The President's Take

In my April/May column to accompany CrisisWatch, our unique conflict tracker, I point to the role of human agency in dealing with global conflict and examine how it came into play during recent developments in Somalia, Iran and on the Korean peninsula. Read more ...

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April saw the conflict in Yemen intensify, with both the Saudi-led coalition and Huthi forces increasing attacks – fuelling risks of further escalation in May. At the Gaza-Israel border, Israeli forces continued to push back Palestinian protesters with deadly force; with larger protests expected in May, casualties could rise. Eastern Libya’s strongman fell ill, prompting fears of further political and military splits. In Afghanistan, the Taliban stepped up attacks, while Kashmir saw deadly clashes and protests. Dozens were killed amid anti-government protests in Nicaragua. In Nigeria, rising violence – especially between herders and farmers – left nearly 500 dead. Burundi could see more political violence around its 17 May constitutional referendum, and a flare-up in attacks by armed groups in the Central African Republic could provoke worse bloodshed in coming weeks. The United Arab Emirates’ withdrawal from Somalia led to clashes between army factions there. On a positive note, Ethiopia’s new prime minister took steps to mitigate ethnic tensions. In North East Asia, tensions escalated across the Taiwan Strait, while China-Japan relations continued to improve, and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and South Korean President Moon pledged to seek “complete denuclearisation” of the peninsula.

Trends for Last Month
April 2018

⚠️ Deteriorated Situations
Central African Republic, Somalia, Nigeria, Taiwan Strait, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Nicaragua, Israel/Palestine, Yemen, Libya

➡️ Improved Situations
Ethiopia, China/Japan, Korean Peninsula
Outlook for This Month
May 2018

Conflict Risk Alerts
Burundi, Central African Republic, Israel/Palestine, Yemen

Resolution Opportunities
None

Trends and Outlook

**Yemen**’s war saw an uptick in violence: the Saudi-led coalition intensified its airstrike campaign, killing at least 66 civilians, and in turn Huthi forces increased missile attacks on Saudi targets. The escalation – which could continue in May – risks derailing efforts to restart peace talks, further regionalising the conflict and aggravating the already dire humanitarian crisis. To curb this worrying trend, diplomatic efforts should be aimed at preventing a coalition attack on Huthi-held Hodeidah, a strategic port city on the Red Sea coast.

As we warned, violence increased at the **Gaza-Israel** border, where Israeli forces suppressed weekly Palestinian protests with deadly force, raising the total number of Palestinians killed since the protests began on 30 March to at least 42. May could be worse, as the largest protests are expected on 15 May when Palestinians mourn the expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from Israel during the 1948 war, a day after the U.S. plans to open its embassy in Jerusalem. In **Libya**, Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s two-week stay in a Paris hospital prompted fears that the search for a successor will fragment his military coalition in the east and see the political camps in the east or west use force to break the current stalemate.

In **Afghanistan**, the Taliban stepped up its efforts to capture district
centres and move closer to the provincial capitals of Ghazni and Sar-e Pul as it announced the start of its spring offensive. Islamic State-Khorasan Province also continued to attack urban centres across the country, including an attack on a voter registration centre in Kabul on 22 April killing around 60 people, amid growing fears over security around elections later this year. Clashes between alleged separatist militants and security forces south of Kashmir’s Srinagar on 1 April left thirteen alleged militants and three Indian soldiers dead. At least three civilians were killed later the same day as police fired on stone-throwing demonstrators protesting the killings.

In Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, two attempts by the army and UN peacekeepers to arrest the leader of one of the city’s armed groups failed and left 32 dead, including one peacekeeper. After armed men attacked a church on 1 May killing fifteen worshippers and a priest, many fear intercommunal violence could again flare in the city and trigger more fighting in the provinces. In Nigeria, Boko Haram kept up attacks, while herder-farmer violence and deadly banditry continued to spiral, leaving some 500 dead.

Political violence could rise around Burundi’s 17 May referendum on constitutional changes, which if adopted would allow President Nkurunziza to run in presidential elections until 2034. The regime, including the ruling party’s youth wing, the Imbonerakure, have been carrying out a campaign of intimidation against anyone who has opposed the referendum, or campaigned for a No vote.

A breakdown in relations between Somalia’s federal government and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), partly driven by the UAE’s deepening cooperation with Somaliland and Puntland regions, over which the federal government claims sovereignty, led to the UAE ending its military training program. After the Emiratis pulled out, rival Somali army factions clashed at the training centre over weapons. Good news from neighbouring Ethiopia, however, as the new Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed took steps to calm tensions between ethnic Somalis and Oromos and relax restrictions on civil liberties.
Dozens of people were reported killed in Nicaragua as mass anti-government protests clashed with security forces. Sparked by social security reforms, the protests vented a deeper fury with President Ortega’s authoritarian rule.

In North East Asia, China held its first ever live-fire exercises in the Taiwan Strait, intended as a warning against Taiwanese who advocate independence. There were further signs of improving China-Japan relations ahead of a planned visit to Japan by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang for a trilateral summit in May. And the month saw an historic summit between the leaders of North and South Korea who pledged to seek “complete denuclearisation” of the peninsula. As we note in our commentary, this could lead to transformative shifts in inter-Korean relations, and sets the stage for upcoming multilateral dialogue, making the meeting between North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and U.S. President Trump more likely.
President Nkurunziza to run in presidential elections until 2034. Opposition coalition in exile late March reiterated call for boycott. Three opposition parties in country, FNL, FRODEBU and UPRONA, 17 April released memorandum addressed to UN Sec-Gen Guterres, African Union (AU) Chair and Rwandan President Kagame, and AU Commission Chair Faki, urging them to stop revision of constitution. Catholic Church for first time 10 April criticised govt for forcing citizens to contribute toward funding vote. AU and UN 16 April criticised govt’s repeated rejection of proposed dialogue with opposition and its suspension from talks. Next day govt said it would not withdraw from talks. 2,500 followers of spiritual leader “Zebyia” returned early April from Rwanda to Burundi following disputes with Rwandan authorities about registration there.

Cameroon  APRIL 2018

Boko Haram (BH) slightly increased operations in Far North against military and civilians, and Anglophone separatists kept up insurgent attacks against security forces and officials, especially in Southwest region. BH attacks in Logone-et-Chari department bordering Lake Chad picked up after ten-month lull there: fighters injured soldier in Amatalia 2 April; over 50 BH fighters thought to belong to al-Barnawi’s faction 3 April launched large attack on military base in Sagme, killing six soldiers, fifteen assailants also killed; fighters kidnapped driver between Sale and Zigague 9 April; killed two fishermen in Ngame 17 April. Soldiers and local vigilantes of Zigague 18 April attacked BH cell in Dougouma across border in Nigeria, killing four fighters. In neighbouring Mayo Sava department to south, BH fighters killed one civilian in Limani 2 April, killed two more in Allargno 9 April and armed forces killed two BH fighters in Cherif-Moussari 25 April. Anglophone separatists conducted attack in Belo village, Northwest region 5-6 April killing one gendarme; killed one soldier in Ediki, Southwest 13 April and same day injured three more in Meme, Southwest; clashed with security forces in Dadi, Southwest 16 April; separatists killed three security forces and bomb killed two others in Lebialem department, Southwest 21-22 April. Separatists 20 April attacked convoy of Southwest governor in Lebialem. Separatists 28 April killed two gendarmes in Bali-Nyongha, Northwest. Priest kidnapped in Belo 30 April. Several new separatist militias formed in April and separatists killed at least three civilians accused of being informants for security forces. Security forces reportedly continued to set ablaze civilian houses in areas thought to be sympathetic to separatists such as Lebialem. Constitutional Council 5 April announced results of 25 March senatorial elections: ruling party CPDM won 63 of 70 seats; as per constitution President Biya appointed senators to remaining 30 seats, giving CPDM 87 of 100 seats in senate.

- BRIEFING: Cameroon’s Anglophone Crisis: How the Catholic Church Can Promote Dialogue
Clashes between armed groups and international and national forces increased, including in capital Bangui, which could provoke further violence in May. UN mission (MINUSCA) patrol 1 April exchanged fire with armed group in PK5 neighbourhood in Bangui. Two joint MINUSCA and army operations to arrest or dislodge head of main local militia in PK5, known as “General Force”, failed 8 and 10 April, 52 people including one peacekeeper killed and 145 wounded; MINUSCA began negotiations with group close to General Force. Ex-Seleka factions assembled in Kaga Bandoro in north late April raising fears of attack on Bangui, MINUSCA deployed to Sibut in centre and govt sent Russian soldiers to talk with rebels 28 April. In centre, anti-balaka militants attacked temporary MINUSCA base at Tagbara near Bambari 2 April killing one peacekeeper, at least 22 anti-balaka also killed. In south east, Ugandan-led militia Lord’s Resistance Army attacked Koubou village near Obo 2 April, MINUSCA and national troops responded, freeing some fifteen abducted civilians. In west, MINUSCA clashed with recently created armed group known as Siriri between Berberati and Gamboula 22 April, unknown number of militants killed. Côte d’Ivoire 24 April said it would send 450 peacekeepers to Central African Republic without specifying date.

Chad APRIL 2018

Following recommendations of late March Forum on Institutional Reform, Ministers’ Council approved draft of new constitution 10 April and passed it on to parliament; new version, among other changes, abolishes PM position, makes president head of govt, and reintroduces presidential term limits which President Déby removed in 2005. Opposition MPs 16 April decided to boycott parliamentary sessions up to and including 30 April, when parliament under heavy security voted overwhelmingly in favour of draft. Opposition and civil society had called for protests against new constitution, some opposition leaders and demonstrators arrested during demonstrations outside parliament. Catholic Church 19 April called on govt to hold referendum on draft constitution. Three soldiers killed in clash with Boko Haram militants in Arge across border in Nigeria 15 April. U.S. 13 April lifted travel restrictions on Chadians, imposed Sept 2017, citing govt’s improvement in identity management and information sharing.

Democratic Republic of Congo APRIL 2018

As preparations for elections in Dec continued, opposition contested electoral commission (CENI)’s
plan to use voting machines. Comité Laïc de Coordination (lay organisation of Catholic Church) 8 April asked CENI not to use them to avoid undermining vote's credibility; five opposition parties jointly contested numbers of voters in register and demanded external audit. Together for Change, platform of opposition leader Moïse Katumbi, held its first meeting in Lubumbashi 7 April. Attorney general late March opened investigation into allegations Katumbi held Italian citizenship while governor of Katanga province, another attempt to prevent him from running in election. President Kabila 16 April rejected international role in elections. Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) 24 April organised first major opposition rally in capital Kinshasa. Govt agreed with UDPS and Tshisekedi family 21 April on arrangements for repatriation from Belgium of body of former party leader Etienne Tshisekedi who died Feb 2017 and funeral, without specifying date. Violence continued across country, especially in east in North and South Kivu and Ituri provinces. In North Kivu, Allied Democratic Forces 17 April attacked Ngite village, looting houses, before army routed them. Unidentified assailants carried out attack in Mungunga neighbourhood of Goma, North Kivu 30 April killing at least seven people. In north west, fighting began in South Ubangi province 23 April between ethnic Enyele militia and security forces, at least 47 civilians drowned in river fleeing violence. Donors pledged $528mn for humanitarian relief 13 April, conference in Geneva had aimed to raise $1.68bn.

