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

Learn more about CrisisWatch →

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Global Overview

JANUARY 2020

Outlook for This Month
February 2020

⚡ Conflict Risk Alerts
In January, the security situation in the Sahel deteriorated, especially in central Mali, western Niger and northern Burkina Faso, where suspected jihadists inflicted a heavy toll on civilians. In Nigeria, Boko Haram stepped up attacks and jihadist group Ansaru claimed its first attack since 2013. Al-Shabaab intensified deadly raids in Kenya, and violence rose in Cameroon’s Anglophone areas and eastern DR Congo. Political tensions increased in Somalia’s Galmudug state and Guinea-Bissau, and security forces hardened a crackdown in neighbouring Guinea. February could see fighting erupt in Somalia’s Gedo region, escalate in the Central African Republic, and resurge in South Sudan where leaders face a new deadline to form a unity government. The U.S.’s killing of Soleimani caused U.S.-Iran tensions to soar, and Iraq felt the brunt of the fallout. Fighting intensified in northern Yemen and across the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border raising the risk that violence spread. Fighting looks set to escalate in north west Syria as Turkish forces strike back against government troops. The U.S.’s release of its peace plan for Israel-Palestine triggered an angry backlash and in Lebanon clashes between
protesters and security forces intensified. Venezuela’s political crisis deepened, but on the up side, the security situation in El Salvador improved, a key insurgent group in Thailand joined formal peace talks, Kosovo’s three-month political deadlock ended, and February could see a deal between Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan to resolve their dispute over the Nile waters.

Trends and Outlook

PRESIDENT’S TAKE

An Ill-named Peace Plan for Israel-Palestine

Robert Malley
President & CEO
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In his introduction to this month’s edition of CrisisWatch, our President Robert Malley reflects on the Trump administration’s "ignominious vision" for Israeli-Palestinian peace and growing instability in the Sahel. He also marks the 48th birthday of our colleague and friend Michael Kovrig, who spent it behind the walls of a Chinese prison.

Continue reading

In Africa, security in the Sahel continued to deteriorate as suspected jihadists upped attacks on civilians in northern Burkina Faso, intercommunal and jihadist violence intensified in central Mali, and in Niger jihadists carried out the deadliest assault yet on security forces, killing at least 89. In Kenya’s north east and east, Somali militant group Al-Shabaab stepped up the frequency and ambition of its attacks, while in neighbouring Somalia, tensions mounted in Galmudug state as rival camps appointed parallel parliaments and state presidents, and in coming weeks clan militias could clash in Gedo region. In South Sudan, new violence could break out this month as President Kiir and main
rebel leader Riek Machar may not have reached an agreement on core issues before the 22 February deadline to form a unity government. Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan made progress in talks to resolve their dispute over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Nile, creating an opportunity to strike a comprehensive deal in February.

Ahead of Cameroon’s parliamentary and local elections in February, Anglophone separatist militants determined to block the poll stepped up their attacks including against electoral staff and the military intensified deadly raids. In eastern DR Congo, militia violence rose in Ituri and North Kivu provinces and, as we feared, fighting escalated between armed groups and among ethnic groups in the Central African Republic’s east and north east, which could lead to larger scale violence in coming weeks.

In Nigeria, Boko Haram factions stepped up their attacks in the north east, and the jihadist group Ansaru claimed an attack in the north west for the first time since 2013. In Guinea, security forces hardened their crackdown on protests against President Condé’s alleged plan to run for a third term leaving at least six dead, while in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau, a standoff emerged amid allegations of electoral fraud.

In the Middle East and North Africa, the U.S.’s killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad caused U.S.-Iran tensions to soar, triggered Iranian strikes on the U.S. military in Iraq and reinvigorated Iraqi efforts to evict U.S. and coalition forces from the country. The White House’s long-awaited plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, published on 28 January, provoked an angry rejection by the Palestinian leadership, further dimming prospects for peace. As Lebanon’s dire economic situation worsened, the anti-government protest movement swelled and clashes between protesters and security forces intensified.

Battle picked up tempo on several fronts in northern Yemen and across the Yemen-Saudi Arabia border between Huthi forces and the Saudi-led coalition, raising the risk that fighting intensify and spread further in
February. Troop movements also suggested a looming escalation further south between the Sunni Islah party and forces backed by the United Arab Emirates. In north west Syria, fighting could intensify yet further as the Turkish military engages Russian-backed government forces in Idlib.

In Asia, in a major step forward in efforts to resolve the conflict in Thailand’s deep south, Barisan Revolusi Nasional, the main insurgent group, and government officials met for the first time in a formal peace dialogue. Though overall levels of violence have declined in recent years, ongoing attacks show that the conflict remains a threat.

In Latin America, Venezuela’s political crisis deepened as the government of President Maduro seized control of parliament. Both opposition leader Juan Guaidó and a member of parliament backed by Maduro, Luis Parra, now claim leadership of the National Assembly. In El Salvador, the security situation continued to improve with President Bukele reporting that January was the least deadly month since the end of the civil war in 1992.

In Europe and Central Asia, in a positive development, Kosovo’s President Thaçi on 20 January nominated Vetëvendosje party leader Albin Kurti as the next prime minister, ending three months of political deadlock.
Africa

Burkina Faso

Suspected jihadists stepped up attacks especially against local population in north, leaving over a hundred civilians dead, and continued their attacks in east and south west, while govt moved forward with plan to recruit civilian volunteers to counter jihadist threat. In north near border with Mali, suspected jihadists increasingly targeted civilians: twelve killed in Gasseliki 10 Jan and at least 39 killed in Silgadji 25 Jan, both Soum province, Sahel region; ten killed in Solle, Loroum province in North region 11 Jan; 36 killed in two villages in Sanmatenga province, Centre-North region 20 Jan; explosive device killed fourteen civilians on Toeni-Tougan road, Sourou province in Boucle du Mouhoun region 4 Jan; possibly in retaliation, security forces 6 Jan killed nine suspected Katiba Macina militants, arrested cell leader in Kolerou area in neighbouring Kossi province. In Soum province, security forces 3 Jan repelled attack on gendarmerie in Inata, killing at least ten assailants; explosive device killed five soldiers in Gorguel 17 Jan. Islamic State’s local affiliate 9 Jan claimed past attacks in northern areas where its presence was unconfirmed, including Sanmatenga and Kossi. In East region, suspected jihadists continued attacks, despite lull in clashes with Koglweogo community defence group: civilian killed in Kankandi, Tapoa province 10 Jan; explosive device 28 Jan killed six soldiers on Madjoari-Pama road, Kompienga province. In south west near border with Côte d’Ivoire, suspected members of jihadist Group to Support Islam and Muslims (JNIM) 5 Jan set Ouo gendarmerie on fire in Comoé province, Cascades region; security forces 14 Jan arrested four suspected Katiba Macina militants in Galgouli, Poni province, South-West region. National Assembly 21 Jan passed law enabling security forces to rely on civilian volunteers to fight armed groups. G5 Sahel heads of state including President Kaboré met with French President Macron in Pau, France 13 Jan, agreed to step up military cooperation with France to counter jihadist threat in Sahel.

Mali

JANUARY 2020

Intercommunal and jihadist violence intensified in centre amid ongoing counter-insurgency operations; France pledged to boost its military presence in Sahel from 4,500 troops to 5,100. In Mopti region in centre, suspected Dogon militiamen 16 Jan attacked Fulani village of Sinda, killing at least fourteen; explosive device 21 Jan killed two soldiers on Boni-Douentza axis; unidentified assailants 22-23 Jan killed six soldiers in Dioungani area. In Ségou region in centre, jihadist coalition Group to Support Islam and Muslims claimed attack against Sokolo military camp that killed twenty soldiers 26 Jan; 29 Jan reportedly captured Sokolo village. French forces continued counter-insurgency operations, notably killing thirty suspected members of jihadist group Katiba Macina south of Mopti 14-15 Jan. Also in centre, protesters demonstrated against UN mission (MINUSMA) in Koro, Bankass, and Bandiagara early Jan. Signatories to 2015 Algiers peace agreement took steps to pacify relations in north east. Delegations from ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements and Platform coalition of pro-govt armed groups held talks in Ménaka 7-8 Jan, signed agreement on security arrangements to prevent confrontation between their respective local factions, committed to join forces against banditry in Ménaka region. Following Dec national inclusive dialogue, govt 11 Jan held meeting with political parties and signatory armed groups to discuss conditions for organising legislative elections before May. Movement of sympathisers of prominent Muslim leader Mahmoud Dicko 15 Jan said it would present list of candidates. Despite 10 Jan protest in capital Bamako against French military presence, President Keïta met with other G5 Sahel heads of state and French President Macron in Pau, France, 13 Jan, agreed to step up military cooperation with France to counter jihadist threat in Sahel; Macron same day pledged additional 220 troops to French Barkhane operation. French govt early Feb said it would deploy 400 more soldiers to focus on border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. PM Cissé 29 Jan pledged to increase size of armed forces by 50% in 2020.

Niger JANUARY 2020

Jihadists continued to step up attacks against security forces in west and target civilians in south east, leaving scores dead, while President Issoufou doubled down on commitment to maintain French military presence. Suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militants 9 Jan attacked military base in Chinégodar, Tillabery region in west near Malian border, killing at least 80 soldiers, deadliest single attack against security forces in recent years; 18 Jan UN peacekeepers killed six civilians in的有效Tillabery region in west; 29 Jan a Tuareg militiaman in Timbuktu region in north captured three local officials while US military disclosed 24 Jan that US camps in north Mali and Niger had been targeted by attacks since 2017.

Malian border, killing at least 89 soldiers – deadliest single attack against security forces in country’s history, four weeks after suspected ISIS’s Sahel affiliate killed 71 soldiers in same region. Govt 13 Jan removed armed forces chief and army chief. After govt 1 Jan banned use of motorbikes in Tillabery region, hundreds protested 18 Jan in Tillabery against restrictions on free movement and worsening security situation. In Diffa region in south east, suspected Boko Haram militants 9 Jan reportedly kidnapped eighteen civilians in Toumour. After President Issoufou and other G5 Sahel heads of state met with French President Macron in Pau, France 13 Jan and agreed to step up military cooperation with France to counter jihadist threat in Sahel, security forces 17 Jan fired tear gas at protesters in capital Niamey demanding departure of French forces, and Issoufou 20 Jan reiterated commitment to French military presence. Security forces 4 Jan dispersed weeks-long sit-in protest of asylum seekers demanding better living conditions and shorter processing times in front of UN Refugee Agency offices in Agadez; police arrested 335 protesters and forced others back to camp, which some set alight.

- VIDEO: Video - Managing Trafficking in Northern Niger

Burundi JANUARY 2020

Ahead of presidential elections in May, ruling party CNDD-FDD chose Evariste Ndayishimiye as its candidate, and its youth wing alongside authorities continued to harass main opposition party National Congress for Freedom (CNL). At CNDD-FDD congress in capital Gitega 26 Jan, delegates chose party’s sec gen Ndayishimiye over national assembly president Pascal Nyabenda, both nominated by President Nkurunziza, to be party’s presidential candidate. Parliament 21 Jan passed law that will grant Nkurunziza villa, around $530,000 and status of “supreme leader” when he vacates presidency. CNDD-FDD youth wing, Imbonerakure, 4 Jan beat CNL member’s father in Mwaro province; 5 Jan attempted to kill CNL member in Kirundo province reportedly for refusing to join CNDD-FDD. Imbonerakure and authorities 6-29 Jan arrested at least fifteen CNL members in Mwaro, Gitega and Makamba and Muyinga provinces. Local residents in Cibitoke province night of 30-31 Jan beat three Imbonerakure suspected of theft; one died 31 Jan. Authorities 16-20 Jan detained journalist who reported on mismanagement of public funds in Karusi province. National Intelligence Service 8-13 Jan arrested three members of two teachers’ unions, including presidents of both, after they protested against withholding of ti th iti 21J l dt id ti ft h ‘ th iti 21J l dt id ti ft h

portion of teachers’ wages; authorities 21 Jan released two presidents. High Court of Bubanza 30 Jan sentenced four journalists arrested in Oct to two and a half years in prison. European Parliament 16 Jan adopted resolution condemning human rights violations against opposition and press, calling on authorities to investigate arbitrary arrests, beatings and killings, and calling for extension of EU sanctions and imposition of UN Security Council sanctions. Rwanda 8 Jan said it was prepared to engage in talks to normalise relations with Burundi.

- **BRIEFING: Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes**

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**Cameroon**

Ahead of parliamentary and local elections 9 Feb, separatist militants stepped up attacks in Anglophone regions in west often targeting electoral staff and materials while military intensified deadly raids and deployed 700 additional gendarmes; in Far North Boko Haram (BH) maintained high rate of attacks on civilians and military. Separatists 5 Jan said they would enforce lockdown (restriction on movement, closure of schools and businesses) in Anglophone regions 7-12 Feb to prevent voting and celebration of youth day 11 Feb, anniversary of 1961 independence plebiscite. Govt 7 Jan deployed 700 additional gendarmes to Anglophone areas. North West region saw most intense violence. Army raid in Donga Mantung 1 Jan left six dead. Villagers angered by separatists’ abuses early Jan chased them from their camps in Ngoketunjia. Suspected separatists 5 Jan kidnapped at least five officials in Babessi. Separatists 7 Jan burned down electoral body’s office in Donga Mantung. Security forces 12-20 Jan killed at least sixteen in several villages and burned down hundreds of houses. Clashes between two separatist groups in Meluf 18 Jan left at least six dead. Security forces 26 Jan killed separatist commander in Bui. Army raids 28-29 Jan killed four in Mbiame and Nkambe. In South West region, separatists 13 Jan killed soldier in Muyuka; 16 Jan ambushed security forces near Mamfe, death toll unknown. Security forces 18-23 Jan killed at least eight civilians and three separatists. In predominantly Francophone West region, Anglophone separatists 7 Jan attacked gendarmerie post in Bangourain. In Far North, almost daily BH attacks on villages and military outposts 3-28 Jan left 26 villagers and eleven militants dead.
Central African Republic

Fighting escalated between armed groups and between ethnic communities in Birao in north east and in Bria in east leaving several dozen dead; violence could intensify further in Feb. In far north east, armed group Popular Front for the Central African Renaissance (FPRC), whose two main leaders are ethnic Runga, continued to advance on Birao, capital of Vakaga prefecture, held by ethnic Kara rebel group Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (MLCJ). FPRC 16 Jan kidnapped MLCJ commander and killed his two bodyguards near Birao. MLCJ next day began violent campaign against ethnic Runga and Sara civilians, destroying hundreds of homes in Birao and surrounding villages. Clashes between FPRC and MLCJ near Birao reportedly left at least twenty dead 19-21 Jan. In east, FPRC killed suspected member of anti-balaka self-defence group near Bria 9 Jan prompting anti-balaka to kill two ethnic Sara. FPRC infighting erupted in Bria 24 Jan between ethnic Runga on one side and Kara and Gula on other leading to nearly 50 deaths according to local authorities. In north west, anti-balaka combatants 23 Jan killed Fulani civilian, sparking clashes later that day in Batangafo between anti-balaka and members of armed group Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC), reportedly leaving eight dead. In centre, clashes in Alindao 9 Jan between army and armed group Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) left three soldiers and eleven UPC dead. FPRC, UPC and MPC 13 Jan jointly denounced govt’s delayed implementation of Feb peace deal and called for talks. In capital Bangui, former transitional President Michel Djotodia 10 Jan returned from six-year exile and next day President Touadéra granted him audience to welcome him back. Touadéra 21 Jan finally met former President Bozizé, who returned from exile clandestinely mid-Dec but remains under national arrest warrant. UN Security Council 31 Jan eased arms embargo on CAR.

