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.

Learn more about CrisisWatch →

Global Overview
DECEMBER 2019

Outlook for This Month
January 2020

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Conflict Risk Alerts
In December, retaliatory attacks in Iraq raised U.S.-Iran tensions to new heights, compounding Iraq’s political and security woes and presaging further escalation in January. In Syria, regime and Russian forces stepped up their offensive in the north west, and Turkey’s potential deployment of troops in Libya could add fuel to the fire. In Burkina Faso, suspected jihadist attacks and intercommunal violence surged, and in Niger jihadists carried out a major assault against security forces. Boko Haram intensified its attacks in Cameroon’s far north and Chad’s west. Fighting erupted in the capital of the Central African Republic and picked up momentum in the north east, where a battle for the provincial capital looms. In Mozambique, suspected Islamist militants intensified their insurgency in the far north, and an armed opposition faction may follow through on its threat to mark the president’s inauguration on 15 January with attacks on civilians. North Korea threatened to resume nuclear and long-range missile tests; India’s controversial citizenship law sparked widespread protests; and a tide of killings shook the prison system in Honduras. On the positive side, an independence referendum was held in Papua New Guinea’s Bougainville, part of the 2001 peace
agreement, and the resolution of a political dispute in Somaliland could open the way for parliamentary and local elections.

PRESIDENT'S TAKE

The Ripple Effects of the Latest U.S.-Iran Escalation

Robert Malley
President & CEO

In his introduction to this month’s edition of CrisisWatch, Crisis Group’s conflict tracker, our President Robert Malley reflects on the consequences of President Trump’s decision to kill Qassem Soleimani, Head of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps Quds Force.

Continue reading

In the Middle East and North Africa, the U.S.’s incendiary killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in Iraq early in the New Year followed a month of escalatory strikes between the U.S. and Iran’s allies. Responding to a series of attacks on U.S. assets, including one that killed a U.S. contractor, the U.S. launched airstrikes on the Iran-backed militia Kataib Hizbollah, killing at least 25. Militia members and their supporters protested outside the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, breaking into the compound and setting the scene for further escalation in January. The confrontation compounded Iraq’s own political and security problems: wrangling over who will succeed Adel Abdul-Mahdi as Prime Minister prolonged the country’s political paralysis and security forces continued their deadly crackdown on anti-government protests. In neighbouring Syria, regime and Russian forces intensified airstrikes and a ground offensive in the north west, taking territory from rebels. In Libya, forces answering to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar made some advances in their campaign to take the capital Tripoli from the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA). Turkey’s potential
deployment of troops to help the GNA could escalate fighting in coming weeks.

In Africa, suspected jihadist attacks and intercommunal violence surged in Burkina Faso’s east and north, and in neighbouring Niger members of Islamic State’s Sahel affiliate continued to launch attacks against the military in the west near the Malian border, including one that killed 71 soldiers, the deadliest attack against security forces in the country’s history. In the Lake Chad basin, Boko Haram increased the rate and deadliness of its attacks in both the Far North region of Cameroon and in western Chad. In northern Mozambique, suspected Islamist militants also intensified their attacks on civilians and security forces, while a spate of deadly raids against civilian traffic hit the centre of the country; the breakaway armed faction of opposition party Renamo denied responsibility, but threatened strikes in the area on 15 January, the day President Nyusi is due to be sworn in for his second term. Violence erupted over informal taxes in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, leaving at least 50 dead, and fighting intensified between armed groups, especially in the north east, where a fierce fight for the provincial capital Birao is imminent. Good news from Somaliland, where the ruling and opposition parties resolved their long-running dispute over the composition of the electoral commission, opening the way for delayed parliamentary and local polls.

In Asia, North Korea threatened to resume nuclear and long-range missile tests, placing the blame on the U.S.’s continued “hostile policy” toward the DPRK. During the Workers’ Party conference on 28-31 December, Kim Jong-un warned that Pyongyang will soon possess a “new strategic weapon”. In India, a controversial citizenship law sparked protests across the country, leading to deadly clashes with security forces that left dozens dead, including at least nineteen in Uttar Pradesh. In Papua New Guinea, the autonomous region of Bougainville successfully held a non-binding referendum on whether to become independent of the national government. The vote, which had been delayed twice in 2019, was part of the 2001 Bougainville Peace
Agreement, which ended ten years of conflict over revenues from mining and its environmental impact. Residents voted overwhelmingly for independence.

In Latin America, a series of killings shook the penitentiary system in Honduras, prompting President Hernández to impose a state of emergency in prisons. Unidentified assailants killed both a high-profile lawyer and the director of El Pozo jail, and mutinies broke out in several prisons, leaving dozens of detainees dead.
province. In north, jihadist attacks targeted security forces and civilians. Suspected members of jihadist Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 3 Dec attacked military positions, killing three soldiers in Toeni, Boucle du Mouhoun region, and wounding four in Banh, North region; army said it killed twenty assailants. In retaliation, army killed 28 suspected militants in three airstrikes in Yatenga province, North region 4 Dec. Suspected jihadists 24 Dec attacked Arbinda town, Soum province in northern Sahel region, killing 35 civilians and seven military; security forces reportedly also killed 80 assailants. Suspected jihadists 26 Dec ambushed military patrol in Hallele, 60km from Arbinda, killing eleven soldiers. Parliament 5 Dec approved 16% increase in defence spending in 2020. Relations with France grew strained after latter 18 Nov raised its assessment of insecurity in country and French President Macron early Dec invited G5 Sahel leaders to Pau in south west France “to clarify their expectations of France” amid growing anti-French sentiment in region. President Kaboré 12 Dec said “the tone and the form” of Macron’s invitation were “problematic”. Meeting initially planned for 16 Dec postponed to 13 Jan. France late Dec designated area in south west running along border with Côte d’Ivoire as red zone, highest level of security risk.

- BRIEFING: L’Afrique de l’Ouest face au risque de contagion jihadiste

Mali  DECEMBER 2019

Violence continued in Mopti region in centre albeit at lower level and major opposition parties boycotted final phase of national inclusive dialogue. In centre, suspected Fulani militiamen and jihadists and ethnic Dogon continued to attack each other in Bandiagara and Koro districts, causing deaths of at least eight people 5-12 Dec. After President Keïta urged security forces in Nov to adopt offensive strategy, army and French forces stepped up operations against jihadists in Mopti region, especially Bandiagara district. Notably, army 5 Dec destroyed jihadist base near Ouo and Mandoli villages and 6 Dec killed five jihadists near Bara Sara. French forces 21 Dec killed 40 suspected members of jihadist group Katiba Macina in Ouagadou forest, Mopti region. In Bamako, final phase of national inclusive dialogue that started in Oct took place 14-22 Dec; delegates from country’s ten regions drew up four key resolutions including organising legislative elections before May 2020 and holding referendum on constitutional revision. But Anw Ko Mali Dron, coalition of major opposition parties and civil society groups, 10 Dec reiterated its refusal to join dialogue process with government. Security situation still volatile.
take part, denouncing govt’s ban on discussion of certain topics, notably Algiers peace agreement. In north, leaders of ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) continued to strengthen group’s cohesion by holding popular congresses. By contrast, divisions deepened within Platform coalition of pro-govt armed groups: one faction boycotted congress of coalition member Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) in Aguelhoc early Dec and instead attended congress of ex-separatist National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) in Kidal 30 Nov-3 Dec where it called for merger with CMA.

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**Niger**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

Jihadists continued to launch attacks in west – including deadliest single attack against security forces in country’s history – and south east. In west near Malian border, suspected members of Islamic State’s Sahel affiliate 9 Dec launched suicide attack against army base in Agando, Tahoua region, killing three soldiers. Two days later, militants from same group attacked military base in Inates, Tillabery region, killing 71 soldiers, prompting President Issoufou to hold emergency meeting of National Security Council 12 Dec and emergency G5 Sahel heads of state meeting 15 Dec in capital Niamey. Suspected jihadist militants 25 Dec ambushed army convoy in Sanam, Tillabery region, killing fourteen soldiers. Jihadist violence also continued in Diffa region in south east near Nigeria. Suspected Boko Haram (BH) militants 1 Dec reportedly killed three in Riari village near Bosso. Suspected jihadists 7 Dec reportedly abducted ten women and girls in Gueskerou commune. Also in Diffa region, 125 former BH militants completed deradicalisation program at facility in Goundamaria 7 Dec; govt said they would start going back to their villages 9 Dec.

- **Q&A:** Behind the Jihadist Attack in Niger’s Inates

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**Burundi**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

Authorities and ruling party’s youth wing continued to repress opposition and
Authorities and ruling party’s youth wing continued to repress opposition and relations between Burundi and Rwanda frayed further. Authorities in Mabayi, Cibitoke province in north west near Rwandan border night of 1-2 Dec arrested five members of main opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL) for collaborating with Rwandan army in alleged attack on military outposts in Mabayi mid-Nov. Youth wing of ruling party CNDD-FDD Imbonerakure 1-3 Dec assaulted five CNL members in Makamba and Mwaro provinces. Authorities 2-11 Dec arrested eighteen CNL members. Suspected Imbonerakure 12 Dec shot dead CNL member in Nyabiraba, Bujumbura province. Authorities 12-27 Dec arrested at least 26 CNL members including several who denounced irregularities in voter registration. National Intelligence Service (SNR) agents in Cibitoke province 22 Dec abducted two people and later reportedly executed both. At parliamentary meeting of regional bloc International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) in Bujumbura, Nkurunziza 6 Dec accused Rwanda of mid-Nov attack in Mabayi. At Burundi’s request, ICGLR deployed fact-finding mission to Burundi and Rwanda to verify attack, findings not yet released. Coalition of opposition parties in exile CNARED announced it would take part in May 2020 elections; sixteen opposition politicians who have lived in exile since 2015 poll returned to country 11 Dec. President Nkurunziza 20 Dec reiterated he would not stand for re-election. Govt mid-Dec temporarily blocked access to online video platform YouTube. Public prosecutor 30 Dec asked for fifteen-year sentence for four journalists and their driver arrested in Oct en route to report on clashes between military and rebels.

Cameroon

Boko Haram (BH) stepped up attacks in Far North and conflict between Anglophone separatists and military continued in west. In Far North, BH launched attacks on several villages and clashed with security forces leaving dozens dead. Notably, BH 22 Dec reportedly killed tens of civilians on islands in Lake Chad, including on Chadian side of border, including at least nineteen Cameroonians. In Anglophone North West region, suspected separatists 1 Dec abducted and killed aid worker in Donga Mantung – first humanitarian to die in conflict. Clashes between separatists and security forces 11-13 Dec left at least three soldiers and two civilians dead in Widikum. Separatists 9 and 12 Dec abducted at least 21 local officials belonging to opposition party Social Democratic Front (SDF) and running for re-election in Feb polls; after receiving ransom, separatists 18 Dec released all 21 SDF hostages.
polls; after receiving ransom, separatists 16 Dec released all 21 SDF hostages. Separatists and ethnic Fulani mid-Dec reportedly clashed in Bua Bua and Kimbi, death toll unknown. Military raid 28 Dec left seven civilians dead in Donga Matung. In Anglophone South West region, clashes between suspected separatists and security forces 11-16 Dec left soldier and at least one civilian dead in Muyuka and Mamfe. Separatists night of 16-17 Dec set fire to home of local SDF official in Kumbo. Twenty separatists 17 Dec surrendered in Kumba. Suspected separatists 19 Dec opened fire on bus killing three civilians in Ekona. Clashes between security forces and separatists left at least three civilians dead in Meme. Pirates 31 Dec kidnapped eight sailors from Greek tanker off Limbe. In North region, security forces 5 Dec killed six men accused of abductions. Parliament 10 Dec passed revised language bill after lawyers and Anglophone MPs protested clause that judges could use English or French when administering justice in Anglophone areas. Parliament 19 Dec passed decentralisation bill that includes granting Anglophone regions special status allowing them to have some say in their own education and justice policies.

Violence erupted in capital Bangui leaving at least 51 dead and fighting between armed groups intensified in provinces especially in north east, where looming fight for provincial capital Birao could see worse violence in Jan. In Bangui’s PK5 neighbourhood, traders 24-28 Dec clashed with militia over latter’s demand for informal taxes, leaving at least 51 dead and several dozen injured. In far north east, armed group Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC) 16 Dec launched attack against armed group Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ) capturing Am-Dafock on border with Sudan; fighting reportedly left several dozen combatants dead. FPRC 18 Dec ambushed MLCJ reinforcements en route from Birao, capital of Vakaga prefecture leaving at least 59 dead in Bihera. FPRC continued to prepare offensive to recapture Birao. In centre, unidentified assailants 3 Dec killed a Fulani near Bambari, Ouaka prefecture; Fulani-dominated armed group Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) held anti-balaka militia and security forces responsible. UPC 15 Dec attacked security forces in Ippy. In east, clashes between anti-balaka and FPRC in Bria, Haute-Kotto prefecture 5-10 Dec caused unknown number of casualties. In west, tensions rose in Bouar after soldier 1 Dec stabbed to death civilian; in Baboua communal skirmishes killed two
people 28 and 31 Dec. Despite govt ban, party of former President Bozizé, Kwa Na Kwa (KNK), held rally in Bangui. KNK 16 Dec announced that Bozizé, in exile since his 2013 ouster, had returned to Bangui. EU 9 Dec formally established EU Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic (EUAM RCA) to support reform of internal security forces including police and gendarmerie; mission set to launch in mid-2020. International Criminal Court 11 Dec confirmed charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity against former anti-balaka leaders Alfred Yekatom and Patrice-Edouard Ngaïssona.