- REPORT: Electoral Poker in DR Congo

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**Gabon**  
APRIL 2018

Constitutional Court 30 April ordered PM Issoze-Ngondet to resign and National Assembly to be dissolved on grounds that both no longer legitimate as govt failed to hold legislative elections before month's end. PM and National Assembly president accepted ruling same day.

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**Ethiopia**  
APRIL 2018

New PM Abiy Ahmed took several measures to mitigate ethnic tensions, promote national unity and relax restrictions on civil liberties. Head of ethnic Oromo party, Abiy Ahmed, elected chairman of ruling coalition Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front late March, sworn in as prime minister 2 April. In his first trip, Abiy 7 April went to Jijiga, capital of Somali regional state, in bid to ease tensions between ethnic Somalis and Oromos. Govt 6 April said it had closed Maekelawi prison, alleged torture site, and same day internet service reportedly resumed in parts of Oromia regional state; internet access restored in other areas 16 April. Abiy 19 April appointed ten new ministers including defence minister. Lawyer representing opposition figures, arrested 25 March for reportedly displaying banned version of national flag, said 5 April they had been released. Arrests under state of
Political negotiations and reconciliation talks between govt and opposition continued following meeting between President Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga in March; two leaders 29 April named fourteen-member team to drive talks. Deputy President Ruto 14 April criticised proposals to amend constitution to create more executive positions to accommodate opposition, describing them as attempt by politicians to secure more top jobs. Standoff between executive and judiciary continued; interior minister 3 April accused judiciary of anti-govt bias and “judicial overreach”; Chief Justice David Maraga 14 April said judiciary was struggling to fulfil its mandate due to budget cuts. Electoral commission 10 April said it had sent its chief executive on compulsory leave for three months pending audit; three of body’s six commissioners resigned 16 April, citing “dysfunctional” management, while maintaining disputed Aug presidential vote was conducted properly.

Following further deterioration of relations between federal govt and United Arab Emirates (UAE) over increased Emirati cooperation with Somaliland and Puntland regions, UAE ended military training program triggering clashes between army factions over weapons at training centre. Federal govt 8 April seized almost $10mn in cash from Emirati plane at Mogadishu airport, which UAE said was to pay Somali soldiers it had been training. Federal govt 11 April ended UAE military training program and 16 April prevented plane leaving Puntland after departing Emirati military instructors refused to allow authorities to search their bags. UAE criticised govt’s actions and 16 April closed Sheikh Zayed Hospital in Mogadishu which it had been running. Members of Somali armed forces 23 April attacked military training centre in Mogadishu that UAE handed back to govt, reportedly
intending to loot it, exchanging fire with UAE-trained forces until presidential palace guards retook control; some UAE-trained forces ran away with weapons. Puntland 16 April urged UAE to stay and continue support for Somalia. PM Khayre continued efforts to remove speaker of federal parliament’s lower house, Mohamed Osman Jawaari, triggering armed standoff. On Khayre’s orders, security forces 4 April closed major roads in Mogadishu and tried to prevent MPs accessing parliament building; Jawaari went to parliament with his own armed guards who confronted forces loyal to Khayre; parliamentary session concluded with neither side making any concession. African Union mission in Somalia (AMISOM) stepped in to mediate. Following talks, Jawaari 9 April resigned and parliament 30 April elected former defence minister as new speaker. Al-Shabaab militants 1 April attacked AMISOM base in Bula Marer, Lower Shabelle region, four AMISOM soldiers and some 30 militants killed. Al-Shabaab suicide bombing at football stadium in Barawe, Lower Shabelle, killed five people 12 April. Suicide bomber 28 April attacked army camp in Galkayo in Puntland, reportedly killing four officers.

Somaliland  APRIL 2018

Authorities 15 April sentenced writer Nacima Qorane to three years in prison for allegedly supporting unification with Somalia, triggering widespread criticism of govt.

South Sudan  APRIL 2018

In late March, regional grouping Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) pledged to place sanctions on individuals violating Dec cessation of hostilities, but fighting continued in several areas; various groups including govt forces and main opposition group Sudan People’s Liberation Movement—In Opposition (SPLM-IO) allegedly responsible. Former army Chief of Staff Paul Malong Awan 9 April announced creation of his new rebel group, South Sudan United Front, and sought entry to peace talks. IGAD postponed new round of peace talks, scheduled to restart 26 April to 17 May because parties remained uncompromising. Army chief Gen James Ajongo died 20 April; at his funeral 25 April, President Kiir said he regretted not killing group of political leaders he arrested in 2014 and former VP now rebel leader Riek Machar in 2016.

- COMMENTARY: Keeping the Hotline Open Between Sudan and South Sudan
President Bashir 10 April ordered release of remaining dozens of political prisoners detained during Jan-Feb economic protests. Bashir 19 April dismissed Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour after he questioned non-payment of salaries to diplomats over six months. Talks between Sudan, Egypt and Ethiopia over latter’s building of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Nile 4-5 April ended without agreement on any issues. Egypt 19 April said Ethiopia and Sudan had not responded to its invitation to resume talks in Cairo. Peace talks in Berlin 16-17 April between govt and two Darfuri rebel groups – Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) faction led by Minni Minnawi and Justice and Equality Movement – broke down after parties failed to agree framework for further talks. Sporadic clashes continued throughout April in Jebel Marra region of Darfur between govt forces and two rebel groups, SLM faction led by Abdel Wahid and SLM-Transitional Council.

- **COMMENTARY: Keeping the Hotline Open Between Sudan and South Sudan**

**Tanzania**  APRIL 2018

Govt 25 April deployed armed police in major towns and authorities reportedly made arrests ahead of planned anti-govt protests called for following day by U.S.-based activist; no large demonstrations reported 26 April.

**Angola**  APRIL 2018

President Lourenco 23 April sacked head of armed forces and foreign intelligence service, continuing purge of officials accused of alleged corruption and connected to former President dos Santos.
**Madagascar**  APRIL 2018

Opposition supporters 21-24 April protested in capital Antananarivo against new electoral laws they claim are designed to prevent opposition candidate and former Presidents Ravalomanana and Rajoelina from running in late-2018 presidential elections; two protesters died in confrontations with police. Opposition activists 24 April called on President Rajaonarimampianina to resign.

**Mozambique**  APRIL 2018

In north, suspected Islamist militants 21-22 April attacked two villages near Mocimboa da Praia and Palma respectively killing one civilian. Disagreement between ruling Frelimo and armed opposition Renamo over who should appoint district administrators blocked parliamentary discussion of constitutional changes aimed at decentralisation and consolidating peace agreement.

**South Africa**  APRIL 2018

Protests calling for resignation of premier of North West province, Supra Mahumapelo, accused of corruption and failing to deliver services, erupted in provincial capital Mahikeng 18 April and spread to several other towns; protesters burned tyres, looted and destroyed property, at least one person killed, over 100 arrested.

**Zambia**  APRIL 2018

Ruling Patriotic Front (PF) 15 April accused opposition United Party for National Development supporters of attacking its own supporters in Monze district in south ahead of 24 April by-election, two PF supporters hospitalised.
Zimbabwe

Ahead of general elections in July, ruling party ZANU-PF primaries 29 April marred by intra-party violence and intimidation in capital Harare, Chiredzi in south east and Central, West and East Mashonaland provinces in north. Police 23 April said govt had created special courts to address political violence and EU 27 April said it would send delegation to monitor elections, first time in sixteen years. Divisions among opposition persisted: High Court 24 April dismissed petition by opposition party Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) seeking to stop expelled party members Thokozani Khupe and two others “unlawfully exploiting and abusing” MDC-T trademark.

Burkina Faso

Insecurity persisted in Soum province, Sahel region in north: gunmen 8 April killed Kouotougou’s mayor; explosive device next day injured seven soldiers in same area; gunmen 12 April killed student and abducted teacher in school in Bouro, Nassoumbou district; Islamic State in the Greater Sahara 17 April claimed 8 and 12 April attacks; suspected Islamist militants 24 April killed three in Niafo village. Trial of 84 people accused of masterminding 2015 attempted coup suspended multiple times, set to resume 9 May.

Côte d’Ivoire

Ahead of 2020 presidential elections, President Alassane Ouattara and Henri Konan Bedié, leaders of two main parties in ruling coalition Rally of Houphouëtists for Democracy and Peace, 10 April affirmed their commitment to coalition and urged members of both parties to show restraint. Representatives of six parties forming ruling coalition 16 April signed agreement in principle to become one. Union pour la Côte d’Ivoire senior officials 28 April rejected text. Seventeen opposition supporters, arrested in Abidjan 22 March during protest against govt’s majority in electoral commission released from prison 6 April but spokesman of opposition platform Together for
Commission, released from prison 3 April, but spokesman of opposition platform Together for Democracy and Sovereignty, Jean-Gervais Tchéïdé, remained in custody because of alleged 2013 arrest warrant. Gunmen 6 April attacked army checkpoint on Bangolo-Kouibly axis in west, one assailant killed.

**Gambia April 2018**

Ruling United Democratic Party (UDP) of President Barrow won local elections 12 April with 62 of 120 constituencies. Voter turnout was low at 34%. Police used tear gas to disperse supporters of UDP and former President Jammeh’s Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction who were throwing stones at each other on election day in Banjul, with both sides celebrating victory in neighbouring districts.

**Guinea April 2018**

Leader of main opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) Cellou Dalein Diallo 2 April met President Condé over contested results of 4 Feb local elections, temporarily suspended protests. Diallo 21 April said protests would resume if govt did not meet opposition’s demands by end of April. Court in Conakry 9 April sentenced UFDG member Ibrahima Sory Camara to eighteen months in prison for insult and libel against president.

**Guinea-Bissau April 2018**

President Vaz 16 April named Aristides Gomes as new consensus PM in compliance with Oct 2016 Conakry agreement in bid to end political stalemate; Gomes formed new govt 25 April. Parliament 19 April held first session in two years, extended its own mandate, due to expire 23 April, until legislative elections scheduled for 18 Nov.
Liberia  APRIL 2018

President Weah 17 April formed five-member Special Presidential Committee and gave it two weeks to submit initial report and make recommendations following NGO Global Witness’s allegations late March of corruption involving govt officials, national oil company NOCAL and U.S. oil company ExxonMobil.