Chad

Boko Haram (BH) kept up attacks in west, govt lifted state of emergency in east and north after five months, and wrangling continued over timetable for long-delayed parliamentary elections. In Lake Chad province in west, BH militants killed at least four and kidnapped four in Alom 11 Jan. Suspected BH suicide bombing in Kaïga-
Kindjiria night of 19-20 Jan left at least nine dead. Skirmish between army and BH in Tetewa 27 Jan left six soldiers dead. Another suspected BH attack on Choua island in Lake Chad night of 29-30 Jan left three Chadian soldiers, one female civilian and 21 BH militants dead. President Déby 30 Jan replaced army chief of staff Gen Taher Erda with Gen Abakar Abdelkérim Daoud. 1,200 Chadian soldiers 3 Jan returned from Nigeria where they had been fighting BH since Feb 2019. French President Macron and G5 Sahel heads of state including Déby met in Pau, France 13 Jan and agreed to step up military cooperation with France to counter jihadist threat in Sahel. French minister of armed forces and Swedish defence minister in N’Djamena 20 Jan discussed possible deployment of Chadian troops to Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger border area. Govt 25 Jan lifted state of emergency in Tibesti province in north and Ouaddaï and Dar Sila provinces in east declared in Aug following deadly clashes. Electoral commission (CENI) 6 Jan proposed to hold parliamentary elections 9 Aug, but ruling coalition and opposition rejected date saying rainy season would hinder polls. Déby requested CENI and National Framework for Political Dialogue, platform comprising ruling coalition and opposition, to draw up realistic timetable. Police 25 Jan prevented meeting of opposition movement-turned-party Les Transformateurs in capital N’Djamena. Public sector workers 7 Jan launched nationwide strike demanding govt reinstate their salaries cut in 2016 as part of austerity measures; govt 9 Jan agreed to gradually reinstate portions of salaries and strikers returned to work next day.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Fighting escalated in Ituri province in north east between security forces and armed groups, militia attacks on civilians surged in Beni territory, North Kivu late Jan, and tensions persisted between President Tshisekedi and allies of former President Kabila. In Ituri, clashes between security forces and armed group Cooperative for Development of Congo (CODECO) in Djugu and Mahagi territories 1-22 Jan left at least 43 dead. Fighting between army and unidentified rebels 5 Jan killed sixteen rebels in Ngongo and Lipri. Unidentified gunmen 15 Jan attacked police station in Irumu killing six. Attack by unidentified assailants in Mahagi territory 19 Jan left nine dead. Maï-Maï raid in Mambasa 19 Jan left three dead. Suspected CODECO attacks in Djugu territory 27-28 Jan left three dead. In North Kivu, security forces made gains against armed group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) but failed to stop...
attacks against civilians. Army operation that led to capture of ADF stronghold Madina 9 Jan reportedly left 40 militants and 30 soldiers dead. In Beni territory, ADF rebels stepped up attacks on civilians killing six 22 Jan, at least 36 28 Jan, and at least 21 two days later. In Beni and Lubero territories, Maï-Maï attacks and clashes between Maï-Maï and security forces 6-31 Jan left fifteen dead. Suspected members of rebel group Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda 15-23 Jan launched attacks in Rutshuru territory that left twelve dead. Maï-Maï militiamen night of 6-7 Jan attacked Ebola centre in Beni territory leaving three dead. Tshisekedi 19 Jan suggested that he might dissolve national assembly if it obstructs him. Jeannine Mabunda, national assembly president and member of Kabila’s coalition, 21 Jan said move could amount to high treason. After opposition members late Dec-early Jan suggested Rwanda intended to annex territory in east, Rwandan FM 8 Jan described remarks as harmful for Rwanda-DRC relations.

- **BRIEFING: Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes**

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**Rwanda**

Rwanda’s relations with its neighbours remained tense. After opposition members in DR Congo (DRC) late Dec-early Jan suggested Rwanda intended to annex territory in east DRC, FM 8 Jan described remarks as harmful for Rwanda-DRC relations. Amid strained Rwanda-Uganda relations, Uganda 8 Jan released nine Rwandans. In north near Ugandan border, security forces 18 Jan shot and killed one Ugandan and two Rwandans suspected of smuggling. Rwandan FM 8 Jan said Rwanda was prepared to engage in talks with Burundi to normalise diplomatic relations. Judicial authorities 23 Jan sentenced six members of unregistered opposition party FDU-Inkingi arrested in Sept 2017 to 7-12 years in prison for “threatening the security of the state”.

- **BRIEFING: Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes**

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**Djibouti**


London Court of International Arbitration 15 Jan ruled for sixth time in favour of Dubai-based company DP World in dispute between it and govt over control of Doraleh Container Terminal; court said Djibouti broke concession agreement with DP World when it seized terminal and transferred assets to state-owned company in 2018. Djibouti 17 Jan rejected decision.

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**Eritrea** JANUARY 2020

Eritrea alongside seven other states bordering Red Sea and Gulf of Aden in Saudi Arabia 6 Jan established regional bloc to improve maritime security.

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**Ethiopia** JANUARY 2020

Political violence and counter-insurgency operations continued in Oromia region, parties manoeuvred ahead of elections tentatively set for Aug, and Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan reported some progress in talks to resolve dispute over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) on Blue Nile River creating opportunity to strike comprehensive agreement in Feb. Security forces early Jan launched counter-insurgency operation against armed opposition faction Oromo Liberation Army in western Oromia, where govt reportedly blocked internet and mobile phone usage. Clashes erupted at Haramaya University in eastern Oromia 11 Jan between security forces and students reportedly protesting counter-insurgency operations in region, some students injured. Residents in Amhara regional state in north late Jan took to streets to protest alleged kidnapping in Oromia of up to 27 students from Amhara. Authorities reportedly arrested at least 75 supporters of opposition parties in Oromia late Jan. After Jawar Mohammed, ethnic Oromo activist and prominent critic of PM Abiy, 30 Dec joined opposition party Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), OFC, Oromo Liberation Front and Oromo National Party 3 Jan formed Coalition for
Democratic Federalism. Electoral board 15 Jan tentatively set 16 Aug as date of
general elections. Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan made some progress in GERD talks in
Addis Ababa, Khartoum and Washington, agreeing 31 Jan in Washington on various
aspects including filling and operation of dam during drought and instructing
technical and legal teams to prepare comprehensive agreement for signature by end
Feb.

Kenya  JANUARY 2020

Al-Shabaab stepped up frequency and scale of attacks in north east and east, and
President Kenyatta reshuffled his cabinet. After springing two ambushes in Wajir and
Mandera counties in north east 28 and 29 Dec respectively, killing two soldiers in
first incident, Al-Shabaab 2 Jan ambushed bus in Lamu county in east, separated
Muslims from non-Muslims and killed four of latter. Also in Lamu county, Al-
Shabaab 5 Jan launched assault on Simba military base in Manda Bay killing three
Americans (one soldier and two contractors) and damaging six aircraft; first Al-
Shabaab attack on base housing U.S. forces in Kenya. Hours later, three men
attempted to break into UK army base in Nanyuki in central Kenya, all arrested. In
Garissa county in east, Al-Shabaab 7 Jan attacked police station killing two
policemen and 10 Jan killed three teachers. Court 22 Jan allowed police to detain 43
people, including 38 students, arrested day before in capital Nairobi and suspected
to be linked to Al-Shabaab. President Kenyatta 14 Jan announced changes to cabinet,
including switching Monica Juma and Raychelle Omamo, cabinet secretaries for
foreign affairs and defence respectively.

Somalia  JANUARY 2020

Al-Shabaab continued to attack security forces and civilians, tensions mounted in
Galmudug as rival camps appointed parallel parliaments, and in coming weeks
militia fighting could erupt in Jubaland state in south. In capital Mogadishu, Al-
Shabaab killed at least six people 8-11 Jan. In Lower Juba, Lower Shabelle and Middle Shabelle regions in south, clashes between Al-Shabaab and security forces and Al-Shabaab attacks 7-25 Jan left at least sixteen soldiers and civilians dead, and some 80 militants. U.S. airstrikes 3-27 Jan left nine Al-Shabaab militants dead. In Bosaso, on Puntland’s coast in north, security forces 6 Jan killed four suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS)-Somalia. Suspected ISIS militants shot dead former official in Bosaso 21 Jan. In Galmudug, following standoff between federal govt and Sufi paramilitary group Ahlu Sunnah Waa-Jama’a (ASWJ) over latter’s seats in new parliament, electoral committee appointed by federal govt 3 Jan approved twenty ASWJ MPs, mid-Jan announced new state parliament and postponed election of president to 2 Feb. Incumbent state President Ahmed Geele Haaf 4 Jan announced parallel electoral committee which 19 Jan announced rival parliament in Galkayo; rival parliament 30 Jan elected Haaf as state president. ASWJ 21 Jan rejected federal govt-led process and announced third rival parliament, which 29 Jan elected ASWJ leader Sheikh Mohamed Shakir as state president. Four presidential candidates 22 Jan said they would boycott presidential polls, accusing federal govt of hijacking process. In Jubaland, state’s VP replaced mayor of Baardheere after latter expressed support for federal govt, prompting Mogadishu to deploy troops to Baardheere where tensions ran high end month. Federal parliament’s upper house 6 Jan approved petroleum law, but Puntland President Deni deemed it unconstitutional on grounds that federal states had not been consulted. In Saudi capital Riyadh 6 Jan, eight countries on Red Sea and Gulf of Aden including Somalia established regional bloc to ensure maritime security.

→ Somaliland JANUARY 2020

Agreement to end long-running dispute over electoral commission unravelled while govt and rebel leader signed peace agreement ending rebellion in Sanaag region in east. After opposition parties Waddani and Justice and Welfare Party (UCID) late Dec granted govt until 10 Jan to dissolve new electoral commission and reinstate its predecessor, President Bihi 13 Jan told UCID and Waddani that govt could not legally disband it. UCID and Waddani accused Bihi of reneging on agreement and called on commission to resign. In Sanaag, following mediation by elders, Colonel Arre, rebel leader who defected from Somaliland to Puntland in 2018, signed peace agreement with govt 2 Jan; as part of deal, army is to absorb rebel soldiers, Arre agreed to go into exile. Sanaag residents 15 Jan opened fire on convoy of Puntland’s deputy
information minister, no casualties. Unidentified assailants 21 Jan shot and killed police officer in Awdal region in west. In Saudi capital Riyadh, eight countries bordering Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, excluding Somaliland, 6 Jan formed regional bloc to ensure maritime security; govt next day said it did not recognise bloc. Coast guard 24 Jan chased away Djiboutian ship installing submarine communications cable.

South Sudan

President Kiir and main rebel leader Riek Machar failed to close gap between their positions on outstanding issues raising risk that they fail to reach agreement by 22 Feb deadline to form unity govt potentially triggering new violence; govt struck ceasefire agreement with armed groups that did not sign Sept 2018 deal; fighting continued in west. Deadlock persisted over number and borders of states: Kiir insisted on maintaining or increasing existing 32 states, while opposition groups pushed for 23 states plus Abyei. South African deputy president David Mabuza, invited to mediate by Kiir and Machar, 16 Jan proposed that 90-day arbitration committee of foreign, regional, and international representatives settle issue; South Sudan Opposition Alliance (SSAA) and Machar’s Sudan People’s Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) rejected proposal, demanding issue be resolved before formation of unity govt. Unification of govt and rebel forces into national army made some progress with SPLA-IO troops early Jan starting to move to cantonment sites in Jonglei, Torit and Wau states. Govt and opposition coalition South Sudan Opposition Movements Alliance (SSOMA), who refused to be part of Sept 2018 peace deal, 13 Jan signed Rome Declaration in Italy, agreeing to cease hostilities, discuss mechanisms to resolve differences, and guarantee humanitarian access. Ceasefire took effect 15 Jan, no major violations by end month. Kiir 29 Jan granted amnesty to all SSOMA factions. Second round of talks expected in Feb. Fighting continued between govt forces and armed groups in Maiwut county, Gambella region near border with Ethiopia. Suspected nomadic Misseriya herders from Sudan 22 Jan reportedly killed 32 people and burnt houses in Dinka village of Kolom, in disputed Abyei area. U.S. 8 Jan imposed sanctions on VP Gai for allegedly ordering murder of opposition figure Aggrey Idri Ezibon and human rights lawyer Dong Samuel Luak in 2017.
Sudan

Security forces quelled mutiny by former members and peace talks with rebel groups continued. Army and paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) 14 Jan put down mutiny by forces from former National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) dissatisfied with severance pay; NISS operations units disbanded in July 2019 when agency was reconfigured as General Intelligence Services (GIS). Mutineers opened fire, blocked roads in capital Khartoum and North Kordofan’s capital El-Obeid and briefly closed two oil fields in East Darfur; two people killed. RSF head Mohamed Hamdan “Hemedti” same day alleged former NISS head Salah Gosh helped instigate mutiny. Sovereign Council head Abdel Fattah al-Burhan next day announced replacement of GIS Director Abu Bakr Mustafa Damblab with army intelligence chief. After fighting erupted late Dec in West Darfur’s capital el-Geneina between Arab groups and Masalit tribe leaving over 60 dead, delegation including PM Hamdok and Hemedti 1 Jan went to city and urged tribal leaders to settle conflict. Peace talks between govt and rebel groups continued in South Sudanese capital Juba ahead of 14 Feb deadline to negotiate comprehensive deal. Abdelaziz al-Hilu, leader of rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) faction, 1 Jan extended ceasefire in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, but govt continued to resist his wish that talks address question of state secularism. Malik Agar, leader of another SPLM-N faction, 17 Jan concluded talks with govt on political agenda; 24 Jan signed preliminary deal granting special status to South Kordofan and Blue Nile, paving way for militants to integrate into army. Rebel faction Sudan Liberation Movement led by Minni Minnawi 24 Jan accused govt of backtracking on pledges, prompting govt and rebel coalition Sudanese Revolutionary Front to reaffirm commitment to peace process. Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan made progress in talks to resolve dispute over Ethiopia’s dam on Blue Nile, agreeing 31 Jan in Washington on various aspects and instructing technical and legal teams to prepare comprehensive agreement for signature by end Feb.
Govt continued to repress opposition and took steps to normalise relations with Rwanda, while relations with Kenya soured over trade dispute. Police 6 Jan prevented musician-turned-opposition leader Bobi Wine from holding first public meeting following Dec announcement that he would run for president in 2021 general elections: police fired tear gas to disperse Wine’s supporters, detained him for staging allegedly illegal outdoor assembly instead of indoor gathering. Following agreement to normalise relations with Rwanda late Aug, military court in Kampala 7 Jan dropped espionage charges against nine Rwandans. In northern Rwanda near Ugandan border, security forces 18 Jan shot and killed one Ugandan and two Rwandans suspected of smuggling. Uganda-Kenya tensions rose after latter seized Ugandan milk shipments 27 Dec, 6 and 12 Jan on suspicion that they had been imported illegally. Ugandan govt 16 Jan said seizures contravened East African Community Customs Union Protocol, demanded Kenya immediately release shipments and cover any financial loss incurred.

