake strategic Janay Abdalle town in Lower Juba region and throughout month reportedly killed at least 39 soldiers, civilians and state officials in Mudug, Middle Juba, Lower Juba, Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle, Bakool, Hiraan and Galguduud regions. Counter-insurgency operations throughout month reportedly left over 100 Al-Shabaab militants dead in Galguduud, Mudug, Middle Shabelle, Lower Shabelle, Bay, Gedo, Middle Juba and Lower Juba regions. Security forces 25 Sept rescued 40 children from Al-Shabaab training camp in Lower Shabelle region. In Mogadishu, suspected Al-Shabaab bombing targeting convoy of African Union mission (AMISOM) 6 Sept left one dead; AMISOM soldiers same day shot and wounded at least seven civilians. Al-Shabaab suicide bombing at restaurant 9 Sept killed at least three. In Middle Shabelle region, suspected inter-clan revenge killing 3 Sept left at least five dead. In Gedo region in south, hundreds late Sept took to streets across region after Kenyan forces reportedly operating under AMISOM 23-24 Sept allegedly killed at least one civilian and abducted several others; Kenyan security forces 26 Sept opened fire to deter demonstrators from approaching border prompting Somali forces to return fire which sparked brief firefight.

➔ Somaliland SEPTEMBER 2020

Ahead of 2021 legislative and local elections, violence erupted in Awdal region in west and tensions rose within ruling party. In Awdal region, amid Gadabursi clan's calls for revision of seat distribution in parliament's lower house before next year's elections, unidentified assailants 2 Sept threw grenade at govt building in regional capital Borama. Also in Borama, suspected clan militia 16 Sept reportedly attacked security forces checkpoint leaving at least one dead. In Sool region in east, rebel group Re-Liberation of Somalia 13 Sept reportedly launched attack on army base in Tukaraq town, leaving casualties on both sides. Meanwhile, tensions rose within ruling Kulmiye party ahead of congress scheduled for early Oct to elect new party leadership; prominent party member Mohamud Hashi 8 Sept accused incumbent party leader, President Bihi, of turning party into "personal fiefdom" after breaking with tradition to relinquish party chairmanship upon winning presidency in 2017, and said he would not take part in leadership contest. Somaliland and Taiwan – both of which seek international recognition – pursued effort to establish diplomatic relations, with Somaliland 9 Sept opening representative office in Taiwanese capital Taipei. After political leaders of Somalia – which considers Somaliland as one of its member states – mid-Sept signed agreement on electoral framework that includes Somaliland, Somaliland 21 Sept said it is an independent state that "has nothing to do with the electoral process in Somalia" and urged Somalia to refrain from making "false claims".

➔ South Sudan SEPTEMBER 2020

Govt and former rebel opposition groups continued negotiations on implementation of power-sharing deal at state and local levels while violence persisted across country. Govt and former rebel opposition groups mid-Sept reached agreement on allocation of ministerial positions at state level, 24 Sept resolved deadlock over total number of counties and agreed on allocation of all but 11 county commissioner positions. President Salva Kiir and former rebel turned VP Riek Machar, however, remained at odds over latter's pick for governor of contested Upper Nile state. Rebel group National Salvation Front (NAS), which refused to be part of 2018 peace deal, continued to launch attacks in Central Equatoria state in south. Suspected NAS combatants 1 Sept killed two civilians in Yiei River county. UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) next day deployed troops to establish temporary base in Lobonok county following recent surge in suspected NAS attacks against civilians and aid workers there; 8 Sept announced its troops had been blocked from reaching Lobonok by govt. NAS next day reportedly repelled joint attack by Kiir's and Machar's forces on its positions in Morobo county, five reported dead on both sides. After UNMISS early Sept began withdrawing its forces from civilian protection camps across country, thousands of internally displaced persons 10, 22 and 28 Sept took to streets of capital Juba, Jonglei state capital Bor town and Unity state capital Bentiu, respectively, calling on UNMISS to reconsider its withdrawal. Intercommunal and other violence remained high in centre. In Unity state, cattle raid 9 Sept left 17 dead in Mayom county and intercommunal tit-for-tat attacks 20-21 Sept left at least five dead in Mayendit county. In Warrap and Lakes state, attacks by unidentified assailants and intercommunal clashes 1-25 Sept left at least 30 dead in several counties. As govt continued to face massive budgetary shortfalls amid low oil prices, Kiir 16 Sept fired Finance Minister Salvatore Garang Mabiordit Wol along with heads of National Revenue Authority and state-owned oil company Nile Petroleum Corporation.

➔ Sudan SEPTEMBER 2020

Govt and rebel group agreed to resume peace talks and violence persisted in rural areas. After faction of rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu withdrew from peace talks in Aug days before govt and other rebel groups struck landmark peace agreement, PM Hamdok and al-Hilu 2-5 Sept met in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa, agreed to hold informal negotiations to discuss contentious issues including "separation of religion and state" and "right to self-determination" with view to resuming formal peace talks. Govt's Higher Peace Council headed by Sovereign Council Chairman and leader of armed forces Abdel Fattah al-

Burhan 14 Sept endorsed agreement. Violence persisted in rural areas amid ongoing protests and sit-ins urging govt to advance transitional agenda. In Red Sea state's capital Port Sudan, clashes between govt forces and local residents 1 Sept left one dead and 25 wounded. In South Kordofan state, unidentified gunmen 4 Sept killed two civilians. In Central Darfur state, unidentified gunmen 10 Sept killed two civilians near Nierteti town prompting demonstrators to take to streets in Nierteti same day; police fired live ammunition leaving two dead. Suspected herders 24 Sept shot and killed two farmers near Nierteti. Army and holdout armed opposition Sudan Liberation Movement/Army faction led by Abdel Wahid al-Nur 28 Sept clashed in Jebel Marra area; death toll unknown. In West Darfur state, unidentified gunmen 13-18 Sept killed two civilians and one policeman. In Northern state, suspected smugglers 20 Sept shot and killed five police officers near Ed Debba town. In capital Khartoum, authorities 16 Sept said they arrested at least 41 members of suspected "terrorist cell" and seized large amounts of explosives. Hundreds 30 Sept demonstrated in Khartoum against deteriorating economic conditions and called for removal of Hamdok's govt; police reportedly fired tear gas to disperse protesters. Govt 4 Sept declared three-month state of emergency over catastrophic floods and 10 Sept announced three-month economic state of emergency amid soaring inflation and sharply deteriorating currency. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 16 Sept called on U.S. lawmakers to pass legislation paving way for Sudan's removal from U.S. State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) list.

- **PODCAST: The Horn: A Rare Glimpse into Darfur's Last Rebel Stronghold**

➔ Tanzania SEPTEMBER 2020

Crackdown on dissent continued ahead of general elections scheduled for 28 Oct. NGO Human Rights Watch 2 Sept voiced concern over rising "repression of opposition parties, nongovernmental organizations, and the media" in lead-up to polls, said security forces arrested at least 17 opposition party members and govt critics since mid-June. Ruling party Chama Cha Mapinduzi 14 Sept said President Magufuli would not amend constitution to seek third term in 2025 if re-elected in Oct. Police 15 Sept detained presidential hopeful Bernard Membe's assistant at economic capital Dar es Salaam airport over money laundering allegations, released him on bail 21 Sept. Opposition parties Alliance for Change and Transparency (ACT) and Chadema 20 Sept accused electoral commission of "widespread irregularities" after latter in Aug disqualified several of their candidates for parliamentary and local council elections. ACT leader Zitto Kabwe 22 Sept said ACT had reached loose cooperation agreement with Chadema ahead of vote; authorities immediately warned any form of collaboration would be illegal at this stage of election campaign. Police 25 Sept detained ACT official Dotto Rangimoto over allegations he breached Cybercrime Act; same day arrested two other ACT officials for allegedly impeding Rangimoto's arrest. Electoral commission 27 Sept said Chadema presidential candidate Tundu Lissu would be required to appear before commission's ethics committee after he accused electoral body of having met with Magufuli to rig elections. Police 28 Sept reportedly fired tear gas at Lissu's convoy in Nyamongo area in north. Authorities 16 Sept lifted ban on Kenyan airlines after Kenya revoked COVID-19 mandatory quarantine for individuals entering country from Tanzania, ending two-month standoff.

 **Uganda** SEPTEMBER 2020

Ahead of early 2021 general elections, ruling-party primaries were marred by deadly violence, while authorities continued to use legal means to harass key challengers and restrict free speech. During primaries of ruling party National Resistance Movement (NRM) 4 Sept, rival supporters clashed over alleged voter fraud in Isingiro district in south west, leaving at least three dead; NRM MP and Labour Minister Mwesigwa Rukutana reportedly shot opponent's supporters after losing primary election in Ntungamo district in south west, injuring three. Police next day detained Rukutana on charges of attempted murder, 7 Sept fired tear gas to disperse Rukutana's supporters demanding his release in Ntungamo municipality; court in Ntungamo 15 Sept released Rukutana on bail. Harassment of opposition continued. Magistrate court in Wakiso district 1 Sept summoned musician-turned-opposition-leader Bobi Wine, who plans to run for president in early 2021, over allegations he falsified documents when registering as candidate for local by-election in 2017. National communications commission 7 Sept said bloggers and social media users with large followings must apply for license to publish information online; NGO Amnesty International 9 Sept decried move as "final blow to freedom of expression". Police 8 Sept fired tear gas to disperse rally of opposition party Alliance for National Transformation (ANT) in Hoima town in west and detained ANT regional coordinator Ismail Kasule; 17 Sept arrested some 20 supporters of Wine's National Unity Platform (NUP) who were demonstrating in capital Kampala against Charles Olim, prominent supporter of President Museveni, after he reportedly fired at NUP offices. In north, South Sudanese refugees 11 Sept clashed with locals in Madi Okollo district over access to water, leaving at least ten refugees and one Ugandan dead, and prompting govt to deploy army and police to area.

 **Malawi** SEPTEMBER 2020

Authorities took additional steps to remove former President Mutharika's appointees from power. President Chakwera 1 Sept reinstated former army chief Gen Vincent Nundwe, whom Mutharika had dismissed. Police 13 Sept detained former Information Minister Henry Mussa and former Director of Information Gideon Munthali over allegations they stole govt computers while in office; court in capital Lilongwe 21 Sept granted bail to both. High Court 22 Sept denied bail to former presidential security aide Norman Chisale, suspected of involvement in 2015 killing of national anti-corruption body official Issa Njauju.

➔ Mozambique SEPTEMBER 2020

Amid counter-insurgency operations, deadly attacks by Islamist militants persisted in far north, while dissidents continued to target civilians in centre. In far northern Cabo Delgado province, Islamist militants retained control of port town and district capital Mocímboa da Praia and continued to launch attacks across province leaving scores of civilians dead. Islamic State (ISIS) 5 Sept claimed to have fended off joint Mozambican-Tanzanian armed force attack on Mocímboa da Praia, killing 20 Tanzanian soldiers, which Tanzania denied. Elsewhere in Mocímboa da Praia district, security forces 5 Sept reportedly regained control of Awasse town and 14 Sept repelled insurgents near Diaca village, killing at least five. In Palma district, insurgents 12 Sept killed at least 24 civilians near Pundanhar village and 24 Sept killed up to five soldiers in Naliendele village; security forces 23 Sept allegedly killed 19 militants in Pundanhar village. In Macomia district, insurgents 22 Sept killed five civilians near Novo Cabo Delgado locality, and 24 Sept killed at least eight others in Bilibiza village. NGO Amnesty International 9 Sept called on govt to launch investigation into “shocking violence” against detainees in far north, including dismemberment, torture, and attempted beheading of alleged militants; said videos depicting atrocities showed perpetrators wearing uniforms of Mozambique Armed Defense Forces and Mozambique Rapid Intervention Police. Govt in following days repeatedly denied allegations and denounced “disinformation” campaign by insurgents. European Parliament 17 Sept condemned use of “disproportionate violence” by security forces, called for impartial investigation into “grave violations”. Suspected members of Renamo Military Junta, dissident faction of opposition party Renamo, continued to launch attacks on transport routes in centre, notably killing two civilians at border between Nhamatanda and Chibabava districts in Sofala province 20 Sept and two others in Sussundenga district, Manica province 27 Sept. Demobilisation and disarmament of Renamo forces continued, with 140 female former combatants reportedly demobilised 5 Sept. Unidentified assailants 13 Sept assaulted journalists Luciano da Conceicao in Maxixe town, Inhambane province (south), and Leonardo Gimo in provincial capital of Nampula (north).

➔ Zimbabwe SEPTEMBER 2020

Authorities continued to use judicial process to harass opposition and civil society, while main opposition party remained divided over leadership dispute. High Court 2 Sept granted bail to prominent investigative

journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and opposition leader Jacob Ngarivhume, both arrested in July on charges of inciting public violence, but barred them from posting on Twitter. Dozens of lawyers later same day staged silent demonstration outside High Court in capital Harare to protest alleged rights abuses by authorities. Police 10 Sept detained student union president Takudzwa Ngadziore for taking part in unauthorised protest in Harare 8 Sept; court released him on bail 14 Sept and police same day arrested nine other students at bail hearing; unidentified individuals 18 Sept assaulted Ngadziore and several journalists at press conference in Harare, and police same day re-arrested Ngadziore on charges of inciting violence; court 21 Sept denied him bail. Ruling party ZANU-PF 11 Sept accused Nelson Chamisa, leader of faction of opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), of providing military training to opposition supporters and planning to destabilise country through acts of sabotage; State Security Minister Owen Ncube 28 Sept accused "rogue" opposition elements backed by "hostile Western govts" of smuggling weapons into country and plotting coup. MDC leaders Chamisa and Thokozani Khupe continued to vie for control of party. Khupe's faction (MDC-T) 19 Sept declared itself Zimbabwe's official opposition party and said it would rename itself MDC Alliance, drawing protest from Chamisa whose faction carries same name; 26 Sept requested that parliament speaker recall six Chamisa-aligned MPs, including VP of Chamisa's faction Lynette Karenzi-Kore. Two gunmen, including one former soldier, 5 Sept killed soldiers at police station in Chivhu town, Mashonaland East province; security forces next day killed assailants outside Chivhu.