Mali  APRIL 2018

Despite 28 March signing of new roadmap to implement 2015 peace agreement by govt, ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) and pro-national unity Platform coalition, at 11 April UN Security Council meeting with France, UK and U.S. advised council to impose sanctions on spoilers. Attacks continued to target govt forces (FAMA), international forces and civilians, as counter-insurgency operations continued in north, north east and centre. In north, gunmen 2 April killed FAMA soldier in Timbuktu city. Unidentified assailants 5 April fired shells at UN mission (MINUSMA) camp in Kidal region, killing two peacekeepers. Assailants disguised as UN peacekeepers 14 April attacked MINUSMA and French Barkhane camp in Timbuktu city, killing one peacekeeper, fifteen assailants reportedly killed; jihadist alliance Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) claimed responsibility. Barkhane had reportedly recently killed alleged weapons expert and trainer for jihadist groups in Timbuktu region, and four other alleged jihadists. French forces said they had killed three alleged jihadists 21 April in confrontation near Goudam village, west of Timbuktu. In north east, joint operations of Barkhane, Platform coalition member Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) and CMA splinter group Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) 1 April neutralised 60 alleged GSIM militants in Akabar area, Ménaka region. Assailants same day ambushed MSA-GATIA unit near Akabar, killing at least three members. MSA-GATIA and FAMA, backed by Barkhane, 6 April clashed with alleged jihadists in same area, two GATIA and unknown number of assailants killed. MSA-GATIA unit 10 April killed three suspected jihadists near Niger border. MSA 15 April said gunmen on motorbikes had killed one of its officers in Ménaka region. Suspected Islamic State in the Greater Sahara militants 26-27 April attacked villages of Awakassa and Anderanboucane, Ménaka region, killing at least 40 Tuaregs. In centre, gunmen 2 April attacked checkpoint in Ségou region, killing gendarme. Army 20 April killed fifteen suspected jihadists in Tina forest, Mopti region. Army 6 April killed fourteen suspected jihadists in Diouara, Mopti region; army said they had tried to escape, while local sources accused army of summary executions.
Security forces 15 April clashed with protesters demonstrating against fiscal measures in 2018 budget in capital Niamey and arrested three civil society leaders. Students demanding reinstatement of five classmates expelled mid-March clashed with security forces 18 April at University of Niamey, several students injured. In west, unidentified gunmen 11 April kidnapped German humanitarian worker 30km from Ayorou in Tillaberi region near Mali border. President Issoufou 1 April said govt will not engage in talks with Boko Haram for release of 39 women abducted in Diffa region in July 2017. FM Ibrahim Yacoub asked to resign 11 April, reportedly for opposition to electoral reforms he deemed non-transparent.

Security forces continued to clash with Boko Haram (BH) militants in Borno state in north east, as herder-farmer violence and rural banditry spiralled, with about 500 killed overall. Army 1 April repelled BH attacks on base and two villages near Borno state capital Maiduguri, thirteen insurgents, thirteen villagers and one soldier killed. Army 7 April killed three insurgents and freed 149 captives at BH hideout in Yerimari Kura. Army 8 April hit BH at Arege and Tumbun Rago. Army 13 April killed seven BH fleeing Sambisa forest. Cameroonian soldiers and local vigilantes of Zigague in Cameroon 18 April attacked BH cell in Dougouma in Nigeria, killing four fighters. Army 20 April repelled BH insurgents in Gamboru Ngala area, killing one. BH 22 April shot dead eighteen forest workers near Gamboru; vehicle same day hit mine planted by BH near Wumbi village, three civilians killed. BH 26 April attacked Jidari Polo area of Maiduguri, repelled by army, nine people including five suicide bombers killed. Herder-farmer violence and related attacks on sedentary farming communities continued in five states; over twenty incidents reported with over 350 people killed, mostly in Benue and Nasarawa states, including 24 April killing of at least eighteen people, including two Catholic priests, at church in Mbalom village, Benue state, which drew Christian protests. Federal parliament 25 April called on govt to sack military and intelligence chiefs for incompetence. Rural banditry continued, especially in Zamfara and Kaduna states. In Zamfara state, army 4 April killed 21 suspected bandits in Tunga Daji village, two soldiers killed; suspected bandits 11 April stormed Kuru-Kuru and Jarkuka villages, killing 26; suspected cattle thieves 19 April attacked Kabaro and Danmami villages, killing at least 27. Suspected bandits 5 April attacked Sarari village, Kaduna state, killing at least five. In federal capital Abuja, police 16-17 April forcibly dispersed Shiite Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN) rallies demanding release of its leader Ibrahim El-Zakzaky, one IMN member reportedly killed. Kaduna state govt 18 April filed more charges against El-Zakzaky.
Opposition Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP) candidate Julius Maada Bio won 31 March presidential run-off with 51.81% of vote and was sworn in as president 4 April. Samura Kamara, losing candidate of ruling All People’s Congress (APC), 4 April said vote was marred by fraud and vowed to appeal result. Police 5 April clashed with youths in Kenema district in east after fighting broke out between APC and SLPP supporters. High Court 23–25 April placed injunctions on sixteen elected APC MPs, following claims by SLPP that they had illegally received govt salaries throughout election campaigns. Police 25 April forcibly removed them from parliament’s opening session. President Bio late April sacked all country’s ambassadors.

Opposition resumed protests 11–14 April after four-week break, again called for protests 25–28 April. Police fired tear gas to disperse demonstrations in capital Lomé and other cities, several protesters reportedly wounded.

Asia

U.S. State Department official in Beijing 18 April said U.S. was “deeply concerned” about China’s reported detention of tens of thousands of ethnic Uighurs in political re-education centres, including relatives of several U.S. citizens working for Radio Free Asia, and was considering sanctions under 2016 Magnitsky Act which targets foreign individuals responsible for human rights abuses. Followed early April call by U.S. Congressional-Executive Commission on China for U.S. administration to take stronger line on China’s detentions and intensifying digital surveillance in Xinjiang. U.S. State
Further signs of improving relations between China and Japan ahead of planned early May bilateral visit by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to Japan and trilateral summit also involving South Korean President Moon. China’s state councillor and foreign minister travelled to Japan 13-15 April to attend fourth China-Japan High-level Economic Dialogue, first such visit in eight years. Japan 15 April confirmed that it would consider cooperating on Belt and Road Initiative projects on case-by-case basis. Japanese and Chinese militaries 17 April resumed personnel exchange program that was halted in 2012 after Japan nationalised disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands; leading delegation to Tokyo 17 April, Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Major General Ci Guowei reportedly said program a precious asset, should become driving force for promoting bilateral relations. China and Japan also held ninth round of High-level Consultations on Maritime Affairs 19-20 April, producing agreement for their maritime transportation departments to restart China-Japan Shipping Policy Forum. Chinese official media welcomed focus on trade and improving relations, although Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono stressed “there will be no genuine improvement in the Japan-China relations without stability in the East China Sea”. China’s PLA Air Force, which has continued to expand its areas of operation and exercises, conducted new exercises over East and South China Seas 23 March, 18 April and 26 April after flying through Miyako Strait between two southern Japanese islands. Japan 7 April activated 2,100-member Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade for first time since World War II. Japan’s Self-Defence Force 13 April reported 23% drop in intercepts by its fighter jets for 2017; intercepts included 500 jet scrambles in response to PLA Air Force, 390 for Russian planes.

Month saw important moves toward rapprochement between North and South Korea with 27 April joint summit, which saw Kim Jong-un becoming first North Korean leader to set foot in South Korea for historic meeting with President Moon. Kim called meeting “starting point” for peace process and pledged “new history” for two countries; leaders issued joint statement committing to seek “complete denuclearisation” of peninsula; agreed to regular phone calls, to meet in Pyongyang later in year, to work on issues including family reunifications and transport links, and to suspend loudspeaker broadcasts and other propaganda across borders. China and U.S. welcomed agreement. Ahead of
In advance of other proliferating missile assets, China and North Korea signed a comprehensive defence agreement at a summit, North Korean state news agency (KCNA) 21 April announced Pyongyang’s suspension of all nuclear and intercontinental ballistic missile tests on grounds it had achieved “nuclear weaponisation”, reported North Korea would close Punggye-ri underground nuclear test site – although conclusions of Chinese study released 23 April, revealing partial collapse of site in Sept 2017, cast doubt among observers on Pyongyang’s motivations. Earlier in month, Kim attended concert given by delegation of South Korean musicians who travelled to Pyongyang 31 March–3 April, met musicians and accompanying South Korean politicians. KCNA 10 April for first time publically acknowledged ongoing dialogue with U.S. when it cautioned dissenting voices against spoiling nascent atmosphere of reconciliation. U.S. President Trump 18 April reported Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Pyongyang 30 March–1 April for talks at “extremely high levels” to prepare for Trump-Kim summit; said U.S. will continue campaign of “maximum pressure” until North Korea agrees to denuclearisation. Seoul reported that Kim offered to invite foreign experts to witness decommissioning of nuclear test site ahead of meeting with Trump.

- **COMMENTARY**: Korean Presidents’ Meeting is a Memorable Step Forward

**Taiwan Strait**  April 2018

China 18 April held first ever live-fire exercises in Taiwan Strait, saying they were intended as warning against Taiwanese who advocate independence. Xinhua news agency reported that nuclear-capable H-6K long-range bombers, Su-30 and J-11 fighters, armed helicopters and reconnaissance aircraft took part in two days of drills. Taiwanese govt dismissed move as “cheap verbal intimidation and sabre-rattling”. Chinese President Xi spoke for first time with Taiwanese delegation at Boao Forum for Asia on Hainan island 10 April; met with former Taiwanese Vice President Vincent Siew of Kuomintang party, called on Taiwan to cease calls for independence and reunify with mainland. U.S. and Taiwanese defence contractors due to meet in Taiwan in May to discuss military sales.

**Afghanistan**  April 2018

Month saw escalation of Taliban offensive attempting to capture district centres and move closer to provincial capitals, Ghazni and Sar-e Pul as it announced the start of its spring offensive; and increased insurgent attacks on civilians in urban areas. Dozens of Afghan army (ANSF) troops killed in clashes with Taliban, including in south, in provinces of Ghazni, Kandahar, Helmand and Zabul; in north, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Sar-e Pul, Takhar. U.S. watchdog for Afghanistan reconstruction 12 April reported Taliban controls, contests or claims to control 46.5% of all 407 districts – more than any time since 2001. With no formal response from Taliban to President Ghani’s 22 Feb “unconditional
time since 2001. With no formal response from Taliban to President Ghan’s 28 Feb “unconditional offer” for peace, Afghan and U.S. officials sought new ways to reinvigorate peace process, including greater role for Saudi Arabia in reconciliation and continuing pressure on Pakistan to encourage Taliban to negotiate; Pakistani PM Abassi 6 April visited Kabul to start “state-to-state” dialogue on peace process. Relations with Pakistan tense due to cross-border security incidents; Pakistani airstrikes and shelling reportedly hit areas bordering Dangam district, Kunar province 4 April in what Afghanistan called “violation of Afghan airspace” and “serious offence against national sovereignty and territorial integrity”, though no casualties; said ANSF would repel future attacks. At least one civilian, two ANSF soldiers and five Pakistani soldiers killed in clashes in Khost province 15 April. Voter registration for 20 Oct parliamentary and district elections started 14 April, amid mounting concerns over fraud and insecurity; Taliban and Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) attacked several centres across country, including Baghlan, Badghis, and Nangarhar and Kabul, where 57 people were killed 22 April by IS-KP; security officials said only around half of 7,355 polling stations safe for voting. IS-KP stepped up urban attacks, including twin attacks in Kabul 30 April killing 29, among them nine journalists. Significant civilian casualties during month, particularly in Kabul, Helmand and Kunduz; more than 50 civilians killed 2 April in Afghan airstrike which struck school in Dasht-e Archi, Kunduz province, prompting outrage on part of some Afghan politicians and religious leaders.

