Tracking Conflict Worldwide

CrisisWatch is our global conflict tracker, a tool designed to help decision-makers prevent deadly violence by keeping them up-to-date with developments in over 70 conflicts and crises, identifying trends and alerting them to risks of escalation and opportunities to advance peace.

Learn more about CrisisWatch →

May 2018

Global Overview

May saw Cameroon’s Anglophone conflict escalate and new clashes between Somaliland and Somalia’s Puntland over disputed territory – in both cases, fighting could increase in June. Intercommunal violence rose in the Central African Republic and on both sides of the Mali-Niger border. In Burundi, President Nkurunziza pushed through changes to the constitution, entrenching his increasingly authoritarian rule. In Yemen, both sides intensified their campaigns and the Saudi-led coalition’s offensive on Hodeida could mean more bloodshed in coming weeks. Israel killed over 60 Palestinian protesters in one day, and Israel-Iran tensions climbed in Syria. President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal could ramp up confrontation between the U.S. and Iran or their respective allies. Fighting intensified in Afghanistan, while Indonesia faced ISIS-linked terror attacks. In North East Asia, China and Japan established a crisis management hotline, tensions flared over the Taiwan Strait, and a planned summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un in June could advance denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.
Trends for Last Month
May 2018

🎉 Deteriorated Situations
Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Somalia, Somaliland, Mali, Niger, Taiwan Strait, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Israel/Palestine, Syria, Iran, Yemen

🎉 Improved Situations
China/Japan

Outlook for This Month
June 2018

💡 Conflict Risk Alerts
Cameroon, Somalia, Somaliland, Iran, Yemen

 добро здравствуйте

 Resolution Opportunities
Korean Peninsula

PRESIDENT’S TAKE

Lesser-Known Conflicts Need Urgent Attention

Introducing the May/June 2018 CrisisWatch, our President Robert Malley spotlights three under-covered crises: Burundi, where constitutional amendments imperil the ethnic power balance; Venez...

Continue reading

Trends and Outlook

Cameroon’s Anglophone insurgency against the mainly Francophone state intensified again, leaving at least 60 dead and raising the risk of worse violence in June. Anglophone separatist militants launched multiple attacks, killing members of the security forces and kidnapping officials. Some Anglophone leaders adopted virulent rhetoric, telling Francophones to leave the Anglophone west or face consequences, and the government stuck to its military strategy. As we have urged, dialogue – potentially mediated by the Catholic Church – is the only way to avoid a long and costly struggle.

In Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, a flare-up of fighting between Muslim and Christian gangs raised fears of a return to largescale intercommunal violence, while in the provinces militias continued to attack civilians, national forces and UN peacekeepers. With most voters endorsing the Burundian government’s proposed constitutional changes in the 17 May referendum, President Nkurunziza could now extend his authoritarian rule until 2034 and upset the delicate power balance
between Hutus and Tutsis. To prevent a slide back into conflict, we argued the African Union must press the government to open political space and end its inflammatory discourse.

A festering territorial dispute on the border between Somaliland and Puntland, a semi-autonomous region of Somalia, saw new fighting that left dozens dead and could worsen in June. Along the border between Mali and Niger, intercommunal attacks rose sharply pitting ethnic Dossaak and Tuareg against Fulani, the former taking part in counter-insurgency operations alongside French and national forces, the latter suspected of supporting jihadists.

Yemen’s unrelenting war could be about to get much worse. The United Arab Emirates and their Yemeni allies launched an offensive to take Hodeida, the main port city in Huthi-controlled territory. Hodeida’s invasion could compound the already acute humanitarian crisis and spark a wider conflict. To avert worse suffering, relevant actors should press Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to hold off, persuade the Huthis to stop missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, and support the new UN envoy to revive a political process that is more inclusive and realistic. Trump’s withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal on 8 May upped the risk of confrontation between the U.S. and Iran or their respective allies in the coming weeks. To save the deal, the onus lies on European powers to preserve as many of the deal’s benefits for Iran as possible.

Trump’s exit was swiftly followed by a major escalation between Israel and Iran over the latter’s role in Syria, with Israel claiming to have hit “dozens of Iranian military targets”. As we had warned, the Israel-Palestine conflict escalated: on 14 May, its bloodiest day since the 2014 Gaza war, Israeli forces killed over 60 Palestinian protesters at the Gaza-Israel border, as tens of thousands demanded the right to return to their old homes in Israel and an end to the Gaza siege.

With fighting season in full swing in Afghanistan, the Taliban intensified attacks on rural centres and provincial capitals. In Indonesia, three families coordinated deadly terror attacks, involving the use of children to deploy bombs, on three churches and the police in and around Surabaya city. These attacks, the deadliest claimed by the Islamic State on Indonesian soil, left at least 25 dead.

Taiwan lost two more of its remaining diplomatic allies after both the Dominican Republic and Burkina Faso formally established diplomatic relations with China. Taiwan’s government said that “outrageous” manoeuvres by China were intended to undermine Taiwan’s sovereignty, and “crossed a bottom line”.

On 9 May, after years of negotiations, Japan and China agreed to set up a maritime and aerial communication mechanism for crisis management, which will help reduce the risk that assertive or aggressive manoeuvres could spark a major diplomatic or military conflict. Crisis Group has long urged the two countries to reach this agreement, calling on them to manage disputes with professionalism and refrain from risky or intimidating behaviour.

The month saw a flurry of diplomatic activity to keep the U.S.-North Korea dialogue process moving forward ahead of the planned 12 June summit between Trump and Kim Jong-un on denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula.

Latest Updates

Africa
Yes win in constitutional referendum could allow President Nkurunziza to stay in power until 2034 and undermine ethnic power balance; violence also escalated with attack in north west leaving 26 civilians dead. In referendum on revised constitution 17 May, amid ongoing harassment and intimidation of No voters and those opposed to referendum, 73% voted Yes. Changes extend presidential terms from five to seven years and may allow Nkurunziza to seek two more terms from 2020. France and U.S. condemned climate of fear and repression. Campaigning officially began 1 May; electoral commission 8 May published revised draft constitution. CNARED opposition coalition in exile reiterated call for boycott. Govt criminalised calls for abstention, punishable by up to three years in prison. Catholic Church 3 May said timing of referendum was not right as some Burundians suppress free speech and people “do not dare say what they think”. Govt 4 May suspended BBC and Voice of America for six months for breaching media laws and warned Radio France Internationale and local radio station to verify sources more rigorously; govt 23 May said it was ready to lift suspensions. Unidentified assailants 12 May killed 26 people in Cibitoke (north west) seemingly targeting families of police officers; govt said attackers were “terrorists coming from and returning to” DR Congo. Vote took place 17 May largely peacefully, but opposition coalition Amizero y’Abarundi denounced security forces forcing some people to polling stations, ruling party’s youth wing Imbonerakure for violating secrecy of votes, and polling station officials for chasing opposition monitors from polling stations. Electoral commission 21 May announced victory for Yes camp. Amizero y’Abarundi 31 May petitioned Constitutional Court to invalidate results.

- OP-ED: AU Must Re-engage in Burundi to Push for Inclusivity as a Way out of Violence

Anglophone separatist militants and security forces intensified attacks on each other and civilians in west, leaving at least 60 people dead and raising risk of worse violence there in June, as Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks in Far North. Anglophone separatists reportedly killed thirteen security force members in Southwest region 3-15 May and two in Northwest region 16-18 May. On National Day (anniversary of unification of French- and English-speaking parts of Cameroon) 20 May separatists attacked Ekona, Kumba, Ikiliwindi and Nguti, all Southwest, killing three security force members and kidnapped officials in Lebialem and Banguem, both Southwest. Ten people reportedly killed in incidents involving security forces in Batibo and Bali villages, Northwest 25 May. Operation by security forces in Menka, Northwest 25 May left at least 32 dead; military said it killed 27 Anglophone militants who killed four of their hostages, Anglophone separatists denied any militants present. Spokesman of Interim Govt of Ambazonia (self-proclaimed Anglophone state) 13 May called on all Francophones in Anglophone area to leave, threatening attacks if they did not, and on all Angophones in French-speaking area to return to their “homeland”; thousands of Francophones left Northwest and Southwest provinces. Some separatists endorsed call, others distanced themselves from it. BH insurgents killed one civilian in Krawa-Maffa,
Mayo Tsanaga department 5 May; kidnapped chief of Kalama, Logone-et-Chari department early May, released him a few days later after family paid undisclosed ransom; security forces arrested three BH around Sagme, Logone-et-Chari 7 May; BH attacked Zeneme, Mayo Tsanaga 14 May stealing 120 cattle.

- **OP-ED:** Au Cameroun, le spectre de la guerre civile plane à nouveau

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**Central African Republic**  MAY 2018

Intercommunal violence flared in capital Bangui, while in provinces armed groups continued to attack national and international forces and civilians, leaving dozens dead. In Bangui, skirmish between security forces and armed group under command of leader known as General Force 1 May triggered fighting between Muslim and Christian armed groups and attacks against civilians, leaving 24 people dead: armed men from predominantly Muslim PK5 neighbourhood 1 May attacked church in Fatima neighbourhood killing several worshippers and priest; in response, assailants lynched two suspected Muslims and burned down mosque. Next day, police dispersed thousands at Bangui cathedral protesting against govt's failure to stem violence. Grenade attack at market in PK5 23 May killed two people; same day armed group from PK5 attacked Fatima neighbourhood, fighting left ten dead. Also in Bangui, civilians stoned vehicle of UN mission (MINUSCA) 4 May and anti-banditry police, seemingly by mistake, killed aide to Sudanese ambassador. In Bambari in centre, armed men reportedly affiliated with ex-Seleka faction Union for Peace in the Central African Republic (UPC) attacked gendarmerie, police station, UN base, NGO premises and catholic church, killing eight people 14-15 May; UN said it had regained control of town 16 May. Suspected anti-balaka fighters ambushed Mauritanian UN peacekeepers 28km south of Alindao in centre 17 May, killing one. After ex-Seleka factions assembled in Kaga Bandoro in north late April raising fears of attack on Bangui, two French fighter planes, at UN’s request, flew over Kaga Bandoro area 13 May. President Touadéra met Russian President Putin in St. Petersburg 23 May to discuss economic and military cooperation.

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**Chad**  MAY 2018

After parliament passed constitutional amendment end April, Constitutional Court 3 May rejected its annulment, proposed by some opposition MPs. President Déby signed into law new constitution 4 May and during ceremony said govt would grant amnesty for all Chadians in exile for political reasons; spokesperson (now in Germany) of former rebel alliance Union of Resistance Forces (UFR) active in east in 2000s expressed doubt in sincerity of Déby’s promise 6 May. New govt formed 7 May. Supreme Court 10
May swore in govt members on either Koran or Bible; Supreme Court president immediately fired one govt member who refused to swear on Bible; another refused to use word “Allah” in her statement. Déby met political parties 8 May but failed to agree on composition of National Framework for Political Dialogue, platform comprising ruling majority, opposition and civil society to discuss conduct of elections. Déby met opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo, at latter’s request, 16 May for first time since 2012. Civil servants went on strike 28 May to demand full payment of salaries as allowances withheld since Jan; 30 May rejected offer of compensation in kind. Boko Haram militants attacked army position on island in Lake Chad during night 5-6 May, killing one soldier, four officials and one citizen.