- **BRIEFING: Averting Proxy Wars in the Eastern DR Congo and Great Lakes**

**Angola** **JANUARY 2020**

Following court decision in Dec to freeze bank accounts of Isobel dos Santos, daughter of former President dos Santos, and her husband over significant state losses, newspapers 19 Jan published investigation into leaked documents which detailed her alleged corruption and misappropriation of funds. Chief prosecutor 20 Jan indicted her for embezzlement and money laundering. She denied wrongdoing.

**Lesotho** **JANUARY 2020**

PM Thabane 14 Jan announced he would resign, without setting date, following recent allegations connecting him to 2017 murder of his former wife Lipolelo Thabane. Allegations became public after police commissioner implicated Thabane
in legal documents following attempts by Thabane to suspend him from office. Police 10 Jan issued arrest warrant for Thabane’s current wife after she refused to meet authorities to answer questions over murder; her current whereabouts are unknown.

Malawi  JANUARY 2020

Opposition continued to challenge President Mutharika’s victory in May 2019 election amid ongoing protests, including over alleged police abuses. Thousands of protesters 9 Jan marched to police headquarters in capital Lilongwe over alleged sexual violence by police during demonstrations in Oct, threatened further protests if police failed to make arrests. Police 11 Jan arrested opposition figure Jessie Kabwila on charges of inciting violence during protest. Anti-corruption body 13 Jan said it had opened probe into alleged attempts to bribe judges presiding over opposition’s petition to annul May election results. Tens of thousands of supporters of NGO Human Rights Defenders Coalition 16 Jan took to streets in Lilongwe, with smaller rallies in Blantyre and Mzuzu, demanding alleged bribers be named and arrested; police 22 Jan arrested and charged prominent banker Thomson Mpinganjira in connection with case; court same day declared arrest warrant void, forcing police to release him. EU election observation mission 8 Jan said it would postpone release of its report on May elections until after court ruling expected early Feb.

Mozambique  JANUARY 2020

Suspected Islamist militants continued to attack civilians and security forces in far north and, as attacks on civilians continued in centre, armed dissident faction of opposition party Renamo threatened to escalate violence there. In Cabo Delgado province in far north, militants 3 Jan killed at least four people in ambush on minibus in Macomia district on Palma-Pemba axis; and 16 Jan killed three civilians near Roma, Mocimboa da Praia district. Militants 18 Jan killed one civilian and
kidnapped two women in Manica village, Macomia district; 25 Jan attacked villages of Namaluco, Cagembe and Nagruvala in Quissanga district, killing at least three civilians. Islamic State (ISIS) 23 Jan claimed responsibility for attack on military base in Mbau same day that left 22 soldiers dead. In centre, police 5 Jan arrested six suspected members of dissident Renamo faction in Dondo, Sofala province. Following threats in Dec by faction, which calls itself Renamo Military Junta, to carry out attacks until govt denied that Renamo leader Ossufo Momade represented party, group’s leader Mariano Nhongo 13 Jan warned he would start targeting civilians and businesses. Momade 16 Jan ruled out dialogue with dissidents. Unidentified gunmen 20 Jan raided Macorococho village, Nhamatanda district in Sofala province, killing four people and looting medicine. Police continued to probe alleged links between Renamo MPs and attacks in centre, arresting and questioning several Renamo MPs throughout Jan.

Zimbabwe JANUARY 2020

Govt and opposition remained at loggerheads over dialogue mechanism as economic crisis persisted. Nelson Chamisa, leader of main opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), 2 Jan said he was open to dialogue with President Mnangagwa mediated by former South African President Mbeki. Govt same day reiterated that Mnangagwa would only engage with Chamisa through its own political dialogue initiative. Police 17 Jan raided MDC offices in capital Harare search for “weapons of war”, made no arrests. MDC rally in Harare 21 Jan drew thousands; Chamisa warned supporters to prepare for “year of demos and action” against govt. Police and courts continued to prohibit most demonstrations. Amid continued economic crisis, confederation of unions Civil Service APEX Council 10 Jan rejected govt’s offer to raise public sector wages by 97%; govt 13 Jan offered one-off allowance to stave off strike action; public sector workers 29 Jan accepted 140% salary increase but continued to demand further concessions. Doctors’ association 21 Jan said it had accepted offer by prominent businessman to distribute $300 monthly allowances over next six months, ending strike that started in Sept. Following rise in gang attacks on mining sites, police mid-Jan arrested over 1,800 people across country for illegally mining gold and complicity in violence.
Côte d’Ivoire  JANUARY 2020

Ahead of presidential election scheduled for Oct, opposition accused govt of using legal measures to ward off key challengers. Court of Cassation 17 Jan declared itself competent to hear charges of embezzlement of public funds, money laundering and conspiracy against state authority brought against former rebel leader and former national assembly speaker Guillaume Soro, who declared his intention to run for presidential election, after chief prosecutor Richard Adou 23 Dec issued international arrest warrant against him based on alleged audio recording. Soro 21 Jan filed legal complaint at court in Paris – because part of alleged recording was done in France – against Adou and three others for illegally recording him, editing and diffusing tape; 28 Jan said he would take part in Oct presidential election despite arrest warrant. Court in capital Abidjan 30 Dec sentenced pro-Gbagbo rebel leader and former youth minister Charles Blé Goudé in absentia to twenty years in prison for crimes during post-electoral crisis in 2010-2011; Blé Goudé remained on parole in The Hague pending outcome of International Criminal Court (ICC) Prosecutor’s appeal against his Jan 2019 acquittal of crimes against humanity. Following efforts in 2019 by former President Gbagbo – in Belgium on conditional release from ICC – to regain control of party he founded, Popular Ivorian Front (FPI), from legally-recognised president Pascal Affi N’Guessan, Gbagbo and N’Guessan met in Brussels 4-5 Jan to discuss reorganisation of FPI. N’Guessan 17 Jan said he had asked to be Gbagbo’s running mate in Oct 2020 presidential election if former president is nominated as FPI candidate, after Gbagbo vowed to run regardless of his legal status.

Gambia  JANUARY 2020

Hundreds demonstrated in capital Banjul 26 Jan to demand President Barrow honour 2016 commitment to serve for three-year transitional period only; police cracked down on protesters, reportedly arresting 137, including journalists; several police officers and protesters also wounded; govt same day outlawed protest movement. In audio recordings released 12 Jan, former President Jammeh announced plans to return from exile in Equatorial Guinea. Thousands demonstrated on outskirts of
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Banjul 16 Jan in support of his return. Govt 19 Jan said Jammeh would face “immediate arrest” and “most serious charges” if he returned. Hundreds 25 Jan marched on outskirts of Banjul calling for justice over human rights abuses under Jammeh’s rule.

Guinea

Security forces stepped up crackdown on protests against President Condé’s alleged plan to run for third term, leaving at least six dead. Following calls by National Front for the Defence of the Constitution, coalition of opposition parties and civil society groups against constitutional change that could pave way for Condé’s re-election later this year, protesters gathered 6, 13, 21, 22, and 23 Jan in capital Conakry and other cities. Clashes with security forces left two civilians dead in Conakry 13 Jan, one in regional capital Labé (centre) same day, and three others in Labé 23 Jan. In strongholds of main opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea in country’s centre, protesters 14 Jan vandalised govt buildings in Labé, Léléouma and Pita; 21 Jan reportedly ransacked police station and prison in Dalaba, freeing seventeen prisoners and looting guns; 22 Jan burnt down police station in Télimélé. Govt 24 Jan said constitutional referendum could take place in Feb. Ahead of legislative elections due 16 Feb, President Condé and ministers toured country and preparations continued. Notably, Condé visited Kindia (west) 6 Jan and PM Fofana visited Kankan (east) 14 Jan. Electoral commission 9 Jan said 40 parties had put forward candidates and released updated electoral roll adding over two million voters, prompting opposition to warn of alleged voter duplicates and irregular enlistment of minors in govt strongholds. Campaign launched 16 Jan. Constitutional Court 9 Jan heard seven members of electoral commission after they filed complaint to denounce commission president’s alleged mismanagement.
Post-electoral standoff emerged amid allegations of fraud in second round of presidential election late Dec. After national electoral commission (CNE) 1 Jan said former PM Umaro Sissoco Embaló had won with 53.55% of votes, defeated candidate Domingos Simões Pereira of ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) complained of fraud and 3 Jan appealed to Supreme Court to annul results. Supreme Court 11 Jan called on CNE to clarify certain aspects of results. CNE responded to Court’s queries and 17 Jan gave final results, confirming Sissoco’s victory, but Supreme Court same day insisted it demanded recount. CNE 22 Jan said it had submitted additional documents to Supreme Court, called for Sissoco to be sworn in. Regional bloc Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) acknowledged Sissoco’s victory 22 Jan but 30 Jan sent mission to Bissau, insisted CNE should comply with Supreme Court’s demand.

Liberia JANUARY 2020

Police 6 Jan fired tear gas and water cannon in capital Monrovia to disperse supporters of prominent critic of President Weah and opposition figure Henry Costa protesting against govt and deepening economic crisis. Immigration authorities 11 Jan questioned Costa, accusing him of having forged his travel documents to return to country in Dec ahead of planned protest. Costa reportedly left country 12 Jan. Sierra Leone’s authorities 15 Jan detained him at Freetown airport after Monrovia requested his extradition, but Costa reportedly left Sierra Leone to U.S. next day. Govt 17 Jan declared Costa fugitive. Costa next day pledged to return to country in May.

Nigeria JANUARY 2020

Two Boko Haram (BH) factions – Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Abubakar Shekau’s group (JAS) – stepped up attacks in north east while in north west jihadist group Ansaru claimed first attack since 2013 as military continued
operations against bandits, amid ongoing herder-related and criminal violence in Middle Belt and Niger Delta respectively. In north east, BH 20 Jan killed local leader of Christian association after abducting him 3 Jan in Adamawa state. In Borno state, military 4 Jan repelled BH attack in Konduga area, six insurgents and four soldiers killed. BH 4 Jan killed three civilians in Chibok area. ISWAP claimed responsibility for 7 Jan attack on Monguno town which killed eight soldiers. In apparent attempt to cut off Borno state capital Maiduguri from rest of country, insurgents attacked travellers on road linking Maiduguri to Yobe state capital, Damaturu: 9 Jan abducted seven, 28 Jan killed three others. BH 20 Jan reportedly killed twenty displaced persons and one soldier in Ngala town. Military 12 Jan reported four ISWAP commanders killed in Lake Chad area; air force 27 Jan reported scores of ISWAP fighters killed in same area 24-25 Jan. Suicide bombers 26 Jan killed three in Gwoza town; 30 Jan killed four in Maiduguri outskirts. In north west, army 12 Jan reported anti-banditry operations in Zamfara and Katsina states 16 Dec-9 Jan killed 106 bandits. Bandits killed 31 people in Zamfara state 14-15 Jan and at least twenty in Niger state 5-25 Jan. In Kaduna state, gunmen killed around 35 people 6-12 Jan; long-dormant jihadist group Ansaru claimed 14 Jan attack against prominent traditional chief’s convoy that killed at least six people. Violence continued in Middle Belt: 30 killed 1 Jan in Tawari town, Kogi state; twelve killed in Kulben village in clash between cattle rustlers and local youths 9 Jan and 23 killed 27 Jan in Kwatas village, both Plateau state. In Niger Delta, pirates 3 Jan killed four navy personnel and kidnapped three foreign workers in Bayelsa state; navy 7 Jan rescued kidnapped men.

Asia

China/Japan JANUARY 2020

Low-level tensions returned ahead of Chinese President Xi’s planned state visit to Japan in April; Japanese Defence Minister Tarō Kōno 14 Jan urged Beijing to respect international norms and said Japan “cannot overlook” China’s military presence in area around disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Japan’s Ministry of Defence 26 Jan released report showing air force scrambled to intercept Chinese military planes 523 times April-Dec 2019, 9.9% increase on previous year, with most taking place over Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands. Japanese media early-Jan reported Tokyo threatened – under U.S. pressure – to retract US$102 million investment in unnamed port project
in El Salvador after latter gave operating authority to Chinese company; in response, El Salvador govt suspended tender process for operating rights. Amid China-Indonesia tensions over Natuna Islands (see South China Sea), Indonesian President Widodo 10 Jan asked Japan to increase investment in fisheries, energy and tourism around islands, while Indonesia and Japan agreed to strengthen coast guard coordination.