Bangladesh  APRIL 2018

Thousands of university students held nationwide protests blocking major roads and highways from 8 April, calling for reforms to civil service quota system that keeps 30% of public posts for descendants of those who fought in 1971 liberation war. In Dhaka, police used tear gas, batons and water cannons to disperse protests, injuring hundreds. Ruling Awami League (AL) deployed its student wing to counter demonstrations, further inflaming tensions. PM Sheikh Hasina 11 April promised to abolish all quotas. Demonstrations suspended 27 April after AL assurances of abolishing quota system. Comilla court 10 April rejected Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Chair Khaleda Zia’s bail petition in case involving 2015 deadly arson attack on bus during months-long violent confrontation between govt and opposition. Jail authorities 10 April denied BNP leaders permission to meet Zia in prison; BNP continued to express concern about her treatment in jail. Meeting with Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Keshav Gokhale in Dhaka 9 April, PM Hasina urged India to pressure Myanmar to take back over one million Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh (see Myanmar). UN refugee agency 13 April signed memorandum of understanding with Bangladesh on voluntary returns of Rohingya refugees but said conditions in Myanmar were not yet conducive to safe, dignified and sustainable repatriation. Hasina asked visiting UN Security Council delegation 30 April to pressure Myanmar to take back refugees.
34 suspected Maoists including at least seven women killed in 22 April clash with security forces in Kasansur area, Gadchiroli district, Maharashtra state; sixteen bodies recovered immediately, at least eighteen found in nearby river in following days. Security forces 23 April killed six suspected Maoists in separate incident in Jimalgatta area, Gadchiroli. Police 3 April killed three suspected Maoist insurgents, one man and two women, in clash in Gadchiroli district, reportedly including top-ranking Maoist leader from Dandakaranya region, Chhattisgarh state. In Bijapur district, Bastar state, suspected Maoists 9 April targeted bus carrying 30 District Reserve Guard officers with IED, killing two officers; PM Modi was scheduled to visit district several days later. Senior Maoist leader surrendered to police in Samblapur, Odisha state 13 April; group of 60 Maoists surrendered in Narayanpur district, Chhattisgarh 26 April.

At least twenty killed in clashes between alleged separatist militants and security forces south of Srinagar 1 April. Fatalities included thirteen suspected militants and three Indian soldiers; three civilians killed later same day when police fired on thousands of stone-throwing demonstrators protesting killings. Schools, colleges and businesses went on strike in protest; authorities imposed security restrictions and deployed additional troops and barricades, suspended cell phone and internet services, shutting down most of state. Four civilians killed in Khudwani village in Kulgam district 11 April when security forces fired on protesters throwing stones in attempt to stop operation against suspected militants. Gunfight in southern Tral area 24 April resulted in two soldiers and four suspected militants killed; Tral residents responded with protests. One civilian and two suspected rebels reported killed in clash between Indian troops and rebels in southern Kashmir 30 April. Tensions also increased over case of rape and murder of eight-year-old Muslim girl held captive in Jammu in Hindu temple in Kathua district in south of Jammu and Kashmir, with brutality of crime sparking protests across India. Police filed charges 9 April against eight Muslim men; case assumed communal dimension amid suspicions girl was targeted because of her ethnicity and religion, while two ministers from ruling Bharatiya Janata party were forced to resign for joining Hindu nationalist-organised rally in support of the accused. Authorities 19 April closed several colleges and schools in state to thwart student protests demanding justice. Court resumed hearing case 28 April. Pakistan and India 30 March agreed to address complaints of harassment of diplomats in accordance with bilaterally agreed 1992 “code of conduct” on treatment of diplomatic and consular staff; came after Pakistan temporarily recalled its high commissioner to New Delhi for consultations following alleged spike in harassment of Pakistani diplomats and their families, and Indian complaints about treatment of its diplomats in Islamabad.
Maldives  APRIL 2018

UN Human Rights Committee ruled that exiled former President Nasheed’s terrorism conviction was based on flawed evidence and violated his right to a fair trial, arguing he should be allowed to stand for election; ruling made public 16 April. Maldives govt rejected call, saying conviction was “lawful and final”. EU 19 April issued report following Jan election follow-up mission; report stated electoral conditions had to change “so that the next elections are held in line with international obligations”, noting developments since Feb declaration of state of emergency had exacerbated issues; govt refuted report’s findings, reiterating invitation to international groups to observe electoral process.

Nepal  APRIL 2018

New govt’s regional diplomatic engagement continued with PM KP Oli completing state visit to India 6–8 April in ongoing effort to repair bilateral relationship and rebuild trust; visit included agreements signed to strengthen development cooperation. Indian PM Modi scheduled to visit Nepal 11-12 May; trip to begin in Province 2 – only province composed of Madhes-only districts along the southern plains. FM Pradeep Gyawali visited China 16–21 April, meeting with his Chinese counterpart to discuss increased bilateral cooperation through development of infrastructure projects, transport networks, and trade especially through Belt and Road Initiative. Despite several months of discussions, efforts to unify ruling UML and CPN (Maoist Centre) parties continued to be delayed due to power-sharing issues and differences over ideology; the two parties leading the leftist coalition missed their own deadline to finalise merger by 22 April; talks ongoing between UML Chairman Oli and Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Nepal Army formed board of inquiry to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation of teenage girl in South Sudan by Nepalese peacekeepers deployed with UN peacekeeping mission there.

Pakistan  APRIL 2018

Late-March protests by Pashtun Tahaffuz (protection) Movement (PTM) supporters continued across country, triggered by arrest of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) political alliance chief Arif Khan Wazir and three other PTM leaders in South Waziristan’s Wana town, and demanding end to
alleged persecution of Pashtuns countrywide; included large demonstration in Peshawar 8 April demanding accountability over enforced disappearances. Military 10 April transferred responsibilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Lower and Upper Dir districts to civil administration, handed military checkpoints to police after ten years of military control – seen by some as evidence of PTM impact. Senate 13 April approved bill to extend jurisdiction of Supreme Court (SC) and Peshawar High Court to FATA. Violence in Balochistan provincial capital Quetta (south west) included four members of Christian family shot dead 2 April and five people killed in clashes same day; two Christians killed by gunman outside church 15 April; six police killed by suicide bombers 24 April. City also saw several attacks on Shiite Hazara community: militants 1 April shot dead Hazara man, prompting protests about govt failure to provide security; three Hazaras killed 18 and 22 April. At least three people reported killed in IED explosion at wedding in North Waziristan 27 April. Anti-terrorism court 3 April declared Khadim Hussain Rizvi, leader of radical Sunni group Barelvi Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (or Labaik), and two others culpable for Nov 2017 occupation of Islamabad-Rawalpindi bridge; Labaik responded by blocking Lahore’s entry and exit points, ending demonstration 13 April after govt reportedly accepted demands. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan 16 April released annual report highlighting increased enforced disappearances, attacks on minorities and curbs on free speech and association; armed men subsequently entered Lahore home of report’s editor Maryam Hassan, taking laptop, mobile and USB devices and interrogating her about her work. SC 13 April ruled parliamentary disqualification under article 62 (1)(f) of constitution is for life, formally barring former PM Sharif from re-entering electoral politics.

Sri Lanka  APRIL 2018

Splits within ruling coalition worsened despite parliament 4 April voting down motion of no confidence against PM Ranil Wickremesinghe by 76-122. Sixteen members of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) bloc loyal to President Sirisena who supported motion resigned from their cabinet positions as ministers/junior ministers 11 April and declared intention to sit in opposition, leaving SLFP further split over whether to remain in coalition with United National Party (UNP). PM received unanimous backing of his own UNP and all minority parties including Tamil National Alliance, Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and smaller Tamil and Muslim parties. Joint opposition led by former President Rajapaksa which brought no-confidence motion seen as weakened by loss. President 12 April prorogued parliament until 8 May to gain more time to manage crisis in SLFP and reshuffle cabinet. More than 300 suspects arrested for early March anti-Muslim attacks, with high-profile accused, including head of militant Buddhist group Mahasohon Balakaya, remaining in jail. Six members of European Parliament Committee on International Trade visited Sri Lanka early April to follow up on commitments made in exchange for GSP+ trade preferences; highlighted “general progress” but stressed more needed to implement international human rights conventions and improve labour conditions; also said they were “not satisfied that adequate policing and protection was provided for those [Muslims] who were under attack” in recent violence and called for govt to ensure no impunity for perpetrators.
Cambodia  APRIL 2018

In 3 April statement PM Hun Sen claimed his govt had thwarted “colour revolution” planned by now-dissolved opposition Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP) and its Western backers. Former CNRP parliamentarian denied accusation, saying it was intended to cause confusion. Addressing students in Phnom Penh 10 April, Hun Sen said that anti-govt group Khmer National Liberation Front (KNLF), based in Denmark, planned to detonate bombs in capital and in Siem Reap province 12 April around traditional New Year celebrations. Opposition leaders continued calls to boycott general election planned for 29 July if CNRP is not reinstated and allowed to field candidates.

Indonesia  APRIL 2018

Military reported clashes between security forces and separatist rebels in Papua province close to Grasberg copper mine in first days of April; said one soldier and two suspected rebels killed, separatists reported just one of their fighters and at least 28 soldiers killed, also a ten-year-old boy.