Democratic Republic Of Congo  MAY 2018

Govt and opposition continued to wrangle over preparations for Dec elections, as armed group violence persisted in east. International Organisation of La Francophonie 6-25 May audited voter register, identified multiple issues, including that 16.6% of voters had been registered without digital recording of their fingerprints; recommended how electoral commission could improve register. Govt 18 May said that list of authorised political parties and coalitions – contested by opposition parties and NGOs – would be revised based on recommendations of committee for follow-up of Dec 2016 Saint Sylvester agreement. Catholic Church 15 and 24 May expressed concern with stalled implementation of Saint Sylvester agreement and with various aspects of election preparations and repeated call for independent audit of voting machines. Kabila 14 May appointed three new judges to Constitutional Court, including two close allies. Police disrupted meetings of opposition leader Moïse Katumbi’s Together for Change movement in Lubumbashi, Haut-Katanga province 5 May and in Bunia, Ituri province 19 May. Three MPs, including two Katumbi allies, banned from parliament 11 May, officially for absenteeism. Katumbi and opposition leader Félix Tshisekedi 25 May confirmed intention to put forward single presidential candidate. Violence continued, especially in east. Unidentified assailants killed park ranger and kidnapped two British tourists and their driver in Virunga national park, North Kivu province 11 May, releasing driver almost immediately and tourists two days later. Mai Mai militia attacked convoy of UN mission (MONUSCO) in Tanganyika province 11 May. Mai Mai militia attacked Namoya gold mine in Maniema province causing multiple casualties 24 May, reportedly tried to take foreign workers hostage but repelled by guards. Suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militia attacked Mangboko village, Beni territory, North Kivu 20 May killing ten civilians. ADF militants clashed with army on Mbau-Kamango axis, North Kivu 24 May, fourteen ADF and five soldiers killed. Ebola outbreak in Equateur province began early April, reported 8 May; 35 cases confirmed and 25 deaths recorded as of 28 May, World Health Organization began using experimental vaccine.
Republic Of Congo  MAY 2018

Court sentenced ex-army chief and former opposition presidential candidate Jean-Marie Michel Mokoko to twenty years in prison for violating state security and possessing weapons illegally 11 May. Court sentenced General Norbert Dabira to five years in prison for violating state security 19 May.

Gabon  MAY 2018

Following dissolution of National Assembly in April, President Bongo 3 May allowed PM Issouze-Ngondet to be sworn in as temporary PM to form interim govt. Issouze-Ngondet 4 May announced temporary cabinet.

Ethiopia  MAY 2018

In talks on Ethiopia’s construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Nile River held in Addis Ababa 15-16 May, Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan agreed to set up technical team to consult on filling of dam’s reservoir and that heads of state would meet every six months; Egypt also reportedly withdrew its proposal that World Bank arbitrate dispute. Earlier talks 5 May ended in stalemate. Amid push toward political opening, Amhara regional state 7 May said it would pardon 3,591 prisoners. Govt 11-12 May began talks with exiled opposition group Oromo Democratic Front (ODF), which said it would return to Ethiopia and form political party; PM Abiy and ODF leaders met in Addis Ababa 23 May and agreed to pursue national unity. Members of Oromo and Garre ethnic groups clashed in Moyale town, near border with Kenya 6 May; several people reportedly killed and some fled across border into Kenya. Govt 26 May announced pardon or removal of charges against 749 detainees, including opposition leader and Ethiopian-British dual national Andargachew Tsige. Amnesty International 31 May alleged that Somali state police attacked civilians in neighbouring Oromia 23 and 24 May, killing five.
**肯尼亚** 5月2018

肯尼亚总统肯雅塔和反对派领袖拉伊拉·奥廷加继续致力于实现和解。奥廷加1月宣布反对由其全国超级联盟（NASA）领导的四家公司，该联盟表示，其成员接近领导的联盟党成为当选。在国家致辞中，肯雅塔表示，政治领导人必须为他们在选举期间创造的分歧道歉，并强调了对国家团结的需要。由肯雅塔和奥廷加领导的14人委员会于5月10日举行首次会议，但没有公开结果。肯雅塔于5月18日表示，他的政府将不会举行宪法改革公投，以引入新的执行职务，这被奥廷加及其盟友所倡导。5月3日，疑似阿尔-沙巴布组织在曼德拉袭击了采石场，造成4人死亡。

**索马里** 5月2018

索马里的冲突在北半球的半自治的蓬特兰地区和邻近的索马里兰之间升温，并可能在6月进一步升级。蓬特兰部队于5月15日开始从索马里兰部队手中重新夺回图卡拉克以南的索尔地区的战斗，该地区在1月被占领；至少有45人丧生。战斗于5月24日在图卡拉克以南的冲突地区重新开始，数十人被杀，双方指责对方在冲突中造成人员伤亡。5月31日，阿尔-沙巴布 stepped up attacks in several regions, among which are the area of and during Ramadan. Kenyan military convoy triggered by a landmine in Dhoobley, near border with Kenya 7 May, at least seven soldiers killed; suicide bomber 8 May attacked a market in Wanlaweyn, Lower Shabelle, killing fifteen civilians and one soldier; next day seven soldiers killed in Wanlaweyn when their vehicle detonated mine; suicide bomber 22 May attacked a military convoy in Afgoye town, 30km north west of capital Mogadishu, killing an unconfirmed number of soldiers. Joint U.S.-Somali operation in Ma’alinka village, 60km south of Mogadishu 10 May reportedly killed five civilians. U.S. said it carried out airstrike 24km south west of Mogadishu 23 May, which it claimed killed ten militants. Mohamed Mursal Abdirahman – reportedly ally of PM Kheyre – elected speaker of parliament’s lower house 1 May after Mohamed Osman Jawari resigned early April.
Conflict between Somaliland and neighbouring Puntland, semi-autonomous region of Somalia, over disputed territory flared, and could escalate further in June. Puntland forces 15 May launched offensive to retake Tukaraq in Sool region from Somaliland forces, which captured town in Jan, at least 45 people killed. Despite calls by Somali federal govt and UN for ceasefire and end to hostilities, heavy fighting resumed on outskirts of Tukaraq 24 May, dozens more reportedly killed, both sides blamed each other for restarting clashes. Poet Nacima Qorane, sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly supporting reunification with Somalia mid-April, released 7 May after receiving presidential pardon. Police 28 May arrested 47 protesters demonstrating in Las Anod town in support of reunification with Somalia, along with two journalists.

Signatories of Aug 2015 peace agreement 17 May began third round of talks, known as High Level Revitalisation Forum, mediated by South Sudan Council of Churches under auspices of regional grouping Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD); talks broke down 23 May having made no significant progress. IGAD allowed former army chief turned rebel Paul Malong to send representatives to talks under umbrella of opposition party. Ugandan President Museveni 3 May called on factions of Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) – including ruling party, opposition in transitional govt and armed opposition – to unite and pursue South Sudanese-led solution to conflict, as alternative to revitalisation process. SPLM-In Opposition (SPLM-IO) faction in transitional govt led by First VP Taban Deng 7 May said it would reunify with ruling SPLM under 2015 Arusha Agreement, but other SPLM-IO faction loyal to former VP Riek Machar said it would only reunify with govt if it reinstates Machar. At meeting of SPLM’s National Liberation Council, first since civil war began in 2013, President Kiir said Machar could return to S Sudan and SPLM in “personal capacity”, but not govt official; Machar rejected proposal. Belligerents continued to clash, violating Dec 2017 cessation of hostilities; most significant fighting involving govt forces, fighters loyal to Machar and local militias took place in former Unity state in north. U.S. 8 May said transitional govt is no longer “inclusive”, that U.S. opposes any effort by transitional govt to unilaterally extend its mandate and announced review of its humanitarian assistance and support to monitoring bodies to ensure it does not contribute to conflict. UN Security Council 31 May agreed to extend some sanctions on govt until mid-July and, absent cessation of hostilities by 30 June, to consider freezing assets and banning travel for six govt officials, as proposed by U.S..
After German-led peace talks collapsed in April, two Darfuri rebel groups involved, Justice and Equality Movement and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) faction led by Minni Minnawi, 7 May extended their unilateral ceasefires for three months. SLM faction led by Abdel Wahid, not party to talks, clashed sporadically with govt forces late April-early May and late May in Jebel Marra area of Darfur. Govt reportedly massed forces in South and Central Darfur for renewed offensive on Jebel Marra before end of dry season (end-June). Economic situation worsened with fuel shortages starting late April; govt 2 May said it had run out of strategic fuel reserves, but 7 May said Saudi Arabia would provide Sudan with oil at preferential rates for five years. President Bashir 14 May reshuffled cabinet, appointing new foreign, oil and interior ministers. In talks on Ethiopia’s construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Nile River held in Addis Ababa 15-16 May, Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan agreed to set up technical team to consult on filling of dam’s reservoir and that heads of state would meet every six months. Earlier talks 5 May ended in stalemate.

Separatist rebel faction Front for the Liberation of Cabinda Enclave-Armed Forces of Cabinda (FLEC-FAC) late April proposed roadmap for peace and 7 May said it sought dialogue with govt to end hostilities. Former President dos Santos 25 May confirmed he will step aside as president of ruling party MPLA.

Following opposition protests in April against new electoral laws, which critics claim were intended to prevent some opposition candidates including former Presidents Ravalomanana and Rajoelina from running in late 2018 presidential elections, High Court 3 May declared laws unconstitutional. Opposition 4 May reiterated call for President Rajaonarimampianina to resign. Rajaonarimampianina 12 May approved new law lifting provision that would have prevented Ravalomanana and Rajoelina from
standing. High Constitutional Court 25 May ordered Rajaonarimampianina to dissolve govt and by 2 June appoint new PM with backing of all parties and thereafter appoint govt that reflects parties in parliament.

Mozambique  MAY 2018

Leader of armed opposition Renamo, Afonso Dhlakama, died 3 May. Former Renamo Sec Gen, Ossufo Momade, elected interim leader 5 May until party congress elects successor. Parliament 23 May approved decentralisation reforms so that, instead of president, parties that win local elections will choose provincial governors. Some 200 women and children 8 May reported to police in Cabo Delgado province in north claiming they had escaped from camps run by Islamist militants in Mocimboa de Praia district. Armed Islamists reportedly attacked two villages, Monjane and Ulumbi, near Palma, Cabo Delgado province (north) 26-27 May abducting and beheading ten civilians from Monjane.

South Africa  MAY 2018

Following violent protests calling for his resignation in April, premier of North West province, Supra Mahumapelo, resigned as premier 23 May, but remained provincial African National Congress (ANC) chairman. In Kwa-Zulu Natal, unidentified gunmen ambushed and killed ANC activist Musawenkosi Mchunu 11 May and same day shot dead Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) councillor Sibuyiselo Dlamini.

Zimbabwe  MAY 2018

President Mnangagwa 30 May announced general elections would be held 30 July. Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) 19 May said it had finished removing duplicated names from biometric voter roll. Mnangagwa 30 May signed into law Electoral Amendment Act which contains provisions to enhance
ZEC’s independence. High Court 14 May ordered National Council of Chiefs President Chief Charumbira to retract statement of support for ZANU-PF and Masvingo High Court 16 May ruled Chief’s Council should refrain from political statements and remain neutral. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum 23 May released report alleging police and ZANU-PF continue to be primary perpetrators of political violence and intimidation.

Burkina Faso  MAY 2018

Attacks on officials, teachers and other civilians continued in north. Unidentified assailants 2 May burned down primary school in Basina village and attacked market shops and headquarters of Koglweogo community defence group in Guenbila village, Sanmatenga province, Centre-North region; Koglweogo members 4 May arrested two suspected assailants in same area. In Sahel region, suspected members of jihadist group Ansarul Islam 3 May kidnapped Red Cross worker in Soum province, released him 8 May; unidentified gunmen 14 May killed prefect of Oursi, Oudalan province; unidentified gunmen 20 May abducted Christian teacher and his wife in Basnéré, Soum province. Security forces 22 May raided hideout of suspected jihadists on outskirts of capital Ouagadougou, three suspected militants and one member of security forces killed; public prosecutor said cell was linked to 2 March attacks against army headquarters and French embassy in Ouagadougou and planning new attacks. Unidentified individuals 23 May killed policeman in Ouagadougou. Trial of 84 people accused of masterminding 2015 attempted coup set to resume 12 June after new adjournments 9 and 25 May. Govt 24 May said it was ending official relations with Taiwan, and two days later formally established diplomatic relations with China.