CHAD

Boko Haram (BH) increased rate and deadliness of attacks in west and authorities detained high-ranking officials over corruption. In Lake Chad province in west, BH attack night of 1-2 Dec on army post reportedly left at least four soldiers and thirteen militants dead. BH raid on fishermen’s camp near Kaiga 17 Dec left at least fourteen dead and thirteen missing. On Lake Chad 22 Dec, BH reportedly killed tens of civilians including Chadians, Cameroonians and Nigerians. In Batha region in centre, farmers clashed 10 Dec leaving at least two dead in Fitri. Authorities 1 Dec arrested presidency sec gen and former PM Kalzeubet Pahimi Deubet over corruption allegations; public prosecutor 23 Dec ordered his temporary release on medical grounds. Police 16 and 17 Dec questioned economy minister Issa Doubragne and director-general of economy ministry Houlé Djonkamla on similar charges; Doubragne left detention 17 Dec, but Djonkamla remained in custody end Dec for further investigation. President Déby 26 Dec replaced Djonkamla as director-general. After NGO Chadian Convention for the Defence of Human Rights (CTDDH) in Nov accused President Déby’s nephew of torture, police 3 Dec arrested CTDDH’s head Mahamat Nour Ibedou for defamation and later charged him with complicity to murder.

- REPORT: Eviter la reprise des violences communautaires à l’Est du Tchad

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

DECEMBER 2019
In east armed group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) continued to attack civilians in response to army offensive, killing about 100, violence persisted in Ituri province in north east, and tensions continued between coalitions of President Tshisekedi and former President Kabila. In Beni territory, North Kivu province, in response to army offensive launched late Oct, ADF continued to attack civilians leaving at least 97 dead. Notably, during night of 29-30 Dec militants killed eighteen people in Apetina-Sana, west of Oicha, Beni territory. Civilians continued to protest insecurity, directing anger at UN mission (MONUSCO); security forces 2 Dec prevented hundreds of protesters from reaching UN compound in Beni and attempted to disperse crowds with live fire, killing at least three. U.S. 10 Dec placed sanctions on six ADF rebels including group’s leader. In Ituri province in north east, armed group Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO) 6 Dec abducted twelve in Djugu territory. MONUSCO soldiers night of 7-8 Dec repelled attack by unidentified assailants. CODECO raid in Mutanga 11 Dec left nine dead. Clashes between security forces and CODECO 14 Dec in Djugu territory left four militants and two soldiers dead. CODECO raids and clashes between CODECO and military in Mutanga and Djugu 11-20 Dec left at least nineteen dead. In Mambasa, clashes between Mai-Mai militants and armed forces 27 Dec left eight dead. In Rutshuru territory, North Kivu, security forces 4 Dec killed commander of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR). In South Kivu, army late Nov launched operation against FDLR splinter group National Council for Renewal and Democracy (CNRD) capturing around 2,000 combatants and dependents; army 16 and 21 Dec repatriated 361 combatants to Rwanda. Members of Kabila’s coalition Common Front for Congo (FCC) denounced 4 Dec decision by FM Nzeza, member of Tshisekedi’s party, to recall three ambassadors, including two reportedly close to Kabila, for “serious breaches”. UN Security Council 19 Dec renewed MONUSCO’s mandate for one year.

- **BRIEFING: A New Approach for the UN to Stabilise the DR Congo**

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**Rwanda**  **DECEMBER 2019**

Rwanda’s relations with both Uganda and Burundi remained fraught. Rwandan and Ugandan officials 13 Dec met in Ugandan capital Kampala to hasten implementation of agreement govts signed in Aug aimed at normalising relations, but they failed to reach breakthrough over mutual allegations of destabilising actions, protection of...
Ethiopia  DECEMBER 2019

Ethnic violence continued especially at universities and Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan reported progress in talks to resolve dispute over Ethiopia’s construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on Blue Nile River. Students clashed at Arsi University in Oromia region 3 Dec and at Gondar University 8 Dec, one student reportedly killed. UN expert on freedom of speech 10 Dec warned that draft legislation against use of hate speech and disinformation could threaten freedom of expression and exacerbate ethnic tensions. Police in Gojam region in west 7 Dec seized 57 Kalashnikovs being transported from Dejen to Bahir Dar in Amhara region. Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan continued talks on Ethiopia’s construction of dam on Blue Nile River. Ministers held technical meetings in Cairo 2-3 Dec and Khartoum 21-22 Dec registering progress; FMs 9 Dec agreed to reconvene in Washington 13 Jan to review outcome of talks. In Somalia’s Gedo region, Somali opposition coalition Forum for National Parties 1 Dec accused Ethiopia of violating Somalia’s territorial sovereignty and demanded immediate withdrawal of all non-AMISOM Ethiopian troops.

- REPORT: Keeping Ethiopia’s Transition on the Rails
Al-Shabaab attacks continued. Al-Shabaab militants 6 Dec attacked bus travelling from Wajir to Mandera in north east, killing at least ten including seven police officers. Authorities 6 Dec arrested Nairobi governor Mike Sonko in Voi in south on at least seven charges including abuse of power, money laundering and fraud; Sonko pleaded non-guilty 9 Dec.

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**Somalia**

Al-Shabaab continued to launch attacks in capital Mogadishu and in south and centre leaving over 100 dead and inter-clan violence flared in centre and Mogadishu leaving some 60 dead. In Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab raid on hotel near presidential palace 10 Dec left ten dead. Truck bombing at Ex-Control checkpoint north west of Mogadishu 28 Dec killed at least 90 including two Turks; Al-Shabaab 30 Dec claimed responsibility, authorities said foreign govt helped plan attack without identifying which one. In south, Al-Shabaab attacks and security operations killed at least 51 insurgents, eight soldiers and five civilians. In Galmudug region in centre, Ethiopian security forces 19 Dec clashed with nomads leaving some twenty dead along border. Al-Shabaab suicide bomb 20 Dec killed at least eight in Galkayo. Militias clashed with Al-Shabaab in Hiraan region 29 Dec reportedly leaving at least ten militants dead. U.S. airstrikes 9-29 Dec killed six Al-Shabaab militants. Al-Shabaab 12 Dec claimed it had destroyed U.S. drone in Hiraan region. In Mudug region in centre, rival clan militias clashed over land dispute 5 and 9 Dec leaving around 50 dead; following mediation by elders and security officials, clans agreed to ceasefire. In Bosaso, Puntland in north, unidentified men killed security official 13 Dec. In Galmudug federal member state, federal govt and local Sufi militia Ahlu Sunnah Waa-Jama’a (ASWJ) 11 Dec reached agreement that ASWJ would be allocated twenty of 89 seats in new state parliament, but tensions over forthcoming elections persisted. After federal govt committee published criteria for candidates, ASWJ 24 Dec said it did not recognise committee and called on federal govt to honour agreement. ASWJ 30 Dec clashed with security forces in Galmudug capital Dhusamareb. Federal parliament’s lower house 28 Dec approved electoral law despite outcry over clause that allows delay of elections and govt to remain in power until elections.
Somaliland  DECEMBER 2019

Ruling and opposition parties resolved long-running dispute over composition of electoral commission, opening way to organisation of delayed parliamentary and local elections. Following consultations, mediation committee of businessmen and elders 16 Dec released recommendations to end electoral dispute, including dissolving recently appointed electoral commission and reinstating former one. Ruling Kulmiye party and opposition parties Waddani and Justice and Welfare Party (UCID) accepted committee’s recommendations. After meeting with President Bihi, UCID and Waddani leaders agreed to give govt until 10 Jan to implement committee’s recommendations and announce new election date. Ethiopian security forces 19 Dec crossed into Somaliland and opened fire on civilians killing three in Allay Baday. In Sanaag region, two warring clans 22 Dec signed agreement to end conflict in El Afweyn district.

South Sudan  DECEMBER 2019

Negotiations between President Kiir and main rebel leader Riek Machar, notably to resolve dispute over number and borders of states, failed to achieve consensus, but both reiterated pledge to form transitional unity govt in Feb, and intercommunal violence continued. Kiir and Machar 4 Dec adjourned negotiations facilitated by regional bloc Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD) and South Africa’s Deputy President David Mabuza: govt insisted on increasing number of states to no less than 32, while Machar’s rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) stated preference for ten. Govt proposed referendum to resolve impasse. After further talks between Kiir and Machar in capital Juba 10-17 Dec, both reiterated commitment to form unity govt by mid-Feb even if political disputes remain unresolved. Unification of country’s 83,000 security personnel remained stalled, undermined by lack of funds and shortages of food, water and medical supplies, which force fighters to abandon cantonment sites. After U.S. temporarily recalled its ambassador to South Sudan in Nov, it placed sanctions 11 Dec on five security officials it says are responsible for abduction and murder of two
Dec on five security officials it says are responsible for abduction and murder of two activists in 2017; 12 Dec implemented visa restrictions on individuals impeding peace process. Intercommunal violence continued early Dec. In Western Lakes state, following clashes between Manuer and Gak communities that left some 80 people dead 27-29 Nov, UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) 3 Dec said it had deployed 75 Nepalese peacekeepers to area. Unidentified gunmen 1 Dec stormed compound of international NGO Relief International in Maban county, Upper Nile state, severely assaulting staff; no casualties.

- VIDEO: Video - A Short Window to Resuscitate South Sudan’s Ailing Peace Deal

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**Sudan** DECEMBER 2019

Transitional govt pursued efforts to hold former regime to account, pursue peace with rebel groups and normalise relations with U.S.. Court 14 Dec sentenced former President Bashir to two years in “social reform facility” for corruption. Sovereign Council 10 Dec ordered creation of committee to remove from power remnants of Bashir’s regime, fight corruption and recover embezzled money. Court 30 Dec sentenced 27 police and intelligence officers to death over killing of teacher in Feb. Third round of peace talks opened in South Sudanese capital Juba 10 Dec. Govt and rebel coalition Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF) failed to reach deal by self-imposed deadline, but expressed confidence in process and agreed to extend talks by two months until 14 Feb. Govt and Darfuri SRF groups 18 Dec agreed to involve local stakeholders in “Darfur track”; 28 Dec agreed on roadmap to end Darfur conflict. Govt and representatives from central Sudan 28 Dec reached peace agreement. Rebel group Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu 26 Dec postponed resuming talks with govt by two weeks to consult with leadership and grassroots. Violence continued in peripheries. In Darfur, herders 10-11 Dec clashed with farmers in Dubo El Omda and Kabkabiya, 10 Dec reportedly killed one farmer and one soldier near Tawila. In Al Qadarif state near Ethiopian border, suspected Ethiopian gang 10 Dec killed civilian in Barka Nurein. During PM Hamdok’s visit to Washington early Dec, Sudan and U.S. agreed to appoint ambassadors for first time in 23 years. U.S. 20 Dec removed Sudan from religious freedom blacklist. “Friends of Sudan” nations, which met in Khartoum 11 Dec, made no financial commitments to support transition, but agreed to convene donor conference in April. Sudan, Ethiopia and Egypt continued talks to resolve dispute
over Ethiopia’s construction of dam on River Nile. Irrigation ministers held technical meetings in Cairo 2-3 Dec and Khartoum 21-22 Dec registering progress; FMs 9 Dec agreed to reconvene in Washington 13 Jan to review outcome of talks.

- **OPEN LETTER**: Open Letter to the Friends of Sudan

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**Tanzania**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

Govt withdrew from African Court on Human and Peoples’ Rights 2 Dec; decision will prevent individuals and NGOs filing rights cases directly against govt. NGO Human Rights Watch 12 Dec reported that authorities were putting increasing pressure on Burundian refugees to leave country, including by intimidation; Home Affairs minister 3 Dec denied govt was forcibly expelling refugees. Police 20 Dec arrested prominent human rights lawyer Tito Magoti; authorities 24 Dec charged him with economic crimes including non-bailable offence of money laundering.

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**Uganda**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

Talks with Rwanda failed to ease tensions, and govt continued to repress opposition. Following agreement to normalise relations with Rwanda late Aug, high-level govt officials 13 Dec reached deadlock in second meeting with Rwandan counterparts in capital Kampala to discuss deal’s implementation. President Museveni 4 Dec led anti-corruption march in Kampala, drawing criticism from opposition who denounced Museveni’s record. Police same day prevented former president of opposition party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) Kizza Besigye from holding his own anti-corruption march. Tensions rose between refugees and local communities in Adjumani district; host community 10 Dec blamed South Sudanese refugees for death of local man, 12 Dec killed one South Sudanese refugee in attack near Nyumanzi settlement. Refugees same day raided nearby villages of Linga, Jurumini, Maiciki, Ege, and Maiaeciki in retaliation, leaving one local man dead. Musician-turned-opposition leader Bobi Wine 11 Dec said he would run for president in 2021.
CrisisWatch | Crisis Group

1/7/2020

Opposition leader Bobi Wine 11 Dec said he would run for president in 2021 general elections.

Angola

Authorities forcibly broke up separatist demonstration. Security forces 10 Dec violently dispersed peaceful pro-independence march in Cabinda enclave in west; police arrested dozens including president and sec gen of Cabinda Independence Movement (MIC), which seeks independence for enclave. In protest, armed separatist movement Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) mid-Dec called for large-scale demonstrations. Supreme Court 9 Dec opened trial of former President dos Santos’s son Jose Filomeno de Sousa dos Santos, charged with embezzling $500mn from Angola’s sovereign wealth fund. Court 23 Dec froze bank accounts and holdings of Isobel Dos Santos, daughter of former President dos Santos, and her Congolese husband Sindika Dokolo over state losses of more than a billion dollars.