Myanmar  APRIL 2018

In north east, clashes escalated between military and Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) across several townships in Kachin State. KIO 6 April attacked Myanmar military base in Hpakant township, reportedly killing several soldiers. Govt forces 11 April attacked KIO’s Laiza HQ and other bases in major new offensive including ground and air strikes. Military reportedly deployed some 2,000 troops as well as aircraft. Some 4,000 civilians reportedly displaced by late April, particularly around Tanai township; UN reported 10,000 displaced since Jan, amid growing concern over humanitarian situation. As repatriation of some 900,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar remained stalled, govt delegation made first visit to Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh 11 April; refugees presented them with list of conditions for their return including restitution, restoration of citizenship and rights, and international security presence. UN Security Council discussed Rohingya crisis in context of annual debate on conflict-related sexual violence 16 April, with Myanmar military listed as perpetrator for first time. Security Council visited Bangladesh and Myanmar 29 April-1 May to review progress in
implementing its Nov 2017 Presidential Statement. Ahead of visit, UN secretary-general appointed Christine Schraner Burgener, current Swiss ambassador to Germany, as special envoy on Myanmar. Two boats carrying Rohingya refugees believed to have departed from Sittwe, Rakhine State headed to Malaysia and Indonesia during month, first known Rohingya smuggling vessels to cross Bay of Bengal in over a year. Military 10 April reported seven soldiers including four officers sentenced to ten years’ prison for killing of Rohingyas in Inn Din village in Sept 2017. Court 11 April rejected motion from defence to dismiss case against two Reuters journalists investigating case. EU late April extended and strengthened arms embargo against Myanmar and started preparing individual sanctions against army officials. International Criminal Court prosecutor 9 April asked court to rule on whether it has jurisdiction over deportations of Rohingyas from Myanmar to Bangladesh as possible crime against humanity.

Philippines  APRIL 2018

Efforts continued to pass Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) by 1 June – when second regular session of Congress adjourns – for president to sign into law. BBL will establish new Bangsamoro Region with wider autonomy to replace Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) to implement 2014 peace agreement. Joint committee of House of Representatives 16 April approved BBL version endorsed by President Duterte and submitted by Bangsamoro Transition Commission. MILF secretariat Chair Mohammad Ameen 3 April said MILF will not disarm up to 9,000 former fighters as scheduled in May unless congress passes BBL. Fifteen suspected ISIS-linked militants reported killed in clashes with military in southern Philippines mid-April; military reported several civilians killed in attacks by ISIS-linked militants. Duterte 4 April announced intention to resume peace talks with Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), National Democratic Front (NDF) and New People’s Army (NPA) insurgency, after calling off talks Nov 2017; said rebels must first agree to ceasefire. Ministry of defence and military said insurgents must also stop extortion and abandon plan to join a coalition govt. Duterte 21 April said he had set 60-day timeframe for revived talks, urging Netherlands-based leader Jose Maria Sison to join talks. Security forces reported at least four NPA killed in clashes in Camarines Sur province 8 and 10 April; several suspected NPA rebels killed in clashes in Mindanao 21 April; 24 April reported they had captured NPA leader and two followers following clash in Massim, southern Mindanao. Two injured by bomb outside church in Koronadal, Mindanao 29 April; authorities blamed Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Suspected Abu Sayyaf militants 28 April beheaded two Christian farmers in Maguindanao.

South China Sea  APRIL 2018
China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) held multiple major live-fire drills and manoeuvres in South China Sea (SCS), Taiwan Strait and Western Pacific Ocean east of strategic Bashi Channel between 24 March - 26 April. PLA 12 April conducted naval parade off Hainan island, China’s largest-ever modern naval display featuring 48 warships (over half commissioned after 2012), 76 aircrafts, more than 10,000 troops. Reviewing display, President Xi pledged to further accelerate navy’s modernisation and development. China’s National People’s Congress 21 March transferred administrative control of coastguard from civilian to military authority, enhancing Communist Party and military control of China’s maritime operations. Philippine foreign minister claimed 12 April Manila and Beijing are “quite near” start of joint oil and gas exploration project, contingent on agreeing legal framework and technical details; said China had pledged not to build new installations on Scarborough Shoal, which is claimed by both countries. U.S. early April said China has deployed military jamming equipment capable of disrupting communications and radar systems on two features it controls in Spratly archipelago. Philippines newspaper 18 April published photos of two Chinese military transport aircraft on archipelago's Mischief Reef. In 17 April testimony to U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral Philip S. Davidson, nominee to head U.S. Pacific Command, stated that “China is now capable of controlling the South China Sea in all scenarios short of war with the United States”. Canadian Senate 24 April passed non-binding resolution criticising China’s “hostile behaviour” in SCS; China called move “irresponsible”. Russia and Vietnam 4 April signed roadmap on increased military cooperation for 2018-2020. Australian media reported China’s PLA Navy 15 April “challenged” two Australian frigates transiting SCS en route to Vietnam; Beijing said its ships behaved professionally during “encounter”.

Following Feb agreement between govt and MARA Patani (umbrella group of five Malay-Muslim separatist groups in exile), PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 17 April announced pilot “safety zone” would be established in Cho Airong district, Narathiwat province in Deep South by end of April, but MARA Patani told media some issues remain to be resolved. Intended as confidence-building measure, safety zone calls for cessation of attacks on civilians; however lack of participation of main militant group, Barisan Revolusi Nasional Patani Melayu (BRN), in MARA Patani process has led to concerns group will sabotage safety zone. Earlier, Prayuth and cabinet 4 April visited Pattani province, meeting with local communities. Ongoing violence in Deep South included: in Narathiwat province, militants 3 April shot dead senior police officer at his home in Sungai Padi district, and three motorcycle-borne bombs exploded in Sungai Kolok 9 April, wounding at least thirteen. In Pattani province, gunmen 8 April killed village defence volunteer in Mayo district; police 10 April killed two insurgents during gun battle in Yarang district; militants 16 April killed two men in Khok Pho district. National Legislative Assembly 3 April forwarded organic law on election of MPs to Constitutional Court for ruling on its constitutionality, on orders from PM, raising concerns over possibility of further delays to general election promised for Feb 2019; Prayuth promised “quick vetting”. Prayuth 3 April told reporters he would be willing to accept PM’s post; follows recent formation of several small parties to support him as PM after a general election.
Papua New Guinea  APRIL 2018

Five people reported killed in inter-tribal conflict in Hela Province (centre) late month. Fighting reportedly flared up after 7.5 magnitude earthquake late Feb displaced thousands; over a dozen reported killed in tribal clashes since then.

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina  APRIL 2018

Visiting Sarajevo 10 April, PM of Bulgaria – currently holding presidency of the Council of the EU – warned that Bosnia faces political paralysis if ethnic political blocs fail to agree on electoral reform ahead of general elections due in Oct, required to form new govt at state and federation level. Upper chamber of parliament cannot be established without new law after Constitutional Court Dec 2016 ruled previous electoral mechanism unconstitutional, and subsequently invalidated those parts of law. Senior U.S. diplomat warned U.S. congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs of destabilising consequences of potential ensuing crisis. Speaker of Russia’s upper house of parliament visited capital Sarajevo 23 April, gave speech criticising NATO enlargement in Balkans; next day visited Bosnian Serb capital Banja Luka, met with Republika Srpska leader Milorad Dodik and reiterated Moscow’s support for entity. Police arrested two people in two anti-terror raids in Sarajevo 10 April, found weapons, bombs, ammunition and Islamic State (ISIS) flags.

Kosovo  APRIL 2018

European Commission report on Kosovo 17 April criticised lack of progress on war crimes prosecution; lack of cooperation with Serbian authorities on issue; and expressed concern over willingness to prosecute former members of Kosovo Liberation Army. Report called for Kosovo and
Serbia to “remain engaged” in dialogue to normalise relations. In interview with Guardian newspaper, Serbian President Vučić said he expects agreement this year, Serbia “ready to discuss every single issue” for compromise solution. EU 3 April criticised Pristina for late March deportation to Turkey of six Turkish nationals wanted for alleged links to Gülen movement which Ankara blames for July 2016 coup attempt; said deportations raise questions about respect for human rights and due process. Kosovo parliament 4 April voted to establish committee to investigate deportations.

➔ Macedonia  APRIL 2018

Greek and Macedonian foreign ministers met in Ohrid 12 April for another round of talks to resolve ongoing name dispute; Macedonian Foreign Minister Nikola Dimitrov reported progress on some issues, differences on others; said they talked for first time about time frame and necessary steps “if a solution is reached and needs to be implemented”. Greek FM Nikos Kotzias said “fewer topics remain to be solved, however these are the hardest ones”. Dimitrov said that sides’ work groups came up with aligned draft document addressing issues including Greek fears of Macedonian irredentism toward northern Greek province Macedonia. FMs met again in Vienna 25 April with UN mediator in dispute Matthew Nimetz, who said “both sides are very dedicated to reaching a solution”. PM Zaev survived no-confidence vote in parliament 11 April by 62-40 votes. Opposition MPs ended four-month boycott of parliament in order to vote; parliament subsequently passed three bills required for progress on EU accession.

➔ Armenia  APRIL 2018

Political crisis as unprecedented anti-govt protest movement forced resignation 23 April of former President Sargsyan from PM position he took up days earlier. Govt 9 April announced it would nominate Sargsyan, who was president for ten years until early March 2018, to position of PM, which under new 2015 constitution takes on hitherto presidential powers. Announcement prompted hundreds to join protests organised by MP Nikol Pashinyan of opposition Yelk alliance and a number of opposition activists in Yerevan calling for Sargsyan to step down. Tensions aggravated by violent actions of police trying to disperse and arrest protesters 16 April. Lawmakers 17 April elected Sargsyan as PM, prompting thousands across country to join demonstrations – by 22 April numbering over 100,000 in Yerevan’s main square, largest protests in Armenia’s post-independence history.

Sargsyan walked out of 22 April dialogue with Pashinyan, who was later detained by security forces, released next day. Sargsyan unexpectedly resigned 23 April, stating “Pashinyan was right. I got it
wrong”. Planned talks between Pashinyan and acting PM Karapetyan 25 April to discuss transitional period, election of new PM and date for snap parliamentary elections were cancelled at last minute, prompting resumption of mass protests. Speaker of parliament 26 April announced parliament would elect new interim PM on 1 May. Yelk alliance 30 April officially nominated Pashinyan for PM position; meeting with parties in parliament same day, Pashinyan promised no rapid change in Armenian foreign policy, calling for cooperation with both Russia and the West; called for reform of electoral system prior to new parliamentary elections.

- COMMENTARY: “Velvet Revolution” Takes Armenia into the Unknown

Azerbaijan  APRIL 2018

President Aliyev won 11 April snap presidential election with 86% of vote for his fourth term in office. Main opposition parties boycotted poll; OSCE election observation mission preliminary assessment noted several shortcomings including restrictive political environment, limits on fundamental freedoms, and lack of genuine competition, prompting verbal attacks by pro-govt media at 12 April press conference. In his first post-election public address, Aliyev promised more work on Nagorno-Karabakh issue in international institutions, while still highlighting need for continued modernisation of army.