➔ ⚡ Côte D'Ivoire SEPTEMBER 2020

Constitutional Council confirmed President Ouattara's candidacy in Oct presidential election and excluded several prominent candidates, creating explosive climate ahead of vote. Constitutional Council 14 Sept approved Ouattara's candidacy in presidential election scheduled for 31 Oct, confirming that 2016 constitutional reform reset counter of Ouattara's mandates to zero. Council also approved candidacies of Democratic Party of Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI) President Henri Konan Bédié, PDCI dissident Kouadio Konan Bertin and Popular Ivorian Front President Pascal Affi N'Guessan, but barred former President Gbagbo and former PM Guillaume Soro from running. Soro immediately decried decision as "politically motivated" and "legally unfounded" and 17 Sept called on opposition parties to "stand together" against Ouattara's third-term bid. Former Gbagbo Minister Charles Blé Goudé 19 Sept urged govt to delay election. Bédié and N'Guessan 20-23 Sept called for civil disobedience against electoral framework and Ouattara's candidacy. Two opposition representatives 30 Sept resigned from electoral commission (CENI) including its second VP, N'Guessan ally Alain Dogou. Prior to Constitutional Council's decision, protesters 13 Sept burned down bus in economic capital Abidjan's Yopougon district (a Gbagbo stronghold) and opposition supporters next day ransacked CENI offices in Bangolo town in west. Internationally, French President Macron 4 Sept met with Ouattara in Paris, reportedly encouraged him to delay elections and reconsider decision to run. Ouattara 12 Sept stated need "to stop thinking that decisions pertaining to our country's future are to be made in New York or Paris" and govt 18 Sept cancelled visit from tripartite mission of African Union, UN and regional bloc Economic Community of West African States scheduled 21-25 Sept. During one-week visit to Côte d'Ivoire, UN Special Representative for West Africa Mohamed Ibn Chambas 21 Sept called on all actors to "avoid violence and

the use of hate speech”. African Court of Human and Peoples’ Rights mid-Sept and 25 Sept demanded authorities allow Soro and Gbagbo to run.

- **BRIEFING: Côte d’Ivoire : reporter pour dialoguer**

➔ ⚡ Guinea SEPTEMBER 2020

Tensions ran high over President Condé’s candidacy in Oct presidential election. Coalition of opposition parties and civil society groups National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC) 1 Sept decried Condé’s candidacy in presidential election scheduled for 18 Oct as “outrageous and conflict-inducing”. Police same day dispersed anti-Condé meeting in Tanéné village, Dubréka prefecture, near capital Conakry, reportedly wounding 12. Condé 2 Sept reiterated he will run for third term. Rifts widened within FNDC over whether to boycott or participate in election. After leader of main opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) Cellou Dalein Diallo 6 Sept announced his candidacy, Union of Republican Forces President Sidya Touré 8 Sept said he did not support Diallo’s candidacy and would boycott elections alongside other opposition leaders; FNDC next day said opposition parties taking part in election would be automatically excluded from coalition. Constitutional Court 9 Sept declared eligibility of 12 presidential candidates including Condé, saying early 2020 constitutional reform reset his “term counter” to zero; Diallo’s candidacy also confirmed. After electoral commission 14 Sept published updated electoral register, opposition next day highlighted anomalies, including high number of registered voters in Condé’s stronghold of Kankan. Govt 16 Sept extended COVID-19 state of emergency for one month, banning gatherings of over 100 people, but campaigning kicked off 18 Sept. In address to supporters in Siguiri city (in Kankan region in east), Condé 22 Sept compared Oct vote to “warlike situation” in which all his “opponents have coalesced to fight [him]”. Police 29 Sept fired tear gas to disperse FNDC protesters in Conakry and reportedly arrested FNDC prominent leader Oumar Sylla, alias Foninké Mengué. Ruling party Rally for the Guinean People supporters 30 Sept reportedly attacked opposition UFDG campaign rally in Faranah city. Unidentified assailants same day threw stones at PM Fofana’s convoy near Dalaba city.

➔ Guinea-Bissau SEPTEMBER 2020

Following longstanding electoral dispute, Supreme Court confirmed Umaro Sissoko Embaló’s victory in

2019 presidential election. Supreme Court 7 Sept confirmed President Embaló's victory in late 2019 election, rejecting challenger Domingos Simões Pereira's appeal; election had sparked months-long standoff amid fraud allegations. Pereira same day acknowledged decision put end to electoral dispute but maintained allegations of electoral fraud. Regional bloc Economic Community of West African States mission in Guinea-Bissau (ECOMIB), whose mandate expired 10 Sept, continued to withdraw its troops from country. Amid international concern over resurgence of drug smuggling in Guinea-Bissau, police 11 Sept arrested head of migration agency, Colonel Alassana Diallo, on allegations of cocaine trafficking. Health authorities 14 Sept said COVID-19 situation was beginning to "stabilise" with number of new cases reaching plateau.

➔ Nigeria SEPTEMBER 2020

Jihadists continued to target civilians and military in north east, while criminal violence persisted in north west and centre, spreading closer to capital Abuja. In north-eastern Borno state, suspected jihadists 1 Sept attacked army post in Magumeri town, killing at least ten soldiers; 6, 15 and 17 Sept launched several attacks on civilians, killing at least 24; and 25 Sept attacked state governor's convoy near Baga town, reportedly killing up to 30. Meanwhile, in continued fight against jihadists, army 14 and 18 Sept killed 20 insurgents near Borno state capital Maiduguri and in neighbouring Yobe state's Bade village; 20 Sept killed "scores" of insurgents after they ambushed and killed army colonel near Damboa town same day; 24-25 Sept launched airstrikes in several areas of Borno, leaving unknown number of insurgents dead. In north west, bandits and other criminal groups continued attacks and kidnappings, killing eight civilians and two police officers and abducting at least 44 civilians in Katsina, Sokoto and Kaduna states 14-27 Sept. Military 13-17 Sept reportedly killed several armed group members in airstrikes in Zamfara state's Birnin-Magaji area and Maru town; 24 Sept killed 21 unidentified gunmen in Faskari area, Katsina state, but lost three soldiers including army colonel. Insecurity persisted in Middle Belt in centre. In Niger state, unidentified gunmen 2-4 Sept killed at least 23 civilians and abducted 53 others in several villages in Rafi, Rijau and Shiroro areas. Security concerns increased around federal capital Abuja. Unidentified gunmen 10 Sept kidnapped at least ten residents in Tungan Maje village, Federal Capital Territory. In neighbouring Nasarawa state, unidentified gunmen 14 Sept ambushed federal road safety agency convoy on Mararaban-Udege axis, killing two officers and kidnapping ten.

Asia

➔ China/Japan SEPTEMBER 2020

Tensions continued between Japan and China over contested island chain in East China Sea. Japanese Defence Minister Taro Kono 9 Sept said China was “national security threat” to Japan, while FM Motegi same day expressed concern over China’s actions in South China Sea at summit of South East Asia regional organisation ASEAN. Some 100 lawmakers from Japanese ruling-Liberal Democratic Party 17 Sept called for joint U.S.-Japan military drills around Nansei island chain, which includes disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands; in response to group’s call, Chinese MFA same day said islands are “China’s inherent territory”. Yoshihide Suga 16 Sept assumed office as Japanese PM, replacing Abe who resigned in Aug citing health reasons, with continuity in foreign policy expected; Suga same day appointed Nobuo Kishi as defence secretary, placing Kono in charge of administrative reform; Chinese state-run Global Times newspaper 20 Sept said “strategic framework of China-Japan relations will remain unchanged”; Suga and Chinese President Xi 25 Sept held phone call and agreed to continue high-level contacts but did not discuss Xi’s suspended state visit to Tokyo. Japan and India 10 Sept signed agreement for “closer cooperation between the Armed Forces of India and Japan”; during call same day, Indian PM Modi and PM Abe welcomed agreement, saying it would strengthen contributions to “peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region”. Japanese defence ministry 30 Sept announced draft budget with 8.3% increase, largest rise in two decades.

➔ Korean Peninsula SEPTEMBER 2020

Tensions remained high following North Korea’s killing of South Korean official at sea and amid concerns that North Korea might test weapon in Oct. Concerns grew that Pyongyang may intensify provocative actions as North Korean soldiers 22 Sept shot and killed South Korean fisheries official at de facto maritime border; Pyongyang warned of tensions if South Korean naval operations continued search for body; DPRK 25 Sept apologised for shooting. Pyongyang may display or test new or advanced weaponry, including possible submarine-launched ballistic missile, in lead up to 10 Oct military parade to celebrate North Korea’s 75th anniversary; Pyongyang is yet to demonstrate “new strategic weapon” announced in Dec 2019. Analysis platform 38 North 14 Sept reported satellite imagery showing four new temporary structures that may be storage units for large missile systems, including launching vehicles. Vice chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff John Hyten 17 Sept said North Korea possesses “small number” of nuclear weapons with “capabilities that can threaten their neighbours” or U.S. Ahead of 21-24 Sept International Atomic Energy Agency conference in Vienna, U.S. 19 Sept called on international efforts to achieve “fully verified denuclearization of North Korea”. Amid continued international concern over North Korea breaking UN sanctions limit on importing fuel, South Korean Yonhap news agency 2 Sept reported findings from data analytics firm Kharon alleging Russian companies Gazprom and Rosneft shipped oil worth \$26mn to Pyongyang in 2018 and 2019. U.S. govt 11 Sept also accused two Hong Kong companies of acquiring over

\$300mn worth of communications equipment for DPRK, violating UN sanctions. Amid economic and humanitarian difficulties in North Korea due to COVID-19 concerns and floods, U.S. Deputy Sec State Steve Biegun 11 Sept said Washington will ease restrictions for U.S. aid workers traveling to country. South Korean vice FM Choi 10 Sept announced Washington and Seoul had agreed to launch a high-level dialogue channel in Oct to run parallel to U.S.-South Korean Working Group; however, U.S. state department reportedly only said they would “positively consider” move, leading to domestic criticism of Choi.

📌 Taiwan Strait SEPTEMBER 2020

Cross-strait tensions spiked amid heightened Chinese military activity and senior U.S. official’s visit to Taiwan. Following Aug visit of U.S. health chief Alex Azar, U.S. State Under Secretary Keith Krach 17-19 Sept visited Taiwan for memorial service in highest level visit by U.S. cabinet official since 1979; Chinese MFA 17 Sept said trip “severely violates the one-China principle” and urged Washington to “immediately stop official exchange with Taiwan”. Beijing conducted live-fire exercises during visit, with Chinese state-run Global Times newspaper quoting experts who suggested drills are “rehearsal for a Taiwan takeover”; 18 Chinese jets, including H-6 bombers and J-16 fighters, conducted military drills in Taiwan Strait 18 Sept, with 19 jets, including a Y-8 anti-submarine plane, holding exercises next day; in response, Taipei scrambled jets and tracked jets with air defence system both days. President Tsai 20 Sept denounced drills, saying they demonstrated to regional countries “threat posed by China”. Prior to visit, Taiwanese military 4 Sept denied claims on social media that its forces had shot down Chinese jet, which crossed median line in Taiwan Strait – referring to de facto sea demarcation that both sides have generally observed for decades. Chinese jets 9-10 Sept entered Taiwan’s Air Defence Identification Zone, while two Y-8’s entered zone 16 Sept. Beijing 14-20 Sept held navy exercises in Yellow Sea, while Taiwan 14-18 Sept conducted computer-aided “war games” as part of annual military drills. Taiwanese FM Wu 17 Sept called for international support to deter “China’s expansionist motivation” during interview. Tensions rose further when Chinese MFA 21 Sept announced that “there is no so-called center line in the Taiwan Strait”, referring to median line. Main Taiwan opposition Kuomintang party 14 Sept announced it would not send official delegation to annual cross-Strait forum following Chinese state media China Central Television 10 Sept headline that claimed party was coming to “plead for peace” amid Taiwan-China tensions. Reuters 16 Sept reported Washington plans to sell up to seven major weapons systems such as mines, cruise missiles and drones to Taipei.

📌 Afghanistan SEPTEMBER 2020

Afghan govt and Taliban began long-awaited peace talks, while violence steadily increased across country.

Taliban and govt 12 Sept began intra-Afghan negotiations in Doha, Qatar's capital, in ceremony attended by High Council for National Reconciliation chief Abdullah Abdullah, FM Hanif Atmar and international figures including U.S. Sec State Pompeo; despite some progress in establishing format and procedure of talks, issues emerged over role of religious minorities, such as Hazara community, and govt's desire not to acknowledge Feb U.S.-Taliban agreement. Other contentious issues included Taliban's opposition to govt's open communication with national media, Taliban negotiators being more senior than their govt counterparts and domestic expectation that levels of violence would quickly fall. Meanwhile, Taliban resumed attacks on district centres with at least seven large-scale assaults on urban areas and several on outskirts of provincial capitals; including 20 Sept attack on Afghan security forces convoy outside Maidan Shar, Wardak province (centre) that killed 31 soldiers and 22 Sept raid on Maruf district centre, Kandahar province (south) that killed at least 20 soldiers and wounded 20 others. Fighting intensified in northern regions and southern provinces of Kandahar and Uruzgan, including series of attacks in latter's Gizab district 17-22 Sept, while clashes continued on Shibergan to Mazar highway in Jawzjan province (north). Govt claimed its forces remained in "active defence" posture but deployed troops to contested areas and continued to conduct airstrikes that caused civilian casualties, including killing dozens of militants and at least ten civilians in Kunduz province (north west) 19 Sept. Govt made progress with political appointments after Abdullah did not object to President Ghani's 31 Aug decree nomination of several cabinet members; however, concerns continued over underlying Ghani-Abdullah tensions and role that Ghani-controlled state ministry for peace, ostensibly under purview of Abdullah's High Council, would play in peace process.