Malawi

Constitutional court 6 Dec concluded hearings relating to disputed May election results; court to release ruling within 45 days, by end of Jan 2020.

Mozambique

Suspected Islamist militants intensified attacks on civilians and security forces in far north; deadly attacks rose in centre and dissident faction of opposition party
Renamo threatened strikes there on day of President Nyusi’s inauguration for second term 15 Jan. In Cabo Delgado province in far north, militants carried out over a dozen attacks on civilians and security forces, leaving over 50 civilians and combatants dead. Notably, militants 4 Dec ambushed three vehicles 25km south of Palma, reportedly killing two; 12 Dec attacked Litapata and Malangonha villages in Muidumbe district, killing three. Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for 6 Dec ambush of military convoy in Narere village that left at least nine soldiers dead, bringing total number of ISIS-claimed attacks to at least 23. Residents in Chitunda and Namacande villages in Muidumbe district 15 Dec chased away security forces in anger at their failure to protect civilians; suspected militants attacked Chitunda next day. Navy 14 Dec intercepted vessel smuggling over one tonne of heroin 50km off Cabo Delgado. Authorities 23 Dec seized over 430kg of heroin and arrested thirteen Pakistanis in Bay of Pemba. In central Mozambique, following attack on civilian vehicle late Nov, unidentified gunmen attacked bus in Manica province 2 Dec and three vehicles in Chibabava district, Sofala province 24 Dec, killing at least ten people. Renamo dissident faction, which calls itself Renamo Military Junta, denied attacks, but 27 Dec said attacks would stop if govt denied that Renamo leader Ossufo Momade represented party and threatened attacks on day of Nyusi’s swearing-in 15 Jan. Defence minister 12 Dec said Renamo was responsible for splinter group’s actions; Renamo accused govt of sponsoring dissident faction. Govt 26 Dec vowed to increase patrols and provide military escorts for vehicles travelling through centre. Constitutional council 23 Dec validated disputed results of Oct presidential election in favour of ruling party Frelimo; Renamo said it would not recognise council’s decision.

**Zimbabwe**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

Authorities continued to clamp down on opposition and public-sector strike continued. Police 1 Dec fired tear gas and live ammunition to disperse gathering of opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in Marondera, east of capital Harare, reportedly targeting party leader Nelson Chamisa; Chamisa was unhurt and police denied shooting. Medical workers continued strike over wages which they began early Sept. At its eighteenth National People’s Conference in Goromonzi, Mashonaland Central 12-15 Dec, ruling party ZANU-PF passed resolutions signalling intent to consolidate power, entrench party and crack down on dissent. Former South African President Mbeki in capital Harare 18-19 Dec held
separate talks with President Mnangagwa, Chamisa and civil society leaders in effort to mediate solution to political crisis. Police 14 Dec arrested Mary Mubaiwa, estranged wife of VP Constantino Chiwenga, on charges of money laundering and attempted murder of Chiwenga.

Côte d’Ivoire  DECEMBER 2019

Ahead of presidential election scheduled for Oct 2020, President Ouattara and opposition leaders continued efforts to strengthen positions. Ouattara held rally in capital Yamoussoukro 6-7 Dec gathering some 300,000 supporters. Authorities 2 Dec expelled from country adviser of opposition party Freedom and Democracy for the Republic, Swiss-Cameroonian Nathalie Yamb. Following imprisonment in Sept of VP of main opposition party Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), party leader former President Bédié 1 Dec appointed as VPs retired general and former pro-Ouattara politician Michel Gueu and former minister and ambassador Gilbert Bleu-Lainé. PDCI youth wing leader Bertin Kouadio Konan 6 Dec met former youth minister Charles Blé Goudé in The Hague. Guillaume Soro, former rebel leader and former national assembly speaker and now presidential candidate, planned to return to country 23 Dec after six months abroad, but cancelled his trip after prosecutors same day issued international warrant for his arrest, accusing him of attempting to undermine state authority and misappropriating public funds.

- BRIEFING: L’Afrique de l’Ouest face au risque de contagion jihadiste

Gambia  DECEMBER 2019

Thousands demonstrated in capital Banjul 16 Dec in protest against President Barrow’s decision to rule for five years, reneging on his 2016 commitment to serve for three-year transitional period only. Barrow 31 Dec launched new party National People’s Party in move that could allow him to contest 2021 presidential elections without need for other parties to back him.
Guinea  DECEMBER 2019

Despite crackdown, protests continued against President Condé’s intention to change constitution allegedly so that he can run for third term in 2020. Following calls by National Front for the Defence of the Constitution (FNDC), coalition of opposition parties and civil society groups against constitutional change, protesters rallied 6, 10, 12 and 15 Dec in capital Conakry and other cities. During funeral procession in Conakry 6 Dec for eight protesters killed in recent confrontations with authorities, protesters again clashed with security forces, reportedly leaving another protester dead. Condé 19 Dec announced new draft constitution, said he would hold referendum to seek voters’ approval. Opposition 20 Dec accused president of staging “constitutional coup”. Nationwide protests against constitutional referendum scheduled for 26 Dec postponed to 6 Jan. Ahead of legislative elections set for 16 Feb, opposition criticised as biased voter registration process and revision of electoral roll that started late Nov. Cellou Dalein Diallo, leader of largest opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea, 1 Dec accused electoral commission of preventing opposition supporters from registering. Opposition 5 Dec said electoral commission was enrolling minors in strongholds of ruling party Rally for the Guinean People. Political dialogue led by PM’s adviser Laho Bangoura resumed 5 Dec, but opposition pulled out 13 Dec to protest alleged malpractice in voter registration. Electoral commission 16 Dec said registration was complete. Opposition 23 Dec vowed to boycott legislative elections and prevent them from taking place.

Guinea-Bissau  DECEMBER 2019

Former PM Umaro Sissoco Embaló 30 Dec won in second round of presidential election 29 Dec with 53.55% of votes, beating former PM and candidate of ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) Domingos Simões Pereira. Pereira denounced electoral fraud, and submitted appeal at Supreme
Simões Pereira. Pereira denounced electoral fraud, and submitted appeal at Supreme Court 3 Jan.

Liberia  DECEMBER 2019

Prominent critic of President Weah and opposition figure Henry Costa returned to country ahead of anti-govt protest planned for 30 Dec. Hundreds of supporters 19 Dec welcomed Costa in capital Monrovia. In last-minute move, Costa postponed protest after govt said it would not be able to provide security and international observers recommended delay; Costa 30 Dec rejected govt proposal to move protest to 5 Jan, said protest could take place 6 Jan.

Nigeria  DECEMBER 2019

Boko Haram (BH) insurgency continued in Borno and Yobe states in north east, bandit-related violence persisted in north west, and incidents of criminal and communal violence occurred in Niger Delta. In north east, BH continued to attack communities and execute captives, as military and vigilantes continued to fight both factions – Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Abubakar Shekau’s group. Notably, insurgents 12 Dec stormed security post at Mamuri about 80km north of Borno state capital Maiduguri, killing fifteen including hunters, vigilantes and policeman. ISWAP 13 Dec killed four of six humanitarian workers abducted near Damask in July. Insurgents 14 Dec killed nineteen herders in fighting outside Fuhe village, near Ngala, Borno state; 22 Dec ambushed travellers on Maiduguri-Monguno road, Borno state, killing at least six and abducting five; 25 Dec issued video showing execution of eleven Christian men, claiming vengeance for U.S. killing of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in Oct. ISWAP fighters 22 Dec attempted to invade Yobe state capital Damaturu, but govt forces repelled them killing about 40. Air Force said it killed scores of insurgents in 31 Dec raid on camp in Abulam area of Sambisa forest, Borno state. In north west, bandit-related violence continued, notably in Zamfara and Niger states despite state govt’s dialogues with bandit leaders. In Zamfara state...
and Niger states despite state govt’s dialogues with bandit leaders. In Zamfara state, bandits raided communities in rural areas of Kaura, Maru and Gummi local govt areas. In Niger state, bandits 1 Dec attacked Koki in Shiroro local govt area killing eleven people, 3 Dec stormed village in Kagara local govt area killing thirteen people and kidnapping nine. In Kaduna state, gunmen 8 Dec killed four youths in Zunuruk, Kaura local govt area. In Niger Delta in far south, pirates 3 Dec stormed oil vessel about 143km off Bonny Island in Rivers state abducting nineteen of 26 crewmembers. Gunmen 7 Dec killed six people at Chokocho, Etche local govt area, Rivers state, possibly in intercommunal feud.

### Asia

**China/Japan**

Chinese and Japanese defence ministers 18 Dec agreed in meeting in Beijing to increase communication and enhance mutual trust between two countries; Japan also expressed concern over China’s military presence in area around disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Meeting marked first such visit by a Japanese defence minister since 2009. Japanese govt purchased uninhabited island in south between Kyushu and Okinawa, for 16 billion yen ($146 bn) from private developer, reportedly planning to use it as training facility for both U.S. and Japanese forces.

**Korean Peninsula**

During Workers’ Party plenum 28-31 Dec, North Korea threatened to resume nuclear and long-range missile tests, blaming continued U.S. “hostile policy”; warned world DPRK will soon possess “new strategic weapon”. Kim Jong-un’s remarks during plenum came ahead of much-anticipated New Year’s Day address, eventually not delivered for first time during Kim’s rule since 2012. Report of plenum revealed Pyongyang planning much harder line in 2020, stressed any chance for diplomacy contingent upon Washington making proposals closer to Pyongyang’s terms. Ahead
of announcement, DPRK further intensified pressure for U.S. to make proposal to implement 2018 Singapore Joint Statement ahead of Kim’s unilaterally-imposed end-2019 deadline, warned U.S. to make concessions, up to them what “Christmas gift” they would get; 7 Dec DPRK UN envoy said denuclearisation was off negotiating table. At meeting with ruling party Central Committee senior officials, Kim 22 Dec stressed need for “offensive measures” to bolster DPRK security. U.S. Special Representative for North Korea Stephen Biegun 16 Dec called on Pyongyang to return to negotiations, said it is time to do “our jobs”; National Security Advisor Robert O’Brien 29 Dec said U.S. was prepared to take action if Pyongyang made good on “gift” threat. Pyongyang 7, 13 Dec tested engine used for intercontinental ballistic missiles or satellite launch vehicle, hailed first test as enhancing its “strategic position”, second test as bolstering “strategic nuclear deterrent”. Meanwhile, U.S. and South Korea remained at loggerheads over cost-sharing for maintaining U.S. troops on Korean peninsula. Fourth and fifth rounds of negotiations brought no progress, Seoul 18 Dec rejected U.S. demands to enlarge scope of costs in existing agreement for South Korea to cover; new round of talks expected in Jan. Amid fears Trump might withdraw troops, U.S. Senate 14 Dec passed provisions prohibiting reduction of total U.S. troops in South Korea below 28,500 unless defence secretary deems it benign for U.S. and key allies’ national security interests. South Korean President Moon Jae-in and Japanese PM Shinzo Abe 24 Dec met on sidelines of trilateral summit with China for first time in fifteen months, however no agreement reached.

- Q&A: Counting Down to North Korea’s Year-end Deadline

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Taiwan Strait  DECEMBER 2019

Ahead of 11 Jan presidential and legislative election, Taiwanese govt 4 Dec proposed anti-infiltration bill aimed at holding back Chinese influence in Taiwanese business community: prevents anyone from donating to a political party, influencing elections, and other ways that could influence politics. China’s Taiwan Affairs Office said that Taiwanese people bill “has already caused alarm and panic that everyone is treated as an enemy”. Chinese govt 21 Dec revised law to simplify investment procedures for Taiwan companies in effort to entice support for China friendly policies in upcoming election; Taiwanese parliament 24 Dec passed anti-infiltration law to combat Chinese funding activities in national politics. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen 18 Dec stated in pre-election policy address that Taiwan “must be
Tsai Ing-wen 18 Dec stated in pre-election policy address that Taiwan must be aware that China is infiltrating and dividing Taiwan’s society in an all-round way. Taiwanese Defence Ministry 2 Dec announced Taiwan plans to invite U.S. military experts to island to “help consolidate and deepen the security partnership” between U.S. and Taiwan and “ensure peace and stability in the region”. Taiwan’s Aerospace Industrial Development Corporation and U.S.’s Lockheed Martin 17 Dec signed agreement to build F-16 fighter jet maintenance centre in Taiwan. Chinese aircraft carrier 26 Dec sailed north of Taiwan Strait; in reaction to Chinese navy patrol, senior Taiwanese official stated that “by flexing military muscles, China is trying to intimidate non-aligned voters”.