Georgia  APRIL 2018

Govt 4 April unveiled new peace initiative for breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia, consisting of new package of laws and project papers in three main areas: simplified registration, increased trade, and education opportunities for people living in de facto entities; represents gov’t first plan in at least five years, reportedly took over a year to build consensus around it within ministries and some opposition parties. De facto authorities in breakaway regions declined plan, which they warned could provoke nationalist calls to halt all contact with Georgia; observers noted that Tbilisi had failed to consult de facto officials while preparing it. Moscow criticised initiative. Tbilisi gov’t to submit plan for parliamentary approval in coming weeks prior to fundraising in foreign capitals.
Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)  April 2018

With threat of military escalation still high, observers warned that political turmoil in Armenia (see Armenia) increases risks in Nagorno-Karabakh and could create temptation for Yerevan or Baku to launch new attacks in conflict zone. Armenian side 22 April distributed video footage of Azerbaijani tanks moving close to southern location of Line of Contact (LoC); Azerbaijan denied, while OSCE Minsk Group 23 April called for restraint “at this delicate time”. Overall situation in conflict zone stayed tense but calm, with sides reporting slight increase in exchanges of fire. Three Armenian soldiers reported killed at military units in southern (9 April) and northern locations (15 and 17 April) of LoC with no connection to attacks from Azerbaijani side. Azerbaijan 18 April reported one civilian wounded at central location of LoC; Armenian side denied. Marking second anniversary of “Four-Day War” 2 April, Armenian and Azerbaijani officials made statements blaming other side for conflict.

Russia/North Caucasus  April 2018

Security forces 19 April reported they had thwarted planned attack on school in Stavropol. In Dagestan, two counter-terrorism operations launched in Derbent city 21 April; National Antiterrorism Committee reported nine suspected militants killed, believed to be planning terror attacks during public holidays in May. Federal Security Service reported suspected militant killed same day in Stavropol Krai. Chechen court 25 April extended pre-trial detention of Oyub Titiyev, Memorial Chechnya director being held on drug possession charge which he denies, for another month until 9 June.

Belarus  April 2018

Parliament 19 April passed first reading of draft amendments to media law that would tighten control over online media and social media. European Parliament same day called on Belarus to “immediately and unconditionally” abandon amendments, which they said threaten free speech; and calling for authorities to rehabilitate political prisoners and end harassment of independent media.
Representatives of Chisinau govt and Transnistria 24 April agreed that vehicles in separatist region can use neutral licence plates starting in Sept 2018. EU official said agreement, which is backed by Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “represents an important step forward and contributes to a positive dynamic in the Transnistrian settlement process”, and would “bring tangible benefits to the population”. At 12 April forum in Ukrainian capital Kyiv, PM suggested Russia withdraw its roughly 1,412 troops stationed in Transnistria, via Ukraine. Both Russia and Ukraine denounced proposal.

Negotiations between Ukraine, Western allies and Russia on Donbas peacekeepers remained stalled. U.S. envoy Volker 13 April said peacekeepers would consist of voluntary national contributions rather than be a traditional UN operation, rejected calls to strip Russia of its UN Security Council veto, and reiterated the U.S. had “not heard anything back from Russia” for three months; Moscow rebutted that Ukraine and its allies had still not submitted a counter-proposal to Russia’s Sept 2017 draft. Ukrainian press 3 April reported Normandy Four leaders from France, Germany and Ukraine would meet without Russia to discuss “ways to accelerate implementation of agreements”. Ukrainian President Poroshenko 13 April said over 40 countries expressed willingness to contribute troops and that he had asked the UN to send a needs-assessment mission to Donbas. Parliament 5 April adopted in first reading the law on national security for civilian oversight of secret services and realisation of NATO standards. Far-right anti-corruption march 3 April drew 5,000-10,000 nationalist demonstrators but remained peaceful. Russian FM Lavrov 19 April threatened “harsh retaliatory measures” after Ukraine detained crew of Russian fishing boat off Crimea. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) 24 April adopted Resolution 2209 that Donbas regions not controlled by govt are “temporarily under the effective control of Russian authorities”. Ukraine 30 April replaced Anti-Terrorist Operation in Donbas with United Forces Operation in line with “reintegration law” adopted in Jan, which empowers president to use military to liberate Donbas. Violence in conflict zone increased slightly as observance of March ceasefire waned. At least five Ukrainian soldiers, six separatist fighters and eleven civilians reported killed; up to eighteen civilians injured 1-30 April.
Greek Cypriot President Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci 16 April met for informal dinner in UN-controlled buffer zone for first time since July 2017 collapse in reunification talks. UN official described meeting as “frank and open exchange of views”; however, observers noted prospects for relaunching reunification talks remain dim. Tensions over hydrocarbons dispute in Eastern Mediterranean continued, but without serious confrontation; ExxonMobil vessel 5 April completed ten-day exploration in Cyprus’s exclusive economic zone. Amid increasing tensions between Turkey and Israel over Gaza protests (see Israel/Palestine), and between Turkey and Greece (see Turkey), Anastasiades and Greek PM Tsipras 4 April met with Israeli PM Netanyahu to discuss construction of gas pipeline from Israel to Western Europe via Cyprus and Greece; follow-up trilateral summit planned in Nicosia in May.

Military operations in south east continued, with near fourfold increase in fatalities in March and April (30 state security force members, at least 41 Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militants, three civilians) compared to Jan-Feb (nine security force members, at least eleven PKK militants). Fatalities in April concentrated mostly in Şırnak, Hakkari and Hatay. Military continued cross-border attacks in northern Iraq targeting PKK positions; security sources 28 March reported military establishing new base in Hakkari’s Şemdinli district near Iraqi border to combat PKK. Crackdown on Kurdish movement members/sympathisers continued. President Erdoğan 18 April called for early presidential and parliamentary elections to be held 24 June. Govt extended state of emergency for seventh time hours after election announcement, prompting small-scale opposition protests across country. EU annual progress report 17 April for Turkey, considered most negative to date, underlined govt’s “legitimate right to fight against terrorism” and praised efforts to integrate Syrian refugees, but was highly critical of country’s democratic trajectory, erosion of rule of law and limiting of freedoms, argued that Turkey moving away from EU; also stressed that security measures should be proportionate; highlighted problem of immunity of security forces for reported killings in anti-PKK operations. Tensions between Greece and Turkey mounted as latter continued to hold two Greek soldiers who crossed into Turkish territory early March. Greece 10 April shot at Turkish helicopter near islet of Ro; Greek fighter jet 12 April crashed into Aegean while returning from intercept mission, resulting in death of pilot. Turkish media reported 27 April that security forces had caught Islamic State (ISIS) suspect in western Izmir province who reportedly had functioned as organisation’s “emir” in Syria’s Deir al-Zour, and mingled with Syrian refugees attempting to cross to Europe.
Kyrgyzstan  APRIL 2018

President Jeenbekov dismissed several senior officials early April, including head and deputy of State Committee for National Security and prosecutor general, dismantling networks loyal to former President Atambayev. Jeenbekov 19 April dismissed govt after parliament passed vote of no confidence in PM Isakov, close ally of Atambayev. Moves came amid signs of tensions between Jeenbekov and Atambayev, who earlier publicly criticised his successor after being elected head of ruling Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK) on 31 March. Atambayev said he does not want to become PM, plans to prepare SDPK for 2020 parliamentary elections. State Committee for National Security 26 April questioned former PM Isakov in relation to alleged corruption. Three people injured along border with Tajikistan in clash between some 50 residents of Kyrgyz town Uch-Dobo (Batken province) and Tajik settlement Khodja-Alo (Isfara district) 3 April, after Kyrgyz woman reportedly attempted to erect fence inside non-demarcated territory in infringement of border regulations. More than 500 people rallied against Chinese-owned gold mining and processing plant in Toguz-Toro district, Jalalabad province 11 April, claiming owners were breaching environmental laws; several buildings set on fire as protests turned violent, demonstrators reportedly attacked police with stones; fifteen people arrested.

Tajikistan  APRIL 2018

Afghan MP 4 April claimed that Taliban militants wounded in Kunduz region were being treated in Tajik hospitals. Tajik authorities denied this and late March allegation by Gen John Nicholson, U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, that Russian weapons are smuggled from Tajikistan into Afghanistan for Taliban use. Three people injured in clash between residents along border with Kyrgyzstan 3 April (see Kyrgyzstan).

Turkmenistan  APRIL 2018

President’s son and Deputy FM Serdar Berdymukhamedov re-elected in parliamentary elections 25 March to represent Dushak, Akhal district; turnout reported at 91%. As increasing numbers attempted to leave country to flee economic crisis, reports emerged from Ashgabat airport that authorities prevented some people from boarding planes.
Uzbekistan  
APRIL 2018

Amid ongoing investigations and arrests related to abuse of power and corruption by former senior officials, authorities 30 March barred sons of Rustam Inoyatov, former head of National Security Service (SNB), and Botir Parpiyev, head of State Tax Committee, from leaving country.

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia  
APRIL 2018

Peace process with Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) received blow with arrest of former commander Jesús Santrich in Bogotá 9 April in joint U.S.-Colombia operation. Santrich accused of conspiring to ship ten tons of cocaine to U.S.; FARC claimed he was framed in set-up, while political right argued that arrest showed that peace deal is a sham. FARC dissident group Oliver Sinisterra front led by alias “Guacho” continued violent attacks along Ecuadorian border, especially targeting electrical pylons; 13 April killed two Ecuadorian journalists and their driver who they had kidnapped late March. Ecuadorian govt 17 April claimed group abducted two more Ecuadorian citizens mid-April. Negotiations between govt and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group continued after resuming mid-March, turning on 2 April to evaluation of previous bilateral ceasefire and political participation issues. In unexpected move 18 April, Ecuadorian President Moreno, hosting talks, announced Ecuador would no longer act as guarantor and negotiations could no longer take place near Quito; observers believe decision came in response to Colombian govt’s apparent unwillingness to help in resolving ordeal of journalists kidnapped by Oliver Sinisterra front. Colombian govt looking for new host for talks with next cycle planned for May; Chile 20 April said it was willing to be host. ELN 5 April claimed credit for two previous abductions in Arauca (east) along Venezuelan border; police 3 April said group kidnapped four people in Catatumbo, Norte de Santander province (north). Also in Catatumbo, conflict for territorial control continued between ELN and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL), dissident guerrilla group from 1990s peace process linked to drug trade, displacing thousands since mid-March and killing unknown number; EPL 24 April released video reportedly showing six kidnapped ELN fighters. Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC), country’s main drug trafficking group, 12 April attacked motorcade of judges and police in San Pedro de Urabá (north west), killing eight policemen, its deadliest attack ever against Colombian forces. Iván Duque and Gustavo Petro continue to lead in polls for upcoming presidential elections; ahead of 27 May first round concerns increased over possible rise in violence against social leaders.
Venezuela  APRIL 2018

Govt pressed on with planned presidential election 20 May despite international and internal pressure to postpone and improve conditions for opposition, which remains deeply split. Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance continued to call for election boycott, refusing to back sole opposition candidate Henri Falcón of Avanzada Progresista party. MUD and radical opposition wing Soy Venezuela 17 April briefly united around vote in opposition-led National Assembly calling for President Maduro to be tried for corruption (as proposed by exiled dissident Supreme Court judges), with 105 out of 167 legislators voting in favour of resolution, only four opposition legislators abstaining; only two legislators of ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) present. Maduro 10 April announced he would not attend Summit of the Americas in Peruvian capital Lima 13 April, calling it a “waste of time”, after previously insisting he would attend despite Peruvian govt rescinding his invitation. U.S. VP Pence, attending summit in place of U.S. President Trump, called Venezuela “failed state”, said U.S. would not stand by while it collapsed. Ad hoc Lima Group of govts issued fresh communiqué reiterating calls for free and fair elections and assistance in tackling humanitarian emergency. U.S. Treasury Sec Steven Mnuchin 19 April hosted meeting of officials from sixteen European and Latin American countries who agreed to strengthen efforts to seize Venezuelan assets acquired corruptly. Govt 5 April suspended Panamanian airline Copa’s flights for three months in response to Panama’s introduction late March of sanctions banning Panamanian firms’ business with 50 Venezuelan officials including Maduro. Measure prompted Panamanian decision to suspend Venezuelan airlines from Caracas–Panama route as well; presidents 26 April agreed to restore normal aviation traffic and set up joint commission under their foreign ministers to review bilateral relations.