Côte D’Ivoire  MAY 2018

Govt put armed forces on state of alert 1 May after 600 gendarmes and police called for protest against delays in bonus payments; protest cancelled following talks. Govt 4 May announced retirement of 2,168 soldiers as part of plan to reduce army by 4,400 soldiers by 2020, each to receive $30,000. In west, members of Toura community clashed with Burkinabe nationals over land dispute in village of Gandié 10 May, one Burkinabe killed, 700 people displaced. In centre, suspected highway bandits 19 May ambushed and killed gendarme in Djékanou area. President Ouattara announced deployment of 450 additional soldiers to UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).
Gambia  May 2018

In mayoral elections 12 May, ruling United Democratic Party (UDP) candidate Rohey Malick Lowe became first female mayor of capital Banjul. Next day UDP supporters clashed with supporters of former President Jammeh’s Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) in Kanifing municipality in west; UDP supporters attacked home of APRC leader in city of Serrekunda in same area. NGOs Human Rights Watch and TRIAL International 16 May said paramilitary unit controlled by then-President Jammeh summarily executed over 50 migrants including 44 Ghanaians in July 2005 and launched campaign calling for prosecution of Jammeh in Ghana’s capital Accra.

Guinea  May 2018

PM Mamady Youlą resigned along with govt 17 May. Ibrahima Kassory Fofana appointed PM 21 May and new govt appointed 26 May. Opposition 14 May resumed protests over outcome of Feb local elections, paralysing parts of capital Conakry; 16 May suspended protests following international community’s offer to mediate. General Union of Workers (UGTG) Secretary General Aboubacar Sidiki Mara arrested 6 May in Boké in west.

Guinea-Bissau  May 2018

National Union of Workers went on strike 7-9 May to demand better salaries for civil servants, 16 May called for new strike 12-14 June.
Liberia  MAY 2018

Special Presidential Committee constituted mid-April to probe into NGO Global Witness’s late March allegations of corruption involving govt officials, national oil company NOCAL and U.S. oil company ExxonMobil 16 May submitted initial report to President Weah.

Mali  MAY 2018

Ahead of presidential elections in July, intercommunal violence escalated in Mali-Niger border area and continued in central Mali, while in north signatories to 2015 peace agreement made some progress in implementing deal. In Mali-Niger border area, mainly ethnic Dossaak armed group, Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), and Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) – both involved in counter-insurgency operations alongside national forces and supported by French forces – reportedly committed abuses including killings against Fulani groups suspected of supporting jihadists, provoking counter-attacks against Dossaak civilians. At least 150 civilians from Dossaak and Fulani communities reportedly killed in attacks 26 April-26 May. In centre, intercommunal violence persisted in Mopti region: unidentified assailants attacked Bandiagara 7 May causing considerable material damage, and kidnappings and killings reportedly continued. In north, deployment of Operational Mechanism for Coordination (MOC) – mixed military units comprising men from army, ex-rebel Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) and pro-national unity Platform coalition intended to shore up security – began in Kidal 4 May and Timbuktu 24 May. In centre and north, attacks continued on national and international forces and civilians. Bombing killed four children in Mopti region 2 May. GATIA vehicle detonated mine in Gao region 8 May, one fighter killed. Gunmen kidnapped prefect of Ténénkou and his driver in Mopti region 8 May. EU 14 May extended its military training mission in Mali (EUTM) for two years, doubled its budget and expanded it to include training of G5 Sahel Task Force. In lead-up to July elections, coalition of almost 70 parties named President Keïta as its presidential candidate 6 May and he officially declared candidacy 28 May in field of about twenty.

Niger  MAY 2018
Intercommunal violence escalated in Mali-Niger border area. Following reported killing of dozens of ethnic Dossaak and Fulani civilians in area late April, suspected members of Malian armed group Self-Defence Group of Imrad Tuareg and Allies (GATIA) – involved in counter-insurgency operations alongside national forces and supported by French forces – 18 May attacked Aghay village, Tillabery region, killing at least seventeen Fulani civilians. Hearings of over twenty civil society leaders arrested late March started 14 May: defence lawyers 11 May filed complaint citing arbitrary detention and irregular procedural standstill.

**Nigeria**  MAY 2018

Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks on civilians and security forces, as herder-related violence in Middle Belt and deadly banditry in north west continued. BH insurgents attacked two villages on Maiduguri-Damaturu road previously considered safe 2 May. Suicide bombers killed at least 50 in and near mosque in Mubi, Adamawa state 1 May; suicide bombers killed three in two villages in Borno state 4 May; suicide bomber killed only themselves in attack on mosque in outskirts of Maiduguri, Borno state 9 May; suicide bomber killed at least five including himself in Konduga area 27 May; suspected BH militants killed at least one herder in Askira/Uba area, Borno state 28 May; army 31 May reported five soldiers killed by BH landmine. Army 16 May said it had killed fifteen BH and rescued 49 persons previous day in southern Lake Chad basin. In Middle Belt, attacks on communities related to herder-farmer conflict continued, leaving at least 50 dead. In Adamawa state, gunmen killed at least 30 in Numan area 2 May. In Taraba, gunmen targeted Christians in Tutiwa, Ussa area 9 May, killing at least nine. Gunmen 28 May killed five people in Guma area, Benue state; 29 May killed at least three people in two villages of Barkin-Ladi area of Plateau state. Benue state officials said violence had evolved from herder-farmer conflict into “insurgency”. In north west, bandits continued attacks on rural communities in Zamfara and Kaduna states, killing at least 100. In Zamfara, bandits killed thirteen people in Maru area 1 May; killed seven at Gidan-Labbo 25 May. In Kaduna, bandits reportedly from Zamfara attacked Gwaska village 5 May, killing 71 people. Bandits attacked four villages in same area 15 May killing at least ten. Army 22 May said it had killed at least 68 bandits in Zamfara state since April. In south east, police arrested 21 suspected members of Biafra agitation group, Indigenous People of Biafra, at home of group’s leader Nnamdi Kanu in Abia state 13 May. Biafran separatists called for sit-at-home protest 30 May to mark 51st anniversary of declaration of Biafran independence, at least 32 protesters arrested in Enugu and elsewhere.

**Sierra Leone**  MAY 2018
At inauguration ceremony of President Bio in capital Freetown 12 May, attempts by Bio supporters to gain access to stadium led to police charge and stampede that left at least one person dead and about 90 injured.

Asia

China (Internal) MAY 2018

Reports continued to emerge of abuses in mass internment camps where authorities have reportedly detained hundreds of thousands of ethnic Uighur Muslim Chinese for “re-education” in Xinjiang – estimated possibly up to 11.5% of region’s adult Uighur and Kazakh population.

China/Japan MAY 2018

During official visit of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang to Japan, the two countries’ defence ministries 9 May concluded ten years of negotiations by agreeing to create a maritime and aerial communication crisis management mechanism including hotline for senior military officials to talk in case of incidents involving navies or air forces, particularly in and around East China Sea; mechanism also mandates common radio frequency for captains and pilots; and commitment to hold regular military dialogues. Hotline expected to reduce risk that assertive or aggressive manoeuvres could spark conflict by creating channel for discussion and de-escalation. China and Japan also agreed to deepen relations in other areas, including establishing public-private sector council on cooperation projects related to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. During 9 May trilateral summit in Tokyo, leaders of China, Japan and South Korea issued a joint declaration on their shared commitment to Korean peninsula denuclearisation. Japan 15 May approved new Basic Plan on Ocean Policy, for first time playing down role of economic development to focus on security concerns; plan will improve radar coverage and satellite surveillance, and promote measures to protect uninhabited islands. At eighth Pacific islands leaders’ meeting 18-19 May, Japanese PM promised to support Pacific islands nations to improve capacity to “protect the sea”, including through legal enforcement capabilities.

• COMMENTARY: Trilateral North East Asia Summit Signals a Return to Cooperation
Month saw flurry of diplomacy to keep U.S.-North Korea dialogue process moving forward ahead of summit scheduled for 12 June. Chinese President Xi Jinping 7-8 May hosted North Korean leader Kim Jong-un for second unannounced visit in Dalian; Kim reportedly said he hoped to take “phased”, “synchronised” denuclearisation measures provided hostile policies and threats are removed; discussed traditional friendship with Chinese counterpart, China's willingness to play constructive role, and North Korea’s development. Chinese foreign minister and head of Chinese Communist Party’s international department visited Pyongyang ahead of meeting, as did U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo 9 May. Xi spoke with U.S. President Trump 8 May and reportedly agreed to continue implementing sanctions. Rare trilateral China-Japan-South Korea leaders’ summit in Tokyo 9 May issued statement supporting denuclearisation (see China/Japan). Relations between the two Koreas and U.S. thrown into doubt after U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton 29 April and 13 May said North Korean denuclearisation could follow “Libya model”: Pyongyang 16 May accused U.S. of seeking unilateral disarmament rather than dialogue. U.S. VP Mike Pence 22 May warned that situation “will only end like the Libyan model ... if Kim Jong-un doesn’t make a deal”; senior North Korean official 24 May said situation “entirely dependent upon the decision and behaviour of the U.S.”. Trump 25 May issued letter cancelling planned meeting with Kim, however U.S. govt 26 May said White House was still planning for summit to proceed. Deterioration in relations occurred as U.S.-ROK military exercises took place in South 11-25 May; North Korea issued several statements mid-May accusing U.S. of introducing B-52 nuclear bombers, F-22 Raptor stealth fighters and nuclear strategic assets to region. Kim Jong-un 25 May requested meeting with South Korean President Moon, which took place in secrecy 26 May north of Panmunjom, ostensibly to get Trump–Kim meeting back on track; followed Moon’s 22 May meeting with Trump in Washington. Pompeo met with senior North Korean official Kim Yong-chol in New York 31 May to discuss negotiations. Pyongyang 24 May proceeded with dismantling only nuclear test site at Punggye-ri.

- COMMENTARY: Trilateral North East Asia Summit Signals a Return to Cooperation

Taiwan lost two more diplomatic allies, bringing down number of countries with formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan to eighteen. Dominican Republic (DR) 1 May formally established diplomatic relations with China; Taiwan expressed anger and announced “termination of relations” with DR, said China had offered $3.1bn investment and loan package as incentive to DR; China denied. Burkina Faso 24
May also announced it was ending official relations with Taiwan, and formally established diplomatic relations with China two days after. Responding at 24 May press conference, President Tsai said: “The series of outrageous manoeuvres from China intended to undermine Taiwan’s sovereignty has crossed a bottom line for Taiwanese society”. Taiwan late month hosted President Moïse of Haiti, with which Taiwan still has diplomatic relations, and pledged $150mn in aid to develop Haiti’s infrastructure. China conducted series of military exercises aimed to deter Taiwan independence: 11 May conducted encirclement drills with H-6K strategic bombers and new Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets across Bashi Channel between Taiwan and northern islands of Philippines; Taiwan said it deployed F-16s to monitor manoeuvres. More Chinese bombers, J-11 fighters and KJ-200 early-warning aircraft flew over Miyako Strait separating Taiwan and Japan’s southernmost islands and conducted exercises in western Pacific in the same drills 11 May.