Afghanistan  DECEMBER 2019

Reduced number of major Taliban attacks in urban zones coincided with renewal of U.S. peace talks with Taliban in Qatar, while violence remained high in outlying areas, partly driven by tensions over presidential elections. U.S. 7 Dec resumed talks with Taliban in Doha, three months after President Trump froze negotiations; U.S. Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad 12 Dec announced “brief pause” in U.S.-Taliban negotiations after Taliban attacked medical facility near U.S. Bagram Airfield near Kabul previous day, killing two civilians and wounding 73. Palace spokesperson 28 Dec said that President Ashraf Ghani would name a negotiating team following U.S.-Taliban talks, in preparation for intra-Afghan phase of peace process. Serious security incidents continued across country including Taliban raid on govt outpost in Imam Sahib district, Kunduz province 6 Dec, killing eleven security forces. In Mazari-Sharif (north) security forces fought pro-govt militia 14-15 Dec in clash reportedly related to domestic political tensions; Interior Ministry reported it as insider attack where militia member killed nine of his fellow militiamen, Taliban reported it as coordinated militant attack with 24 dead. Taliban 25 Dec abducted 27 Afghan activists from People’s Peace Movement (PPM) taking part in peace march in Farah province (west). Taliban end month increased attacks on Afghan military bases and checkpoints: in northern Balkh province, car bombing 26 Dec killed at least six soldiers; in southern Helmand province, explosion then gunbattle 27 Dec killed ten soldiers; in Takhar province (north) 29 Dec attack on local pro-govt militia officer who escaped left seventeen militiamen dead. Officials 1 Dec reported 113 Islamic State members surrendered in Achin district (east). Independent Election
Commission 22 Dec announced preliminary results of 28 Sept presidential elections results, confirming President Ghani’s re-election by a narrow margin pending final results in coming weeks. Ghani’s main opponent Abdullah Abdullah said he would contest preliminary results, including over 300,000 votes he considered suspicious, insisting he would not accept “fraudulent” result, accused Ghani and international community of perpetrating fraud.

Bangladesh DECEMBER 2019

Security forces continued to arrest alleged members of banned militant groups while relations with India soured. Paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) and police 5 Dec detained two alleged members of Ansar al-Islam (also known as Ansarullah Bangla Team, ABT) in capital Dhaka, 8 Dec arrested four alleged ABT militants in Noakhali district in south, 18 Dec arrested at least four in capital Dhaka. RAB and police 11 Dec arrested four suspected Allahr Dal members in Khulna city south west of capital, three in Dhaka 18 Dec, and five in Khulna district 29 Dec. Relations with India deteriorated after Indian parliament 11 Dec passed law providing citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan who had entered country before 2015, ostensibly in effort to shield religious minorities fleeing persecution. FM Momen criticised bill, rejected remarks that Bangladeshi Hindus face religious persecution; next day FM cancelled 12-14 Dec visit to India. Dhaka 12 Dec lodged complaint against attack same day on Bangladeshi Assistant High Commissioner’s convoy in India’s Assam capital Guwahati by demonstrators who opposed granting citizenship to large numbers of Bangladeshi Hindu migrants. To ease tensions India’s external ministry spokesperson 12 Dec said “minorities are protected” under Bangladesh’s “current govt”. Commander of Bangladesh’s border guard 22 Nov said more than 200 people detained after illegally crossing over the border with India, many claimed they were Bangladeshi migrants who had fled India after more than two decades of residence because of persecution and fears of deportation. FM Momen 25 Dec said only Bangladeshi illegal immigrants returning from India would be taken back after verification; all others would be sent back. Bangladesh 30 Dec shut down mobile networks along border with India citing “security reasons”. Relations with Myanmar remained strained over Rohingya repatriation issues. FM 24 Nov refuted Myanmar’s 15 Nov statement holding Dhaka’s “non-cooperation” responsible for delayed Rohingya repatriation, strongly denied
Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army in country.

- REPORT: A Sustainable Policy for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

**India (non-Kashmir) DECEMBER 2019**

Controversial citizenship law sparked widespread protests across the country leading to deadly clashes with security forces, while skirmishes between security forces and Maoists continued. Govt 12 Dec passed Citizenship Amendment Act granting citizenship to non-Muslim migrants persecuted in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who illegally entered India before 2015, ostensibly in effort to shield religious minorities fleeing persecution; critics argue law contravenes secular constitution and its combination with the planned National Register of Citizens could disenfranchise sections of the country’s Muslim minority. New law sparked nationwide protests and clashes with security forces, leaving twenty-seven dead and hundreds injured. Thousands detained for defying ban on protests imposed in several states; police in Uttar Pradesh (India’s largest state, north) accused of openly targeting Muslims following chief minister’s call for “revenge” against protesters 20 Dec, at least 19 killed. Five states and two union territories have announced they will not implement the Act, though federal government says they lack legal power to refuse. In Chhattisgarh state (centre east), police reported security forces 12 Dec killed two suspected Maoist rebels in counter-insurgency operation. Insurgents 19 Dec confirmed death (from illness) of rebel leader Ravalu Srinivas (aka Ramanna), party Central Committee member and historical figure of movement in Chhattisgarh’s Bastar district. Police 22 Dec announced surrender of around 450 Maoist sympathisers in Odisha state (east). Suspected insurgents 27 Dec shot dead supervisor of mining company in Jharkand (north east); 28 Dec killed two villagers in Bihar’s Lakhisari district (north), accusing them of being police informers.

**Kashmir DECEMBER 2019**

https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch#overview
Tensions persisted over Indian govt’s revoking of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) special constitutional status in Aug and clashes across Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir) continued. In string of cross-LoC clashes, Pakistani military claimed Indian fire killed three civilians in mid-Dec, injured two soldiers 1 Dec; Indian armed forces 18 Dec reported clashes left one Indian soldier dead; Indian army chief same day warned skirmishes could escalate at any time. At least four killed during exchange of fire between Pakistan and India 25 Dec including at least one Indian soldier and two Pakistani soldiers. In Indian-administered Kashmir, suspected Kashmiri militants 26 Nov killed at least two in two grenade attacks, one in Hakura village, south of Srinagar, and the other at the University of Kashmir in Srinagar; security forces killed two suspected militants in Pulwama district 25-26 Nov. New Union Territory administration 25 Nov released two political leaders, one each from People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and Democratic Party Nationalist; Police 30 Dec released five political activists, two from Jammu & Kashmir National Conference (NC), and one each from Congress and PDP. New Delhi 27 Dec partially lifted internet shutdown imposed on newly formed Ladakh union territory in Aug, restored internet in north-western Kargil district; internet blackout remained in place in J&K. China 17 Dec postponed bid to hold closed-door UN Security Council briefing same day on situation in Indian-administered Kashmir after UN peacekeeping mission said it was not ready to deliver brief, allegedly because France, U.S., UK and Russia opposed discussing bilateral issue in UN forum. Pakistan media reported 29 Dec Saudi Arabia has decided to convene Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s special meeting on Kashmir in April.

Nepal

Nepal Communist Party (NCP)-led govt continued push to restrict civil liberties with parliamentary committee 29 Dec passing controversial Information Technology Bill first proposed Feb 2019; legislation, if adopted by full parliament, would criminalise social media interactions including with up to five years’ imprisonment; critics claimed move would limit free speech and give govt sweeping surveillance authority. Ruling coalition member Samajbadi Party Nepal quit NCP-led govt after cabinet rejected party leader and Deputy PM Upendra Yadav’s calls to amend 2015 constitution to meet long-standing demands of southern plains-based Madhesi including redrawing federal provincial boundaries and ensuring proportional representation in upper house of parliament. NCP reached agreement 18 Dec with
Rastriya Janata Party Nepal (RJPN) – another Madhesi-based party – to form electoral alliance in lead-up to March 2020 upper parliamentary polls and potentially paving way for RJPN to join ruling coalition. By-elections held 30 Nov produced mixed results for ruling NCP and opposition Nepali Congress with neither winning significant number of 52 vacant seats at federal, provincial and local levels. Govt’s donor relationships received considerable attention with some NCP members 22 Dec expressing concerns about $500 million U.S. energy and infrastructure grant approved Aug 2017 given competing views about Washington’s Indo Pacific Strategy in light of Nepal’s existing Belt and Road Initiative commitments with China.

Pakistan  DECEMBER 2019

Govt and armed forces suffered setbacks in court, fuelling tensions with judiciary, while militant attacks continued. Special court 17 Dec sentenced former army chief and President Pervez Musharraf to death in absentia for high treason and subverting constitution by unlawfully declaring state of emergency in Nov-Dec 2007. Opposition welcomed ruling, but it drew rebuke from armed forces; Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt said it would defend Musharraf during appeal for not being given a chance to defend himself. Courts frustrated PTI govt’s targeting of opposition through anti-corruption National Accountability Bureau (NAB); Islamabad High Court 11 Dec released on medical grounds co-chair and former president of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Asif Ali Zardari detained by NAB on corruption charges since June, 17 Dec granted bail to PPP parliamentarians, Zardari’s sister Faryal Talpur and former federal minister Syed Khurshid Ahmed Shah. Court granted bail to former Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Punjab law minister Rana Sanaullah 24 Dec, detained in a narcotics case since July, and to former PML-N finance minister Miftah Ismail 26 Dec, accused of illegally awarding a contract for an LNG terminal. Following PM Khan’s visit to Saudi Arabia 14 Dec, PM and FM Qureshi pulled out of summit of Muslim-majority countries in Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur mid-Dec. Riyadh had allegedly expressed reservations over Islamabad joining the summit, which they saw as challenge by Turkey, Iran and Qatar to Saudi-led Organisation of the Islamic Conference. Court 11 Dec indicted Hafiz Saeed, leader of militant group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba for terror financing. Militant attacks continued, notably in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in north west: in North Waziristan district militants 1 Dec killed one soldier in attack on checkpoint, 4 Dec killed two soldiers in clashes; 11 Dec
militants killed prominent Shia leader in Lakki Marwat district; 18 Dec two police escorting polio vaccination team were shot dead in Dir district.

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**Sri Lanka**  DECEMBER 2019

Newly elected President Gotabaya Rajapaksa moved to establish his new govt and consolidate his power, as diplomatic spat with Switzerland intensified over detention of Swiss embassy employee. Rajapaksa 10 Dec issued gazette allocating govt departments to ministries; following allocation, 155 separate departments now under control of three Rajapaksa brothers in national govt. Rajapaksa 12 Dec gave assurances there would be no restrictions on media freedom during meeting with heads of media organisations, but said he expected outlets to portray country in good light. In further sign he seeks to return to system of stronger presidential rule, Rajapaksa 16 Dec called 19th amendment of constitution which limits presidential powers “weak” and “inconsistent”. Two prominent opposition lawmakers arrested 18 and 26 Dec in separate cases, raising fears of government crackdown. Govt continued to reverse attempts by previous govt to investigate political crimes under administration of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa (now PM and finance minister); all complete and incomplete cases by Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery and Corruption, Financial Crimes Investigation Division and Special Investigations Unit set to be reviewed, after demotions and threats to punish key police investigators. Following allegations by Swiss embassy that Sri Lankan employee was abducted, threatened and sexually abused last month by unidentified men seeking information on Sri Lankan political refugees in Switzerland, including lead investigator from Criminal Investigation Department (CID), govt 1 Dec released statement claiming police investigation disproved allegations made by Swiss embassy and employee. Police held woman at CID HQ 8-10 Dec for questioning before her 16 Dec arrest; Swiss embassy condemned arrest saying “Sri Lanka’s reputation as a country that upholds the rule of law is at stake”. Swiss govt 19 Dec announced dispatch of senior diplomat to find compromise with govt. Tensions with Switzerland aggravated by Swiss Federal Court 3 Dec decision upholding previous judgement acquitting twelve Tamils for fundraising for Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which court deemed a legal organisation under Swiss law.
Indonesia  DECEMBER 2019

In Papua, military 18 Dec reported two soldiers shot dead by some ten suspected rebels in ambush in Intan Jaya regency. NGO Human Rights Watch reported police arrested at least 110 people for raising banned Papuan national flag at start of month around independence commemoration 1 Dec, charged 20 with treason. Police 18 Dec reported they arrested and were interrogating eight suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militants in Jayapura and Sentani, Papua province, suspected of planning attack and having links to Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD, responsible for several attacks in Indonesia). Police officer killed in suspected terror attack in Central Sulawesi 13 Dec, reportedly carried out by Islamic militant group Mujahidin Indonesia Timur (MIT). Police anti-terror unit early Dec arrested six alleged militants in West Nusa Tenggara province, suspected of ISIS and JAD links. Govt 26 Dec announced plans to revive “truth and reconciliation” commission as way to bring closure over past human rights violations.

Myanmar  DECEMBER 2019

Moves toward international accountability for crimes against Rohingya ramped up with State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi personally leading the country’s defence at Hague-based International Court of Justice in genocide convention case brought by Gambia in Nov; meanwhile clashes continued between Arakan Army (AA) and military. Speaking before court 11 Dec, Suu Kyi denied genocide but acknowledged for first time possible war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by military, and stated that govt and military were investigating crimes and convening courts martial, also claimed govt was taking steps to improve lives of over 600,000 Muslims remaining in Rakhine State. Suu Kyi’s appearance attracted international criticism, amid increased pressure for further sanctions from West; U.S. 10 Dec added Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing, Deputy Commander-in-Chief Soe Win and commanders of two Light Infantry Divisions to its sanctions list. Suu Kyi’s leading defence role received positively within Myanmar, helping consolidate domestic political support ahead of Nov 2020 elections. UN General Assembly 27 Dec
approved resolution strongly condemning human rights abuses by govt against Rohingya and other minorities, Myanmar UN ambassador called resolution “another classic example of double-standards (and) selective and discriminatory application of human rights norms”. AA and military continued to clash across central and northern Rakhine State, Chin State’s Paletwa township, and northern Shan State, with risks of further escalation. AA leader’s wife and two children 4 Dec detained in Chiang Mai (northern Thailand), after Myanmar revoked their passports and requested extradition; AA leader early Dec said AA would not be deterred by family members’ arrest. AA continued apparent tactic of kidnappings striking political targets; 11 Dec abducted National League for Democracy chairman in northern Rakhine State’s Buthidaung Township “for questioning”; he was later reported killed in army shelling. Ongoing clashes between govt and AA 2–6 Dec left over six dead, including children, notably in Mrauk-U and Kyauktaw townships; UNICEF 12 Dec called on all conflict parties to respect civilian nature of schools and for commitment from govt.