- [Q&A: Intra-Afghan Negotiations Set to Begin](#)

➔ Bangladesh SEPTEMBER 2020

Amid ongoing govt crackdown on critics, security operations continued against alleged members of banned militant groups. Govt continued to suppress critics, particularly journalists; ruling-Awami League (AL) member 6 Sept filed defamation cases against four reporters, including newspaper editor over articles deemed critical of AL minister; NGO Reporters without Borders 7 Sept called on govt to dismiss charges against Cox's Bazar journalist who, despite being released in Aug after almost one year in prison where he reportedly suffered police torture, still faces several charges, including illegal possession of drugs and arms. Meanwhile, anti-militancy operations continued: in capital Dhaka, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 9 Sept arrested four suspected members of Ansar al-Islam and police next day arrested four alleged Neo-Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh members; RAB 16 Sept arrested two suspected Ansar al-Islam accused of recruitment through social media and police 18 Sept arrested another suspect; RAB 17 Sept arrested two alleged Allahr Dal members in Gaibandha district and two suspected Allahr Dal members in Rajshahi district on 23 Sept. RAB 29 Sept arrested alleged Ansar

al-Islam member in Ashulia area near Dhaka. Govt 4 Sept extended by six months suspension on “humanitarian grounds” of prison sentence for Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP) chief Khaleda Zia, convicted on corruption charges. Govt 4 Sept organised visit for 40 Rohingya community leaders to Bhasan Char island to observe existing facilities, as part of plans to relocate refugees to flood-prone island post-monsoon; 8 Sept said security forces would construct barbed wire fences around Rohingya refugee camps in Cox’s Bazar district and increase electronic surveillance due to alleged money laundering and drug trafficking among refugees with international and NGO involvement. FM Momen 12 Sept called for international support to facilitate refugee repatriation to Myanmar, warning of “pockets of radicalisation” if situation remains unchanged. Bangladesh UN mission 15 Sept shared “aide-mémoire” with UN Secretary General on movement of Myanmar military close to Bangladesh border, seeking immediate UN Security Council steps to prevent escalation of situation.

➔ India (Non-Kashmir) SEPTEMBER 2020

Border tensions rose between India and China, prompting both sides to step up de-escalatory efforts. After India and China late Aug accused each other of violating Line of Actual Control, sides 1 Sept again blamed each other for taking “provocative” actions. In first high-level meeting since standoff began in April, Indian and Chinese defence ministers 4 Sept held talks in Russian capital Moscow, but made no breakthrough; tensions escalated again as sides accused each other of firing warning shots at each other 7 Sept, in breach of decades-long observed protocol prohibiting use of firearms along border. Indian FM Jaishankar and Chinese counterpart Wang Yi 10 Sept agreed to five-point plan to de-escalate border standoff, agreeing border troops should “quickly” disengage and that both sides would abide by “all existing protocols”. Senior Indian and Chinese military officials 21 Sept agreed to stop further deployment of troops along border and to “refrain from unilaterally changing the situation on the ground”. Meanwhile, anti-Maoist security operations and Maoist violence continued in country’s centre and east, notably: in Telangana (centre), clashes between security forces and Maoists 3-23 Sept killed eight Maoists in Bhadradi Kothagudem and Asifabad districts; in Chhattisgarh (centre), Maoists 1-22 Sept killed nine civilians, two police officers and one forest ranger in Dantewada, Bijapur, Kanker and Sukma districts; in Odisha (east), clashes between Maoists and security forces 9 Sept killed five Maoists and two security personnel in Kalahandi district. India’s national counter-terrorism agency 19 Sept reported arrest of nine al-Qaeda militants in West Bengal and Kerala. Delhi police 13 Sept arrested activist Umar Khalid as “one of the main conspirators” of Feb Hindu-Muslim riots; over 200 academics, authors and filmmakers 25 Sept called for his release. Isolated incidents of anti-Muslim violence reported throughout month, including Hindu mob lynching Muslim youth suspected of theft in Uttar Pradesh’s Bareilly district on 3 Sept. Controversial agriculture legislation late Sept sparked nationwide protests by farmers. India 7 Sept became world’s second-worst-hit nation in terms of reported COVID-19 cases, which surpassed 6mn 28 Sept. NGO Amnesty International 29 Sept halted work in India citing govt’s “incessant witch-hunt”.

→ Kashmir SEPTEMBER 2020

Counter-insurgency operations and militant attacks inside Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) continued at high intensity, while clashes persisted across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir). Notably, in J&K's Baramulla district, clash with police 4 Sept killed three alleged Hizbul Mujahideen militants, police 11 Sept arrested three militants, and family members 16 Sept protested death in custody of youth in Sopore area. Hundreds 17 Sept protested and clashed with security forces in J&K capital Srinagar after police earlier that day shot dead civilian during operation that also killed three suspected militants. Army same day claimed to have averted a major militant attack in seizing 52kg of explosives in Pulwama district. Security forces 20-28 Sept killed militants in Srinagar, Budgam, Pulwama, Anantnag and Kupwara districts, while militant attacks in same period injured soldier in Budgam and killed civilian in Shopian district; unidentified gunmen 24 Sept killed prominent lawyer in Srinagar. Army 18 Sept reported three suspected militants killed in 18 July gunfight in Shopian where missing labourers from Rajouri, appearing to confirm case of extrajudicial killings. UN human rights chief 14 Sept criticised militant and security forces' violence against civilians. Tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad continued with reciprocal allegations of cross-LoC fire: India accused Pakistan of cross-LoC fire that killed two soldiers 2-5 Sept and injured soldier 28 Sept. Pakistan claimed Indian fire was responsible for killing soldier 9 Sept, killing child and wounding seven civilians 13-17 Sept, killing three soldiers 23-26 Sept, and injuring two civilians 24 Sept. Islamabad and New Delhi traded rhetorical barbs in several international forums, including at UN Security Council meeting 3-4 Sept over Pakistan's wish to add two Indian nationals to sanctions list, and India's desire to remove Kashmir from council agenda. In UN General Assembly address 25 Sept, Pakistan's PM Khan warned India was planning another "ill-conceived adventure" to divert attention from its illegal actions and rights abuses in J&K; India's UN mission accused Pakistan of supporting terrorism and called on it to vacate all areas of Kashmir under its control. China and Pakistan 21 Sept condemned "unilateral actions that complicate the situation" in J&K.

→ Nepal SEPTEMBER 2020

Tensions with India persisted and new border issue with China emerged. Tensions with India, which had abated in Aug, threatened to escalate again after Nepal's Ambassador to China Mahendra Pandey 28 Sept accused Delhi of encroachment into Nepali territory and blamed Indian media of spreading "fake propaganda" to undermine Nepal-China relations. Border issues with China arose with 23 Sept reports of Chinese security forces allegedly constructing several buildings inside Nepali territory in the northern district of Humla; Nepal's MFA and

China's embassy in Kathmandu denied reports, contradicting local officials' accounts. Ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) 3 Sept nominated senior leader Bamdev Gautam to upper house of parliament in bid to ease internal party divisions; legal experts criticised decision for contravening 2015 constitution outlining that upper house appointments are partly in place to address under-representation of minority groups; Supreme Court 23 Sept issued interim order halting appointment, citing need for "serious constitutional explanation". During his address to UN General Assembly, PM KP Oli 25 Sept urged support for Nepal's re-election to UN Human Rights Council; human rights activists have persistently called out govt for curbs on civil liberties and for failing to deliver on human rights commitments made in 2017 prior to first Human Rights Council term. Federal govt 28 Sept took over control of policing within Kathmandu valley despite protests from provincial leaders that move infringes on their constitutional rights; move seen as latest govt effort to undermine federal structure and further shrink provincial authority.

➔ Pakistan SEPTEMBER 2020

Govt continued to use anti-corruption cases to attack political opponents, sparking opposition efforts to unseat govt. Govt pursued warrants and indictments against senior opposition leaders, including former Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) PM Sharif and former Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) President Zardari, leading to Islamabad High Court 15 Sept issuing warrant for Sharif's arrest and demanding he return from self-imposed exile in London by 22 Sept. In protest at govt's use of controversial National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for political ends, 11 opposition parties including PPP and PML-N 20 Sept organised "All Parties Conference" in capital Islamabad and online, calling for Khan to resign and agreeing on anti-govt action plan that includes public meetings in Oct and mass demonstrations in Jan. At conference, in online remarks from London, former PM Sharif called military "a state above the state", while opposition called for end to military's political interference. In response, govt 22 Sept disclosed that opposition leaders had 16 Sept held meetings with army chief, implying they had sought his backing; NAB next day summoned opposition leader Fazlur Rehman to respond to corruption allegations and NAB 28 Sept arrested PML-N President and parliamentary leader of opposition Shahbaz Sharif, and same day indicted Zardari; NAB 29 Sept remanded Sharif in custody for 14 days. Internationally, PM Khan 11 Sept welcomed start of Afghan peace talks, and FM Qureshi next day attended opening ceremony virtually, calling for continued international support, including on reconstruction and refugee return; Afghan High Peace Council chief Abdullah Abdullah late Sept visited Pakistan to discuss peace process (see Afghanistan). Militant violence continued; notably, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, Pakistani Taliban claimed 3 Sept bomb blast that killed three soldiers and wounded four others in North Waziristan tribal district, and killed army officer 27 Sept in South Waziristan; violence also ongoing in Balochistan, including 5 Sept bomb blast that injured four in provincial capital Quetta. Sectarian tensions increased following 11-12 Sept protests in Karachi city by Sunni groups claiming Shia leaders made disparaging remarks about Sunni religious figures; unidentified gunmen 15 Sept killed two Shias in KPK capital Peshawar.

→ Sri Lanka SEPTEMBER 2020

Govt tabled bill in parliament to remove constitutional checks on President Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Cabinet 2 Sept approved draft 20th constitutional amendment to replace 19th amendment which curbs presidential powers; new amendment would give president sweeping powers, including to appoint and control all state institutions, appoint and dismiss ministers, head ministries, dissolve parliament one year after its election, as well as full legal immunity. Proposed amendment sparked criticism from opposition, but also within ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party, prompting PM Mahinda Rajapaksa 12 Sept to appoint committee to consider changes. Govt 22 Sept tabled unchanged amendment bill in parliament amid protests from opposition. Supreme Court 29 Sept began consideration of petitions filed by opposition and civil society against amendment. Gotabaya 25 Sept directed officials to implement his future verbal orders as if they were formal written directives, adding that those who fail to do so “will face stern action”. Cabinet 3 Sept appointed nine-member “experts’ committee” headed by Gotabaya’s personal lawyer and featuring notable Sinhala hardliners to draft new constitution; State Minister of Provincial Councils and Local Government Affairs Sarath Weerasekera quoted 6 Sept in support of new constitution removing “detrimental aspects” of 13th amendment, which devolved power in 1987 to satisfy in part Tamil autonomy demands; during virtual summit with Mahinda, Indian PM Modi 26 Sept repeated longstanding calls for implementation of 13th amendment; Mahinda’s separate statement same day ignored the issue. Cabinet 29 Sept approved proposal by Mahinda to ban cattle slaughter, an industry run mostly by Muslims; imports of beef will still be allowed. UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept criticised draft 20th amendment and appointments to key civilian roles of senior military officials “allegedly involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity” and called for immediate end to “surveillance and intimidation of victims [of civil war], their families, human rights defenders, journalists and lawyers”; Sri Lanka 15 Sept dismissed Bachelet’s criticism of amendment as “unwarranted” and rejected “false and unsubstantiated allegations”. UK 17 Sept expressed concern over lack of “meaningful progress” in govt’s commitment to transitional justice.

→ Indonesia SEPTEMBER 2020

Armed separatists led series of attacks on military in Papua. In Papua province, armed separatist group West Papua Liberation Army (WPLA) 5 Sept claimed killing of eight soldiers in Nduga regency, while series of deadly attacks took place in Intan Jaya regency. Notably, in Intan Jaya’s Sugapa district, WPLA 14 Sept shot and injured

two civilians claiming they were intelligence officers, and military reported armed group 17 Sept killed one soldier and one civilian; in Hitadipa district, WPLA 19 Sept killed one soldier, and shortly after military allegedly shot and killed pastor, local army commander denied involvement and blamed WPLA. In Nabire regency, thousands 24 Sept took to streets protesting against extension of Papua special autonomy status set to expire in 2021; police briefly arrested over 150 demonstrators citing COVID-19 restrictions. In provincial capital Jayapura, hundreds of students 28 Sept also protested against extension of special autonomy status; police fired warning shots and tear gas to disperse protesters. In speech to UN General Assembly, Vanuatu PM Salwai 26 Sept said “the indigenous people of West Papua continue to suffer from human rights abuses”, arguing there had been “little progress” in addressing violations; Indonesia rebuked speech saying it would defend itself from “any advocacy of separatism under the guise of artificial human rights concerns” and that Papua and West Papua’s status as part of Indonesia was “final”. In Aceh, police reported 297 Rohingya refugees believed to have been at sea for several months 7 Sept moored at Ujong Blang beach, near Lhokseumawe city.