Korean Peninsula

North Korea maintained its Dec-announced harder-line plans toward U.S. and denuclearisation in 2020, while South Korea announced plans to resume inter-Korean cooperation. Following DPRK leader Kim Jong-un late-Dec remarks warning of “new strategic weapon”, Pyongyang 21 Jan reiterated stance at UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva with Ju Yong Chol, counsellor at North Korea’s mission to UN, saying that if U.S. does not lift sanctions and persists in “hostile policy”, there will “never be denuclearisation”. DPRK state media 24 Jan confirmed veteran military official Ri Son Gwon – previously in charge of inter-Korean affairs – as new FM. South Korean President Moon 8 Jan announced plans to resume inter-Korean cooperation projects including non-governmental tours to DPRK for South’s civilians, Pyongyang has however yet to accept Seoul’s proposal; South Korean President Moon 14 Jan said inter-Korean cooperation would benefit DPRK-U.S. dialogue and could help ease sanctions. In response, U.S. ambassador to South Korea 16 Jan said plans should be consulted with Washington due to possibility of projects earning foreign currency for North Korea, thereby potentially violating international sanctions; South Korean govt next day called remarks “very inappropriate”, said inter-Korean cooperation is “matter for our government to decide”. U.S.-South Korea tensions also ongoing over stalled negotiations on agreement for sharing of cost of maintaining 28,500 U.S. troops on Korean peninsula, as sixth round of talks took place 14-15 Jan in Washington with no resolution. Seoul insisted agreement sticks to outlines in existing Special Measures Agreement while Washington’s focus remained on expanding scope of agreement and reducing cost for U.S.; Seoul 29 Jan said U.S. Forces Korea began sending 60-day notice of potential leave to nearly 9,000 South Korean employees seen as pressure tactic for Seoul to pay more.
Taiwan Strait  JANUARY 2020

President Tsai won re-election in 11 Jan presidential elections, winning 57.1% of vote (highest vote share ever won by Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) candidate) ahead of Han Kuo-yu of Kuomintang party who won 38.6%; in legislative elections held concurrently, DPP retained majority but lost seven seats, taking 61 of 113 total, with Kuomintang winning 38 seats; turnout 74.9%. Tsai 14 Jan said China needed to “face reality” and show Taiwan “respect”. Chinese State Councillor Wang 13 Jan stated “consensus won’t alter because of a local election”; in response, Taiwan’s Mainland Affairs Council claimed Wang “must face up to reality and stop believing his own lies”. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 11 Jan congratulated Tsai on win and praised her for seeking stability with China “in face of unrelenting pressure”. In lead up to vote, FM Joseph Wu 9 Jan warned Beijing not to retaliate if it did not like result and said China should not “read too much into” elections. U.S. warship 16 Jan sailed through Taiwan Strait; Chinese Foreign Ministry 17 Jan warned U.S. to approach Taiwan issue “cautiously and properly” to avoid “damaging China-U.S. relations and peace and stability”. Chinese military jets, including Xian H-6 bombers and a KJ-500 surveillance aircraft, flew through Bashi Channel, body of water separating Taiwan from Philippines, in military exercises 23 Jan, according to Taiwan’s Defence Ministry who monitored drills.

Afghanistan  JANUARY 2020

Incremental progress in U.S.-Taliban peace process slowed Taliban attacks in cities, but insurgent violence persisted in rural areas while U.S. stepped up air attacks and tensions persisted over electoral results. Taliban and U.S. govt 16-17 Jan held talks in Qatar to discuss possible deal; discussions involved U.S. proposal for reduction in violence that would facilitate start of formal peace process, deal now reportedly under consideration by U.S. military; nothing formally announced. Despite lull in major attacks in urban areas, insurgents’ operations in rural areas continued. Taliban fighter 7 Jan disguised as woman killed three security forces in Faryab
province (north); Taliban roadside bomb 11 Jan killed two U.S. soldiers and wounded two in Kandahar province (south); Taliban elite unit 16 Jan attacked police checkpoint, killing eleven police officers in Kunduz province (north); Taliban 28 Jan killed at least seven police officers in police station in Baghlan province (north), and 29 Jan killed at least thirteen Afghan security officers in Kunduz province (north). U.S. military aircraft 27 Jan also crashed in Ghazni province (east) killing two; Taliban claimed responsibility but U.S. military said no indication of enemy action. Throughout month U.S. stepped up air attacks, including drone strike 8 Jan which killed 16 militants and reportedly 10 to 40 civilians in Herat province (west). Afghan security forces 25-26 Jan carried out attacks against Taliban across several provinces, allegedly killing 51 militants; airstrikes left at least seven civilians dead in Balkh province (north), prompting demonstration next day in front of district governor's office demanding investigation. In provincial capital Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh province, car bomb 4 Jan killed one and wounded at least two, and two bombs 14 Jan killed two and wounded at least nine; no one claimed responsibility for the attacks. Following on complaints from main opponent to President Ghani, Abdullah Abdullah, over elections’ results, Electoral Complaints Commission 28 Jan contemplated recounts in 2,500 polling sites amid ongoing review of appeals.

Bangladesh  JANUARY 2020

Security forces continued operations against alleged members of banned militant groups while govt attempted to reduce tensions with India. Paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) 12 Jan arrested two suspected members of Allahr Dal militant group in Khulna city; same day, police detained suspected Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh member in capital Dhaka. In efforts to reduce tensions with Delhi following India’s Dec Citizenship Amendment Act – which grants citizenship to non-Muslim migrants from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan who had entered India before 2015, ostensibly in effort to protect religious minorities – Information Minister 15 Jan visited India; PM Hasina 17 Jan said govt did not understand why bill passed and labelled it unnecessary, but added it was “internal matter”. Amid continued focus on issue of border killings of Bangladeshi citizens by Indian forces, FM Momen 12 Jan said India agreed to stop killings but they were still occurring. Insecurity remained high in Rohingya refugee camps in south; in Cox’s Bazar, border guards 6 Jan killed two refugees accused of drug trafficking, allegedly in gunfight at Ukhiva sub-district. and RAB 31 Jan killed suspected Rohingya drug dealer in
gunfight in Teknaf sub-district. Momen 1 Jan accused Myanmar of reluctance to take back refugees, warned prolonging crisis would create pockets of radicalisation; head of border guard delegation at 5-9 Jan conference with Myanmar Police Force in Dhaka said refugees “vulnerable to extremism and other illicit activities”. Govt 28 Jan announced it will allow formal education for Rohingya refugee children using Myanmar curriculum, starting with pilot program for 10,000. Following 10 Jan launch of election campaign for 1 Feb Dhaka city corporation polls, govt cracked down on opposition Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP). BNP mayoral candidates lodged complaints with electoral officials of harassment and intimidation, urging election commission to prevent police from acting on pending cases against BNP candidates and supporters until after election; police 15 Jan arrested BNP leader campaigning for mayoral candidacy on four cases filed in 2013. Election campaign saw instances of violence including clashes between supporters of BNP and ruling-Awami League candidates in south Dhaka 26 Jan, injuring at least ten.

Mass protests against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) continued nationwide while solidarity protests erupted following attacks on students in capital New Dehli; operations against Maoists in Chhattisgarh state (centre east) persisted. Suspected members of right-wing student group with ties to ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) 5 Jan attacked students and teachers at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi, injuring 39; no arrests made by 29 Jan despite over 40 complaints submitted. Attack sparked solidarity protests across country; police 9 Jan suppressed student-led protest in capital demanding resignation of JNU vice-chancellor for alleged role in attack. State govt for Uttar Pradesh (India’s largest state) 10 Jan began implementing CAA; officials reported 32,000 people from 21 of 80 state districts already identified for citizenship. Supreme Court 22 Jan refused to put a stay on CAA, said it will set up a five-judge constitution bench to hear 144 petitions challenging constitutionality of act; Court gave four weeks to govt to respond to petitions. Election Commission 28 Jan served show cause notice to Union Minister Anurag Thakur for raising controversial slogan during rally for Delhi state elections. Man 30 Jan arrested in Delhi for shooting at anti-CAA protesters in Jamia Millia University, injuring one. As of 27 Jan, four Indian states had passed resolutions against CAA implementation; Union finance minister said 19 Jan that states do not have power to refuse implementation, that it would be “against the constitution”. In Chhattisgarh, police...
implementation, that it would be against the constitution. In Chhattisgarh, police 14 Jan said suspected Maoists murdered brother of former rebel who joined district police. Officials 20 Jan reported security forces killed Maoist rebel in Chhattisgarh’s Bijapur district. Villagers 25 Jan killed a Maoist rebel in Janturai village, Odisha state; police said rebels had demanded villagers not to observe Republic Day. 644 militants from eight illegal groups 23 Jan surrendered to local authorities in Assam state; half belonged to National Liberation Front of Bengalis. Large quantity of explosives 29 Jan seized in Orissa from trader suspected of links with Maoist rebels. 1615 cadres of all four factions of National Democratic Front of Bodoland 30 Jan surrendered in Assam.

Kashmir

Amid heightened rhetoric and threats, clashes continued between Indian and Pakistani forces along Line of Control (LoC, dividing Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir). Following late-Dec clashes that left several dead on both sides and Indian army chief’s 31 Dec warning that India reserved right “to pre-emptively strike” at sources of terror threat inside Pakistan for Islamabad’s “policy of state-sponsored terrorism”, Pakistan’s military spokesperson 14 Jan tweeted Indian statements were “irresponsible rhetoric with implications for regional peace and stability”; in 11 Jan tweet, spokesperson said Pakistani army “fully prepared to respond to any act of Indian aggression”. Indian PM Modi 28 Jan said India would need “week to ten days” to defeat Pakistan if war broke out; Pakistan’s military spokesperson 30 Jan responded “India will start the war, but we will end it”. UN Security Council 15 Jan reviewed situation in Indian-administered Kashmir in closed door meeting requested by China; same day, Chinese ambassador to UN said Beijing recognised Kashmir as territory disputed between India and Pakistan. Next day, Indian govt spokesperson said China should keep to “global consensus on Kashmir and avoid raising” issue at UN. Within Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), security forces 25 Jan killed three militants, including Jaish-e-Mohammed commander Qari Yasir, in clash in Pulwama district; police 31 Jan killed three suspected militants in gunfight on Jammu-Srinagar highway. Govt 24 Jan restored limited internet services, suspended since 5 Aug; previously, Indian Supreme Court 10 Jan ruled internet shutdown unconstitutional but did not direct restoral of all internet. Diplomats from fifteen countries including U.S. visited Kashmir 9-10 Jan, first diplomatic visit since India’s 5 Aug revoking of J&K’s special constitutional status and initiation of
lockdown; EU diplomats declined invitation, reportedly asking for “freedom to meet people unescorted”. Late-Dec J&K Congress president, senior VP and former minister placed under house arrests before visit to southern Kashmir; police 12 Jan arrested Davinder Singh – senior police officer who met diplomats 9 Jan – and two Kashmiri militants from Hizbul Mujahideen accompanying him, in southern Kashmir.

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**Nepal** January 2020

Ruling Nepal Communist Party’s (NCP) stance on justice and accountability came into sharp focus with 26 Jan appointment of Maoist leader Agni Sapkota as new Speaker of House of Representatives; Sapkota is currently facing charges for abduction and murder during Maoist-led insurgency. Human rights activist Sushil Pyakurel resigned 24 Jan from advisory position to President Bhandari after calls to withdraw case involving Sapkota; Pyakurel had been among those who encouraged Supreme Court in 2011 to open investigation into Sapkota’s alleged crimes. Victims of 10-year civil war rebuked 18 Jan agreement between NCP and opposition Nepali Congress to appoint officials for two transitional justice commissions; activists claimed parties’ handpicking of representatives undermined commissions’ independence. In joint statement NGOs Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, International Commission of Jurists and TRIAL International 25 Jan expressed concerns about “serious setback on Nepal’s transitional justice”, said govt’s disregard for accountability will encourage victims to seek justice internationally under universal jurisdiction. Communist Party of Nepal led by hardline Maoist leader Netra Bikram Chand claimed responsibility for 15 Jan IED explosion in capital Kathmandu; Nepal Army also defused several other IEDs planted in capital same day.

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**Pakistan** January 2020

Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) govt obtained extension appointment of army chief after passing legislation with opposition support, while militant attacks continued. Following court ruling that govt must pass legislation within six months to allow extension of army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa’s tenure, PTI govt reached out to opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and Pakistan Peoples Party to obtain parliamentary approval; National Assembly 7 Jan passed three bills allowing for appointment, reappointment or extension for military chiefs for further three years, up to maximum age of 64; next day, Senate approved bills to take effect from 27 Nov 2019, two days before Bajwa was scheduled to retire; move raised concerns over civilian oversight of army. Lahore High Court 13 Jan indirectly overturned special court’s 17 Dec verdict sentencing former President and army chief Pervez Musharraf to death for high treason, declaring formation of special court “unconstitutional” as it was created in 2013 under then-PM Sharif’s orders without approval of his cabinet. Internationally, govt maintained neutrality amid U.S.-Iran tensions (see Iran); army spokesperson 3 Jan reported Bajwa emphasised need for restraint and for maintaining focus on success of Afghan peace process during call to U.S. Sec State Pompeo, while FM Qureshi 12-17 Jan visited Iran, Saudi Arabia and U.S. in attempt to defuse tensions; visit to U.S. also focused on U.S.-Taliban talks and Kashmir issue while Qureshi called for U.S. support to remove govt from Financial Action Task Force’s grey list. U.S. Envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad 31 Jan separately met Bajwa and Qureshi to discuss U.S-Taliban talks in visit to Pakistan (see Afghanistan). Anti-terrorism court 16 Jan sentenced brother and nephew of Tehreek-e-Labaik chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi and 84 Labaik members to 55 years in prison on charges ranging from murder to assaulting ofcials. Militant attacks continued: militant reportedly affiliated with Pakistani Taliban shot dead two police ofcers in Karachi 7 Jan; in Quetta, bomb blast same day killed two paramilitary soldiers, and suicide attack at mosque killed at least fourteen, including senior police officer, 10 Jan.

Sri Lanka

Amid high-level visits from Russian, Chinese and U.S. officials, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa continued to consolidate his power while new arrest of United National Party (UNP) parliamentarian undermined political opposition. President Rajapaksa 3 Jan reiterated his commitment to constitutional reforms to increase presidential mandate under stronger executive system; announcement followed 1 Jan tabling of
private member’s bills by pro-govt MP proposing changes to 19th amendment increase presidential powers; govt hoping parliamentary elections expected in April will give it two-thirds majority required to amend constitution. Authorities 4 Jan arrested opposition UNP member Ranjan Ramanayake over possession of unlicensed firearm; in search of his home, police discovered recorded conversations of Ramanayake discussing ongoing legal cases with police and judges, urging strong action against former Rajapaksa govt officials. Subsequent leaking of recordings to media undermined public credibility of UNP and used to support new govt claims its key members were victims of unjust investigations; President Rajapaksa 9 Jan appointed commission of inquiry to investigate cases of “political victimisation” by various anti-corruption units under former UNP-led govt. Cabinet 2 Jan withdrew draft Counter Terrorism Act which previous govt had submitted to parliament in order to replace controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act with more human rights compliant legislation. In official visit to Sri Lanka, Chinese FM Wang Yi 13 Jan encouraged greater economic ties between two countries, highlighted desire for increased cooperation on Belt and Road initiative and Colombo Port City projects.

Russian FM Sergei Lavrov 14 Jan announced support to improve Sri Lanka’s defence capacity against “threats posed by terrorism, violent extremism, illicit drugs trafficking and other transnational organised crimes” during visit to Colombo. U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Alice Wells also visited Sri Lanka 13-14 Jan, said negotiations over Millennium Challenge Corporation funding would resume after committee appointed by Rajapaksa reviews earlier draft agreed with UNP-led govt.