- **REPORT: A Sustainable Policy for Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh**

**Philippines DECEMBER 2019**

Fighting between armed forces and Islamist groups Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) and pro-Islamic State (ISIS) Dawlah Islamiyah Torayfe Group (DITG) continued in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) in south, while communist rebels clashed with armed forces in several regions. Military early Dec clashed with BIFF and DITG militants in Maguindanao province, notably Shariff Aguak and Shariff Saydona Mustapha municipalities; army mid-Dec said troops had seized almost a dozen BIFF camps in area; suspected Islamist militants 22 Dec launched simultaneous bomb attacks against security forces and civilians in Upi town in Maguindanao province, Cotabato city, and Libungan town in neighbouring Cotabato province, wounding at least 22 including eight soldiers. Implementation of Bangsamoro peace process continued with working groups inside Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA) focusing on drafting priority legislation, such as election code or local govt code. BTA’s Intergovernmental-Relations body, expected to settle disputes between national and Bangsamoro govts, held first meeting 16 Dec to discuss its terms of reference. As part of peace process implementation, decommissioning of Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) combatants continued, including 6,000 combatants in 2019.
with up to 9,000 members laying down arms since late Sept. Martial law in Mindanao, implemented since 2017, expired 31 Dec but state of emergency remained in place. Court in capital Manila 19 Dec sentenced five to life in prison for planning murder of 58 people including members of rival clan and journalists in Maguindanao in 2009. Clashes between communist New People’s Army (NPA) members and armed forces continued early Dec notably in Luzon in north, Visayas in centre and Mindanao in south. Labour secretary and former chairman of govt panel for negotiations with communists, Silvestre Bello III, and founder of Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) Jose Maria Sison talked about potential opening to resume peace talks in Europe 7-8 Dec. Govt and CPP 22 Dec declared holiday ceasefire 23 Dec-7 Jan.

South China Sea

Amid ongoing tensions over South China Sea (SCS), Japanese Defence Minister Tarō Kōno speaking at Doha Forum 15 Dec criticised China for “engaging in unilateral and coercive attempts to alter the status quo” based on assertions that are “incompatible with the existing international order”; also said Japan is “concerned about China’s rapid enhancement of its military power without transparency, including its nuclear and missile capabilities”. Japan’s Nikkei Asian Review 28 Nov reported Japanese officials are concerned China is trying to implement code of conduct that would require U.S. and Japan to request China’s approval before executing military drills with ASEAN countries, saying it would “tie ASEAN’s hands with rules that are convenient for Beijing, and to eliminate or restrict outside influence on the South China Sea”. During lecture in Singapore, Vietnam’s deputy foreign minister Nguyen Quoc Dung 17 Dec stated he hopes China will show restraint during Vietnam’s 2020 ASEAN chairmanship; also called China’s actions in SCS alarming to both Vietnam and other countries who feel they might be threatened by China in the future. Commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet Admiral John Aquilino 13 Dec criticised China’s involvement in SCS and announced that U.S. is “in competition with the People’s Republic of China”; also suggested partnership with “like-minded nations” will keep nations in region secure. Malaysia 12 Dec filed claim with UN to extend its continental shelf in northern section of SCS; Beijing condemned Malaysia’s actions as infringing on China’s sovereignty and violating international law. Jakarta 25 Dec sent diplomatic note to China protesting alleged Chinese Coast Guard vessel...
sent diplomatic note to China protesting alleged Chinese Coast Guard vessel incursion into its exclusive economic zone off the Natuna Islands; Chinese govt spokesperson 26 Dec claimed that zone was part of China.

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**Thailand**  DECEMBER 2019

Domestic political tensions increased as Electoral Commission (EC) recommended constitutional court dissolve opposition Future Forward Party (FFP), whose leader Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit stepped up calls for public protests, while militant attacks in deep south continued at relatively low level. Junta-appointed EC 11 Dec recommended constitutional court dissolve FFP for $6.3mn loan from Thanathorn to FFP during general election which it said violated law against parties accepting cash “from illegitimate sources”. Thanathorn 11 Dec called for supporters to take to streets in Bangkok in opposition to govt; several thousand people demonstrated next day in largest public protest since 2014 coup; Thanathorn pledged larger protests beginning Jan. Constitutional Court 25 Dec accepted EC request to rule on FFP loan case, as well as sedition case against Thanathorn; decisions expected 21 Jan. Violence continued in deep south. In Sungai Padi district, Narathiwat province, militants 27 Nov bombed section of railway track; no casualties. In Saiburi district, Pattani province, gunmen 1 Dec shot dead Muslim woman travelling with her child on motorcycle, and 12 Dec fired on ranger base, causing no casualties. In Thepha, Songkhla province, IED wounded five police 12 Dec. Paramilitary rangers mistakenly killed three civilians 16 Dec in Rangae district, Narathiwat; two rangers charged with murder 20 Dec. Benar News 2 Dec reported meeting between Thai officials and Barisan Revolusi Nasional in German capital, according to source from Malaysian team facilitating moribund peace dialogue between Bangkok and MARA Patani, who said Malaysia not informed of Berlin meeting and did not “recognize” it.

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**Papua New Guinea**  DECEMBER 2019

Bougainville Referendum Commission (BRC) 11 Dec announced result of non-
Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina  DECEMBER 2019

Parliament 5 Dec approved Zoran Tegeltija as new PM; Tegeltija told parliament his gov’t will focus on reforms needed for EU membership and “catch up on lost time” with 2020 budget and reactivating frozen investments. Tegeltija 17 Dec finalised cabinet, which contains nine ministers from three largest ethnic parties and two ministers from junior partners; parliament approved new gov’t 23 Dec, ending fourteen-month stalemate. Several thousand 26 Dec gathered in Banja Luka, administrative centre of majority Bosnian Serb entity Republika Srpska (RS), some demonstrated in support of RS authorities, and others against them, after RS parliament’s heated session over Reform Program that sets out Bosnia’s future relations with NATO. An expert report on the rule of law presented to EU and Bosnian officials 5 Dec said criminal justice system “failing to combat serious crime and corruption”, called on “systemic reforms in important rule of law areas”. NGO Human Rights Watch 13 Dec called on gov’t to reform “discriminatory” constitution to end “second-class status” of Jews, Roma, and other minorities who are not allowed to run for president or parliament.
President Thaçi 12 Dec called for new parliament to hold “constitutive session” 24 Dec between Vetëvendosje (“Self-Determination” party) and Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK); talks on new coalition govt between Vetëvendosje and LDK 25 Dec failed over agreement on candidate for next presidential elections; LDK 26 Dec said in unexpected turn of event it is willing to vote for minority Vetëvendosje govt without joining it, would stay in opposition. More than 20 officials from main Serb party Srpska Lista 17 Dec took on positions assigned by Serbian govt in Serb-controlled north. Pristina condemned claim by Serbian President Vučić 5 Dec that 1999 wartime massacre in southern village Račak was fabricated; Thaçi 10 Dec called for Belgrade to acknowledge its blame for “crimes against humanity”; Pristina court 5 Dec convicted Kosovo Serb MP Ivan Todosijević of incitement to ethnic, racial or religious intolerance for claiming massacre was staged. Albania and Kosovo 3 Dec agreed to merge their electricity power grids, ending Kosovo dependence on Serbia; Belgrade accused them of pursuing “Greater Albania of energy”, urged international community to intervene. Kosovo’s Special Prosecution 2 Dec indicted six people in connection with 2018 murder of Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović; trial postponed 30 Dec until 11 Feb. Journalist Ensar Ramadani said Acting Trade Minister, Endrit Shala, assaulted him 17 Dec.

Parliament 22 Dec passed budget for 2020 with 5% increase in expenditure from 2019 mainly going into increased salaries, pensions, and other social transfers; govt claimed budget to be investment in “human capital” while opposition said salary increase “bribe” ahead of April’s snap general elections. Formation of caretaker govt stalled after opposition VMRO-DPMNE party 30 Dec proposed as interior minister a military official, army lieutenant-colonel Dragan Kovacki, contrary to the constitution. North Macedonia participated in London NATO summit 3-4 Dec, even though Spanish parliament has yet to ratify its membership. Govt 8 Dec reversed pledge to act on advice of Venice Commission to review 2018 language law, which Venice Commission said “goes beyond European standards” and may impose “unrealistic legal obligations on public institutions” and slow down functioning of judiciary, and discard some agreements on bilingualism, as junior governing
coalition partner Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) vice-PM in charge of European issues, Bujar Osmani, warned that changing 2018 law could return country to pre-2001 rights situation for ethnic Albanians.

Armenia  DECEMBER 2019

Special Investigative Services 4 Dec announced it had charged former President and PM Serzh Sargsyan with embezzlement of public money from state assistance program for farmers in 2013; Sargsyan’s Republican Party of Armenia condemned indictment as political persecution aimed at silencing opposition. Prosecutors 27 Dec charged Constitutional Court Chairman Hrayr Tovmasian with two counts of abuse of power during his time as justice minister in 2010-14, Tovmasian said charges were part of “political process” trying to force his resignation. U.S. Senate 12 Dec passed resolution formally recognising mass killings of more than one million Armenians in Ottoman empire as genocide. Defence Ministry 27 Dec displayed new Su-30 fighter jets and anti-aircraft missile systems purchased from Russia.

- REPORT: Digging out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh

Azerbaijan  DECEMBER 2019

President Aliyev 5 Dec ordered snap parliamentary election for 9 Feb. Among opposition, Republican Alternative Party (ReAl), Umid Party, and Musavat party confirmed their participation in election, while National Council of Democratic Forces coalition, led by Popular Front party, announced boycott on basis of poor environment for free and fair election. ReAl leader Ilgar Mammadov publicly urged Aliyev to allow free and fair elections to address negative international perception of country and thus strengthen its negotiating position on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Municipal elections held 23 Dec, with for first time active campaign, including on social media, involving former political prisoners and youth. Central election commission said voter turnout was at 32.72%; independent observers reported
numerous electoral violations and falsification of results at several polling stations. Prominent anti-corruption blogger Mehman Huseynov said police 27-28 Dec detained and beat him and five others without explanation in downtown Baku; Interior Ministry 28 Dec called accusations “untrue” and “fabricated”. Huseynov ran as candidate in 23 Dec municipal elections and had denounced vote irregularities.

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Georgia DECEMBER 2019

Latest round of Geneva International Discussions (GID) talks 10-11 Dec, main forum to resolve conflict over Georgia’s breakaway republics, went badly amid continuing crisis around contested Georgian police outpost near South Ossetian separation line, which led to closure in Sept of main crossing point with Georgia-controlled territory.

GID co-chairs reported “deteriorating situation on the ground” and participants’ “diverging positions on key issues of the agenda have become further entrenched”, with rising tensions leading to increase in incidents including detentions. Several prominent figures appealed to Moscow to support release of Georgian doctor Vazha Gaprindashvili, held in South Ossetian prison since 9 Nov; de facto South Ossetian court 20 Dec sentenced him to 1 year and 9 months’ imprisonment; de facto leadership 28 Dec granted him pardon, paving way for his immediate release. In positive development, following diplomatic efforts of GID, de facto South Ossetian leadership 2 Dec relieved restrictions on leaving territory for retired people and those with serious health conditions, although entrance to region still restricted; leadership also released local residents detained for accidental or first-time crossing into breakaway region. In Abkhazia, following fatal Nov shooting in central Sukhumi café, de facto govt 2 Dec dismissed interior minister and prosecutor general, same day as mass street protests by local opposition and activists. Elsewhere, united opposition parties and activists 6 Dec held anti-govt protest in western city Kutaisi calling for fully proportional parliamentary elections in 2020; ruling Georgia Dream party organised pro-govt rally in Tbilisi 14 Dec attended by tens of thousands, mainly employees of state-run organisations.
Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict  DECEMBER 2019

No breakthrough in talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan early month, however relative calm continued in conflict zone. Armenian and Azerbaijani FMs met during Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Ministerial Summit in Bratislava 4 Dec. Armenian FM Mnatsakanyan presented Yerevan’s approach to peace process, including support for NK’s right of self-determination, NK security, need for NK participation in negotiating process, and implementation of OSCE mechanisms for monitoring ceasefire and investigating violations. Azerbaijani circulated memorandum on its position on NK status, return of adjacent territories and security provisions. Azerbaijani FM Mammadyarov said in media interview 5 Dec Armenia’s side’s emphasis on addressing status is pointless before return of internally displaced persons, also said Armenia has not defined security; Yerevan responded claiming it remains sole guarantor of NK security, and reiterated NK right to self-determination. FMs agreed to continue talks early Jan 2020. After summit, OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs 5 Dec released joint statement praising Nov exchange of journalists between Armenia and Azerbaijan and June release of detainees, but also urged both sides to assist International Committee for Red Cross with data on missing persons and to resume discussions on expanding Office of Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office responsible for monitoring along front lines. Azerbaijan and Armenia 17 Dec reported exchange of re with light weapons in Noyemberyan-Gazakh border region close to civilian-populated areas, first time in more than a year.