Month saw intensified fighting, particularly by Taliban targeting rural centres and provincial capitals, accompanied by increase in Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) casualties. Taliban took parts of Farah provincial capital 15 May, withdrawing next day under heavy bombing by U.S./Afghan militaries forces. Defence Ministry said six other provincial centres threatened, and serious fighting ongoing in fifteen out of 34 provinces. Other Taliban gains included Kohistan district in Badakhshan province 2 May, and several districts in Ghazni, Faryab, Takhar and Baghlan provinces. ANSF retook some district centres but suffered significant casualties and loss of weapons and equipment to Taliban; scores killed as Taliban attacked five ANSF bases during month. Taliban also erected checkpoints on Ghazni-Paktika highway from 6 May. Officials 14 May reported Taliban had carried out 2,700 attacks since late-April start of its spring offensive. Amid reports of troop desertions, U.S. govt report 30 April noted drop in ANSF troop strength, particularly affecting Helmand province, and increase in Taliban-held territory from 11% to 14.5% of country from Jan 2017-Jan 2018. UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) 8 May report on early April Afghan air force strike in Kunduz province concluded 30 of at least 36 killed were children, prompting apology from President Ghani 16 May. Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP) continued attacks on urban centres, including attack on police station in Kabul 9 May, 13 May attack on govt office in Jalalabad city and 30 May attack on interior ministry in Kabul killing ten. Ahead of Oct parliamentary elections, UNAMA 11 May reported 23 attacks on voter registration centres had killed 86, including 6 May attack in Khost province killing seventeen. Ghani 3 May inaugurated delayed distribution of electronic ID cards amid criticism from National Unity Govt partner Abdullah Abdullah and others over controversial inclusion of nationality and ethnicity on cards; comes amid allegations Ghani attempted to interfere in work of electoral commission. Top U.S. commander in Afghanistan Gen John Nicholson 30 May said there were some “off the stage” channels of dialogue in peace process, including with mid- and senior-level Taliban; some observers greeted remark with scepticism.
Opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) continued to campaign for release of imprisoned leader Khaleda Zia; some BNP officials 4 May suggested party should not contest Dec elections if Zia cannot participate. Zia 5 May instructed her lawyers to inform Supreme Court (SC) of her “serious illness” resulting from her confinement. SC 16 May granted Zia bail in one of eight cases against her, but she remains in jail. Ruling Awami League (AL) party’s mayoral candidate Talukder Abdul Khaleque won Khulna City Corporation election 15 May amid allegations of serious electoral irregularities, in vote seen as bellwether context ahead of Dec national polls. BNP alleged police raided 1,600 members’ homes ahead of polls, arresting over 50; senior police official stated they arrested “listed criminals” to maintain “congenial” environment. Electoral Commission declared polls “peaceful” and “excellent” despite BNP demanding fresh vote at 101 polling centres. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)’s foreign ministers summit in Dhaka early May called for sustainable solution to Rohingya refugee crisis (see Myanmar). Myanmar govt 9 May lodged complaint about construction by Bangladesh border police of security posts within agreed no-construction zone near border line. UN Security Council 9 May issued press statement noting scale of humanitarian crisis, and need for Myanmar to create conditions for return. At its second meeting 18 May, Bangladesh-Myanmar working group on repatriation failed to fix start day for process. U.S. President Trump vowed to continue pressure on Myanmar to find solution to refugee crisis in letter to PM Hasina 3 May. Two Jamaatul Mujahideen Bangladesh militants sentenced to death 8 May over April 2016 killing of university professor; three others given life prison sentences. UN Human Rights Council 14 May recommended govt investigate all alleged state violations including abductions, enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings; adopted draft report with 251 recommendations 17 May. Govt launched anti-narcotics operations during month in which officials claimed over 100 people were killed; families of some victims reported they were detained before police staged shootouts.

- REPORT: The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar’s Rohingya Refugee Crisis

Eight suspected Maoists killed in police operations mid-May in Kandhamal and Bolangir districts, Odisha state. In Chhattisgarh state, policeman killed by suspected Maoists in Rajnadgaon district 5 May; six policemen died in suspected Maoist roadside bomb attack in Dantewada district 20 May; security officer killed in IED blast in Sukma district 23 May; police killed three suspected Maoists in Rajnadgaon district 29 May. At least three suspected Maoists reported killed 28 May in shoot-out with police in Jharkhand’s Palamau district.
Pakistan's and India's general directors of military operations 29 May agreed to restore ceasefire after speaking over hotline; move follows continued Cross-Line of Control (LoC) firing by Pakistani and Indian militaries since late April, which came despite protests by Pakistani foreign ministry in April and military chiefs speaking by hotline 29 April. At least four Pakistani civilians, four Indian civilians and one Indian soldier reportedly killed in cross-LoC fighting 17-18 May, with Pakistani officials reporting that three of the victims were children; seven killed 23 May – five civilians on Indian side, one civilian and one soldier on Pakistani side – on sixth consecutive day of cross-border shelling. Pakistan 22 May raised Kashmir issue at UN Security Council. Unrest continued in Indian-administered Kashmir. Indian police 5 May claimed to have killed three separatist militants in Srinagar, sparking protests in which one civilian was killed by police vehicle. Security forces 6 May killed five alleged Hizbul Mujahideen militants, including commander Saddam Padder, in Shopian district, provoking another wave of protests; police fired on hundreds of stone-throwing demonstrators, killing five; another died later from injuries 8 May, sparking fresh clashes. India 16 May announced suspension of military operations for month of Ramadan, reserving right to retaliate, however clashes continued. Army 26 May killed five suspected militants during infiltration attempts across LoC. Separatist groups 19 May organised strikes in Srinagar to protest visit by Indian PM Modi; shops shut while govt cut mobile services, closed schools and universities, and instigated partial curfew. Modi inaugurated Kishanganga hydropower project in Gurez during visit; Pakistan claims project violates 1960 Indus Water Treaty.

Two Supreme Court (SC) judges, Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Justice Ali Hameed – both arrested during Feb state of emergency after ordering release of political prisoners – sentenced to nineteen months in jail 10 May, after court found them guilty of influencing lower court decisions; Saeed sentenced to five months 8 May in separate case accusing him of preventing SC from receiving govt letters. Ahead of 30 May primary votes for Sept presidential elections, Elections Commission 20 May announced candidates convicted of a crime would be barred, resulting in rejection of exiled former President Nasheed’s candidacy for opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) primary due to his widely dismissed terrorism conviction, alongside most other opposition leaders. Joint opposition statement accused Elections Commission of being “hopelessly politicised” and “mouthpiece for President Yameen”.

https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print?l=Crisiswatch+May+2018&crisiswatch=6122&date=May+2018
Indic PM Narendra Modi visited Nepal 11-12 May in ongoing effort to improve bilateral relations; visit focused largely on development, trade, and infrastructure cooperation, but also emphasised religious and cultural ties with a stop in religiously and politically significant Madhesi city of Janakpur. PM Oli to further regional diplomacy with visit to China late June. Ruling CPN-UM and CPN (Maoist centre) parties merged to form Nepal Communist Party (NCP) following seven months of negotiations and disputes over ideology and power-sharing; Oli and Maoist Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to serve as co-chairs; unified party holds just under two thirds of seats (63%) in parliament. New party’s internal composition reflects stronger position of UML following its performance in recent elections; top-down nature of merger resulted in dissent within Maoist ranks about “undemocratic” process to select NCP’s central committee members. Following commitment by NCP leaders regarding constitutional amendments to address Madhesi demands, Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum-Nepal, the fourth largest party overall and second largest Madhesi party in parliament, agreed to join govt 28 May giving ruling coalition two-thirds majority. Largest Madhesi party in parliament, Rastriya Janata Party-Nepal claimed new govt budget announced 29 May overly centralised and fails to provide provinces sufficient financial resources.

Parliament 24 May passed legislation abolishing long-standing semi-autonomous Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and absorb region into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province, amid hopes that introduction of Pakistani constitution and national judicial, security and government institutions will improve conditions in area; president signed bill 31 May. Pashtun Tahaffuz (protection) Movement (PTM) calling for end to rights abuses against Pashtuns, led by youth and activists mainly from FATA and KPK, continued to hold rallies countrywide in defiance of state pressure including arbitrary arrests and detentions. Police and paramilitary rangers harassed, detained or charged hundreds of PTM activists involved in organising rally in Karachi 13 May attended by several thousand supporters. Interior Minister Ashan Iqbal wounded by gunman during political rally in his Punjab constituency 6 May; attacker identified himself as member of radical Sunni group Bareli Tehreek-i-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah (Labaik). Police 8 May confirmed affiliation, Labaik denied. Hazara activists began hunger strike in Balochistan provincial capital Quetta (south west) following attacks on community that killed at least 30 in April and 500 in past five years; after strikers met several senior officials 1-4 May, army announced increased security in city. Army 16 May claimed to have killed three Lashkar-e-Jhangvi members, including senior militant, during raid outside Quetta in which a senior military intelligence officer was also killed; five suspected bombers thwarted and killed during attempted revenge attack 17 May. Former
PM Sharif in 11 May media interview appeared to implicitly criticise military’s political interventions, and lack of progress in trial of alleged Pakistani perpetrators of 2008 Mumbai terror attacks; National Security Council 14 May rejected criticism. PM Abbasi 15 May defended Sharif in parliament, proposed committee to review his remarks. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) govt completed its five-year term 31 May; ahead of elections scheduled for 25 July.

**Sri Lanka**  MAY 2018

Parliament 8 May reconvened after four-week prorogation by President Sirisena; govt remains deeply divided following failed April no-confidence vote against PM Wickremesinghe. Sirisena 9 May declared intention to seek re-election in next polls due late 2019, violating previous pledge not to, and putting him in competition with PM. Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) 25 May introduced private member’s bill for twentieth amendment to constitution to abolish executive presidency. Following move of sixteen govt MPs to opposition, cabinet reshuffle 1 May installed former Justice Minister and Sinhala Buddhist nationalist Wijeyadasa Rajapakse as higher education and culture affairs minister, portfolio that includes politically sensitive archaeology department. Parliament 9 May passed Judicature (Amendment) Act establishing new court dedicated to corruption cases. As country commemorated ninth anniversary of end of civil war 18-19 May, Northern Provincial Council declared 18 May day of mourning and 14-20 May “genocide week”. Sirisena 19 May awarded medals to 50 military officers, some facing war crimes allegations; in speech said UN had made no formal charges of war crimes against govt. Office of Missing Persons (OMP) held first meetings with families of disappeared in Tamil-majority Mannar 12 May and Sinhala-majority Matara 19 May; pledged to establish eight offices in north and east, four elsewhere. Resettlement ministry 15 May announced 300 Tamil villagers allowed to stay on navy-occupied island Iranaitivu following long-standing protests. Three dozen people suspected of committing anti-Muslim violence in March in Kandy remain in custody, including leader of militant Buddhist group Mahasohon Balakaya. Police 15 May interrogated Kandy district parliamentarian from joint opposition led by former President Rajapaksa about violence; National Human Rights Commission held public hearings in Kandy as part of formal inquiry 9-12 May.

- **EU WATCH LIST**: Watch List 2018 – First Update

**Cambodia**  MAY 2018
National Election Committee 14 May announced that twenty political parties had registered ahead of 29 July general election. Govt 24 May said that organising election boycott violates electoral law and will lead to prosecution. Committee on Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia, an independent vote monitor, 15 May announced it would not deploy observers to polls for general election. UN Special Rapporteur to Cambodia Rhona Smith 30 April issued statement calling for release of detained leaders of Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP), which govt dissolved in Nov 2017; also called for end to crackdown on political opposition and for CNRP to be reinstated, and for country’s rulers to return to “constitutional path of multi-party democracy and genuine elections”. UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention late April called for former CNRP leader Kem Sokha, arrested Sept 2017, to be released from prison.