Govt 21 Jan said five citizens kidnapped by Abu Sayyaf militants in southern Philippines after fishing in Philippine waters (see Philippines). Tensions rose following Chinese incursion in exclusive economic zone off coast of northern Natuna island on southern edge of South China Sea, President Widodo 8 Jan visited island saying “De facto, de jure, Natuna is Indonesia”. Military spokesperson 9 Jan stated that Chinese coast guard vessels and fishing boats had departed; Widodo 10 Jan called on Japanese FM to invest in Natuna islands to bolster coast guard coordination (see South China Sea).
Myanmar

Clashes between Arakan Army (AA) and military continued and conflict seems to have expanded to new parts of southern Rakhine State, while Ethnic Armed Organization (EAO) leaders renewed peace process dialog ahead of Nov 2020 general election. AA and military continued to clash across central and northern Rakhine State; several improvised explosive devices 7 and 8 Jan detonated in Rakhine State’s Toungup and Kyaukpyu townships. AA 4 Jan claimed that in 2019, they have engaged in 681 clashes with Tatmadaw, killing or injuring 3,562 soldiers, though figures cannot be corroborated by other sources. EAO leaders 7-8 Jan convened in capital Naypyitaw for meeting of their Peace Process Steering Team; followed by meeting with govt under auspices of Joint Implementation Coordination Meeting (JICM), apex body through which signatories can raise issues with implementation of Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement; concerns from EAO leaders that govt attention to peace process will wane in lead-up to general election prompted Karen National Union and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) to shift their positions and allow JICM to take place for first time since March 2018. In first visit to Myanmar by Chinese head of state since 2001, President Xi Jinping 17-18 Jan met with President, State Counsellor and Commander-in-Chief, focusing discussions on planned China-Myanmar Economic Corridor, also discussed support to peace process. International Court of Justice 23 Jan, in unanimous decision, imposed provisional measures on Myanmar pending final decision on case brought by Gambia under Genocide Convention; Court ordered Myanmar to abide by its obligations to prevent and punish acts of genocide against Rohingya, to preserve relevant evidence, and to submit six-monthly reports on all measures taken, with first report due by 23 May.

Philippines

Violence continued in Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), while less clashes were reported between army and communist rebels throughout country. During operation in Indanan, BARMM’s Sulu province 15 Jan.
military rescued last of three Indonesian fishermen taken hostage by suspected Islamic State (ISIS)-affiliated Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) militants in Sept 2019. Suspected ASG militants also abducted eight Indonesian fishermen 16 Jan in Sabah, Malaysia, later releasing three; incident prompted clashes between suspected ASG militants and military 17-19 Jan in Parang town, Sulu province, which left one suspected militant dead, and in Tawi Tawi province, which killed four suspected militants allegedly affiliated with ASG or criminal group. Low-level political violence ongoing in BARMM, including killing of state official by unidentified assailants 11 Jan and of village chief 28 Jan, both in Cotabato City. Communal tensions persisted; notably, two rivalling Moro National Liberation Front factions clashed 15 Jan in Tabuan-Lasa, BARMM’s Basilan province. De facto truce between govt and communist New People’s Army (NPA) held after holiday ceasefire ended 7 Jan, clashes however took place in Camarines Norte province (Luzon island, north), North Cotabato and Surigao del Norte and Sultan Kudarat provinces (Mindanao island, south). Arrests and surrenders of NPA rebels continued across country: police arrested three suspected NPA rebels in Butuan city (northern Mindanao island) 11 Jan, and NPA rebels surrendered in Quezon province (Luzon island) 15 Jan. As part of first-ever Chinese Coast Guard’s port call in capital Manila, coast guards from China and Philippines 15 Jan conducted joint military exercises on “search and rescue and combating fire at sea”.

South China Sea JANUARY 2020

Tensions rose between China and Indonesia over islands near disputed South China Sea (SCS). In response to Chinese incursion 19 Dec into Indonesian exclusive economic zone off coast of northern Natuna island on southern edge of SCS, Indonesia 3 Jan increased patrol to “anticipate territorial violations, and also illegal fishing” around area. Indonesian govt 6-7 Jan deployed four fighter jets and eight warships; Chinese Foreign Ministry 7 Jan stated both countries have been communicating and are “comprehensive strategic partners”; Indonesian President Widodo 8 Jan visited island saying “De facto, de jure, Natuna is Indonesia”. Indonesian military spokesperson 9 Jan said Chinese coast guard vessels and fishing boats had departed from waters near Natuna islands as soon as Indonesian President arrived. Widodo 10 Jan called on Japanese FM to invest in Natuna islands to bolster coast guard coordination; China’s Ambassador to Indonesia Xiao Qian 16 Jan said...
coast guard coordination; China’s Ambassador to Indonesia Xiao Qian 16 Jan said Chinese fishermen had been operating in waters near islands to catch fish, adding that both countries can solve dispute “in a friendly manner”. U.S. Navy 25 Jan carried out freedom-of-navigation operation near Fiery Cross Reef, Chinese-occupied feature in Spratly Islands, through waters claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam. Chinese media 28 Jan reported that Chinese military had “expelled” U.S. vessel from area.

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**Thailand JANUARY 2020**

Thai officials and Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) representatives met for first round of formal peace dialogue on ending conflict in deep south while domestic political tensions persisted. Constitutional Court 21 Jan dismissed case that opposition Future Forward Party (FFP) had attempted “to undermine the monarchy”; other cases against FFP still pending, including one over alleged illegal loan to FFP by party founder Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit with ruling expected in late Feb. Parliament 10 Jan passed 2020 budget; controversy over proxy voting by coalition MPs could derail budget as Constitutional Court 29 Jan accepted petition to rule on validity of budget vote. “Run to Oust Uncle” (Wing Lai Loong), anti-govt protest run, 12 Jan drew some 18,000 participants in Bangkok; another anti-govt protest scheduled for 2 Feb in Chiang Mai city, northern Thailand. In major development, Thai officials and BRN delegates 20 Jan met in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to announce start of formal dialogue process, with Malaysia resuming role as facilitator. Head of BRN delegation Anas Abdulrahman 21 Jan said both parties had agreed to framework and terms of reference for dialogue after months of negotiations; next meeting reportedly scheduled for 2-3 March. Violence however continued in deep south. Insurgents 12 Jan attacked outpost secured by defence volunteers in Sukhirin district, Narathiwat, one volunteer killed and seven wounded; following attack security forces exchanged gunfire with two insurgents near outpost, killing one insurgent. Gunman 18 Jan killed village headman in mosque in Saiburi district, Pattani. Motorcycle-borne gunmen 22 Jan killed off-duty Muslim ranger in Mayo district, Yala, five-year-old son wounded in attack.

- **REPORT:** Southern Thailand’s Peace Dialogue: Giving Substance to Form
Papua New Guinea  JANUARY 2020

Bougainville Consultation Forum 23 Jan held first meeting following last month’s non-binding referendum in which 98% of electorate voted for independence from Papua New Guinea (PNG); forum set to decide on strategy of Autonomous Bougainville Govt (ABG) in negotiations with national govt of PNG. Bougainville parliament 17 Jan held debate over changes to constitution which would allow president of ABG to hold office for three terms and for three parliamentary seats to be reserved for veterans; negotiations to continue in March after return of parliament from adjournment.

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina  JANUARY 2020

Despite condemnation from Bosniak leaders and ban imposed by Constitutional Court, over 2,400 participants including Serbian PM 9 Jan took part in celebration of disputed Day of Republika Srpska in Banja Luka city marking 28th anniversary of founding of Republika Srpska in 1992. Trial of former Chief Prosecutor Salihović 27 Jan opened for alleged abuse of office.

Kosovo  JANUARY 2020

President Thaçi 20 Jan nominated Vetëvendosje party leader Albin Kurti to be next PM, ending three-month political deadlock, while Kosovo and Serbia agreed to launch direct commercial flights after two-decade hiatus. With governing coalition negotiations following Oct 2019 snap elections apparently stalled. Thaci 6 Jan
Negotiations following Oct 2019 snap elections apparently stalled, Thaçi 6 Jan warned of “constitutional crisis” and gave Vetëvendosje (“Self-Determination”) party 48 hours to form coalition and nominate PM, and 10 Jan said that he might ask Constitutional Court to clarify his constitutional responsibility “to make the institutions functional”; Kurti 13 Jan criticised “threatening warning”, urging Thaçi avoid putting further pressure on negotiating process. Thaçi 20 Jan nominated Kurti to be next PM with constitution granting him fifteen days to form new govt and secure parliament’s approval. Kosovo and Serbia 20 Jan agreed to launch direct commercial flights in deal mediated by U.S. after flights were halted in 1998; outgoing Minister of Infrastructure 21 Jan called deal “a step towards mutual recognition”; Belgrade said deal would be implemented once Pristina lifts its 100% tariffs set in Nov 2018 on Serbian goods.

PM Zaev 3 Jan resigned to allow transitional govt to take over ahead of snap parliamentary election in April; move follows EU decision in Oct not to formally open membership talks with North Macedonia after it was blocked by France, in blow to Zaev’s moves to advance EU integration including compromise with Greece over renaming of country. Parliament 6 Jan approved new caretaker govt under Oliver Spasovski, previously interior minister, to organise polls scheduled for 12 April; main opposition party, VMRO-DPMNE, running several ministries including Interior Ministry and Social Policies Ministry as part of caretaker govt. On taking up rotating EU presidency, Croatia’s PM said he would work to unblock EU accession process with North Macedonia.

Tens of thousands of followers of Serbian Orthodox Church staged regular protests throughout month over controversial new Freedom of Confession Act, leading to clashes with police, and tensions with neighbouring Serbia. Critics argue law, which
was passed 27 Dec, provides for govt register of all religious sites and stipulates religious groups must provide historic evidence of ownership to keep their properties, seeks to reduce role of Serbian Orthodox Church and allow govt to claim religious sites as state property. Tens of thousands of Church followers 12 Jan staged protests in capital Podgorica and other major towns calling for annulment of law; protestors 25 Jan clashed with police in Podgorica after security forces used tear gas to disperse them. Montenegrin president 23 Jan discussed religious law with Serbian president in attempt to diffuse rising bilateral tensions; acknowledged that respective positions on dispute remain so far “distant”. Police 31 Jan arrested in Mojanovići village mother of Milan Knežević, leader of opposition Democratic Front party, along with party members and another family relative; Knežević said arrests were related to his party’s objections to religious law.

Armenia

Former head of National Security Service Georgi Kutoyan 17 Jan found dead in apartment, second senior security official of former leadership found dead with gunshot wound to head in recent months; local authorities suspect suicide.

Azerbaijan

Ahead of parliamentary election on 9 Feb, independent candidates and experts urged govt to hold free and fair election process. Ruling party-led process both more open and with setbacks: at least a third of ruling party’s candidates are new, while some prominent opposition politicians have been denied registration, including Republican Alternative Party (ReAl) leader Ilgar Mammadov and human rights activist Rasul Jafarov; opposition group ReAl still allowed to present political program for election.
Georgia

In major political development, anti-govt protests in breakaway territory of Abkhazia forced the resignation of Abkhaz leader Raul Khajimba, snap presidential elections in Abkhazia are now scheduled for 22 Mar. In Abkhaz capital Sukhumi, dozens of activists 9 Jan took over main building of govt headquarters armed with wooden sticks and boards, sequestering Khajimba, security forces showed little resistance; local opposition leaders joined protesters demanding Khajimba’s resignation with support of local elite; 12 Jan Khajimba resigned. In attempt to ensure Khajimba’s peaceful resignation, Russia 10 Jan dispatched deputy head of Security Council Rashid Nurgaliyev, one of its curators for Abkhazia, without success; Russia 12 Jan then sent Vladislav Surkov, aide to President Putin, but Khajimba had already resigned by the time Surkhov arrived. Abkhaz presidential candidate Aslan Bzhania, former head of local security service, 16 Jan said to Georgian media his readiness to initiate direct contact with Tbilisi, in apparent effort to get support for launch of future economy-related programs in breakaway territory.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Azerbaijan 7 Jan reported one of its border guards killed near Joghaz Water Reservoir, in northern section of border; Armenia confirmed firing of “warning shots” following reported sighting of engineering works in trenches while Azerbaijan 7 Jan denied conducting any works, accusing Armenia of pre-determined killing. Incident provoked more shootings 11 and 15 Jan in same area, two Armenian soldiers reportedly wounded; no statements issued by either govt. Series of meetings with Azerbaijani and Armenian Foreign Ministers, and Co-Chairs of OSCE Minsk Group took place in Geneva 28-30 Jan; topics of discussion included implementation of agreements and proposals made in 2019 and possible next steps to prepare local populations for peace; principles and elements forming the basis of a future settlement; and timing and agenda for advancing settlement process; FMIs agreed to meet again in near future under Co-Chairs auspices.
Russia/North Caucasus  JANUARY 2020

President Putin 15 Jan proposed changes to Constitution during state of nation address, reportedly aimed at shifting power balance between president, cabinet and parliament as well as expanding powers of parliament in move which appears to open options for Putin to step aside from presidency in 2024 while retaining a degree of power. In response, cabinet resigned headed by PM Medvedev, Defence Minister Shoigu and FM Lavrov among few who remained in ensuing reshuffle; non-systemic opposition (unrepresented in Parliament) led protests in following weeks including in capital Moscow, in St. Petersburg and in Yekaterinburg; numbers were small. Some proposed changes included supremacy of Constitution over international laws, ban on foreign citizenship for President and several other officials, appointment by President of all heads of executive and security agencies and barring of “consecutive” two-term limit for President. In North Caucasus, Islamic State (ISIS) 2 Jan claimed responsibility for 31 Dec attack on road patrol which killed three outside Ingushetia’s capital Magas. Head of Chechen Republic since 2007 Ramzan Akhmadovich Kadyrov 16 Jan ceded power due to “temporary disability” putting chairman of Chechen Republic govt Khuchiyev in charge; spokesperson said he is “undergoing treatment requiring medical procedures” same day. Russian court in Stavropol region 24 Jan sentenced Ingush activist to sixteen months in colony-settlement for assaulting police officers during demonstrations in Magas in March 2019; ninth activist to be condemned for similar activities.

- OP-ED: Putin’s Future: Reading the Tea Leaves

Belarus  JANUARY 2020

Following a halt of Russian oil supplies 1 Jan amid a new contract dispute, apparently related to Russia’s offer to supply oil at prices higher than on global market, President Lukashenko 9 Jan said that govt would buy oil elsewhere. First Deputy PM Dmitry Krutov 14 Jan said govt sent proposals to Ukraine, Poland...
Deputy PM Dmitry Krutoy 14 Jan said govt sent proposals to Ukraine, Poland, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Baltic states for oil purchases; Latvian PM 14 Jan confirmed discussion ongoing. Despite standstill in talks on oil prices with Russia, two Russian oil firms, Russneft and Neftisa, restored supplies to Belarus 4 Jan; govt 15 Jan started planned maintenance on Druzhba oil pipeline, main transit route for Russian oil exports to Europe, repairs completed 20 Jan. Local news agency reported Lukashenko stated 21 Jan country seeks to cut Russian oil supplies to 30-40% of domestic market needs, importing 30% of oil from Baltic ports and 30% from Ukraine; Lukashenko added Russia has not agreed on oil transit to Belarus from Kazakhstan. Govt 21 Jan lifted suspension of oil product exports imposed during talks with Russia. Lukashenko 24 Jan said that Moscow’s suspension of oil and gas aimed at dissolving country into “brotherly Russia”, said Belarussian would not accept such move; new defence minister 30 Jan ordered snap exercises to “check combat readiness”.