- REPORT: Digging out of Deadlock in Nagorno-Karabakh

Russia/North Caucasus  DECEMBER 2019

Authorities foiled alleged terrorist plot planned for Constitution Day 12 Dec in Moscow, arresting five suspects (four Tajik nationals and one Russian) reportedly affiliated with Islamic State (ISIS). A gunman opened fire on headquarters of Federal Security Service (FSB) in central Moscow 19 Dec, killing two FSB officers and wounding five other people, four of whom were law enforcement authorities; the fifth was a taxi passenger. Two other suspects were arrested the next day.
attacker, 39-year-old former security guard Yevgeny Manyurov, was killed in a subsequent shootout. Three gunmen attacked a road patrol checkpoint 31 Dec outside Ingushetia’s Magas, North Caucasus, police killed two and wounded a third, one policeman was also killed and two injured.

Belarus  DECEMBER 2019

President Lukashenko 5 Dec dismissed fears voiced by domestic political opponents that economic integration with Russia could result in loss of country’s post-Soviet independence from Moscow. Lukashenko met with Russian President Putin in Sochi, Russia 7 Dec to discuss economic agreements, sparking two days of protests in Minsk with over 1,000 people denouncing “deepening integration” with Russia; two activists reportedly detained two days ahead of planned 20 Dec rally; over 1,000 demonstrators 20 Dec rallied in Minsk to show opposition to second meeting of Lukashenko and Putin in St. Petersburg, Russia, scheduled on same day. Following 20 Dec meeting, Russian Economics Minister Maxim Oreshkin said parties had “failed to resolve key differences over oil and gas”. Belarus Energy Ministry and Russia’s Gazprom 31 Dec signed protocol on gas prices for Jan-Feb, but govts have yet to agree on oil transit to Europe.

Ukraine  DECEMBER 2019

Kyiv, Moscow, and de facto leaders moved tentatively to fulfil pledges of 9 Dec Normandy summit prompting celebration and controversy in Ukraine, while low-level fighting continued in Donbas. Leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany met 9 Dec at their first Normandy Format summit since Oct 2016 to discuss moves toward peace in Donbas. Kyiv and Moscow agreed to conclude new demining action plan, facilitate exchange of prisoners held by Kyiv and de facto authorities before end of 2019, withdraw troops at three locations by March 2020, plan for new civilian crossing points, and continue to discuss controversial elements of a political solution. The sides exchanged 200 prisoners 29 Dec, with de facto authorities
receiving 124 detainees, while Kyiv welcomed 76. Those whom Kyiv handed over included five riot police suspected of killing unarmed protestors during the 2014 Maidan uprising, prompting fresh protests involving families of those killed. Kyiv authorities indicated investigations into the five former officers will continue, but UN warned this would be difficult and criticised govt for narrowing path to justice for 2014 killings. Others exchanged included two Ukrainian Radio Free Europe journalists held by de facto authorities, and people accused of conflict-related crimes by both sides with various degrees of evidence. Ukrainian pro-govt forces lost 10 soldiers 28 Nov-1 Jan per official reports; at least nine Russia-backed fighters were killed according to an anti-separatist non-govt source. Per official and independent sources, 111 Ukrainian government troops died in battle in 2019, nearly equal to 2018 levels but down from 198 in 2017. Independent experts estimate 250-300 Russian-backed fighters were killed in battle. Monitors from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe stated that as of 25 Dec, 18 civilians had been killed in 2019 and 127 wounded, down from 43 killed and 179 wounded in 2018.

Moscow and Kyiv agreed 21 Dec to prolong transfer of Russian gas through Ukraine for five years; Russia’s Gazprom will pay Kyiv $2.9 billion to settle past dispute.

Cyprus  DECEMBER 2019

Tensions over drilling activities in eastern Mediterranean increased following controversial maritime border deal between Turkey and Libya’s Govt of National Accord in Nov, condemned by Cyprus, Greece and Egypt. Turkish President Erdoğan 10 Dec announced intention to carry out joint hydrocarbon exploration activities with Libya under maritime deal, and claimed Cyprus, Greece, Egypt and Israel required Turkish permission to carry out exploration operations in disputed maritime zone. EU 12 Dec rejected agreement and voiced full support for Cyprus and Greece. Turkish drone 16 Dec landed at Geçitkale airport in northern Cyprus after Turkish Cypriot de facto govt gave Ankara permission to use airport for hydrocarbon exploration. With National Defence Authorisation Act signed into law on 21 December, U.S. conditionally removed arms embargo on Republic of Cyprus; Turkish FM denounced move as “dangerous escalation”.

https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch#overview
Northern Ireland (UK)  DECEMBER 2019

Suspected dissident republicans 4 Dec carried out grenade attack on police vehicle in west Belfast; no police officer injured in attack. Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin 16 Dec recommenced negotiations to restore devolved powers to Stormont following 12 Dec UK general elections; assembly elections set for 13 Jan 2020 if no power sharing agreement reached.

Spain  DECEMBER 2019

European Court of Justice 19 Dec ruled Catalan leader Oriol Junqueras had immunity under EU law as Member of European Parliament when he was detained by Spanish authorities in Oct; state attorney 30 Dec recommended to Supreme Court release of Junqueras. Pro-Catalan independence group Democratic Tsunami held mass protest outside main stadium in Barcelona 18 Dec; protesters clashed with police leaving dozens injured prior to match between Barcelona and Real Madrid, which had already been rescheduled from Oct due to violent separatist protests.

Turkey  DECEMBER 2019

Military operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) reduced in intensity in country’s south east and northern Iraq, relations soured with U.S. over further sanctions, and were strained with Russia over Idlib escalation. Fatalities in PKK conflict remained low; security forces focused operations in Tunceli province in south east and maintained air raids and land operations against PKK militants in northern Iraq. Court sustained efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic
northern Iraq. Govt sustained efforts to criminalise pro-Kurdish Peoples Democratic Party (HDP). Besides continued arrests/detentions of HDP officials and members, eight more trustees were appointed to HDP-run municipalities during month (32 out of 69 municipalities HDP won in March 2019 are now run by trustees). Cooperation continued with Russia in north east (NE) Syria, but was strained over escalation in north west (NW): Turkish defence ministry 8 Dec announced deal with Russia to connect areas under control of Turkish-backed Syrian forces to Syrian regime-controlled power plant and demilitarise M4 highway across northern Syria, while Turkish forces continued joint patrols with Russian military units in NE Syria. Ankara reacted harshly to intensified regime and Russian military operations in Syria’s NW which displaced thousands. The fourteenth round of Syria talks with Turkey, Russia and Iran was held in Kazakhstan 10 Dec (see Syria). Relations with U.S deteriorated as U.S. Congress 17 Dec passed National Defense Authorization Act banning transfer of U.S. F-35 fighter jets to Turkey. Senate 12 Dec passed previously blocked resolution recognising mass killings of Armenians in Ottoman Empire as genocide. President Erdoğan 15 Dec threatened to shut down İncirlik Air Base and Kürecik Radar Station used by U.S and NATO forces. Govt continued crackdown on Islamic State (ISIS) networks; police detained over 100 suspected ISIS-linked individuals in Dec including Turkish and foreign nationals. Relations with EU still strained particularly over Cyprus/East Med gas drilling. Following controversial maritime border deal between Turkey and Libya’s Govt of National Accord (GNA) in Nov, parliamentary debate took place 30 Dec on bill that (if approved 2 Jan) would authorise Turkey to send troops to Libya in support of GNA (see Cyprus and Libya).

Kazakhstan  DECEMBER 2019

Dozens of people demonstrated in Nur Sultan and commercial capital Almaty 16 Dec, calling for more rights and release of political prisoners; police arrested dozens of protesters. Authorities 9 Dec reportedly jailed three human rights activists ahead of planned protests. In address to National Council for Social Trust’s Advisory body President Toqaev 20 Dec suggested easing regulations on public protests, simplifying process for creating new political parties, and decriminalising hate speech and libel.
Kyrgyzstan  DECEMBER 2019

Court 6 Dec sentenced former PM Sapar Isakov, close associate of former president Atambayev, to fifteen years imprisonment on corruption charges; Isakov appeared before court again 17 Dec to face new corruption charges. Interior Minister 13 Dec accused Atambayev of shooting dead security officer during 7 Aug raid on his compound by security forces. Court 10 Dec froze bank accounts of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and other media following publication of story on alleged billion-dollar fraud scheme in country’s customs service implicating senior officials; court unfroze accounts three days later but media still face lawsuits. Hundreds of protesters rallied in Bishkek 18 Dec demanding more freedom of speech and examination of corruption claims; also demanded resignation of Prosecutor-General Otkurbek Jamshitov for not investigating case. State officials 20 Dec arrested Syrgak Kenzhebayev, partner of well-known anti-corruption activist Shirin Aitmatova on suspicion of fraud; Aitmatova claimed arrest as retaliatory move for her campaign against corruption. Clashes erupted along border with Tajikistan 18 Dec; six Kyrgyz nationals and three Tajik nationals reportedly wounded (see Tajikistan).

Tajikistan  DECEMBER 2019

Clashes erupted again on Tajik-Kyrgyz border in southern Batken region 18 Dec; six Kyrgyz nationals, including four border guards and a local politician, and three Tajik nationals, all civilians, reportedly wounded.

Turkmenistan  DECEMBER 2019

Former interior minister Isgender Mulikov (fired by President in Oct) and ex-chief of immigration and emigration Meilis Nobato 3 Dec made televised confession of bribes.
migration service Meilis Nobatov 5 Dec made televised confessions of their involvement in corruption case. Court charged Mulikov with abuse of power and fraud, reportedly sentenced him to 20-25 years in prison. President Berdymukhammedov 13 Dec signed new anti-corruption law excluding prisoners convicted of corruption from state amnesties and pardons.

Uzbekistan   DECEMBER 2019

President Mirziyoyev’s Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan won most seats in 22 Dec parliamentary elections, first since Mirziyoyev took power in 2016; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe noted that despite much improved legislation and “greater tolerance of independent voices”, still “numerous, serious irregularities” in electoral process. Ahead of election, report emerged that Justice Ministry had drafted legislation to increase penalties for people using Internet to organise unsanctioned demonstrations. Severe energy shortages sparked rare small protests in parts of country early Dec.

Latin America & Caribbean

Bolivia   DECEMBER 2019

Amid ongoing political tensions, interim govt made moves to prepare new general elections in agreement with Movement toward Socialism (MAS) party of former president Evo Morales, while unrest in streets fell dramatically; relations between Bolivia and Mexico soured. Morales 12 Dec obtained asylum in Argentina following month in Mexico where he fled after his 10 Nov resignation; same day announced he will lead MAS party’s electoral campaign, 29 Dec said after a meeting in Buenos Aires his party will name its presidential candidates for 2020 elections on 19 Jan; other Bolivia-based MAS factions dispute Morales’ leadership. Interim govt 18 Dec issued arrest warrant against Morales for crimes of “sedition, terrorism and terrorist financing”. National Assembly 18 Dec elected new six-members Supreme Electoral
Tribunal, which by 7 Jan will set date for new elections, meant to occur within 120 days but likely to extend until May/June, necessitating extension of interim govt and National Assembly mandate. U.S. President Trump 17 Dec announced backing for interim President Jeanine Áñez and “peaceful democratic transition” and denounced ongoing violence. Interim govt and Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 12 Dec created independent expert group to investigate clashes between police and protesters which left 36 dead and hundreds injured Oct and Nov. Interim govt 5 Dec passed decree to compensate families of those killed during anti-govt protests; 29 families rejected financial settlement, instead called for intervention of international tribunals in their case against govt. Diplomatic tensions between Mexico and Bolivia rose over Mexico’s granting of asylum in its diplomatic facilities in La Paz to nine people, including allies of Morales who Bolivia wants to try for sedition and armed revolt. Mexico says Bolivian authorities have harassed and intimidated its diplomatic staff, including an incident 27 Dec in which Spanish diplomats were also involved.

Mexico’s FM 26 Dec announced country will file a complaint against the interim govt of Bolivia at the International Court of Justice, while interim govt asked 30 Dec Mexican ambassador and two members of Spanish mission in La Paz to leave country in 72 hours.

Anti-govt protests continued across country at lower intensity, although with continued clashes between demonstrators and security forces, while govt moved forward with non-binding consultation referendum and constitutional reform project. Police 6 Dec arrested 136 people during violent protests in Santiago and other major cities; prosecutor’s office reported they have detained over 30,000 protesters, charged 20,000 and placed 2,000 in pre-trial custody since beginning of protests in Oct. More than two million people from 225 of 346 national communes 15 Dec participated in non-binding civil consultation referendum; 92% of participants agreed to new constitution and govt prioritisation of pensions, health and education. Chamber of Representatives 18 Dec approved constitutional reform project detailing measures for formal referendum and subsequent procedures to elect national constituent assembly, President Piñera 27 Dec signed decree that set 26 April 2020 as date for referendum. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 13 Dec released report on protest violence; said police responded in “fundamentally
repressive manner”, leading to 26 deaths and 4,903 people injured, including 2,792 police. Judge 27 Dec remanded in custody six Chilean police officers, accused of torturing and sexually assaulting protester at police station during curfew imposed during first days of protests. Reported rate of dissatisfaction with President Piñera rose to 80% according to survey by pollsters Cadem despite reduction in unrest and reforms.