Indonesia  MAY 2018

Twenty-five killed in series of bombings in and around second largest city Surabaya, eastern Java 13-14 May, in deadliest attack claimed by Islamic State (ISIS) to date. At least eighteen killed and 40 injured in bombings targeting Sunday services at three churches in Surabaya 13 May; police said attacks were carried out by family of six, including nine- and twelve-year-old girls with explosives strapped to them accompanying their mother, and two teenage boys on motorbikes. Police said father of family was head of local cell of ISIS-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) militant network. Three members of another family killed by homemade bombs they were allegedly making in Sidoarjo near Surabaya same day. Four people killed and ten injured in bombing on police HQ in Surabaya 14 May; police said attack was carried out by family of five including child aged eight; ISIS claimed responsibility. Police said all three families connected through religious study group. Five members of elite counter-terrorism police unit Densus 88 and one prisoner killed in riot in maximum-security jail outside Jakarta 8 May; ISIS claimed responsibility, authorities rejected claim. Police shot dead four suspected terrorists attacking police HQ with swords in Pekanbaru, Sumatra 16 May; one police officer killed, two wounded. Parliament 25 May passed new anti-terrorism legislation intended to combat militant networks; first proposed in 2016, new law allows police to detain people suspected of planning attacks for longer, and prosecute those who join or recruit for militant groups.

Myanmar  MAY 2018

Armed conflict in north continued to escalate, with clashes between military and Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) in Kachin state displacing over 7,000 civilians since early April. In northern Shan state, nineteen people killed including twelve civilians and 27 injured in clash in key border trading town
Muse 12 May; fighting followed attack by Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) on police and allied militia positions. China 14 May demanded end to fighting, noting that clashes had killed two Chinese nationals and prompted 300 people to flee into China. Clashes also escalated between TNLA and Restoration Council of Shan State (RCSS) in state early May, displacing some 600 in Namtu township. Early and late May also saw small-scale deadly clashes between Arakan Army and Tatmadaw troops in southern Chin state. Peace process continued to inch toward next Panglong-21 peace conference, although date yet to be fixed. International scrutiny of Rohingya crisis continued: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation FMs meeting in Bangladesh 5–6 May pushed for accountability and political action; Myanmar govt 9 May criticised meeting’s outcome statement, same day lodged complaint about construction by Bangladesh border police of security posts within agreed no-construction zone near border line. Following late April visit to Bangladesh and Myanmar, UN Security Council 9 May issued press statement noting its members “were struck by the scale of the humanitarian crisis”, remain “gravely concerned”, urging govt to create conditions conducive to safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya, implement Rakhine Advisory Commission recommendations, and called for accountability for perpetrators of violence. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi 1 May said her govt “is pleased to be working in partnership with the UN” including on repatriation, “believes that this is the appropriate time” for UN refugee agency involvement in Rakhine, but no substantive follow-through yet. Amnesty International 22 May reported evidence that Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) had killed scores of Hindu civilians after launching attacks on security posts in Rakhine state Aug 2017; ARSA denied.

- REPORT: The Long Haul Ahead for Myanmar’s Rohingya Refugee Crisis

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Philippines  MAY 2018

Lower house of Congress 30 May and Senate 31 May passed Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) bill, which paves way for creation of self-governing Bangsamoro region in southern Philippines, in accordance with 2014 peace agreement between govt and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). President Duterte 29 May certified BBL bill as urgent, meaning both House and Senate could approve their versions of bill before Congress adjourns 1 June. Bill now set to go to bicameral conference committee during recess to reconcile House and Senate versions of bill, before being sent back for both houses to ratify 23 July in time for Duterte to sign ahead of his state of the nation address. MILF peace panel chair, Mohagher Iqbal, 30 May said he hoped reconciled BBL would be faithful to peace agreement. MILF filed complaint with govt peace panel after police in Mindanao shot dead nine MILF members during operation as part of Duterte’s war on drugs 25 May. Duterte late month said he had agreed to resumption of peace talks with Communist rebels, but that they had to take place in Philippines, not Norway. Representatives of govt and Communists reported they had agreed in back-channel talks early May on interim ceasefire, amnesty for political prisoners and rural development reform. Netherlands-based leader José Maria Sison reported sides had agreed to sign interim peace agreement in late June for resumption of formal talks. Late-month clash between New People’s Army (NPA) and military saw three rebels killed in Mindanao. Authorities arrested NPA leader Elizalde Cañete 12 May. On one-year anniversary of start of five-month Islamic State (ISIS) siege of Marawi city in Mindanao, anger continued over govt approach to reconstruction and inability of many residents to return — Red Cross reported some 230,000 remain displaced. Military 25
May rejected calls to lift martial law in region. Several killed in continuing clashes between military and Abu Sayyaf group in southern Basilan and Sulu provinces.

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**South China Sea** MAY 2018

Chinese steps to enhance military capabilities in air force and navy continued to stoke regional anxiety in South China Sea (SCS). People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force 9 May announced that its Chengdu J-20 stealth fighter had conducted drills over SCS in “actual war conditions” to “further upgrade the air force's combat capabilities”. China's first home-built aircraft carrier departed Dalian port for sea trial 13 May; based on same design as Liaoning, new carrier is likely to enter service by 2020 in fully operational role. CNBC 2 May cited U.S. govt source reporting that China in April deployed anti-ship cruise missiles and surface-to-air missiles on Fiery Cross Reef, Subi Reef and Mischief Reef in Spratly Islands; if confirmed, would mark China’s first missile deployments in Spratlys. China did not deny allegations, said such moves strictly defensive; U.S. warned China would face “consequences” for military build-up in contested waters. China 17 May called for halt to offshore oil drilling by Russia's Rosneft in area of sea claimed by both China and Vietnam; Rosneft responded that area was in Vietnam’s territorial waters. China 18 May said it had landed bombers on SCS feature for first time, with drills consisting of simulated strikes against sea targets; video showing H-6K bomber landing and taking off from base on Woody (Yongxing) island, largest of disputed Paracel Islands, reportedly confirmed claim. CCTV footage published 15 May showed Chinese ship-borne helicopters conducting live-fire drills in SCS. U.S. subsequently on 23 May retracted invitation for China to take part in RIMPAC joint naval drill, saying recent moves were inconsistent with principles of exercise. Two U.S. warships sailed within twelve nautical miles of Paracel Islands 27 May, prompting Chinese condemnation; Chinese warships reportedly confronted U.S. ships and warned them to leave. U.S. and Philippines conducted 34th annual military exercises 7-18 May, largest since 2016. Japan and Philippines 8 May conducted joint maritime patrol in Palawan near West Philippine Sea. Philippines FM 28 May said country “prepared to go to war” over resources in SCS.

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**Thailand** MAY 2018

Militants staged coordinated bombings across country’s four southernmost provinces 20 May, mostly targeting ATMs and utility poles; sixteen IEDs exploded, three people injured. Among attacks in Yala province, militants 15 May launched grenades at three separate security posts in Krong Penang district and Yaha district, injuring two rangers; on 4 May detonated bombs on two cellular towers and set tyres on fire in several districts. In Narathiwat province, one ranger wounded 25 May in clash with militants on
border between Rangae and Chanae districts. Gunmen killed Muslim man and wounded former defence volunteer in Rangae on 26 May. No public developments in peace dialogue process between Bangkok and MARA Patani following April announcement by PM Prayuth that pilot safety zone would be established in Narathiwat’s Cho Airong district. Election victory of Pakatan Harapan in Malaysia prompted speculation new Malaysian govt may review its role as dialogue facilitator (Malaysian facilitator was reportedly close to former Malaysian PM Najib Razak). Security officials set up checkpoints on roads leading to Bangkok ahead of four-year anniversary of military coup that brought National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) to power 22 May; hundreds of demonstrators attempted to march to Government House, fifteen protest leaders arrested and charged with sedition, released on bail 24 May. NCPO 18 May launched proceedings against Pheu Thai Party for violating regime orders banning political activity and for violating Computer Crimes Act, after three of its members read out indictment of military rule before media. Constitutional Court 30 May ruled that draft organic law on election of MPs does not violate constitution, clearing an obstacle to general election.

Europe & Central Asia

➤ Bosnia And Herzegovina  MAY 2018

Govt’s decision to allow Turkish President Erdoğan to stage re-election rally in Sarajevo, after several European countries barred him from holding similar rallies, prompted criticism from some observers; some 12,000 people reportedly attended rally, 10,000 watched it outside venue. Erdoğan also met with Bosnian tripartite President Izetbegović while in Sarajevo to discuss economic cooperation.

➤ Kosovo  MAY 2018

Local media 17 May reported that govt is preparing alternative plan to transition Kosovo Security Force into regular army over ten-year period, by removing some restrictions on its mandate and mission. Ahead of June expiration of mandate of EU rule of law mission EULEX, justice ministry told media that govt wants a redesignated mission with support role in its place. One person injured in Pjeferq/Petrić village as ethnic Albanian protesters blocked road against displaced Serbs who were visiting.
Macedonia  MAY 2018

Efforts intensified to find agreement to long-standing name dispute, with Macedonian and Greek PMs discussing it on sidelines of EU-Western Balkans summit 17 May, and their FMs at UN-mediated talks in New York 24-25 May; UN mediator Matthew Nimetz said talks had “intensified considerably”. During meeting in Brussels 27 May, FMs reportedly agreed on “a framework that needs more work”. Macedonian PM Zaev 30 May said talks in delicate and final phase, and any final deal would be submitted to a referendum in Sept or Oct, after being ratified in parliament. Zaev gave ministerial posts to two small ethnic Albanian parties in proposed cabinet reshuffle 22 May, increasing his support in parliament by five MPs. Skopje court 23 May sentenced former PM Gruevski to two years jail for “receiving a reward” of illicitly purchased luxury Mercedes; Gruevski said he was being framed.

Armenia  MAY 2018

Parliament voted May 8 to appoint former protest leader Nikol Pashinyan as PM, after initially voting against him May 2; Pashinyan appointed new cabinet consisting largely of allies, including pro-Western ministers for foreign and defence portfolios and defence ministry’s chief of general staff; is also expected to replace regional govt heads. Challenges include former ruling Republican Party majority in parliament, potentially blocking moves to introduce promised anti-corruption and electoral reforms; continuing pressure from public calling for punishment of corrupt officials and economic reform, with small protests continuing across country; and uncertainty over anticipated snap elections. Protesters stormed Yerevan’s city hall May 16 demanding mayor’s resignation. Pashinyan met Russian President Putin 14 May in margins of the Eurasian Economic Union summit in Sochi. For his first official visit Pashinyan 30 May went to Georgia, aiming for closer economic and political cooperation.

- COMMENTARY: For Azerbaijan, Armenia’s Political Upheaval is a Double-edged Sword

Azerbaijan  MAY 2018

https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print?l=Crisiswatch+May+2018&crisiswatch=6122&date=May+2018
Defence minister visited China late April, meeting with representatives of companies manufacturing military products, in reported move to strengthen its defence arsenal. Police arrested at least four opposition members who helped organise rally in central Baku celebrating centennial of founding of the Republic 28 May.

- COMMENTARY: For Azerbaijan, Armenia’s Political Upheaval is a Double-edged Sword

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**Georgia**  MAY 2018

Georgia announced it was severing diplomatic relations with Syria and called for international support after Syria 29 May recognised independence of Georgia’s breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In Abkhazia, six prominent local opposition politicians 18 May released statement voicing concerns about plans for a new law enforcement agency comprising police-like body of about 200 people, which would reportedly be responsible for prevention of crime in region, believing it could be used to safeguard current leadership and attack political critics. In Tbilisi, Georgian Dream 11 May elected former PM Bidzina Ivanishvili to chair party, which holds majority in parliament and full control over govt, but had been facing internal splits. During annual U.S.-Georgian Strategic Partnership meeting in Washington 21 May, U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo affirmed U.S.’s support for Georgia’s eventual membership in NATO, and called for Russia to withdraw troops from breakaway regions.