Ukraine JANUARY 2020

Despite hopes for progress over resolution Donbas conflict during 9 Dec Normandy summit, month saw increase in military and civilian casualties in Donbas conflict zone. Although Kyiv and Moscow agreed to withdraw troops at three additional locations by March 2020, conflict parties have yet to formally agree on any locations after two meetings of Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) in Minsk. Kyiv insists on resuming control of border with Russia in uncontrolled territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions before holding elections there; Kyiv envoy and ex-president Kuchma 16 Jan asked for new TCG subgroup devoted to border issues, which would also address necessary border access for OSCE monitors; Moscow and de facto leaders have not responded; Kyiv’s TCG envoy for political affairs Reznikov 23 Jan said “Minsk agreements need to be re-examined” in reference to border handover. Russian President Putin 11 Jan reiterated calls for Ukraine to amend its constitution, in accordance with Minsk agreements, to recognise special status of areas currently under separatist control. Associate of Putin’s aide Vladislav Surkov, who oversees Russian support and control of separatist-held Donbas, said 25 Jan that Surkov had resigned due to shift in Moscow’s Ukraine policy; Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied any such shift. Dmitry Kozak, newly-appointed head of Russia’s presidential administration, is expected to take on his responsibilities. Use of heavy weaponry increased mid-Jan, with fighting concentrated east of Zolote disengagement area,
near Shyrokyne, Avdiivka, and Svitlodarsk. Per official and independent sources, govt forces 1-29 Jan lost eleven servicemen at contact line, thirty-three injured; Russian-backed fighters lost from three to at least nine; at least three civilians injured due to mines and explosive devices, one person injured by shelling.

Cyprus
JANUARY 2020

Republic of Cyprus govt signed gas pipeline deal with Greece and Israel that would go past Turkey in eastern Mediterranean as Turkish hydrocarbon explorations continued. Prospects for rejuvenation of reunification talks remained bleak. Republic of Cyprus, Greece and Israel 2 Jan signed agreement validating construction of an eastern Mediterranean natural gas pipeline that would bypass Turkey; Turkish FM spokesperson same day criticised agreement saying it was “the latest instance of futile steps, aiming to exclude Turkey and “TRNC” [referring to the internationally unrecognised “Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus”] in the region”. Turkish govt 17 Jan dispatched Yavuz drillship to maritime area in Republic of Cyprus’ declared exclusive economic zone for further round of hydrocarbon explorations; EU foreign policy chief Borrell next day announced EU was preparing list of names of Turkish individuals and businesses to be sanctioned over Turkey’s continued drilling activities. Turkish govt 30 Jan vowed to continue all off-shore activities in maritime area claimed by Republic of Cyprus until rights of Turkish Cypriots are “guaranteed”. Referring to Cyprus reunification talks, UN special envoy for Cyprus 20 Jan said “there’s growing scepticism as to whether it’s still possible” as negotiations remained deadlocked.

Northern Ireland (UK)
JANUARY 2020

After collapse in Jan 2017 of power-sharing coalition, led by Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin, all five main parties 11 Jan accepted power-sharing deal to restore institutions of Belfast/Good Friday Agreement including executive, assembly and North/South ministerial council, ending three-year impasse in devolved
administration; all five main parties joined coalition ministerial executive. Northern Ireland Assembly 20 Jan passed a motion withholding “consent” for UK govt withdrawal bill from EU.

> Spain  JANUARY 2020

Supreme Court 9 Jan ruled that Catalan leader Oriol Junqueras, currently serving a 13-year prison sentence for sedition and misuse of funds, cannot take up his seat as Member of European Parliament (MEP); European Court of Justice ruled last month that Junqueras had immunity from prosecution as an elected MEP when he was convicted by Spanish courts in Oct 2019. Trial of former Catalan police chief Josep Lluís Trapero, along with three other officials, began 20 Jan over alleged role in disputed Oct 2017 independence referendum; Trapero stands accused of rebellion and faces up to eleven years in prison. Catalonia regional govt 27 Jan removed voting powers of regional govt president Quim Torra, sparking protests from pro-independence supporters; move follows 23 Jan supreme court decision to strip Torra of his seat until a final sentence is made over his public ban for office. Torra 29 Jan announced plans for snap regional election; in reversal of previous position, central govt next day promised to begin talks over Catalonia dispute with regional govt prior to election.

> Turkey  JANUARY 2020

Fatalities in conflict between govt and Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) remained low while security situation in Turkish-controlled territory in Syria continued to be volatile, and parliament approved military deployment to Libya raising stakes in eastern Mediterranean. Harsh winter conditions resulted in fewer casualties in PKK conflict in south east. Interior Ministry 11 Jan announced completion of Operation Kiran after 11th phase of military operation against PKK. Military 10 Jan launched Operation Kapan in attempt to clear out militants from rural areas of southern
Hatay, south-eastern Mardin and Batman provinces. President Erdoğan 8 Jan met Russian President Putin in Turkey to discuss military situation in Syria; following meeting, Putin 10 Jan announced ceasefire in Syria’s Idlib province. Temporary ceasefire failed to halt Syrian govt attacks there. Erdoğan 29 Jan criticised Russia for not abiding by its commitments under Sochi and Astana accords in Idlib region. UN same day said violence in Idlib province had displaced nearly 390,000 in past two months. Amid rising number of displaced persons, Erdoğan 31 Jan expressed concern at new threats near Turkey’s border and said Turkey ready to take necessary steps including using military force in Syria. In Turkey-controlled area of north east Syria, Defence Ministry 8 and 16 Jan said seven Turkish soldiers had died in car bomb attacks attributed to Kurdish-led People’s Protection Units. Parliament 2 Jan authorised troop deployment to Libya to support Tripoli-based Govt of National Accord; military has reportedly deployed 80 Turkish officers for training and coordination purposes as well as some 2,000 allied Syrian fighters. Erdoğan 14 Jan vowed Turkey would not refrain from “teaching Haftar a lesson” if latter’s forces maintained offensive on Tripoli (see Libya). FM Çavuşoğlu 18 Jan accused Greece of sabotaging efforts to bring peace to Libya following 17 Jan visit by Haftar to Athens in response to its exclusion from 19 Jan Berlin Conference on Libya; accusation comes amid rising tensions between Turkey and Greece particularly over Turkey-Libya maritime deal (see Cyprus).

Kazakhstan JANUARY 2020

Dozens protested in Almaty city (south east) 8 Jan calling for Ukraine not to extradite Kazakh opposition blogger Zhanar Akhmet, arrested for fraud in 2017, citing fears for her safety. Dozens of women gathered in capital Nur-Sultan 13 Jan in front of Labour and Social Protection Ministry demanding raise in social benefits. President Tokayev 16 Jan appointed former interior minister Qalmukhanbet Qasymov as chief of State Guard Service; rights groups accuse Qasymov of ordering police shooting of oil workers during 2011 protests in Zhanaozen, south west, which killed at least sixteen. Amid ongoing concerns over treatment of ethnic Kazakhs in China’s Xinjiang province, court in Zaisan (east) 21 Jan sentenced two ethnic Kazakhs who crossed border from Xinjiang seeking asylum to one-year prison for illegal entry, but ruled they would not be deported, citing possible persecution in Xinjiang.
Kyrgyzstan  JANUARY 2020

On disputed border with Tajikistan, unknown assailants night of 9 to 10 Jan threw stones at cars and a house, reportedly injuring some citizens in Batken region; border guards intervened and gunshots were fired but unclear from which side. Incident led to evacuation of over 200 people from Damkha village near location of clashes, and fuelled accusations on both Kyrgyz and Tajik sides over who started incident; 14 Jan prompted talks between Kyrgyz and Tajik officials on process of land exchange; sides established joint working group to decide on demarcation of 114-km border by 15 Feb. Amid ongoing concerns over press freedom, unidentified men 9 Jan assaulted editor in chief of local investigative and anti-corruption website Factcheck near his office in capital Bishkek, police 14 Jan charged four suspects. Hearing of libel lawsuit against local media outlets which had reported on corruption allegations, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Kyrgyz Service (known as Azattyk) and news site Kloop, started 20 Jan, then postponed to 29 Jan. Court 9 Jan ruled that trial of former president Atambayev, charged for illegal release in 2013 of high-profile convicted criminal, would continue in abstentia; Atambayev denies charges, refuses to attend trial.

Tajikistan  JANUARY 2020

Tensions rose 9-10 Jan along disputed border with Kyrgyzstan after stones thrown at cars and a house in Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region and gunshots fired; fuelled accusations on both Kyrgyz and Tajik sides over who started incident; 14 Jan prompted talks between Kyrgyz and Tajik officials on process of land exchange; sides established joint working group to decide on demarcation of 114-km border by 15 Feb. Local radio station 20 Jan reported that authorities previous weeks arrested some 70 suspected members of banned political groups, including possibly Muslim Brotherhood group; General Prosecutor Yusuf Rahmon 28 Jan said that 113
individuals suspected of such allegiances have been detained since beginning of Jan. Journalist Daler Sharifov, who had long reported on violations of religious freedoms, 28 Jan detained on charges of inciting ethnic or religious discord, could face up to five years imprisonment.

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**Uzbekistan**  
**JANUARY 2020**

President Mirziyoyev’s Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (UzLiDeP) gained one seat in parliamentary elections 5 Jan, giving it 53 out of 150 seats. Election saw twice as many female MPs elected compared to last election in 2014 (48). Mirziyoyev 24 Jan pledged social reforms in state-of-nation address, including granting citizenship to some 50,000 long-time residents, relaxing rules restricting free movement for people from rural areas, and increase to social allowances. Trial of Gulnara Karimova, jailed daughter of former President Karimov, accused of illegally buying and selling state-owned shares, started 8 Jan. Local media early Jan reported Uzbekistan had completed demining activities along border with Tajikistan, meeting end-2019 deadline agreed between countries in 2018. Nafosat Olloshukurova, blogger who reported on alleged corruption and abuse by officials, fled country 20 Jan.

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**Latin America & Caribbean**

**Bolivia**  
**JANUARY 2020**

Political tensions continued but unrest in streets appeared to subside as electoral court formally called for new elections. Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) early Jan set general election rerun for 3 May. Constitutional court 15 Jan approved extension of mandate of national and local authorities, including president, deputies and senators until inauguration of new govt. Former President Morales, leading Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party’s electoral campaign, 19 Jan named former economy minister Luis Arce as MAS presidential candidate, and former FM David
Choquehuanca for VP, after TSE late Dec dismissed requests to stop MAS from participating in election. Indigenous activists expressed discontent, and demanded Choquehuanca leads ticket. Judicial authorities 20 Jan launched investigation against Arce and other MAS leaders for alleged corruption. Interim President Jeanine Áñez 24 Jan announced her candidacy in presidential election after having ruled out running, sparking criticism from allies and opponents; after asking all ministers to resign for “new stage of democratic transition”, Áñez 28 Jan unveiled new cabinet, replacing three ministers. Interim govt 17 Jan deployed army in several cities and regions known to be Morales’s strongholds ahead of planned protests by indigenous groups on occasion of Plurinational State Day 22 Jan, also day that should have seen new govt take office following last Oct general elections; indigenous groups protested against interim govt notably in El Alto city and Chapare province but no major clashes reported. U.S. 23 Jan said it would send ambassador to Bolivia for first time in a decade. Interim govt 24 Jan cut diplomatic relations with Cuba in response to Havana’s alleged “constant hostility”.

Chile

Anti-govt protests continued at lower intensity, while govt moved forward with preparations for plebiscite on constitutional reform. Demonstrations reduced to once a week in capital Santiago, and occasionally elsewhere but clashes between protesters and security forces continued. Notably, protesters 3 Jan set fire to San Francisco de Borja church in Santiago, dedicated to serving national police; security forces 24 Jan fired tear gas and water cannons at protesters in Santiago. Govt moved ahead with preparations for 26 April plebiscite on whether to draft new constitution, and whether members of future special constituent assembly should all be elected or half should be elected and half should be current members of parliament. 23 parties announced support for constitutional reform, six opposed. President Piñera 15 Jan proposed reform to pension system, core issue in protests. Public opinion poll which surveyed 1,496 people 16 Jan showed distrust of institutions continuing to grow, with 5% trusting govt, 3% Congress, 2% political parties, and 6% approving of Piñera.
Colombia JANUARY 2020

Allegations of extrajudicial surveillance by military intelligence shook govt, while clashes between armed groups continued notably in west, displacing civilians along Pacific Coast. After President Duque late Dec replaced head of military Nicacio Martínez, citing personal reasons, local media 13 Jan reported govt dismissed Martínez after discovering that he oversaw illegal surveillance of Supreme Court judges, opposition members and journalists, allegedly using technology intended for combating armed groups; Martínez denied accusations but attorney general opened investigation same day. Duque 9 Jan reported security improvements in 2019, notably 48% drop in kidnappings; but UN Human Rights spokesperson 14 Jan said “staggering number” of human rights defenders killed in 2019 raised concerns for peace process between govt and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Killings of social and community leaders spiked with 27 social leaders and five demobilised former FARC combatants reportedly killed throughout month. In Chocó (west), violence between Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC, one of country’s main drug trafficking group) and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group continued, leading to more displacement; govt 9 Jan reported 80 community members displaced in Nuquí municipality following 5 Jan murder of indigenous leader. Community groups continued to call on govt to re-open talks with ELN to reduce violence. ELN early Jan offered several olive branches, symbol of peace, to govt; however govt maintained conditions that ELN release all hostages and unilaterally halt attacks and 16 Jan requested Cuba extradite ELN leader Nicolás Rodríguez Bautista, alias “Gabino”. Govt 12 Jan said it had thwarted plot to kill FARC political leader Rodrigo Londoño, alias “Timochenko”, reportedly orchestrated by FARC dissident leaders. National protests against pension reform, lack of education funding, political corruption, perceived failure to advance 2016 peace accord with FARC, and to prevent killing of rights activists restarted 21 Jan with massive demonstrations in major cities.
Political crisis deepened as MP Luis Parra, backed by President Maduro, and opposition leader Juan Guaidó both claimed National Assembly (AN) leadership after Maduro’s govt moved to take back control of opposition-dominated parliament. Ahead of scheduled vote to elect AN president for next twelve months, govt 5 Jan deployed National Guard to prevent opposition MPs from entering parliament building. Maduro’s new ally Parra, expelled from opposition Primero Justicia Party over allegations of corruption in Dec, declared himself AN president same day, but opposition said voting session did not reach quorum of 84 MPs (out of 167). Guaidó 5 Jan convened session away from parliament building, said 100 MPs re-elected him as AN president. Guaidó 8 Jan held session in parliament building after forcing his way past police cordon in standoff with security forces, but abandoned plan to hold new session there after paramilitary groups known as colectivos 15 Jan attacked convoy carrying several opposition MPs to parliament building and assaulted journalists. In defiance of order banning him from leaving country, Guaidó 19 Jan started foreign tour in bid to shore up international backing, meeting with leaders of Colombia, UK, France, Canada, U.S. Sec State Pompeo and EU foreign policy chief Borrell.