Maduro 12 April handed Oil Minister Manuel Quevedo powers to reform energy sector, despite reported Russian and Chinese pressure to sack him.

- **OP-ED: Why China Should Help Solve Venezuela’s Deepening Crisis**

Guatemala  APRIL 2018

Commission in charge of selecting candidates for new attorney general 17 April presented final list of six to govt; President Morales to decide by 16 May amid concerns he will appoint a counter-reformist candidate, and calls from civil society organisations that he conduct an open and transparent selection process. Former military dictator José Efraín Ríos Montt, whose trial on charges of genocide...
during counter-insurgent campaign in early 1980s had been scheduled to restart 6 April, died 1 April aged 91.

**Honduras  APRIL 2018**

UN-backed dialogue to promote political consensus following late 2017 electoral crisis stalled over possible decree that would make final negotiation document a binding agreement; President of National Congress Mauricio Oliva 5 April said “it would be illegal” to create such a decree. Former opposition candidate Salvador Nasralla 10 April announced withdrawal from talks, saying govt had “no real political will for solving the electoral crisis created by the fraud”; 15 April reaffirmed his commitment to challenge Nov 2017 election results. Official data released 3 April showed homicide rate continuing to fall, with 16% fewer murders Jan-March 2018 than same period 2017. President Hernández 16 April announced creation of Transnational Anti-Mara Unit to strengthen state response to gang violence, consisting of agencies from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and U.S. Operation Dragon IV, led by attorney general’s office, 17 April arrested 284 people with alleged links to organised crime and involvement in corruption, extortion and trafficking. Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro 13 April announced appointment of Luiz Antonio Guimarães Marrey as chief of support for Mission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH); appointment not well received by govt, confirming growing tensions between OAS, Hernández and MACCIH. U.S. President Trump 3 April threatened to cut aid if govt did not stem migration to U.S..

**El Salvador  APRIL 2018**

Trend of rising homicide rates continued throughout April, despite govt rhetoric linking alleged improvements in security situation to implementation of controversial “extraordinary measures” in place since 2016 that isolate gang members in jails. Police chief Howard Cotto 2 April announced 939 murders between Jan and March, equal to 10.4 homicides a day, explicitly linking rise to “extraordinary measures”; parliament 6 April voted to extend measures for another six months. Police 12 April announced increase in gang attacks against security forces early 2018. UN Human Rights Committee 5 April pointed to existence of “death squads” inside El Salvador’s armed forces, warning that large number of abuses remain unpunished. Businessman Carlos Calleja was elected presidential candidate of conservative ARENA party 22 April.
Nicaragua  APRIL 2018

Student- and civil society-led protests erupted in capital and other cities after govt 16 April introduced reforms to social security system cutting pension benefits and raising tax, prompting tens of thousands to take to streets; protests also venting fury over President Ortega’s authoritarian rule and close family grip on power, with calls for his resignation. UN human rights office 24 April said at least 25 people killed during protests, citing concerns over reports of unlawful killings, and alleged excessive use of force by security forces; other sources said more than 60 killed; fatalities included journalist Angel Gahon, shot dead 21 April while reporting on protests in city of Bluefields (south east). Ortega 24 April withdrew controversial changes in effort to restore peace. Dozens of arrested student protesters released same day; some accused police of torture and other ill-treatment while in custody. International observers condemned govt crackdown, including UN, Organization of American States and Pope Francis; Nicaraguan Church 24 April agreed to mediate between civil society and Ortega.

Haiti  APRIL 2018

Haitian nationals 4 April attacked Dominican Republic soldiers in border municipality Bánica, contributing to increasing hostility toward Haitians in Dominican Republic and growing unrest in border area; follows recent implementation of Dominican Republic’s reinforced border security plan to prevent illegal entry of Haitians. Concerns continued early April over proposed reconstitution of armed forces after President Moïse 27 March announced new seven-member high command, pledging development of 5,000-strong force to provide humanitarian assistance and control borders; critics point to army’s previous politicised role, with several members of new command involved in 1991 coup against former President Aristide. UN Security Council 10 April extended mandate of UN Mission for Justice Support in Haiti for another year.

Mexico  APRIL 2018

Political violence continued during run-up to 1 July elections, largest polling day in country’s history.
Political violence continued during run-up to 1 July elections, largest polling day in country's history; attacks on candidates included killings of Maribel Barajas Cortés, candidate for local assembly in Michoacán state (west) 11 April; José Efraín García, mayor of Tlahuapan, Puebla state (central) 12 April; Juan Carlos Andrade, mayor of Jilotlán de los Dolores, Jalisco state (west) 15 April. National Association of Mayors reported 121 mayors killed since 2006. Violence against journalists continued; police 5 April attacked two journalists and detained a third in Tijuana, Baja California state (north west), where they were covering forced displacement case. Authorities reported 4,206 homicides in Jan and Feb 2018, 11% more than in same period 2017, with Baja California, Guerrero, Mexico, Guanajuato and Jalisco states most violent. Public outrage followed 23 April announcement by Jalisco state prosecutors that three film students missing since March had been killed and dissolved in acid. Violence against women also a particular concern; National Citizen Observatory of Femicides 10 April presented report stating more than 8,900 women murdered between 2014 and 2017. Clashes between security forces and criminal groups continued claiming dozens of lives, including six civilians killed in crossfire in Reynosa, Tamaulipas state (north east) 11 April; six police and ten alleged attackers killed in shootout in Zihuatanejo, Guerrero state (south west) 17 April. Dozens killed in feuds and clashes between criminal actors, also responsible for forced displacement of civilians. Govt 10 April announced increase in soldiers deployed to southern border to appease U.S. govt and demonstrate cooperation on migration issue, amid continuing tense relations between the two countries.

- **COMMENTARY:** Addressing the Migration Bottleneck in Southern Mexico

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**Middle East & North Africa**

📅 **Israel/Palestine**  APRIL 2018

Israeli troops forcibly suppressed weekly Palestinian protests at Gaza-Israel border killing at least thirteen Palestinians, raising total since protests began 30 March to at least 42, and injuring over 5,500; violence could rise as largest protests expected 15 May when Palestinians commemorate expulsion of 750,000 Palestinians from Israel in 1948 war and U.S. 14 May plans to open embassy in Jerusalem. During protests at Gaza-Israel border 6 and 13 April, Israeli forces reportedly shot and killed Palestinian journalists. Separately Israeli forces killed several more Palestinians in Gaza. In West Bank, Israeli citizens killed two Palestinians accused of trying to attack Israelis: checkpoint security guards 2 April shot Palestinian near Tulkarem who later died; armed civilian killed another Palestinian in Mishor Adumim settlement 9 April. Also in West Bank, hate crimes against Palestinians increased mid-April, including burning of mosque and destruction of vehicles and property. Palestinian National Council, legislative body of Palestine Liberation Organization, met 30 April. Israel reportedly attacked air base in central Syria 9 April killing seven Iranians; Iran promised retaliation. Strikes on three bases in northern Syria 29-30 April, described by Syrian opposition as Israeli and by pro-Syrian govt website as Western, reportedly killed 38 Syrian soldiers in Hama and eighteen Iranian fighters. At Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia 15 April, Saudi King Salman announced contributions of $150mn to Islamic Waqf in Jerusalem, which administers holy sites, $50mn to UN agency for Palestinian refugees and increase in budgetary aid to Palestinian Authority.
from $7mn to $21mn per month.

- **COMMENTARY: Gaza Protests Mark Shift in Palestinian National Consciousness**

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**Lebanon**  
**APRIL 2018**

Ahead of first general election in nine years 6 May, supporters of PM Hariri-led Future Movement clashed with supporters of Nabil Badr of Beirut al-Watan party and damaged latter’s office in Beirut 16 April. Army intervened to end standoff between supporters of rival Druze parties south of Beirut 22 April. Independent Shiite candidate said same day that Hizbollah supporters beat him up for putting up election poster in Hizbollah stronghold, Bint Jbeil district in south. Lebanese Electoral Supervisory Committee 19 April condemned intervention of govt officials in campaigns. Police 24 April detained in Zgharta near Tripoli in north reported Islamic State (ISIS) commander who had fled Syria.

- **MEDIA RELEASE: Trigger List: Crisis Group raises Syria threat level to critical**

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**Syria**  
**APRIL 2018**

U.S. President Trump late March-early April plunged U.S. Syria policy into confusion, making clear he wants to seize territory still controlled by Islamic State (ISIS) and then withdraw in next several months; top military officials pushed back, highlighting risks of hasty withdrawal. Regime forces by mid-April had taken complete control of Eastern Ghouta, last significant rebel stronghold in greater Damascus; as talks over surrender deal stalled between govt and Jaish al-Islam, only rebel group still controlling part of Eastern Ghouta, regime 7 April allegedly conducted chemical weapons attack on rebel-held Douma, killing at least 42 people. In following hours, Jaish al-Islam accepted deal to evacuate thousands of fighters and civilians to Turkish-dominated territory north of Aleppo and release captives. U.S. and allies accused regime of conducting chemical attack, regime and Russia denied, with contradictory explanations. U.S., UK and France 14 April launched coordinated missile and airstrikes on three sites in Syria allegedly associated with regime’s chemical weapons program, informing Russia beforehand. Israel 9 April attacked air base in centre, which it had identified as command-and-control site for Iranian drone that entered Israeli airspace in Feb, killing seven Iranians; Iran promised retaliation. Strikes on army bases in north 29-30 April, described by Syrian opposition as Israeli and by pro-Syrian govt website as Western, reportedly killed 38 Syrian soldiers in Hama and eighteen Iranian fighters. In north, Turkey established two more observation posts 3 and 7 April along front line between rebel-held Idlib province and regime-controlled territory, bringing total to nine and consolidating Russian-Turkish efforts to pacify north west. Infighting continued
between rebel alliances Hei’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and Jabhat Tahrir al-Sham (JTS); parties 7 April agreed on ceasefire for mediation, which failed and fighting resumed 15 April; HTS took several towns in southern Idlib province, but lost several in western Aleppo province. Regime forces late April bombed areas in south Damascus held by jihadists and other rebels, and prepared for expected offensive against besieged rebel enclave north of Homs.