- REPORT: Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Time to Talk Trade

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**Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)**  MAY 2018

New Armenian PM Pashinyan indicated in various public statements and interviews there will be no softening in Armenian position on main issues related to Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) peace process. During 1 May debate in parliament Pashinyan commented that he did not advocate for return of any territories in conflict zone to Azerbaijan; in statement to parliament following week, Pashinyan said any deal on NK would have to guarantee local Armenians’ right to self-determination; at one point said NK and Armenia should unite. Pashinyan visited NK 9 May (traditional day for Armenian leaders to visit region), said he wanted to see NK representatives part of settlement framework; Azerbaijani FM Elmar Mammadyarov 25 May said “such wish of Armenians was aimed to damage peace process” and that he had already passed
this message to Minsk Group co-chairs. Azerbaijani Defence Minister Zakir Hasanov 12 May said Pashinyan’s comments on NK were “unacceptable” and that Azerbaijan is prepared for “large-scale military operations”. Minsk Group co-chairs 15 May announced visit to region and possible meeting with new Armenian leadership in June. Currently no contact between Azerbaijan and Armenia on NK or clarity on when and how the two sides will meet; in 28 May statement, U.S. State Department called on parties “to resume intensive negotiations as soon as possible”. French FM Jean-Yves Le Drian during tour of South Caucasus 27 May said France plans to “work more actively to search for the ways of settling the Karabakh conflict”. One Armenian soldier reported wounded in north-western location of Line of Contact 13 May. One Azerbaijani soldier reported dead in Azerbaijan’s south-western region Nakhchivan at state border with Armenia 20 May.

Russia/North Caucasus MAY 2018

Four gunmen attacked Russian orthodox church in centre of Chechen capital Grozny 19 May, killing two police and one churchgoer, and injuring two police and another churchgoer; police shot dead all four suspected attackers. Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov said attackers were attempting to take hostages; Islamic State (ISIS) claimed it was responsible; Kadyrov said ISIS was not behind the attack because there were no ISIS members in Chechnya. Kadyrov 28 May said he was ordering DNA tests to help repatriate children born in Middle East to parents who left North Caucasus to join ISIS. French police reported that suspect in 12 May knife attack in Paris in which one person was killed and four injured was naturalised citizen born in Chechnya; ISIS claimed he was one of its “soldiers”. Chechen Supreme Court 4 May rejected appeal by Oyub Titiyev, director of Chechnya office of Memorial human rights organisation, against extension of his pre-trial detention.

- COMMENTARY: What to Expect of President Putin’s Foreign Policy in His New Term

Ukraine MAY 2018

Increased violence coincided with start of Joint Forces Operation (JFO), amid speculation that Ukrainian forces are systematically retaking “grey zone” villages between the front lines delineated by Minsk II in February 2015, and reports separatists reinforcing positions and escalating shelling of govt-controlled areas near Troitske, Mariupol, Donetsk suburbs. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) 18 May voiced concern at skirmishes near Horlivka, where Ukrainian army retook Chihari village 14 May. Raids deep inside separatist territory fuelled rumours Kyiv
is preparing to escalate: JFO press centre 20 May reported that troops carried out raid near Holmivskiy several km into separatist-held Donetsk; Luhansk separatists said unknown saboteurs 21 May detonated explosives at Shterovka bridge over 40km into their de facto territory. Senior SMM official 21 May described week as “in many ways the worst” this year with almost 7.7k ceasefire violations; expressed “particular concern” about Horlivka. International monitors recorded 31 civilian casualties 1-31 May including ten deaths. Ukrainian army received first tranche of advanced U.S. anti-tank Javelin missile systems; repeated public reassurances they would only be used defensively. Minsk Trilateral Contact Group 4 May announced resumption of mobile phone coverage in separatist-held areas. Poroshenko 10 May discussed roadmap for implementing Minsk through proposed peacekeeping mission at meeting with German Chancellor Merkel and French President Macron. After meeting with Putin in Sochi 18 May, Merkel announced German foreign ministry was working with Russian counterparts to develop “joint mandate” for peacekeeping mission. Macron told press 25 May that EU will discuss sanctions renewal in July and France will support them until Moscow makes progress implementing Minsk. U.S. special envoy Kurt Volker visited govt-controlled areas in conflict zone 15 May. Putin same day opened bridge between Russian mainland and Crimea, Moscow’s only direct road link to annexed region. Dutch-led international criminal investigation into July 2014 downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 24 May announced that Russia’s 53rd Anti-aircraft Rocket Brigade fired the fatal shot.

Cyprus  MAY 2018

Month saw signs of interest on part of Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot leaders in possible resumption of reunification talks. At request of govt of Greek Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades, UN Secretary-General Guterres 2 May appointed temporary envoy Jane Holl Lute to oversee possibility of resuming talks; UN said full-time special envoy to be appointed only if talks resume; Ankara yet to approve Holl Lute’s appointment. Turkish foreign ministry 3 May stated “a new path should be tried”. Greek Cypriot negotiator Andreas Mavroyiannis said there was no alternative to reunification. Amid ongoing hydrocarbons dispute, Anastasiades met Greek PM Tsipras and Israeli PM Netanyahu 8 May for fourth trilateral summit on Eastern Mediterranean pipeline project and energy cooperation; Tsipras said project “not just about energy but the highest level of geostrategic cooperation”. Turkish Cypriot leader Akinci 9 May said summit excluding his and Turkey’s govts was not “a peace route”.

Spain  MAY 2018
Madrid govt extended direct rule over Catalonia after rejecting regional cabinet proposed by newly elected Catalan leader Quim Torra 20 May. Separatist Torra, elected by regional parliament 13 May, had nominated to cabinet four ministers from previous regional govt who are now being held in custody or living in exile after being accused of crimes including rebellion and misuse of public funds. Earlier in month, Madrid blocked Catalan parliament’s attempt to reappoint self-exiled former leader Carles Puigdemont as regional president.

Turkey  MAY 2018

Security operations in Turkey’s south east against militants of the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK) – listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the U.S. and the EU – continued with less fatalities compared to previous month. Ahead of 24 June presidential and parliamentary elections, govt continued crackdown on pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) stripping two more members of MP status, bringing total to eleven (out of 59). Erdoğan 4 May said Turkey will maintain military presence in Syria’s Afrin until area secured, adding that “Idlib, Tal Rifaat and Manbij will be next” (FM Çavuşoğlu is set to visit Washington 4 June to meet U.S. Sec State Mike Pompeo to, among others, discuss issue of Manbij). Military 16 May announced it had finished establishing security posts in Syria’s Idlib province. Govt reported that some 150,000 Syrian refugees had returned to Syria from Turkey over past eighteen months, particularly after Afrin operation. Detentions and arrests of suspected ISIS militants continued, including senior ISIS figure Ismail Alwaan al-Ithawi, who foreign ministry reported was captured following joint operation with U.S. and Iraqi intelligence. Govt and President Erdoğan criticised President Trump’s 8 May decision to withdraw from Iran nuclear deal. Relations with U.S. were further strained particularly after 14 May opening of U.S. embassy to Israel in Jerusalem, which prompted govt to recall its ambassadors to U.S. and Israel and declare three days of national mourning over deaths in Gaza (see Israel/Palestine); Turkish foreign ministry 15 May instructed Israeli ambassador to Ankara and Israeli consul general to leave Turkey. Tensions with Greece over Aegean Sea de-escalated somewhat; Turkish and Greek military chiefs of staff met on sidelines of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) meeting in Brussels 16 May.

Kazakhstan  MAY 2018

Police 10 May detained dozens of protesters during nationwide demonstrations calling for release of political prisoners; rallies were organised by banned Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan movement to coincide with visit from EU delegation. Parliament 31 May approved bill allowing President Nazarbayev
to chair Security Council for life. Several activists detained or arrested ahead of planned rally against land reforms scheduled for 21 May.

**Kyrgyzstan** MAY 2018

As govt continued to pursue anti-corruption agenda with investigations into failure of Bishkek Thermal Power Plant (TPP), with four former PMs, including Sapar Isakov, among those being investigated for involvement, parliament 10 May voted in favour of drafting bill to deprive former presidents of legal immunity; would allow TPP investigations to look into former President Atambayev. Authorities 29 May charged Isakov with corruption. Incidents continued at Tajik border after Tajik guards entered village in Kyrgyz territory.

**Tajikistan** MAY 2018

After accusations by Afghan MP in April that Taliban militants were being treated in Tajik hospitals, Tajik authorities 24 April announced cancellation of 2012 contract which allowed Afghan soldiers wounded near border to receive treatment in Tajikistan. Incidents continued at Kyrgyz border after Tajik guards entered village in Kyrgyz territory.

**Uzbekistan** MAY 2018

President Mirziyoyev visited U.S. 16-17 May, meeting with President Trump, Sec State Pompeo, and Sec Defense Mattis; signed $4.8bn of commercial contracts; committed to continuing cooperation within Northern Distribution Network to Afghanistan. Authorities released several activists and political prisoners from prison ahead of visit, including one journalist and three bloggers who had been on trial
charged with anti-constitutional actions for their writings critical of regime; Fahridin Tillyayev of Freedom Party (Erk) and opposition activist Nuriddin Djumaniazov, released from prison 12 May; and former Justice Minister Ravshan Mukhidinov, released from prison 15 May. Amnesty International visited Uzbekistan 22-25 May for first time in fourteen years, met with officials and civil society representatives.

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia  MAY 2018

In first round of presidential elections 27 May, right-wing candidate Iván Duque, prominent critic of peace agreement between govt and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), won 39.1% of vote, leftist former guerrilla Gustavo Petro 25.1%; both go through to second round 17 June. Drug trafficking probes involving FARC commanders continued: Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), established under peace deal to handle cases deriving from govt-FARC conflict, 17 May suspended extradition of former FARC commander Jesús Santrich to U.S. on trafficking charges until govt proves his alleged crimes took place after signing of peace agreement; Colombia’s attorney general accused JEP of having “threatened democratic institutions”, said ruling invalid. Former FARC commander Iván Márquez, also suspected of drug trafficking and who left Bogotá for southern Caquetá province 19 April, announced he would not take office as senator in July in protest against drug trafficking charges against Santrich, and accused govt of wrecking peace accord. Four former FARC fighters killed during May, bringing total former FARC members killed in 2018 to 24. Conflict with FARC dissident groups continued. Gentil Duarte-led Seventh Front allegedly killed two Colombian marines 1 May in town of Puerto Cachicamo, in Guaviare (south east); security forces operation led to death of eight Seventh Front dissidents in Putumayo (south) 16 May; army 11 May captured alias “Mordisco”, leader of Sixth Front dissident group, in Cauca (south west); govt bombed camp in Caquetá belonging to Seventh Front 28 May, killing eleven; some civil society organisations stated two fighters said to have died in operation were peasant leaders. Govt and National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group 10 May resumed negotiations in Cuba following Ecuador’s April announcement it would no longer host talks. ELN 14 May announced unilateral ceasefire around elections 25-29 May. Security forces 17 May captured five ELN Héroes de Anorí front guerrillas in Antioquia (north west). Fighting continued between ELN and Ejército Popular de Liberación (EPL) in Catatumbo (north east); clashes in Hacari left several dead 15 May. JEP 8 May ruled that “parapoliticians” – politicians who sided with paramilitaries during conflict – would be excluded from transitional justice system, arguing that they were motivated by personal interest rather than political cause.
President elections took place 20 May, despite domestic and international pressure to postpone; electoral authorities declared incumbent President Maduro winner with 67% of vote, on 46% turnout – much higher than most independent estimates. Opposition candidate Henri Falcón of Avanzada Progresista party officially won 21.1%; evangelical Pastor Javier Bertucci 10%. Falcón declared he would not recognise result. Earlier, his campaign manager 16 May filed Supreme Court injunction to stop alleged govt illegal “vote-buying”; during campaign Maduro offered Bs10mn to those who voted; electoral authority subsequently prohibited fulfilment of promise. Ahead of poll, Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance intensified call for boycotts and campaigned against Falcón standing. Ad hoc Lima Group of govs 14 May met in Mexico City, issuing “final call” to postpone elections. Following announcement of results, Lima Group announced recall of remaining ambassadors from Caracas in protest at results. U.S. 21 May announced new economic sanctions; Caracas 22 May responded by expelling two U.S. diplomats, accusing them of “conspiracy”. U.S. 7 May had already announced sanctions on three individuals and twenty companies with ties to Maduro. Council of the EU 28 May announced fresh sanctions without specifying them. Organization of American States 29 May said it will present evidence to International Criminal Court that Maduro govt has committed crimes against humanity in response to report by panel of independent international experts alleging extrajudicial killings and torture of political prisoners. Prospect of shutdown in oil production loomed after international arbitration court late April awarded ConocoPhillips $2,040mn in long-running legal battle with Venezuela over rescinding of its contracts by President Chávez in 2007, prompting Conoco to seize Venezuelan oil refining and storage assets in Dutch Antilles and state-owned oil company PDVSA to withdraw its tanker fleet to Venezuelan waters.