- **STATEMENT:** Seizure of Parliament Plunges Venezuela into Deeper Turmoil

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**Guatemala**  JANUARY 2020

After President-elect Giammattei took office 14 Jan, new govt launched corruption crackdown but civil society continued to raise concerns over alleged democratic backsliding. State prosecutors 15-16 Jan issued arrest warrants against eight senior officials for alleged corruption, prompting police to arrest former congresswoman and former mayor. Outgoing President Morales and VP Cabrera 14 Jan took oaths of office in Central American Parliament – parliamentary institution of regional organisation Central American Integration System – in Guatemala City; protesters and opposition denounced move as attempt to secure immunity from prosecution. In further attempt to delegitimise dismantled anti-corruption body International Commission against Impunity (CICIG), outgoing Congress 10 Jan recommended arrest of CICIG judges and prosecutors, accusing them of wrongdoing. Giammattei 16 Jan presented plan to create Anti-Corruption Presidential Commission to replace CICIG, and launched it 20 Jan. Controversial Law of Acceptance of Charges came into force 16 Jan, potentially reducing sentences by half for those involved in corruption cases who accept their guilt; civil society group Alliance for Reform same day filed
cases who accept their guilt; civil society group Alliance for Reform same day led plea against law to Constitutional Court on grounds that it promoted impunity; court same day suspended law temporarily. Caravan of migrants who departed from Honduras 15 Jan heading toward U.S. reached Guatemala-Mexico border 19 Jan; migrants clashed with Mexican security forces as Mexico, under pressure from U.S., denied them entry (see Mexico). FM Brolo 22 Jan said govt would maintain controversial Asylum Cooperation Agreement signed with U.S. in July 2019 which allows U.S. to transfer asylum seekers to Guatemala so that they can apply there.

Honduras JANUARY 2020

Mandate of anti-corruption body Mission to Support the Fight against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH) ended, prompting backlash from civil society, while state of emergency in prisons continued. Mandate of Organization of American States (OAS)-backed MACCIH expired 19 Jan following govt and OAS’s failure to reach agreement on its renewal; around 800 people protested in capital Tegucigalpa 19 Jan against cessation of body, with students, businesses, unions and opposition calling for national strike. U.S. House of Representatives 18 Jan condemned non-renewal of MACCIH, as did EU 22 Jan. Insecurity persisted: authorities reported 7.1% increase in homicides in 2019 compared to 2018, to 3,996 cases; bus drivers 13 Jan went on strike to denounce gangs’ extortion. State of emergency in prisons, declared by govt in Dec after tide of killings shook prison system, continued throughout month. Amid continued regional focus on migration, acting U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security 9 Jan visited Honduras to finalise migration agreement under which U.S. will send asylum seekers from other states in region to Honduras to apply for asylum there. Caravan of migrants – reportedly 1,000 at departure but growing to 4,000 – heading toward U.S. left Honduras 15 Jan; migrants reached Guatemala-Mexico border 19 Jan, clashed with Mexican security forces as Mexico, under pressure from U.S. govt, denied them entry (see Mexico).

El Salvador JANUARY 2020

Security situation continued to improve with President Bukele reporting Jan as least deadly month since end of civil war in 1992, while Legislative Assembly (LA) passed historic law to protect victims of forced displacement. Govt 8 Jan reported homicides fell by 60% since Bukele took office in June 2019, totalling 2,398 in 2019; attorney general 13 Jan reported 3,202 disappearances in 2019, down from 3,679 in 2018; 8 Jan made combatting extortion his priority for 2020 after reports increased 17.2% in 2019, to 2,598 cases. Bukele reported smallest number of homicides in Jan since end of civil war in 1992. Public opinion poll which surveyed 1,204 people 16 Jan showed 91% approval rate for Bukele. LA 9 Jan passed bill to protect internally displaced persons notably by bringing together institutions to respond to and prevent forced displacement. On day of 28th anniversary of 1992 peace agreement 14 Jan, victims of 1980-1992 civil war continued to decry impunity for war crimes and demanded that they be consulted in formulation of National Reconciliation Law, which LA has been discussing since July 2016, when Supreme Court declared Amnesty Law unconstitutional. Prosecutors 9 Jan issued arrest warrant for prominent opposition politician Sigfrido Reyes, who left country in Nov, for embezzlement during his term as LA president from 2011 to 2015; judge asked international police organisation Interpol to issue red notice for his arrest. Attorney general 27 Jan initiated pre-trial procedure against former head of LA Norman Quijano, on charges of illicit association and electoral fraud, for reportedly meeting with gang members and negotiating their support for his presidential race in 2014.

Nicaragua

Govt sought to ease growing international condemnation of human rights abuses, while opposition struggled to create cohesive front. In meeting with foreign diplomats 6 Jan to present outlines of govt’s foreign policy for 2020, FM Denis Moncada said govt aimed to strengthen international cooperation, while defending principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. National Assembly (NA) 9 Jan announced eight focus areas for parliament including electoral reforms which will involve consultations with political parties but not opposition platforms such as Civic Alliance and Blue and White National Unity (UNAB). Govt 10 Jan launched “human rights and reconciliation” plan under which 7,500 local peace commissions reportedly created in 2019 would be used as arenas for reconciliation. Opposition gave contradictory signals as to its future unity. UNAB 4 Jan elected new political...
gave contradictory signals as to its future unity. UNAB 4 Jan elected new political council. After UNAB founding member Civic Alliance 6 Jan reiterated it is separate from UNAB, both organisations 9 Jan said in joint statement they would continue to work together to defeat govt in upcoming 2021 elections, and 17 Jan announced formation of “National Coalition” open to civil society groups and political parties. Coordinadora Universitaria grouping of four university associations 15 Jan left Civic Alliance for UNAB. Harassment of opposition continued including govt supporters 2 Jan throwing dye and stones at house of opposition activist Amaya Coppens in city of Estelí. Armed assailants 29 Jan killed at least two indigenous Mayangna people in attack reportedly linked to land disputes, on nature reserve in north.

Haiti

Political instability loomed as President Moïse started to rule by decree and unveiled controversial plan to reform constitution. Following failure to hold parliamentary and municipal elections in Nov, Moïse 13 Jan announced mandates of lower house deputies and most senators had formally expired; security guards next day denied several senators access to parliament building; several senators said they would file lawsuit against Moïse for ending their mandate, while civil society condemned “dictatorial drift”. Moïse 17 Jan announced plan to overhaul constitution and put new draft to referendum to end “cycle of decades of political crises”; opposition denounced move as unconstitutional. Moïse 29 Jan initiated talks with opposition and civil society to find political solution; key opposition leaders boycotted talks, demanded change of govt. Insecurity persisted with gangs fighting for control of Cité Soleil neighbourhood in capital Port-au-Prince: gang members 11 Jan killed Judge Antoine Lucius; police 12 Jan reportedly extrajudicially killed individual suspected of having killed policeman 11 Jan.

Mexico

Criminal violence remained high, particularly in central states, while security forces
clashed with migrants attempting to enter country through southern border. In centre, Guanajuato state recorded 395 murders 1-27 Jan amid competition between Jalisco Cartel New Generation (CJNG) and alliance of local armed groups for control of oil siphoning, drug routes and drug retail markets; in Michoacán state, suspected members of unidentified crime group 20 Jan killed two soldiers and wounded ten police in ambush outside avocado industry hub Uruapan. Clashes between CJNG and rival group Los Viagras over north-bound trafficking corridors from Guerrero state (south) through Michoacán 11 Jan killed two alleged armed group members and police officer; clashes between same groups in Zirándaro, Guerrero starting 14 Jan killed at least ten and forced 800 civilians to flee. Suspected members of armed group Los Ardillos 18 Jan ambushed and killed ten members of indigenous community in Guerrero. Army 16 Jan killed eleven members of illegal armed group, reportedly after being ambushed in Miguel Alemán, Tamaulipas state (south). In what observers lauded as effort to recognise scale of disappearances, govt 6 Jan reported 61,637 people currently classified as disappeared; previous govt maintained total was 40,000. Targeted killings of journalists and activists continued, with radio host Fidel Ávila, missing since Nov 2019, found shot dead 7 Jan in Michoacán state, women’s rights activist Isabel Cabanillas found shot dead 19 Jan in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua state (north) and environmental activist Homero Gómez, missing since 13 Jan, found dead 29 Jan in Michoacán state. Amid regional focus on migration, caravan of Central American migrants, having departed from Honduras 15 Jan, reached Guatemala-Mexico border 19 Jan; after govt closed border 18 Jan under pressure from U.S., National Guard 19-21 Jan used tear gas and threw stones to prevent migrants entering country, leaving several wounded.

**Middle East & North Africa**

 Fist Israel/Palestine JANUARY 2020

U.S.’s release of its Middle East peace plan provoked Palestinian anger further dimming prospects for peace; meanwhile violence along Gaza-Israel fence continued at low intensity and Israeli security forces clashed with Muslim worshippers at Jerusalem’s Holy Esplanade. U.S. 28 Jan published plan that proposes “Palestinian state” with capital on outskirts of Jerusalem and recognition of Israeli sovereignty over West Bank settlements. Palestinian President Abbas rejected plan as “conspiracy”. In Gaza, Palestinian militants 15 Jan fired four rockets into Israel.
In Gaza, Palestinian militants 15 Jan fired four rockets into Israel prompting Israel to retaliate against Hamas sites in Gaza. Militants mid-Jan began again to launch incendiary balloons toward Israel, prompting Israel to strike Hamas targets in Gaza several times mid- to late Jan. Israeli security forces 21 Jan killed three Palestinians who crossed into Israel. Militants late Jan launched at least ten rockets at Israel, which again retaliated against Hamas in Gaza. Qatar 26 Jan disbursed $7mn to Palestinians in Gaza. In Jerusalem, Israeli security forces 7 Jan reportedly attacked and arrested a dozen Muslim worshippers at Holy Esplanade. Several hundred Muslim worshippers 17 Jan protested at Holy Esplanade prompting security forces to disperse crowds. Security forces clashed again with Palestinians at Holy Esplanade 24 and 31 Jan. In days following release of U.S. peace plan 28 Jan Palestinian protests continued across West Bank. Israel 5-6 Jan approved construction of 1,936 homes for Israelis in Area C in West Bank; 12 Jan approved plans to create seven new Israeli nature reserves and expand twelve existing ones in West Bank. In Israel, PM Netanyahu 21 Jan said that, if re-elected in March polls, he would annex Jordan Valley and Israeli settlements in West Bank; soon afterward Blue and White party leader Benny Gantz said that if his party won, he would annex Jordan Valley but only as part of international agreement. In Syria, suspected Israeli airstrikes against Iranian targets 9-14 Jan killed at least eleven.

Tensions between Jordan and Israel persisted. Jordan early Jan received first delivery of Israeli gas under new deal. Protesters 3, 10 and 17 Jan took to streets in capital Amman and other cities calling on govt to cancel deal. Parliament’s lower house 19 Jan passed law to ban Israeli gas imports. In Saudi capital Riyadh, Jordan and seven other countries on Red Sea and Gulf of Aden 6 Jan established regional alliance to ensure maritime security. After release of U.S.’s Israeli-Palestinian peace plan 28 Jan, dozens protested at U.S. embassy in Amman and thousands protested across country 31 Jan.
Anti-govt protests grew and clashes with security forces intensified as dire economic conditions continued to deteriorate and PM Diab’s announcement of new cabinet failed to appease protesters. Protests swelled mid-Jan as value of Lebanese Lira 13 Jan fell to 2,500 to the dollar in parallel market, 40% drop since Aug 2019, further eroding citizens’ purchasing power and leading private sector to cut salaries and central bank to limit cash withdrawals and transfers outside country. In Beirut, riot police 14 Jan clashed with protesters near central bank HQ, police arrested 57. Protesters next day gathered outside police station demanding demonstrators’ release and clashed with police, who arrested at least 55 more. Protests 18 and 19 Jan escalated in downtown Beirut as security forces attempted to disperse protesters with water cannon, tear gas and rubber bullets, leaving several hundred people injured. Diab 21 Jan announced new cabinet backed by Hizbollah and allied parties; parliament still has to give cabinet vote of confidence. Protesters rejected cabinet as part of elite they seek to oust. Lawmakers 27 Jan passed 2020 budget aimed at tackling economic crisis as protesters outside parliament clashed with security forces, at least 27 injured. UK, which classified Hizbollah in its entirety as terrorist organisation in March 2019, 17 Jan expanded asset-freezing measures, previously targeting military wing, to include Hizbollah’s political wing.

- COMMENTARY: Pulling Lebanon Back from the Precipice

Govt forces with Russian air support continued to advance into rebel-held Idlib province in north west killing hundreds of civilians and displacing hundreds of thousands raising risk that Turkey responds with force against govt troops in coming weeks; in north east and east fighting between Turkey and Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) subsided, but Islamic State (ISIS) upped operations against SDF and govt forces. In north west, govt and Russian forces continued aerial bombardments in Idlib province throughout month, notably govt bombardment on Idlib city 15 Jan killed nineteen civilians. Govt offensive in area south of Maarat al Numan 16 Jan left at least 26 rebel fighters and 29 govt soldiers dead; govt 28 Jan regained control of town. Russian airstrikes 21 Jan killed over 40 civilians in rural
Idlib province. State media 22 Jan claimed rebel shelling of western neighbourhoods of Aleppo city killed three civilians. Turkish President Erdoğan 29 Jan criticised Russia for not abiding by its commitments under Sochi and Astana accords in Idlib. UN same day said violence in Idlib province had displaced nearly 390,000 in past two months. Amid rising number of displaced persons, Erdoğan 31 Jan expressed concern at new threats near Turkey’s border and said Turkey ready to take necessary steps including using military force in Syria. In north east, in Raqqa ISIS mid-Jan carried out first open attack against govt forces since 2017, killing one soldier. In east, ISIS 2 Jan claimed responsibility for attack on SDF checkpoint in Abu Hamam, Deir al-Zour province that killed nine SDF troops. Govt 14 Jan said ISIS attack in Badia region of Deir al-Zour killed four soldiers. Russian President Putin visited President Assad in Damascus 7 Jan to discuss military situation. UN Security Council 10 Jan voted to renew resolution 2165 mandating cross-border aid into Syria, reauthorising delivery through two crossings between Turkey and Syria (Bab al Salameh and Bab al Haweh crossings) for another twelve months, but discontinuing delivery through crossings at al-Ramtha (from Jordan) and Al Yarubiyah (from Iraq).