➔ Myanmar SEPTEMBER 2020

Clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and security forces continued to inflict heavy toll on civilians. In Rakhine state, military 1 Sept allegedly shot and killed villager in Kyauktaw township; 3 Sept reportedly burned down nearly 200 homes in Kyauktaw and killed two villagers it claimed were AA insurgents. Two police officers went missing 5 Sept in Maungdaw township, mutilated body of one found two days later. Artillery shelling 8 Sept reportedly killed five villagers in Myebon township. Unidentified gunmen 10 Sept shot and injured police officer in Minbya township. Artillery shelling 11-17 Sept killed one villager and injured seven more in Rathedaung and Kyauktaw townships. Military 29 Sept announced extension of its nationwide COVID-19 ceasefire until end-Oct, but continued to exclude Rakhine state and Paletwa township. UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept said military’s alleged targeting of civilians in Rakhine and Chin states may constitute “war crimes or even crimes against humanity”. Canada and Netherlands 2 Sept issued joint statement indicating they would support Rohingya genocide case filed by Gambia against Myanmar at International Court of Justice. International news outlet The New York Times and NGO Fortify Rights 8 Sept reported on video testimony of two Tatmadaw deserters confessing to army-directed atrocities against Rohingya, both fled Myanmar in Aug and are believed to be in The Hague in the Netherlands and to have been interviewed by International Criminal Court; military questioned credibility of confessions and called for soldiers to be returned to Myanmar to face justice. Ahead of Nov general election and amid rise in COVID-19 cases, campaign period kicked off 8 Sept; several opposition parties called for postponement of polls in light of deteriorating COVID-19 situation but Union Election Commission (UEC) 14 Sept rejected calls; unknown individual threw two grenades at residence of UEC official in capital Naypyitaw 19 Sept; neither exploded.

➔ Philippines SEPTEMBER 2020

Clashes persisted in south between militant groups and security forces following deadly blast in Aug; clan fighting also continued in south. In Maguindanao province in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), security forces' operations following deadly blasts in Jolo in late Aug resulted in small clashes between soldiers and elements of Islamic State-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Sulu; special forces 9 Sept led operation in suspected hideout of ASG sub-leader Zamboanga Sibugay in Roseller Lim municipality, which killed five suspected ASG militants and left two soldiers wounded; one militant 28 Sept also killed in Patikul. Roadside bomb 18 Sept killed one marine, wounding four others in Datu Hoffer town. In Basilan province, armed group 16 Sept kidnapped Filipino businessman. Clan conflicts continued in BARMM and in adjacent provinces of Sultan Kudarat and nearby province of Sarangani in the town of Maitum; in Maitum, two Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)-affiliated groups 11-13 Sept fought intermittently, killing two and wounding several. In Lanao del Sur, MILF represented by Abdullah Macapaar of Northwestern Mindanao Front agreed to convince members of Dawlah Islamiya insurgent group to lay down arms. Clashes between communist New People's Army and armed forces continued in Luzon in north, Visayas in centre and Mindanao in south, although at relatively lower level compared to Aug; clashes killed at least 14 combatants and civilians and injured one throughout month.

- **COMMENTARY: Resilient Militancy in the Southern Philippines**

➔ South China Sea SEPTEMBER 2020

Tense exchanges continued between China and U.S. During annual meeting of South East Asia regional organisation ASEAN, Chinese Vice FM Luo Zhaohui 4 Sept met with ten envoys and accused U.S. of threatening peace and stability in South China Sea (SCS); Chinese Defence Minister Wei Fenghe 7-11 Sept travelled to meet with leaders of Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and Philippines. In address to ASEAN forum, U.S. Sec State Pompeo 10 Sept said U.S. "will be here in friendship to help" and urged countries to cut ties with state-owned Chinese companies. During ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting with Pompeo, Vietnamese FM Pham Binh Minh 10 Sept said U.S. "role and contribution to maintaining peace, stability and security in the region are encouraged"; Vietnamese MFA 17 Sept reaffirmed Vietnamese sovereignty over Hoang Sa (Paracel) Islands and Truong Sa (Spratly) Islands; China 28 Sept conducted military drills near Paracel Islands. Chief of Indonesian maritime security agency 15 Sept stated that Indonesia would increase maritime security operations near northern Natuna islands after reports of Chinese coastguard vessel 12-14 Sept entering area. Philippines FM Teodoro Locsin 16 Sept said that Philippines would push for conclusion of Code of Conduct in SCS amid ongoing ASEAN talks on subject. In pre-recorded

address delivered to UN 22 Sept, Philippines President Duterte affirmed 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision that rejected legality of China's maritime and territorial claims based on historic rights, marking shift from his earlier stance downplaying the ruling. France, Germany and UK 18 Sept submitted note verbale to UN stating that China's exercise of "historic rights" in SCS contravened UN Convention on Law of Sea. U.S. defence dept 1 Sept reported that China has world's largest navy; Chinese defence ministry 13 Sept called report "wanton distortion" and described U.S. as "destroyer of world peace". U.S. state dept 27 Sept issued statement concluding U.S. will "stand with our Southeast Asian allies and partners in resisting China's coercive efforts to establish dominion over the South China Sea".

➔ Thailand SEPTEMBER 2020

Protests continued to grow in size as demonstrators staged largest pro-democracy rally since 2014 military coup; Muslim leaders proposed small measures to address local demands in deep south. Amid near-daily small-scale demonstrations mainly in capital Bangkok, police 1 Sept arrested activist and president of Student Union of Thailand, Jutatip Sirikhan, who was granted bail same day. Police 3 Sept arrested protest leaders Anon Nampa and Panupong Jadnok after Bangkok Criminal Court ruled they had breached their Aug bail terms by continuing to take part in protests, both released 7 Sept after police withdrew request to detain them; Constitutional Court 16 Sept accepted complaint accusing Anon, Panupong and Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul of attempting to overthrow govt. Also in Bangkok, on field adjacent to Grand Palace, activist group United Front of Thammasat and Demonstration 19 Sept organised largest pro-democracy rally since 2014 coup with more than 30,000 demanding dissolution of parliament, new constitution, end to harassment of activists and reform of monarchy. Demonstrators next morning installed plaque commemorating transition from absolute monarchy to democracy and attempted to deliver letter to king's Privy Council demanding action on ten-point manifesto to reform monarchy. After police prevented protesters from reaching Privy Council offices, they handed letter to senior police officer. Protest organiser Parit "Penguin" Chiwarak 20 Sept called for general strike on 14 Oct, anniversary of 1973 student uprising. Palace 15 Sept announced that king had approved appointment, effective 30 Sept, of army chief General Apirat Kongsompong and head of corrections department Police Colonel Narat Sawettanan as deputies to Lord Chamberlain of Royal Household. Parliament 24 Sept postponed vote on constitutional amendments, instead voted to form another committee to consider charter change. In deep south, security forces 6 Sept killed two suspected insurgents in Thepa district, Songkhla province. Head of Thai delegation in peace negotiations with insurgents 13 Sept met with Muslim leaders in Nong Chik, Pattani, who proposed making Friday – Islam's holy day – a public holiday, posting village signs in Thai, English and Malay and declaring latter as an official language in southern provinces.

Europe & Central Asia

➔ Kosovo SEPTEMBER 2020

U.S.-led Kosovo-Serbia talks resumed and produced first agreement on normalisation of economic ties ahead of restart of EU-led dialogue. Kosovo PM Hoti and Serbian President Vucic 2 Sept met in Washington DC for U.S.-brokered dialogue and 4 Sept signed agreements on normalisation of economic ties; deal excluded contentious issue of mutual recognition. Agreement included provision for Serbia to move its Israel embassy to Jerusalem, while Kosovo would also open embassy in city; Israeli PM Netanyahu same day welcomed news and said his country would establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo; EU 7 Sept raised “serious concern and regret” over embassy plans. President Trump called agreement “major breakthrough” in which both parties “committed to economic normalisation”; Vucic said that agreement was with U.S. and not Kosovo; Hoti also expressed hope deal would lead to mutual recognition. Hoti and Vucic 7 Sept met in Brussels with EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell for EU-led talks; at meeting, Hoti and Vucic agreed to practical cooperation on issues of missing and internally displaced persons; subsequent round of EU-led talks scheduled for 28 Sept postponed due to COVID-19. The Hague Special Chamber tasked with investigating alleged crimes during 1998-1999 war 24 Sept announced its first arrest, detaining former Kosovo Liberation Army commander Salih Mustafa based on “warrant, transfer order and confirmed indictment issued by a pre-trial judge”; Mustafa faces charges of torture, false imprisonment and murder.

➔ Montenegro SEPTEMBER 2020

Post-election protest and attacks on ethnic minorities erupted following defeat of incumbent President Đukanović. Đukanović, who had ruled country for three decades, 1 Sept conceded defeat following 30 Aug election, accusing Serbia of stoking ethno-nationalist tensions; Belgrade same day denied meddling in election; election dominated by controversial Freedom of Confession Act that critics argue facilitates govt register of all religious sites in attempt to reduce role of Serbian Orthodox Church. Three opposition coalitions –For the Future of Montenegro, Peace is Our Nation and Black in White – 9 Sept signed coalition agreement promising to uphold country’s commitment to joining EU bloc. Meanwhile, post-electoral attacks broke out against ethnic minorities as supporters of pro-Serb parties reportedly attacked Bosniaks and Albanians in northern towns, and caused material damage to an Islamic community centre in the northern town of Plvelja 2 Sept. Religious leaders and opposition parties called for calm; top Orthodox Bishop Metropolitan Amfilohije 2 Sept called attacks an affront to “every citizen of Montenegro”. Thousands of protesters 6 Sept gathered in capital Podgorica to contest Serb nationalist

imagery featuring prominently in opposition celebrations. New parliament 23 Sept convened, approved new govt composed of three electoral coalitions with slim majority of 41 seats; leader of pro-Serbian opposition party Zdravko Krivokapić appointed new PM.

⚡ Armenia SEPTEMBER 2020

Authorities called on public to prepare for war after major deadly clashes with Azerbaijan along front line of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, raising risk of escalation in Oct. Largest-scale fighting since 1994 ceasefire erupted 27 Sept as Azerbaijani army attacked Armenian troops located along key sections of 200km-long front line in NK conflict zone: fighting reportedly killed dozens and wounded hundreds of military personnel on both sides (see Nagorno-Karabakh). Azerbaijan 27 Sept reported taking control of several Armenian positions in southern part of NK conflict zone; de facto leader Arayik Harutyunyan next day said Armenian troops regained control of initially lost positions. Govt 27 Sept declared martial law and started to mobilise reserve troops.

Previously, deadly clashes 16-21 Sept broke out along state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Armenia 16 Sept reported one soldier killed and Azerbaijan 14-21 Sept reported one killed and two wounded; both countries called on public to prepare for imminent war or to be ready for adversary attack. Meanwhile, Russian protesters stuck in Armenia due to closure of state borders amid COVID-19 3 Sept gathered in front of govt buildings in Yerevan demanding resumption of air travel to Russia.

⚡ Azerbaijan SEPTEMBER 2020

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Sept reported one soldier killed and Azerbaijan 14-21 Sept reported one killed and two wounded; both countries called on public to prepare for imminent war or to be ready for adversary attack. Following police 22 March arrest of member of opposition alliance National Council of Democratic Forces and member of Musavat Party, Tofuq Yagublu, authorities 3 Sept sentenced Yagublu to four years and three months in jail on hooliganism charges; Yagublu went on hunger strike in protest, and on 11th day of strike was transferred to private clinic. More than 30 protesters 9-11 Sept gathered in capital Baku as well as Berlin, Toronto and other cities demanding Yagublu's release; court 18 Sept revised Yagublu's sentencing to prison term with bail, allowing him to return home. Govt 28 Sept extended COVID-19 lockdown to 2 Nov, while allowing some internal travel as of 8 Sept.

➔ Georgia SEPTEMBER 2020

Political tensions ran high in de facto South Ossetia as anti-govt protests continued over death in custody.

After numerous senior officials, including interior minister, PM and parliamentary speaker, announced their resignation in response to popular outcry against local authorities prompted by late-Aug death in custody of local 28-year-old man, opposition MPs 2 Sept boycotted parliamentary sessions, preventing quorum, and demanded general prosecutor to leave his position. De facto President Anatoly Bibilov meanwhile refused to resign, a key demand of protesters, and offered instead a parliamentary investigation. Supporters of de facto president 4 Sept held rally, while a few days later opposition 11 Sept organised demonstration. De facto leader 4 Sept spoke with members of Russian presidential administration in Russia's capital Moscow, reportedly requesting opening of border crossing with Russia that was closed since March due to COVID-19; Russia 15 Sept opened border and sent officials to investigate local needs to respond to pandemic and economic consequences.

