The President’s Take

In my second monthly column to accompany CrisisWatch, our unique conflict tracker, I look at how outside actors are now openly fighting not for Syria, but over it. I also note more bad news from Venezuela, and flag our upcoming report on how the outside world and regional governments can avert disaster there. Read more ...

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President & CEO

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February saw a twofold deterioration in the Syrian conflict – the Assad regime stepped up its brutal bombardment of rebel-held Eastern Ghouta, and regional and global powers increased their direct interventions in Syria, raising the risk of worse fighting in coming weeks. Elsewhere political polarisation between governments and opposition movements was rife. In Bangladesh, the conviction of opposition leader Khaleda Zia sparked protests, which could worsen if she is barred from participating in elections, while in the Maldives the government launched a crackdown on the judiciary and declared a state of emergency. In Venezuela, formal talks between the government and the opposition broke down, deepening the political impasse. In Guinea, alleged electoral fraud in local elections sparked opposition-led protests and violent clashes with security forces, while in Tanzania the killing of two opposition politicians highlighted shrinking political space. In Cameroon, deadly clashes between security forces and Anglophone separatists continued and could well worsen around senatorial elections planned for 25 March.

**Trends for Last Month**

**February 2018**

**🔺 Deteriorated Situations**

Tanzania, Guinea, Bangladesh, Maldives, Venezuela, Syria

**🔺 Improved Situations**

None

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YES, I AGREE
Trends and Outlook

In February, the conflict in Syria grew yet more abysmal. First, the regime unleashed a horrifying bombardment on Eastern Ghouta, the last major rebel-held area near Damascus, reportedly killing hundreds. Rebels also shelled parts of the capital under regime control, causing more deaths. With the UN’s and Russia’s efforts to organise ceasefires having scant effect and regime forces launching a ground offensive, the suffering is likely to continue. Second, outside actors – regional and global adversaries sucked into the conflict – directly confronted each other, significantly raising the risk of more damaging fighting among Syrian and non-Syrian forces in coming weeks. In the north west, Turkey pursued its fight against affiliates of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in Afrin district; fighting there will likely intensify if it pushes closer toward the city itself. In the east, a strike by U.S. forces against pro-regime forces, killing scores of Russian mercenaries, could augur worse clashes along the Euphrates. Elsewhere, Israeli jets bombed Iranian targets in response to growing tensions on Syria’s southern border. As we have argued, to prevent a new phase in Syria’s war involving Israel, Russia should act as broker to bolster the de-escalation agreement that keeps Iran-backed forces away from Syria’s 1974 armistice line with Israel.
the confrontation could worsen if Zia’s petition for bail is rejected and she is barred from contesting elections later this year. As we note in a new report, Bangladesh’s earlier political polarisation helped create conditions for a jihadist resurgence. Another violent election cycle, resulting from the Awami League’s marginalisation of the BNP – including Zia’s conviction in February – would again benefit the jihadist fringe. Rather than cracking down on political rivals, the government should be building political consensus on how to tackle Bangladesh’s security threats.

In the Maldives, President Abdulla Yameen defied the country’s Supreme Court after it overturned the prison sentence of exiled former President Mohamed Nasheed and ordered the release of other jailed opposition leaders, saying their trials had been “politically motivated”. The government arrested two Supreme Court judges and declared a state of emergency, which the UN’s human rights chief condemned as an “all-out assault on democracy”.

In Cameroon’s Southwest and Northwest regions, clashes between Anglophone separatists and security forces and attacks by both sides left at least 28 dead, including security forces, armed separatists and civilians. The confrontation, which started as protests by Anglophone teachers and lawyers, is rapidly morphing into an armed insurgency. In this fraught atmosphere, senatorial elections planned for 25 March could spark more violence. A direct dialogue between the government and Anglophone community leaders is critical to calm the crisis, particularly ahead of October presidential polls.