- MEDIA RELEASE: Trigger List: Crisis Group raises Syria threat level to critical

**Bahrain**  APRIL 2018

King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa 26 April commuted death sentences to life in prison for four Shiite detainees accused of forming terror cell.

**Iran**  APRIL 2018

U.S. and E3 (France, Germany and UK) 11 April held fourth round of talks to find way to assuage U.S. concerns over Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); despite reported progress, it remained uncertain whether they could find solution to satisfy White House without violating deal before President Trump’s 12 May deadline when he has threatened to withdraw from deal. President Rouhani 24 April warned there would be “severe consequences” if U.S. leaves deal. European Council 12 April did not adopt E3-led proposals for new Iran sanctions but extended for one year sanctions first imposed in 2011 responding to serious human rights violations. French President Macron during White House visit 24 April proposed talks with Trump on a new deal that would expand JCPOA, potentially curbing Iran’s ballistic missiles and regional activities. German Chancellor Merkel also tried during her 27 April visit to Washington to persuade Trump to stay in deal. President Rouhani 25 April questioned right of U.S. and allies to renegotiate deal. Israeli PM Netanyahu 30 April revealed cache of intelligence that allegedly showed Iran pursued nuclear weapons in past; information did not seem to add much to knowledge of UN nuclear inspectors. Attack, reportedly launched by Israel, on air base in central Syria 9 April killed seven Iranians; senior Iranian officials warned incident would “not remain unanswered”. Strikes on three bases in northern Syria 29-30 April, described by Syrian opposition as Israeli and by pro-Syrian govt website as Western, reportedly killed 38 Syrian soldiers in Hama and eighteen Iranian fighters. Iran condemned U.S.-led airstrikes against suspected Syrian chemical weapons facility 14 April, Supreme Leader Khamenei called it “major crime”. In south east, clash between border guards and alleged terrorist cell near border with Pakistan 17 April left three terrorists, one police officer and two security force members dead.
REPORT: Iran’s Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East

Iraq

April 2018

Ahead of parliamentary and governorate elections 12 May, campaigning officially began 15 April. Test of newly introduced electronic voting system 18 April reportedly exposed faults. Islamic State (ISIS) continued to launch attacks, especially against officials, in Diyala province in east, Kirkuk province in north and Nineveh province in north west; security source 14 April said roadside bomb in Diyala province killed local judge. Military 9 April reportedly killed prominent ISIS leader Abu Walid al-Checheni in Diyala province. Air force 19 April reportedly carried out strikes against ISIS base near Hajin in Syria with Syrian govt approval. Unclaimed suicide attack 8 April at political party headquarters in Anbar province in west killed four. Ambush on military convoy in Saladin province in north 11 April left five fighters of govt-aligned Shiite Popular Mobilisation Units dead; unclaimed bombing at their funeral 12 April killed sixteen. In far north, Turkey continued operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militants in early April: PKK forces claimed to have killed five Turkish soldiers 17 April and seven more 19 April, all in Barzan, northern Iraq.

Saudi Arabia

April 2018

Govt and UAE continued efforts to create regional front against Iranian, Qatari and Turkish influence: govt hosted Arab League summit in Dhahran 15 April and brought together 24 militaries 21 March-16 April for “Gulf Shield 1” training exercises. As Saudi-led coalition escalated campaign in Yemen, Huthi forces upped attacks on Saudi infrastructure and assets: Huthi forces 3 April attacked Saudi oil tanker in Red Sea off Yemeni port of Hodeidah and Saudi military 11 April shot down Huthi armed drone attempting attack on oil facility at Abha in south.

Yemen

April 2018
As Saudi-led coalition escalated campaign on multiple fronts, including on Huthis’ home province of Saada in north, Huthi forces increased missile attacks on Saudi infrastructure and assets; escalation could continue in May. In response to coalition strike on Hodeidah port 2 April that reportedly killed at least a dozen civilians, Huthi forces next day attacked Saudi oil tanker in Red Sea, causing slight damage. Huthis 11 April attempted armed drone strike on oil facility in southern Saudi city of Abha, but Saudi forces shot down drone. Coalition airstrikes took high civilian toll: strike on vehicle in west of Taiz province 20 April killed 21 passengers; strike on wedding party in south west of Hajja province 22 April killed at least twenty, including bride; strike on fuel station in Hajja 23 April killed thirteen civilians. Coalition airstrike in Hodeidah 19 April killed president of rebel Supreme Political Council, Saleh al-Sammad. Day before and day of his funeral 27–28 April Saudi-led coalition heavily bombarded capital Sanaa, hitting blood bank and around Sabaen square where thousands gathered for funeral. Coalition 27 April claimed that its strike on Sanaa killed two Huthi commanders and dozens of militiamen. In retaliation for Sammad’s death, Huthis claimed to have fired eight missiles at Saudi’s southern Jizan province 28 April; Saudi govt said it had intercepted four missiles and one Saudi citizen killed by debris. Division within coalition persisted; United Arab Emirates (UAE)-backed separatist Southern Transition Council which largely controls Aden in south remained at odds with Hadi govt. PM Daghr returned to Aden 12 April. UAE-aligned security services killed Islamic State (ISIS) leader Saleh Nasser Fadhil al-Bakshi in Aden 28 April. Newly appointed UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, following initial meetings with warring parties, briefed UN Security Council 17 April; said he would return to Yemen within two months with plan to revive talks, but that military escalation risked derailing peace efforts.

**United Arab Emirates**  APRIL 2018

Relations between govt and federal govt of Somalia deteriorated following latter’s objections in recent months to increased UAE cooperation with Somaliland and Puntland regions over which federal govt claims sovereignty. Somali federal govt 8 April seized almost $10mn in cash from Emirati plane at Mogadishu airport; UAE denounced action, saying money was to pay wages of Somali soldiers it had been training. Somalia 11 April said it would take over military training program from UAE. Emirati govt 15 April said it would stop training program and 16 April closed UAE-run hospital in Mogadishu (see Somalia).

**Algeria**  APRIL 2018

President Bouteflika 9 April made rare public appearance in Algiers 48 hours after ruling party
National Liberation Front urged him to run for fifth term in 2019 presidential election. Morocco early April said Western Sahara Polisario Front independence movement had entered UN-monitored buffer zones in Western Sahara from Algeria and accused Algeria of funding, protecting and diplomatically supporting Polisario Front (see Western Sahara). Govt 1 May said military killed two suspected Islamist militants, arrested eight others in April.

- COMMENTARY: The Youth Movement in Sahrawi Refugee Camps

Egypt APRIL 2018

Army 25 April said counter-terrorism operations in North Sinai in preceding week had killed 30 suspected Islamic State (ISIS) Sinai Province militants, including leader Nasser Abu Zaqoul, three police officers also killed. Fourteen ISIS militants 14 April attacked military base in central Sinai, killing eight soldiers. Govt 14 April extended state of emergency for three months. Cairo military court 10 April sentenced 36 people to death for involvement in attacks against Coptic churches in Cairo, Tanta and Alexandria in 2016-2017. Military court 24 April sentenced former anti-corruption chief Hisham Geneina to five years in prison on charges of spreading false news harmful to military, Geneina arrested 13 Feb after opposition presidential candidate Lt Gen Sami Anan chose him to run for VP. President Sisi 24 April signed law creating Supreme Council to Combat Terrorism and Extremism.

Libya APRIL 2018

Hospitalisation of eastern commander Khalifa Haftar prompted fears of fragmentation in his military coalition and possible mobilisation of his enemies in both western and eastern Libya seeking to reverse status quo in Benghazi in east; election of Khaled Mishri, member of party linked to Muslim Brotherhood, as president of Tripoli-based High State Council (HSC) strengthened opposition to dialogue among eastern constituencies. Field Marshal Haftar, commander of Libyan National Army (LNA), hospitalised in Paris 9-24 April, allegedly after suffering stroke. His opponents in west launched misinformation campaign claiming he was incapacitated or even dead. Haftar returned to Benghazi in east 26 April and addressed supporters, dispelling false rumours. Khaled Mishri, member of Justice and Construction Party (JCP), linked to Muslim Brotherhood, 8 April elected president of HSC, body loyal to UN-backed Presidency Council and rival to Tobruk-based parliament House of Representatives (HoR). Mishri and HoR President Aghela Saleh met in Morocco 23 April, but eastern constituencies remained opposed to overtures to HSC and Muslim Brotherhood, which they see as terrorist organisation. In east, LNA commander Salah Bulgheib 8 April survived assassination attempt
and LNA chief of staff 18 April survived car-bomb attack in Benghazi, one civilian killed. LNA 21 April said it had killed and injured dozens of “terrorists” in Sdada area near Misrata, 200km east of Tripoli. In south, inter-tribal clashes fuelled by national rivalries continued, albeit more sporadically; mortar attack on Sebha airport set civilian aircraft on fire 24 April. Pipeline carrying crude oil from Waha oil field into country’s biggest export terminal Es Sider shut down for several days after it was set on fire 21 April. Unidentified militants fired rockets at Mitiga airport in capital Tripoli 19 April, damaging arrivals hall and passenger aircraft belonging to state-run Libyan Airlines. Two armed groups aligned with Presidency Council’s Interior Ministry, Central Security Brigade (Ghaniwa Brigade) and Eighth Force (al-Nawasi Brigade), clashed in Tripoli 30 April, several reportedly wounded. UN political mission 5 April launched series of preparatory meetings for national conference, one pillar of UN Action Plan for Libya.

➡️ Mauritania  APRIL 2018

Opposition party National Forum for Democracy and Unity said it would contest legislative and municipal elections scheduled for Aug or Sept after previously boycotting votes.

➡️ Morocco  APRIL 2018

Govt 1 April said Polisario Front independence movement had entered UN-monitored buffer zones in Western Sahara from Algeria, threatened to take control of area (see Western Sahara).

- COMMENTARY: The Youth Movement in Sahrawi Refugee Camps

➡️ Tunisia  APRIL 2018

Security forces 11 April clashed with jihadist group linked to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Mghilla near Algerian border in west, one soldier killed. Campaign for 6 May local elections started 17 April; police and soldiers 29 April voted ahead of poll, first time security forces allowed to vote.
Morocco 1 April said Polisario Front independence movement had entered UN-monitored buffer zones in Western Sahara from Algeria, threatened to take control of area. Vote at UN Security Council on one-year renewal of UN mission MINURSO scheduled for 25 April postponed due to disagreements over content of resolution. Security Council 27 April passed amended resolution, pushed by U.S., renewing MINURSO's mandate for only six months, urging conflict parties to enter into direct talks as soon as possible and calling for end of status quo. China, Russia and Ethiopia abstained.

- **COMMENTARY**: The Youth Movement in Sahrawi Refugee Camps