- **COMMENTARY: President Maduro’s Likely Re-election in Breadline Venezuela**

Govt 16 May appointed Consuelo Porras new attorney general (AG); despite concerns in some quarters she will be influenced by President Morales’s attempts to hinder the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), said her commitment to continue investigations begun by her predecessor – including against sitting president – was “beyond doubt”. CICIG Commissioner Iván Velásquez and outgoing AG Thelma Aldana early May revealed new phase of investigation into alleged illicit campaign funding of Morales’s political party, which Aldana said should be enough to justify request to remove his immunity from prosecution. Govt 16 May moved embassy in Israel to Jerusalem,
reportedly in bid by Morales to get U.S. to reduce support and funding for CICIG. Govt 14 May requested Sweden and Venezuela withdraw ambassadors for interfering in national affairs.

> Honduras  MAY 2018

Ruling National Party, Liberal Party and former opposition alliance presidential candidate Salvador Nasralla 14 May joined UN-backed dialogue to continue discussing human rights and legal reforms that would prevent recurrence of political crisis similar to late 2017 post-election crisis. Earlier, Nasralla 11 May resigned from main opposition group Opposition Alliance against Dictatorship, which did not attend meeting, raising doubts over prospect of fruitful dialogue. National Party continued to push for conservative social agenda and militarised security policy during month, including discussions in Congress of mandatory Bible readings in schools and compulsory military service as “violence prevention” measures. UN special rapporteur on situation of human rights defenders, Michael Frost, following mid-May visit highlighted setbacks in anti-corruption campaign and lack of protection for human rights defenders. Govt rejected Organization of American States (OAS)’s April appointment of Luiz Antonio Guimarães Marrey as chief for Mission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MAGCIH), requested second option. Rose Elena de Lobo, wife of former president, acquitted on embezzlement charges in another perceived setback for MAGCIH. U.S. gov’t 4 May announced termination of Temporary Protected Status for around 57,000 Hondurans; deportations, up 25% in 2018 compared to 2017, likely to increase further.

> El Salvador  MAY 2018

Govt confirmed further increase in violence in first months of 2018, with homicides up 10% on 2017. Attorney General Douglas Meléndez 10 May noted existence of new gang violence in northern San Salvador, in centre of country, and expansion of gang violence in many municipalities prioritised under “Safe El Salvador” gov’t violence prevention program. In 15 May media interview, two heads of MS-13 gang highlighted new call by three largest gangs for new truce with gov’t. Gender-based violence also increased; Ministry of Justice and Public Security announced 17% increase in femicides in 2018, totalling 165 as of 15 May. Govt 5 May approved initiative presented by women’s rights groups to combat gender violence. Minister of Justice 26 April acknowledged police and armed forces’ involvement in causing insecurity and forced displacement. Seven police officers sent to trial 7 May for killing four people; thirteen police officers convicted of crimes including extortion, murder and sexual harassment. Former
President Saca and six members of his govt 16 May sent to trial for money laundering. FMLN ruling party chose FM Hugo Martínez as its presidential candidate for 2019 elections.

Nicaragua MAY 2018

Continued unrest following April anti-govt protests and violent crackdown, with at least eleven killed and scores injured as security forces reportedly fired on protesters during 30 May mass protest led by mothers of those killed since start of violence in April; Associated Press also reported that some demonstrators used improvised weapons. Earlier, tens of thousands 10 May protested in capital Managua, and in Matagalpa and Chinandega; two protesters killed during clashes with police 12 May. Govt 13 May agreed to allow independent inquiry into events since mid-April. Govt and opposition 18 May agreed week-long truce following church-mediated talks, but talks broke down 23 May; fresh protests and accompanying violence left eight dead 25-27 May. Responding to 30 May violence, Catholic Church condemned violence and said it was abandoning talks. Inter-American Commission on Human Rights 21 May accused police of excessive force against anti-govt protesters, claiming 76 killed since mid-April; govt claimed figure was sixteen.

Haiti MAY 2018

President Moïse late May visited Taiwan, which promised to provide $150mn aid to develop rural electricity infrastructure in Haiti, one of only eighteen countries with which Taiwan has diplomatic ties (see Taiwan). As Haitians continued to seek refuge in neighbouring Dominican Republic, tensions rose after two Haitian migrants reportedly killed two Dominican nationals 25 April and 1 May, prompting violent reprisals and hate speech against Haitians. Dominican President Medina 13 May announced 900-strong reinforcements to military presence on border, now numbering 6,300.

Mexico MAY 2018
Political violence remained high in run-up to 1 July presidential, legislative, state and local elections. Violence particularly targeted at mayoral candidates, including mayor of Pacula, Hildalgo state, and mayoral candidates for Tenango del Aire, Mexico state, and Apaseo el Alto, Guanajuato state. In worst-affected state Guerrero (south), 24 politicians assassinated and three more disappeared since campaigning began 8 Sept 2017. During same period, at least 1,000 candidates have withdrawn their candidacies nationally citing internal party decisions and political violence. Violence against journalists also continued, including Juan Carlos Huerta shot dead in Villahermosa, Tabasco state (south east) 15 May; National Commission for Human Rights 3 May reported 133 journalists assassinated in Mexico since 2000. Enforced disappearances and alleged collusion between state and criminal actors continued; media late April reported that three people searching for disappeared family members in San Miguel Soyaltepec, Oaxaca state (south west) also went missing 6 April. Federal authorities 14 May filed international arrest warrant for Luis Ángel Bravo Contreras, former Veracruz prosecutor allegedly involved in covering up cases relating to thirteen bodies found Jan 2016. Widespread violence relating to drug trafficking and organised crime also continued; authorities found eight bodies in mass graves in Michoacán state 25 April, twelve in Guanajuato state 12 May; at least 42 executions occurred in Oaxaca in first nine days of May. Lower house of Congress late April unanimously approved initiative abolishing elected politicians’ immunity from prosecution. Commission on Defence and Promotion of Human Rights 2 May revealed 25 incidents of internal forced displacement in 2017 affecting 20,390 people, 60% of them from indigenous groups. U.S.-Mexican relations strained by early May revelations U.S. govt paid $60mn between 2005 and 2017 to settle U.S. Customs and Border Protection cases of human rights violations; U.S. President Trump’s alleged referral to migrants as “animals” 16 May prompted further anger. Govt said it “deeply regrets and disapproves” of U.S. decision 31 May to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium imports, and would impose retaliatory tariffs.

- REPORT: Mexico’s Southern Border: Security, Violence and Migration in the Trump Era

Middle East & North Africa

Israel/Palestine  MAY 2018

Israeli forces killed over 60 Palestinians 14 May during largest protests at Gaza-Israel border since weekly demonstrations began end March, conflict’s bloodiest day since 2014 Gaza war, pushing total killed during protests to over 100. Protests took place same day as opening of U.S. embassy in Jerusalem and day before Palestinian commemoration of expulsion and flight of 750,000 Palestinians from Israel in 1948 war. Israeli forces 14 May struck several Hamas targets unconnected to protests. Protests continued but on smaller scale 15 and 18 May. Protest leaders announced next major march 5 June, anniversary of beginning of 1967 war. After discovering improvised explosive device along Gaza border, Israel 27 May fired on position of radical group Islamic Jihad in Gaza, killing three. Israel 29 May responded to 27 mortars fired from Gaza with airstrikes on 35 sites allegedly belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad; Hamas and Israel 30 May established de facto ceasefire. Israeli navy 29 May apprehended Palestinian
vessel attempting to break Gaza blockade. In West Bank, Israeli military 24 May conducted arrest raid near Ramallah, one soldier wounded during raid died 26 May. Palestinian govt 22 May called for International Criminal Court investigation into Israeli crimes in occupied territories. Palestinian National Council (PNC), legislative body of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), met 30 April-3 May and selected new fifteen-member Executive Committee, comprising more loyalists of PLO Chairman Abbas. Nasser Qidwa, possible Abbas successor, 6 May announced resignation from Fatah Central Committee over PNC meeting proceedings. PM Abbas hospitalised with apparent pneumonia 20-28 May. Israeli forces 8 May struck Syrian army positions in al-Kiswak, south of Damascus, reportedly killing fifteen people, including eight Iranians. Israel 10 May launched airstrikes against Iranian infrastructure in Syria, reportedly killing 23; it said attacks were in response to Iran firing rockets at Israeli troops in Golan Heights (see Syria).

- **OP-ED: Peace Starts In Jerusalem’s Holy Basin**

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**Lebanon**  May 2018

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In parliamentary elections 6 May, first in a decade, PM Hariri’s Future Movement incurred losses, winning 21 of 128 seats (down from 33), while Shiite parties Hizbollah and Amal increased share, winning thirteen and fifteen seats respectively. President Aoun’s Christian-majority Free Patriotic Movement and allied independent candidates won 22 seats, up from eighteen. Turnout was 49%, down from 54% in 2009. President Aoun designated Hariri to form new govt 24 May. Clashes between supporters of rival Druze parties in Choueifat, south of Beirut 8 May left one man dead. U.S. and Gulf partners 16 May imposed additional sanctions on Hizbollah leadership, targeting chief Hassan Nasrallah and deputy Naim Qassem.

- **COMMENTARY: In Lebanon's Elections, More of the Same is Mostly Good News**

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**Syria**  May 2018

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Israel-Iran confrontation over latter’s role in Syria escalated. Following increasingly inflammatory rhetoric and suspected Israeli strikes near Damascus 8 May, Israeli artillery struck inside Syria adjacent to Israeli-occupied Golan Heights night of 9-10 May, followed by rocket strikes into Golan Heights from Syria, which Israel blamed on Iranian Revolutionary Guards. Israel responded with its most extensive airstrikes in Syria yet in conflict, hitting, it claimed, “dozens of Iranian military targets”. Iran denied
responsibility for rocket launches into Golan Heights. Damascus claimed Israeli strikes hit Syrian military sites, not Iranian assets. Govt forces continued to eliminate remaining pockets of opposition control in central Syria, by striking surrender/evacuation deals with opposition forces in eastern Qalamun region, western Rif Dimashq province, in southern Damascus and north of Homs, swelling number of displaced civilians and rebel fighters in Idlib and Turkish-dominated areas in north. Pro-govt forces took control of all areas surrounding Damascus after pushing out Islamic State (ISIS) forces from pocket in south 21 May. In north west, Turkey established twelfth and final planned military observation point ringing Idlib and adjacent rebel-held areas. East of Euphrates River, rebel Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) backed by U.S.-led coalition resumed operations to take remaining pockets of territory held by ISIS.