Local elections in Guinea, the first since 2005, triggered violence after the opposition accused President Condé and the ruling party of misusing the electoral code to give unfair advantage to the incumbent. The opposition is now calling on the court to annul the results. This site uses cookies. By continuing to browse the site you are agreeing to our use of cookies. Review our privacy policy for more details.
Formal talks aimed at ending the standoff between Venezuela’s government and opposition broke down on 7 February following the government’s unilateral announcement in January that it would hold early presidential elections in April. The Lima Group of fourteen nations that has been pushing for a solution to the Venezuela crisis expressed its “firm rejection” of the election plan, saying that the election would lack legitimacy and credibility without adequate guarantees.
In Southwest and Northwest regions, security forces continued to clash with Anglophone separatists and attack civilians; separatists could intensify attacks around senatorial elections planned for 25 March. Security forces killed civilians and burnt houses in Bole Bakundu, Southwest 1 Feb. In clashes and attacks in Northwest 1-8 Feb three security personnel and nine others killed. Separatists killed three gendarmes in Kembong, Southwest and abducted local official in Batibo, Northwest 11 Feb. Incidents involving security forces left three people dead: one in Banga Bakundu, Southwest 14 Feb, one in Angie, Northwest 14 Feb and one in Ndongo, Southwest 17 Feb. Separatist armed group Tigers of Ambazonia 16 Feb killed one gendarme in Kumba and another in Bebensi 18 Feb, both Southwest. Marines killed four armed men in Mundemba, Southwest 20 Feb. One gendarme killed in Munyengue, Southwest 24 Feb. Security forces killed armed separatist and several civilians in Ebonji, Southwest 25 Feb. Separatist armed group Ambazonia Defence Forces abducted local official in Batibo, Northwest 25 Feb. Soldiers in pursuit of separatists crossed into Cross River state, Nigeria 26 Feb, reportedly killing at least one civilian there. New separatist armed groups formed: Banso Resistance Army and Donga Mantung Liberation Force. Separatist Interim Govt of Ambazonia Governing Council 19 Feb warned against holding senatorial elections, planned for 25 March, in Northwest and Southwest. EU, U.S., France and Equatorial Guinea called for dialogue to end violence and UK minister visited 13-14 Feb urging de-escalation. In Far North, Boko Haram (BH) continued attacks: militants killed military officer in Limani 1 Feb and 25 other people in multiple places 3-24 Feb. Security forces killed BH suicide bomber, while another detonated explosives killing only himself in Kordo, near Kolofata 11 Feb. President Biya 7 Feb scheduled senatorial elections for 25 March; opposition Mouvement pour la Renaissance du Cameroun (MRC) 19 Feb decided to boycott on grounds that most councillors and mayors who will vote belong to ruling party. Main opposition party Social Democratic Front 24 Feb elected MP Joshua Osih as candidate for presidential elections later in 2018.

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ex-Seleka militiamen to forced labour in perpetuity for charges including rebellion. Facilitation Panel of African Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation led by African Union held third round of consultations in Bangui 16 Feb, including with fourteen rebel leaders.

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**Chad**  
FEBRUARY 2018

Alleged Boko Haram (BH) militants ambushed army patrol near Nigerian border 21 Feb killing two soldiers, first reported BH attack in Chad since May 2017. Public Security Minister Ahmat Bachir 6 Feb suspended for two months ten parties that tried to organise protest march; of which five reinstated following appeals. At summit in Brussels 23 Feb, donors increased pledges for G5 Sahel joint force to total of €414mn, with EU increasing its contribution from €50mn to €100mn. Following talks in Doha 20 Feb, govt and Qatar said they had resumed diplomatic relations, broken off in Aug 2017.

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**Democratic Republic of Congo**  
FEBRUARY 2018

Crackdown by security forces on anti-govt protests led by Catholic Church-affiliated Comité Laïc de Coordination 25 Feb left two people dead, one in Kinshasa and one in Mbandaka, capital of Equateur province in north west. Platform of protestant churches (ECC) 19 Feb reaffirmed support for elections and electoral commission. Catholic bishops concluded congress 15-17 Feb expressing concerns over violent repression of protests and increased insecurity, while demanding full implementation of Dec 2016 Saint Sylvester agreement and international certification of new electronic voting machines. Conflict between Hema and Lendu communities escalated in Dungu area, Ituri province leaving 60 to 100 people dead in 2018 and forcing some 27,000 people to flee to Uganda mid-Feb; govt and UN mission (MONUSCO) reinforced their presence in area. Security forces repelled attack by alleged Kamuina Nsapu militants in Lombelu, Kasai Central province in centre 26 Feb, clash reportedly left one soldier and fourteen others dead. Army 19 Feb captured camp of armed group Allied Democratic Forces and killed one commander in Beni area, North Kivu. Clashes between ethnic Hutu on one side and Nande and Hunde groups on other left sixteen civilians and seven militiamen dead in Rutshuru.