🚩 ⚡ Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict SEPTEMBER 2020

Severest escalation since 1994 ceasefire erupted between Armenia and Azerbaijan along front line in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict zone, raising risk of worsening fighting in Oct. Large-scale fighting 27 Sept erupted as Azerbaijani army attacked Armenian troops located along key sections of 200km-long front line in NK conflict zone: most intense fighting involving tanks, artillery, helicopters, drones and infantry took place south, north and north east of frontline. Fighting reportedly killed dozens and wounded hundreds of military personnel on

both sides. Azerbaijan 27 Sept reported taking control of several Armenian positions in southern part of NK conflict zone; de facto leader Arayik Harutyunyan next day said Armenian troops regained control of initially lost positions. Armenia, Azerbaijan and de facto NK entity 27 Sept declared martial law and started to mobilise reserve troops; on both sides, groups of volunteer fighters, mainly veterans of 1992-1994 war in NK, arrived in conflict zone to support fighting. Civilian areas on both sides located close to front line suffered regular attacks, leading to at least 14 civilians killed and dozens wounded, including children. Towns situated far from front line faced artillery, rocket and drone attacks, including Armenian-controlled Stepanakert city 27 and 29 Sept, and Azerbaijani city Naftalan 28 Sept; Armenia 29 Sept reported attack on its town of Vardenis located close to NK conflict zone. Russia, France, Germany, EU, U.S., Iran, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Minsk Group co-chairs and UN Security Council 27-29 Sept called for immediate ceasefire and return to talks. Turkey's President Erdogan 27 Sept said Ankara would support Azerbaijan "with all means"; Armenia 29 Sept accused Turkey of downing its military jet, but Ankara same day denied its involvement. Reuters 28 Sept reported that Turkey deployed up to 1,000 Turkish-backed Syrian National Army fighters from Syria to Azerbaijan days before outbreak of fighting; Ankara and Azerbaijani President Aliyev 29 Sept separately denied report. Previously, deadly clashes 16-21 Sept broke out along state border between Armenia and Azerbaijan; Armenia 16 Sept reported one soldier killed and Azerbaijan 14-21 Sept reported one killed and two wounded; both countries called on public to prepare for imminent war or to be ready for adversary attack.

➔ Russia/North Caucasus SEPTEMBER 2020

In Far East, weekly mass protests continued while international community called for investigation into alleged poisoning of opposition leader. In Far East, thousands of people continued to protest each Saturday in Khabarovsk city against July arrest of former local governor and member of nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia Sergei Furga, accused of involvement in murders of businessmen in 2005-2006; Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu 17 Sept announced increase of military presence in region. Moscow City Court 18 Sept upheld extension until 9 Dec of Furgal's pre-trial detention; Furgal called charges against him "a persecution" via video link during hearing and demanded all hearings in his case be public. After French and Swedish laboratories 14 Sept independently confirmed that Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny was poisoned in Aug with lethal nerve agent Novichok, Germany and France same day called on Russia to conduct credible and transparent investigation; UN human rights chief Michelle Bachelet 8 Sept also asked Russia for "thorough, independent, impartial and transparent investigation into this assassination attempt."

➔ Belarus SEPTEMBER 2020

Mass demonstrations continued following disputed Aug presidential elections, leading to clashes with police and numerous arrests. Tens of thousands continued to gather throughout month in capital Minsk to demand President Lukashenka step down after disputed Aug vote; police clashed violently with demonstrators, detaining hundreds. In response to call from opposition leader Svyatlana Tsikhanouskaya, thousands of students 1 Sept boycotted start of school year and staged marches collecting signatures calling on Lukashenka to resign; security forces detained seven journalists covering protests and 4 Sept arrested five university students protesting in capital Minsk. After govt late Aug detained third member of opposition Coordination Council, other council member Pavel Latushka 2 Sept fled to Poland. Masked men 7 Sept reportedly detained protest leader Maria Kolesnikava in Minsk and 8 Sept attempted to forcibly expel her from country across border with Ukraine; masked men 9 Sept also detained opposition leader Maxim Znak. Lukashenka 8 Sept said he would not step down but remained open to early presidential elections. UN Human Rights Council 14 Sept confirmed it would hold urgent debate on human rights situation in Belarus. U.S. 4 Sept deployed 500 troops and 40 tanks to Lithuania near border with Belarus for pre-agreed two-month deployment; Russia and Belarus throughout month held joint military drills in Brest region near border with Poland. Head of Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Sergei Naryshkin 16 Sept accused U.S. of “poorly disguised attempt” to organise coup in Belarus. Russian President Putin 14 Sept confirmed after talks with Lukashenka that Russia would lend \$1.5bn to Minsk. Lukashenka 23 Sept sworn in for new term, prompting thousands to take to streets; police fired water cannon to disperse crowds and arrested hundreds; Pavel Latushka same day called on protesters “to immediately start a civil disobedience campaign”; U.S., UK, Germany, European Parliament and Canada were among actors that refused to recognise Lukashenka. UK and Canada 29 Sept imposed sanctions on Lukashenka, his son and eight senior officials. French President Macron 29 Sept said he hoped mediation will begin soon.

➔ Ukraine SEPTEMBER 2020

Discord among Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) parties resurfaced over local election in Donbas, while July ceasefire held in Donbas conflict zone. Ahead of nationwide elections scheduled for 25 Oct, disagreement persisted between Ukraine, Russia and Russian-backed proxies in Donbas over Ukrainian parliament’s July decree that conditioned local elections in Donbas on region’s “deoccupation, demilitarisation and reintegration”; disagreement blocked discussions at 16 Sept TCG meeting on prisoner swap and disengagement along contact line;

Russian TCG representative Boris Gryzlov 16 Sept said decree contradicts Minsk agreements, while Donbas proxies urged Kyiv to amend the decree. Reintegration minister 18 Sept called for parliament to amend decree, citing its impact on Minsk negotiations. President Zelenskyy 30 Sept dismissed first deputy head of Ukrainian delegation to TCG and former PM Vitold Fokin after Fokin 29 Sept stated that he “can see no evidence of war between Ukraine and Russia in Donbas”. In Donbas, 27 July ceasefire held but fighting 6 Sept killed one govt serviceman at checkpoint in Luhansk region, and both sides continued to sustain non-combat casualties mainly from explosives, including three Ukrainian soldiers and two Russian-backed fighters killed 1-23 Sept, according to pro-Ukrainian non-govt source. Advisers of Normandy Four (France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia) leaders 11 Sept met in Berlin, reached agreement to allow Red Cross to visit prisoners in custody of Russian proxies. NATO and govt 20 Sept began four-day joint command and staff military exercises, coinciding with Russian “Caucasus 2020” military drills. Ukraine 30 Sept reported record daily number of 4,027 new COVID-19 cases, prompting Kyiv to restrict entry to all foreigners until 28 Sept; de facto republics reported modest rise in cases. G7 member states 16 Sept urged Ukrainian authorities to support anti-corruption agencies, including National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine, after Constitutional Court 16 Sept ruled that bureau was unlawfully established by presidential decree; vice chair of delegation to EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Association Committee 17 Sept stated govt “is jeopardizing visa-free with EU and further tranche of €1.5bn assistance”.

- **PODCAST: War & Peace: Rethinking an End to Ukraine’s Costly War**

➔ Cyprus SEPTEMBER 2020

UN announced intention to reignite stalled reunification talks, while Turkey and Greece expressed willingness to defuse persistent tensions in Eastern Mediterranean. UN Sec-Gen António Guterres 16 Sept announced intention to restart reunification talks in Cyprus and convene meeting of relevant parties following 11 Oct presidential election in “Turkish Republic of North Cyprus” (TRNC); Republic of Cyprus officials welcomed proposal but stated Turkey must first cease exploration activities in its exclusive economic zone, while “TRNC” “PM” Ersin Tarar welcomed move and called for solutions other than federation; Turkish FM 15 Sept expressed opposition to federative solution and said options such as a “loose federation” or “confederation” should be discussed. U.S. 1 Sept lifted for one year 33-year-old arms embargo to allow sale of “non-lethal military goods” to Republic of Cyprus; Turkish MFA same day condemned move as having “negative effects on the efforts to reach a settlement on the Cyprus issue”. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 12 Sept visited Republic of Cyprus, expressed “deep concerns” over Turkish actions in region while reaffirming U.S. support for “bi-zonal, bi-communal federation”. Previously, Russian FM Lavrov 7-8 Sept visited Republic of Cyprus, expressed willingness to “assist with establishing a pragmatic dialogue” between Republic of Cyprus and Turkey; Turkish FM 14 Sept responded that if Russia wished to mediate, counterpart would be “TRNC”, not Turkey. Amid ongoing tensions between Turkey and Greece in eastern Mediterranean, Ankara 12 Sept withdrew its drillship *Oruç Reis* from contested waters and returned it to Turkish port Antalya; Greek PM Mitsotakis 13 Sept welcomed “positive first step” toward de-escalation. Turkish President Erdoğan 18 Sept said he was eager to give “a chance to diplomacy and display a

positive approach”. Both sides continued to carry out military exercises in contested waters throughout month. Meanwhile, efforts to defuse tensions continued apace: as of 20 Sept, NATO had convened four rounds of military-to-military technical de-confliction talks, while Germany continued to facilitate preparations for bilateral “exploratory talks” between sides; Athens and Ankara mid-Sept both confirmed readiness to begin exploratory dialogue soon.

- **STATEMENT: [How to Defuse Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean](#)**

➔ Turkey SEPTEMBER 2020

Security operations continued against Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) in south-eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, while Ankara sought regional support against group. In Turkey’s south east, Turkish military continued operations against PKK in rural areas of Mardin, Muş, Bingöl, Hakkari and Van provinces. In northern Iraq, after Turkish military 31 Aug seized control of two strategic locations in the Haftanin region, military conducted 14 reported air raids on PKK positions throughout month. PKK continued to wage attacks against Turkish military: PKK militants 4 Sept assaulted Turkish excavator south of Hantur mountain range and 11 Sept attempted to infiltrate two Turkish military outposts in Haftanin. President Erdoğan and FM Çavuşoğlu 4 Sept received Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Nechirvan Barzani in Ankara to discuss “joint fight against PKK” among other issues. Erdoğan and Iranian President Rouhani 8 Sept vowed cooperation against PKK and its Iranian affiliate the Kurdistan Free Life Party. In northern Syria, low-intensity clashes continued between Turkish forces and People’s Protection Units (YPG); YPG-attributed car bomb attack in Syria’s Ras al-Ayn 24 Sept injured 12 civilians. Russian-Turkish ceasefire held in Idlib despite strains (see Syria). Govt continued moves toward criminalising members of pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP); police detained more than 130 HDP members or sympathisers throughout month; detention of 82 individuals and activists, including HDP co-mayor, over their alleged role in the Oct 2014 Kobani protests drew international criticism. Govt continued with operations against Islamic State (ISIS) in Turkey: security personnel reportedly detained over 150 individuals with suspected ISIS links throughout month. Defence ministry 28 Sept announced capture of alleged al-Qaeda affiliate Islom Saydalimov in the southern Hatay province. Amid ongoing tensions between Turkey and Greece over drilling activities in eastern Mediterranean, both sides expressed willingness to defuse tensions through talks (see Cyprus).

- **STATEMENT: [How to Defuse Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean](#)**

→ Kazakhstan SEPTEMBER 2020

Stifling of opposition continued amid calls for creation of new opposition party and adoption of limited reforms. Around 200 people 13 Sept gathered in authorised rally in Almaty to call for release of political prisoners and authorisation to form new opposition Democratic Party, which govt has repeatedly barred from official registration; demonstrators also called for expulsion of Chinese ambassador to Kazakhstan, citing fear of Chinese economic “expansion” in country. After prominent civil rights activist Erbol Eskhozhin publicly called police officers “Nazarbayev’s puppies” during protest earlier this year, in reference to former President Nazarbayev, Almaty city court 14 Sept fined Eskhozhin \$530 for insulting police. Almaty city court next day upheld April sentence of activist Alnur Ilyashev, convicted for criticising govt response to COVID-19 outbreak, to parole-like limited freedom. Authorities 25 Sept disrupted protests across country organised by exiled leader of opposition Mukhtar Ablyazov by reportedly surrounding public squares and preventing demonstrators from gathering; police reportedly detained protesters in capital Nur-Sultan, Aktobe and eastern Semey. President Tokayev 1 Sept called for “reset” of state structures, including implementation of direct elections for local governors from next year; move follows persistent calls from opposition groups for democracy reform in recent years. Tokayev same day announced creation of two new state agencies and more independence for Agency for Emergency Situations to tackle COVID-19 pandemic.

→ Kyrgyzstan SEPTEMBER 2020

Political parties launched electoral campaigns ahead of Oct parliamentary poll amid reports of alleged vote buying and clashes between parties’ supporters. In run-up to parliamentary elections scheduled for 4 Oct, 15 political parties 4 Sept kickstarted electoral campaigns in contest for 120 seats in Supreme Council; Central Elections Commission (CEC) chairwoman Nurjan Shaildabekova same day called for all parties to ensure “clean and open elections”. After CEC 3 Sept rejected applications by Aktiv and United Kyrgyzstan parties for failure to meet registration requirements, administrative court of capital Bishkek 9 Sept announced reversal of decision for United Kyrgyzstan, allowing party to officially join parliamentary race. Reports of alleged voter buying surfaced mid-month. Parliament speaker and Kyrgyzstan Party parliamentary candidate Dastan Djumabekov 14 Sept accused of giving new mother \$600 during pre-election tour in Talas region, reportedly using funds from his speaker’s official activities; move which CEC official next day called possible vote-buying attempt. Local news emerged that head of education dept in Kara-Suu district, Osh region, and Mekenim Kyrgyzstan party parliamentary candidate Gulaym

Mashrapova featured in WhatsApp message circulated week 14 Sept where she reportedly threatened to withhold teachers' salaries if they did not mobilise ten voters for her party; Mashrapova denied allegations while police reportedly launched investigation. Unity party supporters 20 Sept disrupted My Homeland Kyrgyzstan party rally in southern Aravan district, Osh province, reportedly beating participants and leaving 12 injured; police briefly detained ten suspected attackers; Mekenim Kyrgyzstan party members 21 Sept reportedly attacked and injured Republika party campaigners in Alysh village, Naryn province.