- IMPACT NOTE: Editorial in the Washington Post: The World Must Do Something about the Children of ISIS Fighters

Iran-U.S. tensions soared early Jan as U.S.’s killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani provoked Iran to strike U.S. military installations in Iraq, and in response to Iran’s further breach of nuclear deal, three European states triggered dispute resolution mechanism, which could potentially lead to deal’s collapse. In Iraq, U.S. drone strike at Baghdad airport 3 Jan killed Major General Soleimani, leader of Iran’s Quds Force, expeditionary wing of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC); strike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, commander of Iran-backed Iraqi militia Kataib Hizbollah. Iranian missile strikes 7 Jan hit U.S. bases at Ain al-Assad and Erbil in Iraq but killed no personnel; Pentagon said 64 U.S. soldiers injured. Iran 5 Jan for fifth time breached Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) by announcing it would no longer observe deal’s limits on number of centrifuges Iran may operate. In response, UK, France and Germany 14 Jan activated deal’s dispute resolution mechanism, which could eventually result in restoration of pre-JCPOA EU and UN sanctions on Iran. U.S. 30 Jan abandoned JCPOA exemptions for Iran’s shipbuilding.
U.S.’s killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in capital Baghdad provoked Iranian missile strikes on U.S. assets in Iraq and reinvigorated efforts to evict U.S. and coalition forces, and security forces continued to violently repress anti-govt protests. Following tit-for-tat attacks between U.S. and Iran-backed militia Kataib Hizbollah late Dec, U.S. drone strike in Baghdad 3 Jan killed ten including militia’s commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, also deputy commander of Shiite militia coalition Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU), and Soleimani, whom Washington claimed had been planning attacks on U.S. targets. Iran 8 Jan retaliated with missile strikes on two air bases in Anbar and Erbil provinces hosting U.S. troops, causing material damage and injuring 64 U.S. soldiers. Shiite militia Asa’ib Ahl Al-Haq 8 Jan called for militant action against U.S. Numerous unclaimed aerial attacks targeting U.S. assets and PMU continued throughout month, notably three rockets 26 Jan reportedly hit U.S. embassy. Parliament by slim majority 5 Jan passed non-binding resolution tasking govt to expel U.S. and other foreign troops from Iraq. U.S. threatened govt with sanctions if it forced American troops to leave. U.S. 10 Jan rejected PM Mahdi’s request to draw up plan for troop withdrawal. Responding to call by influential Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Baghdad 24 Jan, demanding end to U.S. military presence. Anti-
govt protests persisted in Baghdad and south, clashes with security forces left at least ten dead 20-21 Jan. Sadr 24 Jan withdrew support for protests and his supporters next day left protest camps in Baghdad and southern cities; security forces proceeded to raid camps leaving at least twelve dead. Sadr 31 Jan called on his supporters to rejoin protests. Following Soleimani’s killing, NATO and U.S.-led coalition against Islamic State (ISIS) suspended operations 4 and 5 Jan respectively and some participant states removed small numbers of troops. Army 30 Jan said it was resuming joint operations with U.S.-led coalition. ISIS attacks 2-29 Jan left at least thirteen security force members and two civilians dead.

Oman  JANUARY 2020

Sultan Qaboos bin Said al-Said died 10 Jan aged 79; royal family council 11 Jan pronounced his cousin, Haitham bin Tariq al-Said, as Sultan. In his first address, Sultan Haitham pledged to continue his predecessor’s friendly relations with all states.

Qatar  JANUARY 2020

Amid rising regional tensions Emir Al-Thani visited Iran and govt enhanced energy ties with Kuwait. Following U.S.’s 3 Jan killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani, Emir Al-Thani 12 Jan met Iranian President Rouhani in Tehran; after meeting, Emir said “only solution to these crises is de-escalation from everyone and dialogue”. State-run Qatar Petroleum 5 Jan signed 15-year deal to provide 3mn tonnes of liquefied natural gas to Kuwait each year from 2022.
After several quiet weeks, fighting intensified mid-Jan between Saudi-led coalition and Huthi forces in northern Yemen and across Yemen-Saudi border, raising risk of further escalation in Feb; Saudi mediators persuaded Yemeni govt and southern separatists to agree on new roadmap for implementing Nov 2019 Riyadh Agreement; and Saudi Arabia sought to calm U.S.-Iran tensions following U.S.’s killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani. Cross-border violence between Saudi Arabia and Yemen’s Huthis reduced early Jan but, as de-escalation talks stalled, fighting escalated mid-Jan, including Saudi airstrikes on Huthi positions and Huthi attacks on Saudi positions. Following failure of Yemeni govt and separatist Southern Transitional Council to fully implement 5 Nov Riyadh Agreement within 90-day timeframe, Saudi officials 9 Jan oversaw agreement on “Phase 2” implementation plan; plan tasks Saudi military officials with moving rival groups’ heavy weapons in Aden to Saudi-controlled base in city. After U.S.’s 3 Jan strike that killed Soleimani, govt 5 Jan said U.S. had not consulted it beforehand and FM Jubeir 6 Jan called for restraint and de-escalation of regional tensions.

Suspected Huthi missile strike on govt forces in north led to intensification of fighting on several fronts including across Yemen-Saudi border, which could spread and escalate further in Feb; govt and southern separatists agreed on new roadmap to implement 5 Nov Riyadh Agreement; and troop build-up in Taiz province in south could augur escalation in Feb between Sunni Islamists and Salafists. In north, talks between Saudi Arabia and Huthis continued and for first half of month both sides largely refrained from cross-border violence. But Huthis increased tempo of fighting along key front lines in north and strike on govt forces’ base in Marib province 18 Jan that reportedly killed over 100 soldiers led to escalation between Huthis and their allies on one side and Saudi-led coalition on other in Al Jawf, Marib and Sanaa governorates. Both sides suffered heavy losses. In south, under pressure from Saudi Arabia, govt and separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) 9 Jan agreed on “Phase 2” plan to implement Nov Riyadh Agreement; parties had failed to fully implement deal within initial 90-day timeframe disagreeing on how to sequence security and political aspects, with clashes erupting early Jan. New plan requires...
security and political aspects, with clashes erupting early Jan. New plan requires
govt-affiliated forces to redeploy from Aden to front lines in al-Dhale and Abyan
provinces, and for STC forces to move from Aden to Lahj governorate within twenty
days from 11 Jan. As part of “Phase 2” agreement, govt and STC exchanged 53
prisoners 12 Jan. Rival Yemeni groups 24 Jan completed transfer of heavy weapons in
Aden to Saudi-controlled base in city within fifteen-day timeframe. After early
redeployments from Aden, process again stalled late Jan, with local appointments
still not made. In Taiz governorate, tensions mounted between Sunni Islamist Islah
forces, which control Taiz city centre, and United Arab Emirates-backed forces based
in Turbah south of city and on Red Sea coast. Islah reportedly building up forces near
Turbah late month raising risk of major confrontation there.

- **ALERT: Breaking A Renewed Conflict Cycle in Yemen**

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**United Arab Emirates**  
**JANUARY 2020**

After U.S.’s 3 Jan killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani sparked rise in
regional tensions, FM 3 Jan called for “wisdom, balance and political solutions above
confrontation and escalation”.

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**Algeria**  
**JANUARY 2020**

Protests demanding radical political change continued but in smaller numbers
compared to previous months, while new President Tebboune, elected in Dec 2019,
launched several initiatives in attempt to show good-will and rebuild trust between
protesters and authorities. In capital Algiers, security forces arrested at least twenty
protesters 17 Jan and at least four others 24 Jan; more protesters reportedly rallied in
Algiers 31 Jan for 50th week and ahead of one-year anniversary of protest movement
in Feb. Tebboune met with prominent opposition figures in late Dec and Jan; formed
constitutional reform panel with aim to strengthen public liberties and judicial
independence 8 Jan; and transferred power to appoint senior officials to PM Djerad
18 Jan. Authorities released several opposition and civil society leaders involved in protest movement: wealthy businessman Issad Rebrab, detained since April 2019, released 1 Jan after court same day sentenced him to six months in prison for financial crimes; dozens arrested during demonstrations in 2019, including independence war veteran and protest movement figure Lakhdar Bouregaa, released 2 Jan. Court in Biskra 18 Jan convicted university student to eighteen months in prison for “insult to a regular body” after he posted videos of police repression of protests on social media. Appeal Court of Algiers 31 Jan sentenced two members of protest movement, Toufik Kerfa and Yacine Elouareth, arrested in Nov, to three months in prison for endangering state security. During Berlin Conference on Libya 19 Jan, Tebboune offered to host dialogue between Libyan warring factions. FM Sabri Boukadoum brought together FMs of Egypt, Tunisia, Chad, Niger, Sudan, and Mali in Algiers 23 Jan to discuss political solutions to Libyan conflict.

Egypt JANUARY 2020

Tensions with Turkey grew, and President Sisi continued to tighten his grip on media, while Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan made progress in talks to resolve dispute over Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on River Nile opening opportunity to strike comprehensive deal in Feb. Govt 2 Jan condemned Turkey’s decision to send troops and weapons to support Libyan militias loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord against Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s forces backed by Cairo, and National Security Council convened same day in Cairo to identify measures to address potential threat to national security. FMs of Egypt, Greece, Cyprus and France met in Cairo 8 Jan and jointly condemned Turkey’s move. Govt 10 Jan said armed forces were conducting military exercises in country’s strategic areas and along coasts of Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea to show “strength and readiness of the armed forces to protect the capabilities and wealth of the country”. Police 14 Jan raided Cairo office of Turkish state-owned Anadolu news agency and detained four staff, including Turkish national, on grounds of having links to banned Muslim Brotherhood group; authorities released them 16-19 Jan. Govt 8 Jan approved new media policies after Sisi late Dec reinstated information ministry abolished in 2014 and said authorities had to block websites to protect country. In Washington DC 13-15 Jan, representatives of Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan signed six-point preliminary agreement on filling of reservoir and operation of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on River Nile; met again in Washington DC 28-29 Jan in attempt to finalise.
on River Nile; met again in Washington DC 28-29 Jan in attempt to finalise agreement and resolve dispute, but extended talks due to deadlock over agreement details; 31 Jan said in joint statement they had reached agreement and would sign deal by end of Feb. During meeting with Sisi 19 Jan, U.S. Sec State Pompeo expressed outrage at death of U.S. citizen Moustafa Kassem in prison 13 Jan. Court in Cairo 27 Jan sentenced 37 people to jail terms, including eight to life in prison, for joining Islamic State (ISIS)-Sinai Province.

Libya JANUARY 2020

Diplomatic efforts intensified to de-escalate conflict between forces loyal to UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar’s Arab Libyan Armed Forces (ALAF, previously known as Libyan National Army), but fell short of ceasefire deal. Turkish parliament 2 Jan approved deployment of troops and naval assets to Libya in support of PM Serraj’s GNA. In subsequent weeks, Ankara reportedly sent 2,000 allied Syrian fighters and dozens of Turkish military experts to capital Tripoli. Airstrike on military academy in Tripoli 4 Jan reportedly killed at least 30, most of them students; GNA blamed ALAF, who denied involvement. ALAF 6 Jan seized control of coastal city of Sirte. Russia, Haftar’s ally, and Turkey 8 Jan called for ceasefire starting 12 Jan and return to negotiating table; for a week starting 12 Jan, both sides refrained from aerial strikes and only exchanged minor artillery fire. Russia and Turkey 13 Jan brought Haftar and Serraj to Moscow in attempt to seal seven-point ceasefire agreement; Serraj signed it, but Haftar rejected it. Pro-Haftar local tribes 17 Jan shut down oil production and exports, prompting production to plummet from 1.2mn barrels per day to 300,000 overnight; blockade was ongoing as of 31 Jan. Leaders from twelve countries including Russia, Turkey, Egypt, Germany, France, Italy and UK, as well as representatives of UN, EU, African Union and League of Arab States, attended much-delayed international peace conference in Berlin 19 Jan, called on warring parties and their foreign backers to “redouble efforts” for sustained suspension of hostilities; commit to implement UN arms embargo; and support UN-backed political process. In Berlin, Serraj and Haftar did not attend conference, but reportedly agreed to appoint representatives to military committee scheduled to meet in Geneva under UN auspices by end of Jan to discuss details of ceasefire; military talks were later postponed. Fighting resumed late Jan in Tripoli: ALAF airstrikes 29 Jan killed four civilians in southern Hadba neighbourhood.
STATEMENT: Libya: Turning the Berlin Conference’s Words into Action

*Mauritania*  
**JANUARY 2020**

At G5 Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger) meeting in France on 13 January, President Ould Ghazouani and other G5 Sahel heads of state reiterated their commitment to fighting terrorist groups and support for French military presence in the region.

*Morocco*  
**JANUARY 2020**

Following Côte d’Ivoire in June and Comoros in December, Gambia, Guinea, Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe opened consulates to Morocco in Dakhla and Laayoune in Western Sahara in January, thereby recognising Morocco’s claims over disputed territory. Parliament passed two laws integrating waters off coast of Western Sahara into its maritime territory.

*Tunisia*  
**JANUARY 2020**

Political polarisation grew as attempts to form government failed. Parliament on 10 January rejected the government proposed by PM-designate Habib Jemli, with only 72 of 217 MPs voting in favour. President Saïed on 20 January named former finance minister and candidate in 2019 presidential election Elyes Fakhfakh as new prime minister and tasked him with forming a new government by 15 March. Fakhfakh opened consultations with ten party leaders to build...
majority of 109 MPs needed to form govt. Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda 27 Jan threatened to reject govt if consultations did not include all parties in parliament. Fakhfakh 29 Jan unveiled policy priorities of his future govt, indicating tackling poverty, inequality and unemployment as urgent goals. President of Free Destourian Party (FDP) and MP Abir Moussi 14 Jan called for dismissal of Islamist-inspired party An-Nahda president Rached Ghannouchi from parliament speaker position for treason following his visit to Turkey, where he met with Turkish President Erdoğan 11 Jan. Supporters of radical right-wing political group Karama coalition 16 Jan assaulted Moussi and other FDP members in parliament building.

Western Sahara

Following Côte d’Ivoire in June and Comoros in Dec, Gambia, Guinea, Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe opened consulates to Morocco in Dakhla and Laayoune in Western Sahara in Jan, thereby recognising Morocco’s claims over territory. Polisario Front independence movement, ruling party of self-declared Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), condemned moves and asked African Union (AU) to intervene. Morocco’s parliament adopted two laws integrating waters off coast of Western Sahara into its maritime space 22 Jan; Polisario rejected move as lacking legal effect. SADR representative to AU, Lamin Baali and AU Peace and Security Commissioner Smaïl Chergui met in Addis Ababa 26 Jan, discussed “respect of international legality” in disputed territory.