**Bahrain | MAY 2018**

In mass trial of 138 people on terrorism-related charges, High Criminal Court 15 May revoked citizenship of 115 of which 53 were also sentenced to life in prison. Next day Amnesty International condemned move noting that revocation of citizenship turns defendants into stateless people, which violates international law. In separate trials, court 21 and 30 May revoked citizenship of nineteen more people on terrorism charges, bringing total number of revocations in 2018 to 250.

**Iran | MAY 2018**

U.S. President Trump withdrew from Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 8 May, increasing risk of confrontation between U.S. and Iran and their respective allies in coming weeks. In days preceding 8 May, leaders of E3 (France, Germany and UK) visited Washington to try to persuade Trump to remain in deal. Withdrawal started countdown to reimposition of U.S. nuclear-related sanctions on Iran waived under deal, with wind-down periods of 90 or 180 days. U.S. Treasury 15 May announced new sanctions against Iranian individuals, notably Central Bank governor. U.S. Sec State Pompeo 21 May outlined plan to implement “strongest sanctions in history”. Deal’s remaining signatories began efforts to convince Iran to remain committed to it. E3 issued joint statement 8 May regretting Trump’s decision and reiterating support for JCPOA. Iranian FM Zarif met E3 counterparts and EU foreign policy chief Mogherini in Brussels 15 May. EU 18 May announced steps to preserve European business in Iran, including European Investment Bank funding for Iran-related financing and oil payments. Zarif described preliminary discussions in Beijing, Moscow and Brussels as “positive start”. Israeli govt claimed to have hit all Iranian infrastructure in Syria in airstrikes 10 May, reportedly killing 23; Israel said attacks were response to Iran firing rockets at Israeli forces in Golan Heights between Syria and Israel (see Syria).
Protests in Kazeroon, west of Shiraz, over plans to divide city in two, left one dead 17 May. Morocco cut ties with Iran 1 May, accusing govt and Lebanese Shiite movement Hizbollah of training and providing weaponry to Western Sahara independence movement Polisario Front.

- **OP-ED**: The Iran deal is on life support. Can Europe revive it?

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**Iraq** 

MAY 2018

In parliamentary elections 12 May, Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr’s coalition won largest number of seats – 54 out of 328 – with Hadi al-Ameri’s Fatah Alliance winning 47 and incumbent PM Abadi’s Nasr coalition coming third with 42; parties began bargaining over PM and cabinet positions. Voter turnout was low at 44.5%, down from 62% in last election in 2014. Political violence flared before and after vote. Farouk Zarzour, candidate in Ninevah province, shot dead by family members 6 May, reportedly because he advocated relations with secularists; Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility. Thugs in Zakho and Dohuk and police in Suleimaniya reportedly assaulted opposition politicians in late April and early May. After vote, allegations of electoral fraud triggered violence, mainly in Kurdistan: electoral commission 16 May said unidentified armed men took over Kirkuk election office, preventing 186 ballot boxes from being sent to Baghdad. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Peshmerga forces 13 May fired at headquarters of Kurdish opposition Gorran Movement in Suleimaniya. Air force continued strikes on ISIS positions around Syrian towns of Hajin and Dashishah throughout May; govt claimed to have killed 40 ISIS fighters. ISIS claimed numerous attacks in Diyala province. In north, Turkey continued operations against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) militiants. PKK militiants reportedly killed two Turkish soldiers 21 May.

- **STATEMENT**: The Contested Iraqi Parliamentary Elections in Kirkuk

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**Saudi Arabia**  

MAY 2018

Security forces 9 May shot down two missiles over capital Riyadh fired by Huthi forces in Yemen. With ban on women driving scheduled to be lifted mid-June, at least seven high-profile activists calling on govt to allow women to drive arrested mid-May. Armed assailants 31 May stabbed policeman to death before exchanging fire with National Guard in city of Taif, east of Mecca.

- **REPORT**: Saudi Arabia: Back to Baghdad
Fighting intensified as United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Yemeni allies mid-May launched offensive toward Huthi-held Hodeida port on Red Sea coast and Saudi-led coalition and Huthi forces upped airstrikes and missile attacks respectively, raising risk of further escalation in June. UAE-led forces claimed victories in al-Jahari and al-Khokha districts about 120km south of Hodeida. Fighting intensified 30 May less than 10km from Hodeida airport reportedly leaving 53 rebels and seven coalition-led fighters dead. UAE-led forces also claimed victory in Taiz governorate in south. Saudi-led coalition airstrike on presidential palace in Huthi-controlled capital Sanaa 7 May reportedly targeted head of Huthi revolutionary committee Mohammed Ali al-Huthi and newly appointed Huthi President Mahdi Mashat, strike killed at least six civilians, unclear if reported targets killed. Huthis continued missile attacks on targets in Saudi Arabia, Red Sea and Yemen: Saudi security forces 9 May shot down two missiles over capital Riyadh and over southern city of Jizan 21 May; missile reportedly struck Turkish vessel in Red Sea carrying wheat to Yemen 10 May; missile reportedly killed five civilians in govt-held Marib city 22 May. UAE’s late April deployment of troops and armoured vehicles to Socotra island in Gulf of Aden without consulting Hadi govt sparked spat between nominal allies; Hadi govt accused UAE of occupying territory. Saudi delegation 4 May travelled to island to mediate dispute. Yemeni PM Bin Daghr 14 May said dispute resolved. Govt declared state of emergency for Socotra as cyclone Mekunu hit island 24 May. Saudi-led coalition 14 May said it would allow two flights a month between Cairo and Sanaa for those needing urgent medical care. UN Special Envoy Martin Griffiths continued talks with local and regional actors intending to present framework agreement for reviving talks to UN Security Council mid-June.

- COMMENTARY: Eight Days in Aden – a Forgotten City in Yemen’s Forgotten War

President Bouteflika made public appearance mid-May, second in five weeks. Abderrazak Makri re-elected head of opposition party Movement of Society for Peace (MSP) 13 May; Makri 16 May said MSP will start consultations with other movements toward national consensus on economic reform. Diplomatic tensions escalated with Morocco over Western Sahara: Moroccan FM 14 May said Algeria supported Lebanese Shiite movement Hizbollah in arming and training Western Sahara’s Polisario Front independence movement. FLN Secretary General Djamel Ould Abbès 17 May said major military training exercise 6 May near Moroccan border was “warning”.

https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print?l=Crisiswatch+May+2018&crisiswatch=6122&date=May+2018
Egypt

MAY 2018

Govt’s 10 May announcement of metro fare hikes by up to 300% triggered days of protests across Cairo that closed several metro stations; security forces 12 May arrested ten demonstrators. Govt stepped up crackdown on critics as President Sisi prepared to be sworn in for second four-year term early June: security forces 5 May arrested blogger Sherif Gaber; 6 May arrested satirist Shady Hussein Abu Zaid; 11 May detained director of Egyptian Commission for Rights and Freedoms Mohamed Lotfy with his wife and son, Lotfy and son released but his wife kept in custody with detention renewed 28 May for fifteen days; 15 May arrested leading 2011 activist Shady Ghazaly Harb; 23 May arrested journalist Wael Abbas; 26 May arrested Sisi’s former supporter turned critic, politician Hazem Abdel-Azim; Cairo military court 22 May sentenced journalist Ismail Alexandrani to ten years in prison. State toughened action against Muslim Brotherhood (MB); prosecutor-general 13 May referred 278 defendants to military court on charges of joining banned MB-linked groups Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra. In operation launched in Sinai in Feb, military 17 May said in past few days it had killed nineteen suspected members of Islamic State (ISIS) Sinai Province and arrested twenty; two soldiers and eight suspected militants killed 29 May. Tripartite negotiations between Egypt, Ethiopia and Sudan over Ethiopia’s construction of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on Nile River made no progress 5 May but in Addis Ababa 15 May parties agreed to go ahead with long-delayed joint study of dam.

Libya

MAY 2018

At summit in Paris hosted by French President Macron 29 May, rival leaders committed to holding parliamentary and presidential elections 10 Dec; meanwhile violence continued in capital Tripoli in west, Derna and Benghazi in east and Sebha in south. In Tripoli, two Islamic State (ISIS) militants 2 May attacked electoral commission, killing thirteen staff and three security officers; some Tripoli militias pushed govt-aligned Presidential Guard out of two bases 26 May. Head of Tripoli-based UN-backed Presidency Council (PC) Faiez Serraj 9 May passed decree giving more autonomy and legal authority to Special Deterrence Force, Salafi-dominated Tripoli-based armed group loyal to him. Eastern commander Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar 7 May oversaw large military parade in Benghazi in east; 8 May announced Libyan National Army (LNA) would launch new operation to wrest control of eastern city of Derna from coalition of Islamist militants recently renamed Derna Protection Force (DPF); LNA airstrikes 15 May reportedly killed five DFP members; LNA commander killed and two fighters wounded 22 May; UN 31 May said indiscriminate shelling on city had killed at least five civilians, including two children, since 22 May, described violence there as “unprecedented”. Also in east, ISIS claimed car bombing at checkpoint in Ajdabiya that killed at least two LNA troops and kidnapping of police officer in Awjila, both 22 May.
Car bombing in Benghazi 25 May killed at least seven civilians. Fighting restarted in early May in southern city of Sebha between militias composed of Awlad Suleiman Arabs and affiliated with Haftar’s LNA, and Tebu ethnic minority militias affiliated with Tripoli-based Govt of National Accord (GNA), at least 30 killed by late-May including civilians. PC 13 May called for immediate ceasefire and deployment of neutral force in Sebha. Human traffickers trying to prevent some 200 captive Eritreans, Ethiopians and Somalis from escaping reportedly killed at least twelve in Bani Walid, about 180km south east of Tripoli 23 May.

- **BRIEFING: Making the Best of France’s Libya Summit**

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**Morocco** MAY 2018

Morocco cut ties with Iran 1 May, accused Tehran and Lebanese Shiite movement Hizbollah of training and providing advanced weaponry to Western Sahara independence movement Polisario Front, govt 14 May said Algeria supported Hizbollah in backing Polisario Front. Govt condemned Polisario Front’s 45th anniversary celebrations in Western Sahara’s Tifariti area east of separation wall 20 May as “provocation” and “violation of ceasefire”, and said it had alerted UN. UN 19 May called on parties to avoid action “which may constitute a change to the status quo”.

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**Tunisia** MAY 2018

In municipal elections for 350 local councils 6 May, independent candidates came first with 32.9% of vote, Islamist party An-Nahda second with 28.6%, and Nida Tounes – which came first in 2014 parliamentary vote – came third with 20.8%. Turnout was low at 33.7%. Poor performance of Nida Tounes worsened internal dispute between party head Hafedh Caïd Essebsi (son of President Beji Caïd Essebsi) and PM Youssef Chahed. Chahed defended his record amid pressure for ruling coalition to dismiss him and 29 May said Hafedh Caïd Essebsi was responsible for “destruction of Nida Tounes”, while An-Nahda refused to back calls for his dismissal.
Polisario Front independence movement 20 May held military parades in Tifariti area east of separation wall to mark its 45th anniversary; Morocco condemned move as “provocation” and “violation of ceasefire”, and said it had alerted UN. UN 19 May called on parties to avoid action “which may constitute a change to the status quo”. Morocco cut ties with Iran 1 May, accusing Tehran and allied Lebanese Shiite movement Hizbollah of training and providing advanced weaponry to Polisario Front, and 14 May said Algeria supported Hizbollah in backing Polisario Front.