➔ Tajikistan SEPTEMBER 2020

Incumbent President Rahmon announced bid for fifth presidential term ahead of Oct poll. Ruling People's Democratic Party 3 Sept nominated Rahmon, in power since 1992, to run for fifth term in presidential elections scheduled for 11 Oct, ending speculation he would step down to make way for his son, Rustam Emomali. Lawyer and Gorno-Badakhshan provincial council member, Faromuz Irgashev, same day announced intention to run in elections to fight "injustice being meted out by law enforcement officers against ordinary people"; State Committee for National Security officers next day visited and questioned Irgashev at his home. After 11 Sept candidate registration deadline, Central Election Commission 14 Sept announced total of five presidential candidates, excluding Irgashev who reportedly failed to collect enough voter signatures; candidates next day launched electoral campaigns. Nationwide internet outage 16 Sept coincided with online address by exiled Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan opposition leader Muhiddin Kabiri, speaking from Washington DC, U.S.; Kabiri accused govt of preventing opposition from participating in elections. State Communications Service representative next day said 30-minute internet shutdown occurred for "unknown reasons". Group 24 opposition movement, which govt proscribed as extremist group in 2014, 2 Sept said Russian authorities detained activist and member Shobuddin Badalov in Nizhny Novgorod city in Russia; Group 24 alleged involvement of Tajik officials. Meanwhile, U.S. defence dept 1 Sept said China may be planning to set up new military bases in Tajikistan "to establish a more robust overseas logistics and basing infrastructure". Afghan FM Mohammad Haneef Atmar and Tajik counterpart Sirojiddin Muhridin 17 Sept met in capital Dushanbe, reportedly to discuss range of issues including resumption of electric supply from Tajikistan to Afghanistan; Afghan MFA same day announced plans for strategic partnership agreement with Tajikistan.

➔ Turkmenistan SEPTEMBER 2020

Govt continued to deny any COVID-19 cases amid reports of outbreak, while tensions rose in Balkanabat city over cash shortage. Amid govt's continued denial of COVID-19 outbreak inside country, independent media Radio Free Europe 3 Sept reported hospitals in capital Ashgabat were increasingly overwhelmed by rise of COVID-19 cases. In Balkanabat city (west), public anger rose over authorities' failure to provide money for cash withdrawal machines and growing queues in front of banks; at least 200 Balkanabat residents 7 Sept reportedly marched to prosecutor's office and Central Bank in city centre to demand solution to cash shortage; authorities next day introduced cash withdrawal coupons. NGO Human Rights Watch 23 Sept said govt inaction toward economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic has worsened pre-existing food crisis in country, urged govt to "take immediate measures to make sure that people can get adequate food". Dozens of Turkmen citizens 1 Sept held rally in front of Turkmenistan embassy in Washington DC, U.S., demanding govt cancel plan to amend constitution initiated by President Berdymukhammedov last year. Berdymukhammedov 25 Sept signed constitutional amendment to merge parliament with People's Council to create two-chamber institution. Human rights groups Turkmen Helsinki Foundation and Russian Memorial 7 Sept said in joint statement that police 5 Sept detained lawyer Pigambergeldy Allaberdiyev near Balkanabat for suspected links with protests abroad; national security ministry first described Allaberdiyev's arrest as "terrorism case", but officially arrested him on assault and hooliganism charges.

➔ Uzbekistan SEPTEMBER 2020

Deputy PM died from COVID-19 complications. U.S. state dept 5 Sept expressed concern over fate of Uzbek journalist Bobomurod Abdullaev, extradited to capital Tashkent from Kyrgyzstan in Aug, calling on govt to "clarify the allegations against him as well as the next steps". Swiss govt 11 Sept announced agreement with Uzbek authorities over return of \$130m confiscated in 2012 from daughter of late Uzbek President Karimov, Gulnara Karimova, in connection with international corruption case; non-binding agreement states returned assets should be "used for the benefit of the people of Uzbekistan"; 13 Uzbek rights activists 16 Sept released joint letter urging Swiss, U.S. and Uzbek govts to ensure confiscated assets will not be misused. Lawmakers 15 Sept approved draft legislation to improve religious freedom, including provision to allow wearing of religious clothing in govt offices and education institutions. Deputy PM Uktam Barnoev 20 Sept died from COVID-19 complications in hospital in Germany, two months after testing positive for virus.

Latin America & Caribbean

➔ ⚡ Bolivia SEPTEMBER 2020

Risk of violent escalation around 18 Oct general elections rerun remained high amid govt crackdown on opposition. Court 7 Sept ruled exiled former President Morales ineligible to run for Senate in Oct. Govt 9 Sept asked International Criminal Court to launch investigation into alleged “crimes against humanity” by opposition supporters during Aug protests. NGO Human Rights Watch 11 Sept accused govt of “abusing the justice system” to pursue Morales’ supporters and denounced terrorism charges against former president as “politically motivated”. Interim President Jeanine Añez 18 Sept dropped out of presidential race, citing need to unite vote against Morales’ Movement for Socialism (MAS); move follows large-scale Jubileo Foundation poll 16 Sept which found 40.3% of Bolivians plan to vote for MAS presidential candidate Luis Arce. Meanwhile, several attacks targeted party supporters. Notably, unidentified assailants 17 Sept threw stones at right-wing Creemos party member in Oruro city; others 20 Sept pelted centrist Comunidad Ciudadana member with rocks in capital La Paz. Three top cabinet ministers 27 Sept resigned, reportedly because they oppose privatisation of regional electricity company in Cochabamba city.

➔ Colombia SEPTEMBER 2020

Police brutality sparked deadly unrest, while violence in rural areas continued to take high toll on civilians. After video emerged of excessive use of force by police against taxi driver during his arrest night of 8-9 Sept, large protests 9 Sept erupted in capital Bogotá and other cities; protesters set at least 22 police stations on fire across country and police fired live ammunition, leaving at least 13 dead in and around Bogotá 9-10 Sept. High Commissioner for Peace Miguel Ceballos 14 Sept alleged National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas and dissident Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) groups coordinated violence, while attorney general 18 Sept said govt had captured four members of FARC dissident cell in Bogotá. Following calls by National Strike Committee, which coordinated late 2019 protest movement, thousands 21 Sept took to streets in several cities to protest dire economic situation and poor living conditions. Supreme Court 22 Sept ruled in favour of citizen petition requiring govt to guarantee right of peaceful protest; govt next day said it would ask Constitutional Court to re-evaluate decision. Large-scale killings (with three or more victims) of civilians continued, leaving at least 12 dead in Bajo Cauca area of Antioquia and Córdoba departments (north west) where Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, one of country’s main drug trafficking groups) and AGC splinter group Caparros fight for control of mining rights and drug trafficking routes, and ELN and FARC dissident factions also operate. Several massacres also recorded in Sept in Cauca and Nariño departments along Pacific coast, leaving at least 17 dead. In Alto Baudó municipality, Chocó (west), fighting between AGC and ELN 25 Aug-17 Sept displaced some 450 people and confined over 4,000 members of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities to homes. In testimony to Special Jurisdiction for Peace

(established by govt-FARC peace deal), FARC party chief Rodrigo Londoño 9 Sept said forced recruitment was not FARC policy during civil war, sparking criticism from other political parties; FARC 15 Sept issued statement describing kidnappings as “grave error”.

- **COMMENTARY: Colombia: Peace Withers amid the Pandemic**

➔ Venezuela SEPTEMBER 2020

Rifts widened within mainstream opposition over whether to contest legislative elections as President Maduro’s govt maintained tight control on electoral framework. Opposition led by Juan Guaidó 7 Sept reiterated decision to boycott 6 Dec legislative elections, with 37 parties signing “unity pact”; some factions, however, proceeded with election preparations; two-time presidential candidate Henrique Capriles registered to run again before 8 Sept deadline, said he might pull out if conditions do not improve. Guaidó 23 Sept called on UN member states to consider application of “responsibility to protect” doctrine to Venezuela, and 27 Sept announced formation of Commandos for Liberty and Free Elections, committees of local activists tasked with mobilising protests and coordinating opposition on the ground. Delays in election preparations and high rates of COVID-19 infection continued to cast doubt upon electoral calendar; independent research by Academy of Sciences 10 Sept predicted over 10,000 virus cases per day in Dec, while electoral authority yet to provide details on new electronic voting system. Head of govt-controlled National Constituent Assembly Diosdado Cabello 6 Sept said body would not draft new constitution before mandate expires in Dec. Series of protests late Sept erupted across country over petrol shortages and breakdown of basic services. International actors also remained divided over electoral process. High-level EU and EU-backed International Contact Group mission to Caracas 23 Sept sought six-month postponement and improvement in election conditions, notably by allowing foreign observers, while U.S. special representative Elliott Abrams 27 Sept criticised move, saying Brussels did not consult Washington on the matter. Organization of American States Sec Gen Luis Almagro 17 Sept called those participating in elections “accomplices of dictatorship”. UN fact-finding mission 16 Sept accused security forces and intelligence agencies of “extrajudicial executions, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions and torture” amounting to crimes against humanity since 2014, argued that Maduro and several ministers “were aware of the crimes”, and called for international prosecution of those responsible; govt immediately rejected allegations, claiming mission had been bought off.

➔ Guatemala SEPTEMBER 2020

Amid persistent tensions between Congress and judiciary, authorities launched attacks on press. President Giammattei's ally and head of controversial coordination cell within govt Miguel Martínez 9 Sept filed criminal complaint against *Plaza Pública* newspaper for threats, harassment and extortion, after it reported same day that Martínez and Giammattei are business partners. Public Ministry 12 Sept opened investigation after police officers previous day reportedly beat and arrested Vox Populi journalist Sonny Figueroa shortly after he published article criticising Martínez's role in govt. Authorities 22 Sept arrested journalist Anastasia Mejía in Joyabaj municipality, Quiché department, on sedition charges; NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 28 Sept called for immediate release of Mejía and for govt to "guarantee that journalists can report freely without persecution". NGO Human Rights Watch 9 Sept called on judiciary and Congress to "end their relentless attacks" on human rights ombudsman Jordán Rodas for "his defence of sexual and reproductive rights". Election of Supreme Court and appeal courts magistrates remained stalled in Congress after Attorney General's office in Feb revealed irregularities in selection process; Congress leaders 9 Sept created working group on issue. Following Aug murders of NGO worker and land defender, NGO International Land Coalition 9 Sept expressed concern over violations of rights of members of indigenous and peasant organisations. Prison inmates in Guatemala City 3 Sept took four guards hostage in response to govt transferring Barrio 18 gang leaders to different prisons in attempt to curb extortion orders; inmates released guards next day. Health Ministry 8 Sept recorded 21,000 cases of acute malnutrition.

➔ Honduras SEPTEMBER 2020

Political tensions increased ahead of 2021 general elections while social unrest remained high, particularly in capital Tegucigalpa. Congress 10 Sept failed to pass new electoral law, with some opposition groups claiming it did not address crucial issues including possible creation of second round of election. National Electoral Council 13 Sept nonetheless approved electoral calendar, including primary elections set for March 2021, generating criticism from opposition. Left-wing opposition Freedom and Refoundation Party (Libre) deputy Juan Ramón Flores 27 Sept said party will take to streets to demand approval of law. Unrest over lack of revenues and salary arrears amid COVID-19 pandemic continued, including protests in Tegucigalpa by minibus drivers 1 Sept and teachers 7 and 25 Sept. Police 15 Sept used tear gas to disperse some 1,000 anti-govt protesters gathered in Tegucigalpa on occasion of Independence Day. Members of Garífuna indigenous community 4 Sept protested in Tela town, Atlántida department (north) to demand that govt secure release of community leaders abducted in July by armed individuals in police outfits. *El Heraldo* newspaper 22 Sept reported 36 massacres (defined as killings of three or more) in 2020. After report, more large-scale killings took place 25 Sept in Tambla municipality, Lempira department (west), and 26 Sept in La Ceiba municipality, Atlántida (north), leaving eight dead in total. Unidentified gunmen 27 Sept killed journalist Luis Alonzo Almendares in Comayagua city, Comayagua department (centre). Security forces 1-14 Sept destroyed eight airstrips used by drug traffickers in Gracias a Dios department (Caribbean region) and 11-13 Sept dismantled two coca plantations and two laboratories in Colón department (north). U.S. court 10 Sept delayed

sentencing of President Hernández's brother Tony Hernández – found guilty in 2019 of drug trafficking – from 16 Sept to 10 Nov. National Anti-Corruption Council 7 Sept alleged coronavirus-related corruption has cost govt \$11mn; prosecutors called several high-level officials to testify in COVID-19 corruption cases, including FM Lisandro Rosales 10 Sept.

➔ El Salvador SEPTEMBER 2020

Amid ongoing political tensions between govt and judiciary, reports emerged of officials conducting informal negotiations with criminal groups. Newspaper *El Faro* 3 Sept reported senior state officials including director of prisons Osiris Luna have been negotiating since at least Oct 2019 with MS-13 gang leaders in jails to reduce homicides and secure electoral support; President Bukele same day denied allegations but Attorney General's Office 4 Sept opened investigation and 7 Sept raided penitentiary system headquarters and two jails. Attorney general 16 Sept issued fresh arrest warrant for former President Funes on charges of illicit association, arbitrary acts and neglect of duties in relation to 2012 "gang truce". Tensions between executive and judiciary persisted. Supreme Court 15 Sept ruled requirement to test negative for COVID-19 within 72 hours of landing in El Salvador, introduced by airport authorities 11 Sept, is unconstitutional; Bukele next day said measure would remain in force; attorney general 23 Sept opened investigation into possible felonies by presidential staffers for disregarding Court's order. Institute for Access to Public Information 10 Sept criticised govt's Aug changes to freedom of information act that make it more difficult to obtain public information from govt institutions. Group of U.S. Democratic lawmakers same day expressed "deep concern" over govt's "hostility toward independent and investigative media outlets", echoed by six Republicans 23 Sept who also warned that alleged negotiations with MS-13 would legitimise gang. Bukele 8 Sept asked VP Ulloa to draft constitutional reforms "in accordance with current societal needs"; Ulloa 17 Sept said reforms would not touch on country's political system or alternance in power but declined to clarify their scope. Military 21 Sept denied judge investigating 1981 El Mozote massacre, in which army killed around 1,000 civilians, entry to military archives; judge 23 Sept rescheduled inspection for 5 Oct, but Bukele next day said he will not allow access.