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**Colombia**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

National Strike continued to pressure govt of President Duque, whose planned “National Conversation” talks did little to quell protests, while attacks and clashes involving armed groups continued, displacing civilians along Pacific Coast. Coalition of university and workers’ unions, peace activists, indigenous leaders and opposition continued to demand govt directly negotiate with strike organisers on growing list of demands; tens of thousands joined protests on 6 Dec in Bogotá, Cali, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Cartagena, and several smaller cities. Govt 2 Dec agreed to hold separate dialogue directly with strike organisers; on 26 Dec announced minimum wage increase of 6%, largest increase in recent history. Strike leaders who also resurrected calls for govt to restart direct negotiations with National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, suspended since Jan 2019. Duque 10 Dec said door to negotiations remained open, but ELN must release all hostages and unilaterally halt attacks. Car bomb attributed to ELN exploded in Boyacá department at military base close to Venezuelan border 12 Dec, wounding at least three; Duque said attack indicated ELN did not want peace. Violence and clashes between Gaitanista criminal cartel (AGC) and ELN continued to displace five Afro and indigenous communities in Alto Baudó (Chocó), with govt early Dec reporting 3,200 displaced in November. Both groups seeking to consolidate control over corridor connecting coca-producing areas in Bajo Cauca (Antioquia) to Pacific coast. Elsewhere, combat escalated along Pacific coast communities in Nariño between armed forces and FARC dissidents, displacing several hundred civilians; military early Dec reported FARC dissidents and others increasingly deploying improvised explosive devices. A young couple, both environmental activists, was killed 20 Dec in rural area outside Atlantic city of Santa Marta; 24 Dec social leader Lucy Villarreal was assassinated in Tumaco, Nariño. Duque announced 27 Dec he was replacing head of military Nicacio Martínez, whose year-long tenure was plagued by scandals over past association with “false positive” assassinations, pressure on soldiers to capture and kill combatants. New army chief...
assassinations, pressure on soldiers to capture and kill combatants. New army chief is Eduardo Zapateiro.

Venezuela

Govt mid-Dec launched fresh wave of judicial attacks on opposition MPs ahead of 5 Jan vote to ratify Juan Guaidó as president for next 12 months. Govt-controlled Constituent Assembly 17 Dec lifted parliamentary immunity of four MPs accused, inter alia, of treason. Police special forces (FAES) 20 Dec arrested another, Gilber Caro, without specifying charges. Guaidó 11 Dec admitted failure so far to oust Maduro, promised talks with all sectors of opposition to determine way forward; however opposition deeply divided over whether to participate in 2020 legislative elections. Guaidó and his “govt” tarnished by corruption scandals involving opposition legislators and individuals linked to his team late Nov/early Dec, including online news site exposé of eight opposition legislators allegedly involved in attempts to clear names of corrupt businessmen linked to govt’s food distribution scheme CLAP (Local Committees for Supply and Production); Guaidó ordered investigation. Lawmakers claimed Maduro govt actively seeking to corrupt members of opposition, offering individuals up to $1mn to switch sides. Likelihood of foreign military intervention receded further with passage by U.S. Congress 16 Dec of appropriations bill rejecting use of force in Venezuela and explicitly endorsing strategy of “direct, credible negotiations”; also allocates $400m for humanitarian assistance. Despite partial reactivation of economy, due to informal dollarisation, openings for foreign capital and sanctions-evasion schemes, as well as stabilisation of oil production, severe petrol shortages over Christmas/New Year brought lengthy queues. Maduro 23 Dec accused Colombia, Brazil and Peru of backing 22 Dec raid on 513 Jungle Infantry Batallion in Bolívar state in which dozens of weapons were stolen and (according to govt) one soldier killed. Govt demanded Brazil return 5 military deserters accused of attack who fled across border.

• BRIEFING: Peace in Venezuela: Is There Life after the Barbados Talks?
Guatemala

President Morales’ approval of Law of Acceptance of Charges, and Congress’s continued actions to delegitimise dismantled anti-corruption body International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), point to increasing impunity despite pushback from opposition and civil society groups. Truth Commission created in Oct for people who consider themselves to be victims of CICIG concluded its last public hearing 27 Nov, with final report due to be presented 10 Jan to Congress, donor govts of CICIG, UN and Organization of American States. Morales 16 Dec sanctioned controversial reform that reduces sentences up to 50% for those involved in corruption cases who accept their guilt, despite protests against it by civil society groups, who also rejected planned budget cuts for health and education. After President Morales met with U.S. President Trump 17 Dec, the Wall Street Journal reported 20 Dec Guatemala is set to start accepting migrants from Brazil and Mexico, under Asylum Cooperation Agreement signed in July 2019.

Honduras

A tide of killings shook the prison system, while the fate of anti-corruption body MACCIH (Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras) remained unclear. Lawyer of Nery Orlando López, murdered drug trafficker whose ledgers provided critical information to convict president’s brother in Oct, was shot dead 9 Dec in western Copán department by unknown assailants; another lawyer next day announced he will request political asylum in another country, due to persecution from Public Ministry and death threats on social media. Director of El Pozo jail, seen talking to Nery Orlando López shortly before he was killed, also murdered 12 Dec while driving in Choluteca. Mutiny broke out 14 Dec in maximum security jail “La Tolva” leaving at least five dead, all MS13 gang members. Hernández 17 Dec decreed state of emergency in prisons, authorising militarised National Inter-Institutional Security Force (FUSINA) to take control of prison system, and suspending National Penitentiary Institute (INP). A further two mass jail killings in Tela 20 Dec and El Porvenir 22 Dec left another 18 and 19 dead respectively. Ahead of 15 Jan expiration of mandate of anti-corruption body MACCIH, National Congress special commission presented report 10 Dec arguing that body violated constitutional rights, guarantees and principles, and did not
respect national laws or international conventions; 71 National Congress deputies same day endorsed report conclusions and voted in favour of not renewing MACCIH’s mandate. Organization of American States-Honduran govt commission presented its own report 12 Dec, concluding that MACCIH agreement should be renewed and improved. Civil society, opposition parties and international community spoke out in defence of MACCIH, including newly formed Media Platform against Corruption and Impunity, Partido Innovación y Unidad (PINU) and Libertad y Refundación (Libre) parties. Honduran Congressman Oscar Nájera, close to President Hernández, was sanctioned 20 Dec by the U.S. for involvement in “significant” corruption.

El Salvador DECEMBER 2019

Judicial authorities took steps in fight against organised crime, including trial involving plea-bargain witness that ended 12 Dec with conviction of 373 of 426 MS13 gang members on trial, including seventeen historic leaders, on homicide, drug, and weapon charges among others, with sentences of up to 74 years. Judge said prosecutors should have also presented charges against politicians from ARENA (Alianza Republicana Nacionalista) and FMLN (the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) parties whom witness accused of negotiating with gangs in exchange for political support. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) paid first “in loco” visit in 32 years 2-4 Dec, focusing on public security, transitional justice, people deprived of their freedom, migrants’ rights, women’s rights and LGBTI people. According to National Police, December closed with 120 murders, which Bukele said 31 Dec was least violent month since 1992 peace agreement. Homicides dropped 6 per cent in the second half of 2019. President Bukele visited Japan, China, and Qatar late Nov-15 Dec, securing investment in important infrastructure projects and other cooperation agreements.

Nicaragua DECEMBER 2019
Situation remained tense as govt threats and attacks on political opponents and churches continued, and domestic and international pressure on govt mounted, including new U.S. sanctions. Govt nevertheless released 91 political prisoners 30 Dec and moved them to house arrest following mediation efforts by papal nuncio Waldemar Sommertag; according to local human rights bodies, a further 65 remain in prison. Domestically, opposition organisations Civic Alliance and Blue and White National Unity worked to create more cohesive front, 12 Dec presenting joint proposal for electoral reforms. At least 70 civil society organisations 10 Dec denounced systematic violation of human rights. President Ortega’s brother Humberto 11 Dec released letter directed to his brother calling for release of all political prisoners before Christmas. Ortega’s international isolation increased; U.S. 12 Dec imposed another round of sanctions, targeting another of Ortega’s sons and three Nicaraguan entities including DNP Petronic, national fuel provider managed by Ortega’s family; Legislative Assembly 14 Dec approved its nationalisation. Russia meanwhile thanked Nicaraguan govt 12 Dec for its support in UN. Legislative Assembly 10 Dec approved 2020 budget, foreseeing just $22.5 million in aid from five countries, compared to $386.4 million from 21 countries when Ortega returned to power in 2007. Govt maintained domestic repression. Police 3 Dec gave awards to officers who participated in raid which left five people dead, including two officers and three civilians allegedly involved in 2018 protests. Catholic church 8 Dec denounced police detention for twelve hours of priest accused of disrupting public order. Permanent Commission on Human Rights (CPDH) 10 Dec said it had received around 3,000 complaints regarding allegedly state-sponsored human rights violations. Police 12 Dec charged on opponents and journalists attending presentation of opposition’s electoral reform plan in Managua, reportedly wounding at least six.

Haiti DECEMBER 2019

Political and economic instability continued amid political stalemate, although anti-govt protests subsided, with many schools and businesses reopening 2 Dec after more than two months closure due to protests. No significant progress in terms of negotiations between Moïse and opposition, although FM issued statement 12 Dec that private meetings between president and members of opposition have been
that private meetings between president and members of opposition have been making progress. President Moïse 7 Dec gave interview stating Haiti is ungovernable under current constitution, which he said limits presidential power. International community continued to support national dialogue, including visit of senior U.S. official 6 Dec for meeting with Moïse and FM; hundreds of protesters marched to U.S. embassy same day demanding Trump administration stop supporting Moïse. Consensual Alternative for the Refoundation of Haiti, an anti-Moïse political platform, 9 Dec rejected U.S.’s recommendation for dialogue among political actors without preconditions or delays. Levels of violence in slums reportedly increased amid security vacuum as police divert resources to dealing with protests; news agency Reuters 10 Dec reported gangs fighting over territory where they extract “protection” fees and carry out drugs and arms trades. Amid worsening humanitarian crisis, violence continued to affect aid distribution.

**Mexico DECEMBER 2019**

Violence continued across country, particularly in Guanajuato and other central states, while tensions with U.S. from Nov eased somewhat. Head of Public Security Secretariat of Cuernavaca in Morelos state (centre), Juan David Juárez López, shot dead 6 Dec in apparent targeted assassination. Also in centre, armed commando 11 Dec attacked municipal police building in Villagrán, Guanajuato state, killing three police and kidnapping four others who were later found dismembered in plastic bags 13 Dec; Jalisco Cartel New Generation claimed responsibility for attack; Villagrán lies in highly contested area due to pipeline running through it, from which criminal groups siphon gasoline. Guanajuato (centre) recorded as deadliest state in country for police, with 78 killed in 2019, out of 442 nationwide. Fighting between members of Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel in a Zacatecas state prison 31 Dec left 16 dead in Cieneguillas town (centre). Genaro García Luna arrested in Dallas, Texas 9 Dec on charges of accepting millions in bribes from Sinaloa Cartel as public security secretary and chief drug-war architect under president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012), and as head of Federal Investigation Agency under previous president Vicente Fox. Calderón reacted with “surprise”. U.S. President Trump 6 Dec announced he was “delaying” designation of Mexican criminal groups as Foreign Terrorist Organisations, which he announced following early Nov killing of Mormon family with U.S. nationality in northern Mexico; Mexican govt had lobbied intensely against designation, which it argued would compromise its sovereignty. Following more than
Middle East & North Africa

Israel/Palestine  DECEMBER 2019

Low-level violence persisted between Israeli forces and Palestinians along Gaza-Israel fence. Palestinians in Gaza resumed weekly “Great March of Return” protests along Gaza-Israel fence 6 Dec after three-week suspension. Palestinian militants 7 Dec fired three rockets from Gaza into Israel, two were intercepted and one landed in field; Israel responded with airstrikes on Hamas targets in Gaza. Israeli aircraft 17 Dec killed Palestinian approaching fence. Palestinian militants launched two rockets at Israel night of 18-19 Dec, one was intercepted and one landed in field; Israel retaliated by bombing three Hamas sites and temporarily reducing Palestinian fishing area. Palestinians 25 Dec launched rocket toward Ashkelon in Israel, where PM Netanyahu was addressing campaign rally; Israel intercepted rocket and responded by striking several Hamas targets in Gaza. Hamas 26 Dec said it would suspend weekly demonstrations along Gaza-Israel fence until April and would then reduce their frequency to monthly. In West Bank, Palestinians 9 Dec launched general strike and clashed with security forces in Hebron after Israeli defence minister approved construction of new settlement there. Ahead of anniversary of Hamas’s founding, security forces night of 11-12 Dec arrested a dozen senior Hamas officials across West Bank. Israel 15 Dec reduced power supply to Palestinian residential areas in several cities to pressure Palestinian electric company to pay outstanding debt. In Israel, after Blue and White Party leader Benny Gantz failed to form coalition govt, Israeli lawmakers 11 Dec passed bill to dissolve parliament and hold new elections 2 March. PM Netanyahu won Likud party primaries 26 Dec with over 72% of votes. In Syria, suspected Israeli airstrikes targeting Iranian weapons depots 7 Dec killed at least five.
Lebanon

President Aoun appointed former minister Hassan Diab as new PM and anti-govt protests continued to lead to violence. Following PM Hariri’s resignation in Oct, consensus appeared to form early Dec on accepting businessman Samir Khatib as new PM. But after Khatib withdrew his candidacy 8 Dec, former and caretaker PM Hariri emerged as front runner. Hariri 18 Dec withdrew his candidacy after two largest Christian parties said they would not endorse him. Parliament 19 Dec voted former education minister Hassan Diab to become new PM and Aoun tasked him with forming govt. Diab said he planned to form govt of technocrats within six weeks. International Support Group for Lebanon in Paris 11 Dec conditioned financial aid on formation of credible govt committed to implementing economic reforms. Unrest mid-Dec left dozens injured. In capital Beirut, security forces 14 Dec prevented suspected supporters of Hizbollah and Shiite Amal Movement from attacking anti-govt protesters. Security forces later that night and 15 Dec clashed with anti-govt protesters. Scuffles broke out night of 16-17 Dec as security forces prevented Hizbollah and Amal supporters from reaching anti-govt protesters. Suspected Hizbollah and Amal supporters 17 Dec attacked several protest camps throughout country.