➔ Nicaragua SEPTEMBER 2020

Judicial moves sent chilling message to opposition and media. In capital Managua, judge 3 Sept issued arrest warrant for three relatives of opposition platform Civic Alliance leader Juan Sebastián Chamorro over alleged tax arrears; judge 11 Sept ordered seizure of independent broadcaster Canal 12's assets as part of tax arrears case. President Ortega 15 Sept said he would seek to impose life sentences on those convicted of hate crimes; comment followed 12 Sept killing of two girls in Mulukukú municipality, North Caribbean Coast Autonomous Region, but some in opposition including ex-vice minister José Pallais interpreted it as threat to opposition representatives; govt 17 Sept began gathering signatures to ask Supreme Court of Justice and National Assembly to introduce tougher sentencing guidelines. Police 25 Sept raided headquarters of feminist organisation María Elena Cuadra in Managua. Govt-controlled National Assembly 22 Sept started discussing bill that would increase scrutiny of citizens and organisations receiving foreign funds – dubbed as “foreign agents” – and ban them from participating in politics. Opposition same day strongly objected to proposal. International actors expressed concern over intensifying state repression. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 10 Sept reported 45 govt opponents arrested by police since early Aug. UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept denounced persistent attacks against opposition and press, while U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo next day accused Ortega of “doubling down on repression” and becoming “a dictator”. NGO Amnesty International 30 Sept said govt was “preparing for a new phase of repression” in light of new draft laws that “attempt to silence those who criticise government policies”.

➔ Guyana SEPTEMBER 2020

Ethnic clashes erupted between Indo- and Afro-Guyanese communities. Suspected Indo-Guyanese assailants 5 Sept killed two Afro-Guyanese teenagers in Number Three village in predominantly Indo-Guyanese Mahaica-Berbice region in north east; incident followed conclusion in Aug of election standoff that divided electorate along ethnic lines. Hundreds of Afro-Guyanese in following days took to streets across Mahaica-Berbice, reportedly attacking Indo-Guyanese homes, businesses and individuals; police 7 Sept fired teargas and bullets at protesters in Mahaica-Berbice and neighbouring Demerara-Mahaica region, leaving several injured. Police 6-9 Sept detained seven individuals suspected of involvement in killings of Afro-Guyanese teenagers. Unidentified assailants 9 Sept killed Indo-Guyanese teenager, grandson of suspect in custody, in Number Three Village. Afro-Guyanese protesters same day beat Indo-Guyanese man to death in Bath Settlement, Mahaica-Berbice, after he opened fire at them. Former President Granger 7 Sept voiced support for protests, while President Ali same day urged de-escalation and vowed to take “strong” action against those fuelling racial hatred. Guyana Human Rights Association 8 Sept said killings were “a continuation of earlier ethnic upheaval”.

→ Haiti SEPTEMBER 2020

Series of protests erupted throughout month amid persistently high levels of criminal violence. Police remained on “high alert” across country following late Aug murder of twelve people in capital Port-au-Prince by suspected gang members led by Jimmy Chérisier, alias Barbecue. Police 2 Sept arrested suspected leader of G9 coalition of gangs Albert Stevenson, alias Djouma; after G9’s 7 Sept ultimatum for his release expired, dozens 9 Sept protested near Port-au-Prince airport to demand his release. Anti-govt protesters 8 Sept clashed with security forces in Port-au-Prince and reportedly burned several govt vehicles; demonstrators accused President Moïse of orchestrating late Aug murder of prominent lawyer and govt critic Montferrier Dorcal, which Moïse denied. Hundreds of armed police officers from hardline police organisation Fantom 509 and their supporters 15 Sept blocked roads and set cars on fire in Port-au-Prince, demanding higher salaries plus release of police officer jailed since May on murder and arson charges, and accusing interim director of national police Normil Rameau, who launched six-month anti-gang operation in Aug, of failing to defend their interests; authorities 25 Sept released officer. National Food Security Coordination 9 Sept said 4mn people are food insecure in Haiti, up from 3.7mn in Sept 2019, as border with Dominican Republic remained closed amid COVID-19 pandemic.

→ Mexico SEPTEMBER 2020

Criminal violence remained high while political tensions emerged over 2021 budget. Armed group-related violence continued, particularly in Baja California state (north) and central states of Colima, Michoacán, Guanajuato and Morelos. Notably, gunmen 1 Sept killed eight people attending funeral in Cuernavaca city (Morelos); 17 Sept attacked another wake in Celaya city (Guanajuato), killing five; and 22 Sept attacked taco stand in Irapuato city (Guanajuato), killing five. President López Obrador 1 Sept said “atrocities” – defined as acts of violence that include mutilation and torture – no longer occur in Mexico, but NGO Causa en Común 8 Sept reported 1,850 such attacks between Jan and Aug. Decapitated body of crime reporter Julio Valdivia, who recently covered clashes between local gang and police forces, was found 9 Sept outside Córdoba city, Veracruz state (Gulf Coast in east), bringing number of journalists killed under current administration to 17. Dozens of prominent journalists and intellectuals 17 Sept called on López Obrador to protect journalists and stop his attacks on “freedom of expression”. Govt 9 Sept presented 2021 budget including no significant stimulus investment despite expected economic fallout of COVID-19 pandemic, but major increases for armed forces. UN Human Rights Chief Michelle Bachelet 14 Sept and prominent civil society organisation Semáforo Delictivo 21 Sept expressed concern over increasing militarisation of public security, with freedom of information request 6 Sept showing 31% more soldiers deployed across country than at any point under two preceding administrations; budget also included cuts in

funding to federated states and municipalities, prompting ten governors 7 Sept to accuse federal govt of granting some states preferential treatment. Women's rights groups early Sept occupied National Human Rights Commission's offices in several locations, including in Mexico City 9 Sept, to decry govt's lack of response to femicides.

➔ Paraguay SEPTEMBER 2020

Tensions ran high following military operation against armed group. President Abdo 2 Sept said military operation against Paraguayan People's Army (EPP) in northern guerrilla camp near Yby Yaú city, left two "rebels" dead same day; Argentinian FM 4 Sept said victims were two Argentinian girls visiting their fathers in rebel camp. Security operation brought harsh criticism of govt; opposition parties 4 Sept decried govt's "rush to bury the bodies of these girls before they had even been identified" and NGO Paraguay's Human Rights Coordinator same day said incident "bears all the hallmarks of a fresh state crime". After EPP 9 Sept abducted former VP Óscar Denis Sánchez and his assistant Adelio Mendoza in Amambay department, reportedly in retaliation for previous incident, Interior Minister Euclides Acevedo 10 Sept said EPP had started "war" against govt. EPP 13 Sept said Denis would be killed unless govt released two imprisoned EPP leaders, next day released Mendoza.

Middle East & North Africa

➔ Israel/Palestine SEPTEMBER 2020

Israel signed bilateral normalisation agreements with United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain; Hamas and Fatah announced deal to hold elections and tit-for-tat attacks broke out between Gaza militants and Israel. At White House ceremony, PM Netanyahu alongside Emirati and Bahraini FMs 15 Sept signed deal to normalise relations. Ahead of signing, President Abbas 3 Sept chaired meeting with Palestinian factions, including Hamas, to define unified response, calling for formation of popular committees to oversee resistance activities against occupation and later stressing need to unite Palestinian political system. At Arab League meeting, UAE and Bahrain 9 Sept defended deal by citing Israel's commitment to halt prospective West Bank annexation. Following failure of Palestinian efforts to get Arab League to pass resolution condemning deals, Palestinian PM Mohammed

Ishtayeh 14 Sept called for reconsidering relations with league, describing forum as “a symbol of Arab inaction”. Hamas and Fatah 24 Sept announced deal to hold Palestinian Authority (PA) legislative elections, PA presidential elections and Central Council elections for the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. Across West Bank, Israeli security operations led to numerous arrests and clashes that caused injury of at least 70 Palestinians and two Israelis; notably, Israel 7 Sept detained over 45 Palestinians in Hebron in largest arrest campaign this year while skirmishes between Palestinians and settlers near Ramallah early Sept broke out. In sign of Israel’s ongoing de facto annexation of West Bank, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz 6 Sept approved construction of 5,000 settler housing units. In Gaza, Egyptian delegation 10 Sept visited amid efforts to mediate prisoner exchange talks between Hamas and Israel. Despite late Aug ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, armed factions 15 Sept protested normalisation deals by firing around 15 rockets into southern Israel, wounding two in Ashdod; Israeli air force retaliated with airstrikes. Meanwhile, COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Gaza despite lockdown, heightening fears of major outbreak in blockaded territory. In Israel, coronavirus cases rose rapidly; govt 13 Sept imposed a three-week national lockdown. Weekly anti-govt protests continued despite health restrictions: thousands 12 Sept gathered outside PM Netanyahu’s residence denouncing corruption and govt’s handling of pandemic.

- **PODCAST: Hold Your Fire: Ethiopia's Political Crisis**

Lebanon SEPTEMBER 2020

New PM-designate resigned after failing to form govt amid deepening political polarisation, increased U.S. pressure on Hizbollah and clashes in capital Beirut. Following govt’s resignation last month, French President Emmanuel Macron 1 Sept arrived in Beirut to pressure political elite to kickstart reforms to counter deteriorating economic crisis and secure commitment from new PM-designate Adib – former ambassador to Germany appointed PM-designate 31 Aug – to form govt within 15 days. However, by mid-Sept deadline Adib failed to form new govt due to dispute over allocation of finance portfolio and U.S.-France disagreement over role of Hizbollah. Adib 26 Sept resigned citing govt formation gridlock; Macron next day said there would be “serious consequences” for politicians who failed to uphold deal. Meanwhile, U.S. increased financial pressure on companies and individuals linked to Hizbollah: U.S. Treasury 9 Sept sanctioned Hizbollah allies, former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil and Youssef Finianos of the Christian Marada Movement; 17 Sept sanctioned two Lebanese companies and one individual for allegedly funneling funds to Hizbollah. President Macron expressed concern over sanctions, warning that confrontation with Hizbollah could further hamper reform efforts. In sign of worsening security across country, violence between rival political groups broke out in Beirut: in Tariq al-Jdide neighbourhood, clashes involving rifles and rocket-propelled grenades 7 Sept erupted between Sunni groups affiliated with former PM Saad Hariri and followers of his brother Bahaa, killing one and injuring two; in eastern suburb, clashes 14 Sept broke out between Christian party Free Patriotic Movement and Lebanese Forces. Four Lebanese soldiers 14 Sept killed in operation to apprehend alleged jihadist militant suspected of planning late Aug attack in Kaftoun village that killed three people; shootout between army and jihadist militants 27 Sept killed three near Miniyeh. Daily COVID-19 cases 14 Sept surged past 1,000 for the first time since outbreak. Accidental explosion at suspected Hizbollah arms

depot 22 Sept rocked southern town of Ain Qana, reportedly causing four casualties.

➔ Syria SEPTEMBER 2020

Ceasefire in north west faced new strains, jihadist group Hei'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) sought to consolidate control in Idlib, and Islamic State (ISIS) stepped up deadly attacks. In north west, March ceasefire continued to hold despite daily shelling in southern Idlib and western Aleppo countryside; Russia 25 Sept conducted some 30 airstrikes in opposition-controlled areas, marking highest uptick in strikes since ceasefire. Following late-Aug attacks on Russian-Turkish patrols along M4 highway by unidentified assailants, Russian and Turkish forces 1 Sept held joint military trainings; Russia 15 Sept however declined participation in joint patrol, triggering speculation of impasse between countries over Idlib; Turkish FM 16 Sept described meeting between Turkish and Russian military officials as not “fruitful” while Russian FM Lavrov 21 Sept assured patrolling “would resume soon”. In Idlib, jihadist rebel group HTS reportedly cracked down on rival factions: group early Sept detained French jihadist Omar Omsen and members of rival faction Hizb al-Tahrir; alleged U.S. drone 14 Sept killed two senior commanders of Hurras al-Din – jihadist group competing with HTS – in move likely to aid HTS consolidation in Idlib city; HTS 27 Sept killed two Iraqi ISIS senior commanders in Salqin, Idlib. Confrontations between ISIS militants and regime persisted in area between Aleppo, Hama and Raqqa, raising concerns of jihadist resurgence: fighting first week of Sept killed 48 regime soldiers and 22 ISIS fighters; ISIS militants 7 Sept took control of Doubayat gas field in Homs briefly before Russian forces regained control; heavy fighting between Syrian Army and ISIS in Raqqa province 19-22 Sept reportedly killed at least 64 on both sides. In south west, high-profile assassinations targeted regime: unknown gunmen 1 Sept reportedly killed Syrian Arab Army 5th Corps leader Abdel Salam al-Masri; unknown assailants 2 Sept killed govt officer in Nawa; alleged ISIS assassinations against regime-affiliated senior figures continued, 10-15 Sept killing at least six military commanders. In north east, U.S. Central Command 18 Sept announced additional force deployments following collision last month with Russian military vehicles. Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes 3, 11 Sept struck Iran-linked targets near Iraqi border and Aleppo, respectively.

➔ Bahrain SEPTEMBER 2020

Country signed historic normalisation deal with Israel. Bahrain and United Arab Emirates (UAE) 15 Sept signed

bilateral normalisation agreements with Israel at White House ceremony in Washington DC, U.S.; deal paves way for greater cooperation between two Gulf states and Israel in areas of defence, tourism, trade, and cybersecurity. News of agreement was met with some local opposition, with small protests mid-month erupting across country; 17 political and civil society groups 18 Sept signed petition expressing opposition to agreement; hashtag “Bahrainis Against Normalization” 15 Sept became top trending social media topic in country.

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➔ Iran SEPTEMBER 2020

U.S. ratcheted up pressure on Iran by unilaterally declaring restoration of all pre-nuclear deal UN sanctions on Iran, despite widespread international opposition to move. After triggering “snapback” mechanism of Resolution 2231 in Aug, U.S. 19 Sept declared “the return of virtually all previously terminated UN sanctions” on Iran that were lifted following Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), warning that it will use its “domestic authorities” if UN member states fail to implement sanctions. However, UK, German and French (E3) UN envoys 20 Sept reiterated their view that U.S. snapback notification “is incapable of having legal effect” and restoration of pre-2231 sanctions “would also be incapable of having any legal effect”. Given wide divergence between U.S. on one side and UN Security Council members and JCPOA signatories on other, President Rouhani 16 Sept said U.S. “was left alone” at UN, and hailed its failure as “great and historic victory”. U.S. rolled out sanctions throughout month: Treasury 3 Sept blacklisted six entities linked to already-sanctioned petrochemical company; Treasury 17 Sept unveiled sanctions against “Iranian cyber threat group Advanced Persistent Threat 39 (APT39)”; executive order 21 Sept accompanied by “sweeping” nuclear, missile and conventional arms designations; State Dept 24 Sept blacklisted Iranian judicial officials and entities for human rights violations. Meanwhile, Joint Commission of JCPOA 1 Sept convened with all sides underscoring continued commitment to salvaging nuclear deal; in positive sign, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General 14 Sept confirmed that agency had already visited one of two sites previously in dispute with Iran and expected to inspect second site soon. Non-nuclear tensions persisted with U.S.; President Trump 14 Sept echoed media report that Iran may be planning attack against U.S. in retaliation for killing of Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commander Qassem Soleimani in Jan and vowed retaliation “1,000 times greater in magnitude!”; IRGC head 19 Sept remarked “we will target those who had an either direct or indirect role” in attack. Amid concern of third wave of COVID-19 infections, national currency 20 Sept hit a historic low of 273,000 rial to dollar.

- [PODCAST: Hold Your Fire: Libya's Proxy War](#)

➔ Iraq SEPTEMBER 2020

PM Kadhimi embarked on major govt reshuffle amid persistent attacks on U.S.-led coalition forces and partial withdrawal of U.S. troops. In significant govt reshuffle, PM Kadhimi 14 Sept replaced heads of Central Bank and Trade Bank of Iraq, mayor of Baghdad, and eight deputy ministers; opposition coalitions Sairoon Alliance, al-Fatah and State of Law 15 Sept separately criticised move, while Baghdad protesters same day accused PM of sectarian motivations. Kadhimi 14 Sept also replaced heads of Iraqi National Intelligence Service and provincial command centres in Anbar, Basra, Diyala and Salah al-Din. In sign of support for govt's program, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani 13 Sept wrote letter to Kadhimi in support of early elections and called on govt to combat corruption, control border crossings and confiscate illegal arms. Meanwhile, authorities 16-17 Sept arrested senior govt employees – heads of Iraq's retirement fund and Baghdad's investment commission – as well as CEO of electronic payment company Q-card as part of PM's anti-corruption drive. Attacks on U.S.-led coalition forces continued: numerous IED attacks 3-19 Sept targeted foreign diplomats and supply convoys of coalition forces, reportedly killing one and injuring another; unidentified groups 15-16 and 22 Sept fired rockets at green zone; rocket attack 28 Sept near Baghdad's airport killed five civilians. Following successful rounds of U.S.-Iraq "strategic dialogue" in Washington DC, U.S. 9 Sept declared force drawdown from 5,200 to 3,000 troops as U.S. Central Command cited advances in Iraqi forces' capacity to fight Islamic State (ISIS). U.S. 25 Sept informed Baghdad of intention to close embassy unless govt helped stop attacks on U.S. personnel. ISIS-related violence and military operations against group continued: Iraqi security forces and coalition 10-14 Sept killed at least 14 ISIS militants in Ninewa, Salah ad-Din, Kirkuk, Anbar and Diyala; ISIS attacks around Diyala and Kirkuk 12-17 Sept killed at least 11; later in month, Popular Mobilization Forces 19 Sept killed five ISIS fighters south of Mosul. Kadhimi 10 Sept completed first visit to Erbil, raising prospect of improved relations between Baghdad and Kurdistan Autonomous Region and expectation of upcoming new security arrangements in disputed territories.

➔ Saudi Arabia SEPTEMBER 2020

Huthis throughout month launched cross-border missile attacks on Saudi Arabia. Huthis 10 Sept claimed they launched missile and drone attack from Yemen on "important target" in Saudi capital Riyadh; Saudi state media 20 Sept reported Huthi attack on village in southern Jizan province wounded five civilians. Uptick in Huthi attacks prompted by apparent attempt to force Riyadh into renewing direct talks with Huthi leaders in hope it would allow group to sidestep Yemen's Hadi govt in peace process; Huthis mid-Sept claimed their communications channels with Saudis have become more active since early Sept. Saudi authorities 28 Sept said security forces detained ten individuals after uncovering "terrorist cell" allegedly linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard

Corps.

➔ Yemen SEPTEMBER 2020

Huthi military campaign continued in north amid renewed clashes around Hodeida port; in south, govt and separatists resumed talks. In north, Huthis throughout month made new gains in oil-rich Marib governorate and consolidated control over territory in neighbouring al-Bayda governorate. Huthis mid-Sept negotiated truce with elements of Murad tribe in al-Mahaliya, thereafter claiming to control the territory. Huthis also continued to launch cross-border missile attacks on Saudi Arabia in apparent attempt to force Riyadh into renewing direct talks that they hoped would allow them to side-step Hadi govt in peace process; Huthis early Sept claimed communications channels with Saudis had become more active. In Taiz in north, clashes early Sept broke out between United Arab Emirates (UAE)-affiliated and govt forces on one hand and Islah-backed military and security forces on other; UAE-backed forces also clashed with Huthi fighters around Red Sea port city of Hodeida throughout month, raising prospect that Huthis may withdraw from Dec 2018 Stockholm agreement that prevented govt assault on Hodeida. Hadi govt continued to halt fuel imports to Hodeida port amid ongoing spat with Huthis over collection of revenues. In south, govt and separatist Southern Transition Council (STC) mid-Sept resumed power-sharing talks after STC withdrew from talks late Aug citing govt attacks on its forces; both sides, however, continued tit-for-tat attacks in Abyan governorate. Meanwhile, on diplomatic front, UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths mid-Sept presented latest draft of his “Joint Declaration” initiative to Huthis and Hadi govt; initiative calls for nationwide ceasefire, economic and humanitarian confidence-building measures and national political talks. Hadi govt and Huthis 27 Sept agreed on prisoner exchange deal first outlined in Stockholm agreement following talks in Geneva, Switzerland; Huthis to release 400 prisoners while govt will release 681 prisoners in deal Griffiths hailed as “very important milestone”; exchanges to take place mid-Oct.

- [PODCAST: Hold Your Fire: Ethiopia's Political Crisis](#)

➔ United Arab Emirates SEPTEMBER 2020

Country signed historic normalisation deal with Israel. United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain 15 Sept signed bilateral normalisation agreements with Israel at White House ceremony in Washington DC, U.S.; deal paves way for greater cooperation between two Gulf states and Israel in areas of defence, tourism, trade, and cybersecurity.

- **PODCAST: Hold Your Fire: Ethiopia's Political Crisis**

➔ **Algeria** SEPTEMBER 2020

Series of court cases marked restricted space for media and civil society. Appeal court 15 Sept sentenced journalist Khaled Drareni to two years in prison, reducing his original three-year sentence, on charges of “inciting an unarmed gathering” and “undermining the integrity of the national territory”. NGO Reporters without Borders immediately condemned “unfair and violent repression”. Court of Ténès 17 Sept sentenced Hirak figure and former policeman Toufik Hassani to two years in prison on charges of “threatening police agents” and “divulging professional secrets on Facebook”. Govt 21 Sept banned French TV M6 from operating in Algeria after it broadcast documentary on Hirak protest movement. Court in Akbou 27 Sept sentenced former opposition politician Khaled Tazaghart to one year in prison on charges of “inciting an unarmed gathering” and “disrupting public order”; thousands 29 Sept reportedly took to streets in neighbouring Tazmalt town, Bejaia province, to call for his release. Court in Bordj Bou Arreridj 27 Sept sentenced Hirak figure Brahim Laalami to three years in prison on unclear charges; Laalami was arrested 9 Sept after he was released from prison 30 Aug. Dozens of lawyers 27 Sept held sit-in in capital Algiers to demand independent judiciary and right to counsel. Bar association 30 Sept started nationwide two-day strike to demand “respect for the right to a defence”. Amid major economic downturn, President Tebboune 20 Sept said oil rent was over.

➔ **Egypt** SEPTEMBER 2020

Demonstrations broke out across country calling for President Sisi to resign; security forces deployed in main cities in response. Hundreds of anti-Sisi protesters 20 Sept took to streets in capital Cairo, Alexandria,

Aswan and Suez cities and smaller towns after Spain-based businessman Mohamed Ali (who had sparked wave of protests in Sept 2019) called for new demonstrations against political repression, corruption and economic crisis. Protesters reportedly set presidential residence in Aswan on fire and attacked several police vehicles; security forces fired tear gas and arrested dozens. After several days of lower-scale demonstrations, thousands took to streets notably in Cairo, Giza and Luxor cities; one protester reportedly killed in unclear circumstances in Al-Blida village, Giza governorate. In days before protests, govt deployed security forces in main cities, particularly Cairo, where they reportedly carried out random checks and inspections of passers-by. Earlier in month, around 300 protesters gathered outside police station in Giza governorate to protest death in custody of shopkeeper, who was reportedly detained after refusing to bribe police officer on 5 Sept. Ahead of elections for lower house of parliament due to take place by end of year, main pro-Sisi party Mostaqbal Watan 13 Sept unveiled coalition of 16 parties. In North Sinai, military forces late Aug-early Sept reportedly regained control of several villages in Bir Al-Abd area seized by Islamic State (ISIS) in July. Negotiations with Ethiopia over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam remained at a standstill (see Nile Waters). High-level Egyptian delegation 14 Sept met with eastern Libya leaders Aguila Saleh and Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi city in Libya notably to discuss resumption of oil exports; Haftar 18 Sept agreed to lift months-long oil blockade and oil sales resumed 26 Sept (see Libya).

➤ Libya SEPTEMBER 2020

Oil exports resumed after rival camps brokered deal to lift months-long oil sector blockade, and rival PMs pledged to step down amid protests. East-based strongman Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar 18 Sept agreed to lift eight-month oil sector blockade and allow resumption of oil sales; move followed weeks of intense diplomatic efforts and meeting between Haftar's camp and west-based UN-backed PM Serraj's Deputy Ahmed Meitig in Russia mid-Sept. Central Bank and officials in Tripoli late Sept distanced themselves from deal on grounds that Meitig made too many financial concessions to Haftar camp, but oil exports resumed 26 Sept. Ceasefires declared by rival east-based House of Representatives' head Aguila Saleh and Serraj in Aug mostly held, despite Haftar's Arab-Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF) shelling UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) forces' headquarters west of strategic city of Sirte 1 Sept. Heads of rival assemblies, Saleh and Tripoli-based High State Council's Khaled Mishri 6-10 Sept met in Morocco and agreed to start consultations on appointment of five top institutional posts, including Central Bank governor; leaders also agreed to appoint members of their institutions to participate in UN-mediated talks scheduled to restart in Oct, with aim to reach agreement on new unified govt to guide country toward general elections within 18 months. Protests against corruption and worsening living conditions subsided in west but continued in east. Protesters 13 Sept set fire to govt headquarters in Benghazi city and attacked police station in al-Marj town, prompting police to fire live ammunition, leaving one dead and several wounded. Amid unrest and in alleged attempt to pressure representatives of various factions to agree on new unity govt, rival PMs announced their intention to step down. East-based PM Abdullah al-Thani 14 Sept tendered his resignation to Saleh, who left him in caretaker capacity until lawmakers review his resignation. Serraj 16 Sept said UN-brokered talks have led to "new preparatory phase" to unify institutions and announced his intention to resign by end of Oct. Two militias

loyal to GNA 24 Sept clashed in Tripoli suburb of Tajoura, leaving at least three killed and several wounded.

- [PODCAST: Hold Your Fire: Libya's Proxy War](#)

➔ Tunisia SEPTEMBER 2020

Parliament approved new govt, while Islamic State (ISIS) launched deadly attack on security forces.

Parliament 2 Sept approved PM-designate Hichem Mechichi's technocratic govt with 134 votes out of 217; move followed weeks of power struggle between President Saïed and major parties in parliament after Saïed late July tasked Mechichi with forming new technocratic govt, disregarding balance of forces in parliament; Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda, largest group in parliament, eventually backed Mechichi citing country's "difficult situation". Three suspected jihadists 6 Sept attacked national guard checkpoint in Akouda town near Sousse city, killing one officer and wounding another; security forces subsequently killed all three and arrested dozens suspected of involvement; ISIS next day claimed responsibility for jihadist attack.