Syria

Regime and Russian forces intensified airstrikes and ground offensive in north west taking ground from rebels. In north west, regime forces 1 Dec launched ground assault to retake territory they lost previous month. Regime and Russian airstrikes continued to target rebel-held areas in Idlib; Russian airstrikes and barrel bombs 8 Dec killed 21 civilians. Regime and Russian airstrikes on villages in Maarat al-Numan district, Idlib province 17 Dec killed 24 civilians. State news 22 Dec reported regime forces had retaken around twenty villages in Maarat al-Numan district. UN 27 Dec said regime offensive had displaced over 235,000 civilians in Dec. In north east, Turkey 8 Dec struck deal with Russia to connect areas under control of Turkish-backed Syrian forces to regime-controlled power plant and to withdraw Turkish
backed Syrian forces to regime-controlled power plant and to withdraw Turkish-
backed Syrian National Army and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces from M4
highway. Insecurity persisted in areas under control of Turkish-backed forces; car
bombing in Al-Mabrukah in Hasakah province 18 Dec killed five civilians, and
landmine at Tel Abyad border crossing in Raqqa province same day killed four. Car
bombing 23 Dec killed eight in Turkish-controlled village of Suluk near Tel Abyad.
Airstrikes of unknown origin 7 and 25 Dec killed ten pro-Iranian fighters in Deir al-
Zour province in east; Lebanese Shia group Hizbollah blamed Israel for 25 Dec
attack. Delegates from Russia, Turkey and Iran 10 Dec met in Kazakhstan for 14th
round of talks on Syria, with focus on how UN-sponsored Constitutional Committee
can overcome impasse in drafting new constitution; talks made no progress. U.S.
Congress 17 Dec passed Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act enabling U.S. govt to
sanction any person or entity engaging in economic activity with Syrian regime.

Iran-U.S. tensions rose as U.S. responded to series of attacks on U.S. assets in Iraq
with strikes on Iran-backed militia there; tensions could spiral further in Jan,
especially around Iran’s planned further violation of nuclear deal 6 Jan. In Iraq,
attacks on U.S. assets intensified: unidentified assailants 3, 5, 9 and 11 Dec launched
rockets at military bases housing U.S. troops; rocket attack on base outside Kirkuk 27
Dec killed U.S. contractor. U.S. Sec State Pompeo blamed “Iran’s proxies”. U.S.
airstrikes 29 Dec hit bases in Iraq and Syria of Iran-backed Kataib Hizbollah militia,
part of paramilitary Popular Mobilisation Units, killing at least 25 fighters. In
response, supporters and members of Kataib Hizbollah protested outside U.S.
embassy, 31 Dec broke into compound. Chair of joint commission of Joint
Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) during meeting in Austria 6 Dec noted
“serious concern” in relation to Iran’s incremental violations of nuclear deal.
Russia’s State Nuclear Energy Corporation Rosatom 5 Dec announced suspension of
work ostensibly for technical reasons at Fordow nuclear facility, where in Nov Iran
restarted uranium enrichment. U.S. 15 Dec withdrew sanctions waiver for
international civil nuclear cooperation at Fordow. Iran and U.S. exchanged prisoners
in Switzerland 7 Dec; Iran released Princeton University doctoral student Xiyue
Wang in exchange for release of Iranian scientist Masoud Soleimani held since 2018
for sanctions violations. U.S. 11 Dec announced new sanctions against Iranian
shipping and aviation industries. NGO Amnesty International 16 Dec reported that
nationwide protests over fuel prices in Nov had led to violent clashes between protesters and security forces that left 304 demonstrators dead. Govt 11 Dec said it had foiled “state sponsored” cyberattack on national banking system; 15 Dec said it had foiled another cyberattack.

- **STATEMENT: Learning the Right Lessons from Protests in Iran**

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**Iraq**  
**DECEMBER 2019**

Following PM Mahdi’s resignation, wrangling over his successor extended political paralysis; security forces continued deadly crackdown on anti-govt protests; and in response to increasing attacks on U.S. assets, U.S. airstrikes on Iran-backed militia triggered violent protest at U.S. embassy raising risk that U.S.-Iran tensions fuel further escalation in Jan. After parliament 1 Dec accepted PM Mahdi’s resignation, two main parliamentary coalitions both claimed constitutional right to name new PM by virtue of being largest bloc; President Salih 15 Dec tasked parliament speaker to determine largest bloc. Parliament 24 Dec passed electoral law allowing people to vote for individual candidates instead of party lists. Iran-backed bloc proposed governor of southern Basra province Asaad al-Eidani, but Salih 26 Dec refused to appoint him PM “to avoid more bloodshed” and offered his resignation to parliament. Protesters 1 and 3 Dec stormed Iranian consulate in Najaf. U.S. 6 Dec sanctioned leaders of Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) for roles in repressing protests. In capital Baghdad, gunmen night of 6-7 Dec killed at least 22 protesters and three policemen. Drone 7 Dec hit home of Moqtada al-Sadr, Shiite cleric and leader of Reform and Construction parliamentary bloc, causing no casualties. Attacks on U.S. assets intensified: unidentified assailants 3, 5, 9 and 11 Dec launched rockets at military bases housing U.S. troops; rocket attack on base outside Kirkuk 27 Dec killed U.S. contractor. U.S. Sec State Pompeo blamed “Iran’s proxies”. U.S. airstrikes 29 Dec hit bases of Iran-backed Kataib Hizbollah militia, part of PMU, in Iraq and Syria killing at least 25 fighters. In response, supporters and members of Kataib Hizbollah protested outside U.S. embassy, 31 Dec broke into compound. Islamic State (ISIS) attacks in Diyala and Kirkuk provinces left at least 26 security force members dead. Police 3 Dec announced capture of alleged deputy of ISIS leader al-Baghdadi. Security forces 15-31 Dec killed 57 ISIS militants in Diyala, Nineveh, Erbil and Salah al-Din provinces.
Kuwait  DECEMBER 2019

Emir swore in new govt 17 Dec following resignation of previous govt in Nov due to vote of no confidence against interior minister. Authorities 13 Dec arrested Egyptian man over alleged links to banned Muslim Brotherhood group; suspect deported to Egypt next day after admitting to transferring funds to organisation.

Qatar  DECEMBER 2019

Emir Al-Thani did not attend Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in Saudi capital, Riyadh 10 Dec but sent PM, highest ranking Qatari to attend GCC summit since beginning of dispute in June 2017; meeting achieved no breakthrough on tensions between Saudi-led bloc and Qatar. FM 15 Dec said recent talks with Saudi Arabia had broken stalemate and introduced line of communication; FM announced govt would analyse demands of blockading countries but would refuse to alter relations with ally Turkey to end dispute.

Saudi Arabia  DECEMBER 2019

Govt continued efforts to de-escalate its conflict with Huthi rebels in Yemen and implement agreement between Yemeni govt and Yemen’s southern separatists. Saudi-led coalition continued informal talks with Huthi rebels on de-escalation measures. Govt accused Huthi rebels of attack on medical facility in Saudi city of Jizan in south 10 Dec, which caused no casualties; Huthis denied attack, but claimed 27 Dec strike on local military headquarters in Najran (see Yemen). Saudi-led coalition continued to oversee implementation of Riyadh Agreement struck in Nov.
cooperation continued to oversee implementation of Riyadh Agreement struck in Nov between Yemeni govt and southern separatists. Ceasefire held in south, but other key aspects of agreement remain unimplemented (see Yemen). At annual Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit in capital Riyadh 10 Dec, members committed to enhancing security cooperation while taking steps to establish financial and monetary unity by 2025, but made no breakthrough on resolving dispute between Saudi-led bloc and Qatar. Govt 1 Dec assumed presidency of G20 forum, becoming first Arab state to lead group. Saudi Aramco oil and gas company 11 Dec began trading on Saudi stock exchange following initial public offering (IPO); IPO raised $25.6bn, with total company valuation at $1.7tn.

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**Yemen**  DECEMBER 2019

Following signing of Riyadh Agreement in Nov, ceasefire between govt and southern separatists held and de-escalation talks between Saudi-led coalition and Huthi rebels continued. In south, while truce largely held, tensions remained over troop build-ups in strategic locations across south and failure to implement key aspects of agreement, including formation of unity govt and appointment of governor and security chief in Aden. Informal de-escalation talks between Huthi rebels and Saudi-led coalition continued as fighting along Saudi-Yemeni border and Saudi airstrikes decreased. Senior military commander Adnan al-Hammadi shot and killed by his brother in Taiz in south 6 Dec; dispute reportedly fuelled by split between factions loyal to Sunni Islamist group Islah and factions supportive of United Arab Emirates. Saudi govt accused Huthis of carrying out 10 Dec attack on medical facility in Saudi city of Jizan in south; no fatalities recorded in first reported cross-border attack since Sept. Huthis claimed 27 Dec missile strike on local Saudi military headquarters in Najran; Saudis denied strike. Yemeni govt and Huthi rebels exchanged prisoners in Taiz 19 Dec; govt released 60 Huthi rebels in exchange for 75 govt-affiliated detainees. U.S. navy 4 Dec announced seizure of “significant” shipment of Iranian missile components bound for Yemen. U.S. State Department 5 Dec announced $15mn reward for information on Yemen-based Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps senior commander Abdul Reza Shahlai.
Algeria  DECEMBER 2019

Former PM Abdelmadjid Tebboune won presidential election 12 Dec with 58% of votes as protests against regime continued. Electoral commission said turnout was 39.9% but independent observers put it at 15%. In first speech after elections, Tebboune 13 Dec offered dialogue with protest movement against ruling elite. Tebboune sworn in 19 Dec. Demonstrations continued before and after elections. Thousands protested against poll in capital Algiers 11 Dec. Security forces cracked down on protests in second largest city Oran 11-13 Dec, reportedly arresting 450. Thousands of students and teachers demonstrated in Algiers 17 Dec against new president, rejecting his offer of dialogue. Army chief of staff Gaid Salah died of heart attack in Algiers 23 Dec aged 79. Tebboune 28 Dec named former diplomat Abdelaziz Djerad as new PM. Thousands protested 27 Dec in Algiers and students gathered 24 Dec despite day of mourning for Salah. Court in Algiers 10 Dec convicted former PMs Ahmed Ouyahia and Abdelmalek Sellal to fifteen and twelve years in prison respectively for corruption.

Egypt  DECEMBER 2019

Following late Sept anti-govt protests, President Sisi reshuffled security apparatus in late Nov and early Dec and jihadist attacks and counter-terrorism operations continued in Sinai. Sisi reportedly appointed commander of Republican Guard Gen. Ahmed Ali as head of presidency office, former army Chief of Staff Gen. Mahmoud Higazi to key position within presidency office, and former military official Mostafa Shawkat as head of Republican Guard. In Sinai, Islamic State (ISIS)-Sinai Province militants 8 Dec launched simultaneous attacks on military camp at Al-Ahrash near Rafah and military vehicle in Sheikh Zuweid, killing four soldiers. Army raid 5 Dec killed three suspected jihadists in North Sinai. Talks between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over Ethiopia’s construction of its Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on River Nile continued in U.S. in bid to resolve dispute by 15 Jan. After FMs met in Washington 9 Dec, Egyptian officials said negotiations were moving forward. Further talks took place in Sudanese capital Khartoum 21-22 Dec. Sudan 22 Dec said countries had come closer to agreeing on operation of dam and filling of reservoir.
Tensions within ruling party Union for the Republic (UPR) increased as President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani and former President Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz competed for influence. Security forces late Nov arrested presidential guard
commander and his deputy, both Abdel Aziz loyalists. Ghazouani won outright backing of ruling party during party congress in capital Nouakchott 28-29 Dec. Party delegates renewed all party’s governing bodies including National Council and entrusted them to Ghazouani’s close allies, and elected Ghazouani’s chosen candidate, Sidi Mohamed Ould Taleb Amar, as party president.

**Morocco**  DECEMBER 2019

Police 14 Dec arrested suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militant in Meknes in north and said he was planning suicide attack. Parliament’s foreign affairs committee 16 Dec approved two bills extending Rabat’s maritime boundaries over Western Sahara’s territorial water.

**Tunisia**  DECEMBER 2019

PM-designate Habib Jemli 12 Dec asked President Saïed to push back 15 Dec deadline to form govt by one month until 15 Jan. Jemli continued consultations with party leaders to build majority of 109 MPs needed to form govt.

**Western Sahara**  DECEMBER 2019

Leader of Polisario Front independence movement Brahim Ghali 16 Dec denounced UN’s inability to end diplomatic stalemate over disputed territory, as young Sahrawis increased pressure on Polisario leadership to end status quo. After Moroccan parliament’s foreign affairs committee 16 Dec approved two bills extending Rabat’s maritime boundaries over Western Sahara’s territorial water.
Maritime boundaries over Western Sahara's territorial water, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) 18 Dec said move was “null and void”. Polisario Front renewed confidence in Brahim Ghali as secretary general with 86.10% of votes during its fiftieth congress in Tifariti 19-23 Dec.