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YES, I AGREE
Community 3 Feb said it would open liaison office in Kinshasa.

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**Rwanda**  
**FEBRUARY 2018**

Army 15 Feb said it had killed three Congolese soldiers during 13 Feb skirmish along shared border; both sides blamed each other for instigating clash. Police 23 Feb said they had killed five Congolese refugees since 20 Feb during protests by refugees against UN’s cuts in food rations in Kiziba refugee camp in west; UN 26 Feb said police had killed eleven refugees and urged govt investigation.

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**Ethiopia**  
**FEBRUARY 2018**

PM Desalegn 15 Feb said he would resign from post and leadership of ruling coalition to ease reforms, but would stay in power until successor identified; amid anti-govt protests, govt 16 Feb reimposed state of emergency, in place from Oct 2016 to Aug 2017. Following govt’s early Jan announcement that it would pardon some political prisoners, attorney general 8 Feb announced pardon of 746 prisoners, mostly detained during 2015-2016 unrest in Oromia and Amhara regions. Anti-govt protesters in several towns in Oromia mid-Feb demanded release of more opposition leaders. Oromo politician Bekele Gerba and several others released 13 Feb. Ethnic Oromo party Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO), member of ruling coalition, 21 Feb elected former army intelligence officer Abiy Ahmed as its leader, signalling intention to nominate him for PM. Somali regional govt 22 Feb said it had released 1,500 more prisoners.
8 Feb. Police arrested opposition lawyer Miguna Miguna, who played prominent role in ceremony; authorities 6 Feb charged Miguna with treason, sparking clashes between opposition supporters and police in Kisumu in west, one bystander killed. Same day High Court ordered govt to stop proceedings against Miguna until authorities had brought him to Nairobi court; govt same day deported Miguna, describing him as “prohibited immigrant” due to his dual Kenyan-Canadian citizenship. High Court 15 Feb revoked Miguna’s deportation, declaring it illegal; decision on whether Miguna can return expected in March. Authorities 3 Feb arrested opposition MP George Aladwa. Govt prevented two prominent Odinga supporters, senator and financier, from leaving country 19 Feb; allowed them to travel next day. Human Rights Watch 25 Feb reported that police and armed gangs killed at least 37 people Sept-Nov 2017 around 26 Oct presidential election rerun.

Somalia FEBRUARY 2018

Al-Shabaab continued to clash with govt forces and troops from African Union mission (AMISOM) in Lower Shabelle region, kept up targeted killings in capital Mogadishu and intensified attacks in Puntland in north east. In Lower Shabelle, Al-Shabaab attacked and claimed to have temporarily captured from govt forces Afgoye town, about 30km from Mogadishu 10 Feb. Army and AMISOM recaptured from Al-Shabaab Awdheegle town, about 60km from Mogadishu 11 Feb, but withdrew next day. In Mogadishu, Al-Shabaab militants killed two army officers 14 Feb. Twin car bombings claimed by Al-Shabaab targeted presidential palace and hotel in Mogadishu 23 Feb, killing at least 38. Exchange of fire between AMISOM and Somali army troops at checkpoint in Mogadishu same day left three Somali soldiers dead; both forces blamed each other for incident. In Puntland, militants attacked police station in Bosaso 6 Feb, injuring four officers. At meeting of National Security Council 6 Feb, federal govt and regional states announced joint committee on integrating regional state forces into Somali National Army and agreed on roadmap for Federal Policing Model and temporary resource-sharing agreement. Federal govt 19 Feb appointed new heads of police and national intelligence, posts vacant since President Farmajo sacked predecessors following 28 Oct lorry bomb in Mogadishu. Reacting to VAT hikes announced by federal govt 18 Feb, businessmen launched boycott of Mogadishu’s port and called for strike in Bakara Market, country’s largest. U.S. said it conducted three airstrikes against Al-Shabaab: one near Jilib, Middle Juba region 19 Feb killing three militants, one near Jamaame, Lower Juba region 21 Feb killing four militants, and another near Jilib 26 Feb killing two militants.

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Standoff continued between Somaliland and Puntland forces following 8 Jan clash over disputed border.

South Sudan  FEBRUARY 2018

At close of peace talks 5–16 Feb, regional bloc International Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and African Union threatened punitive actions against parties violating Dec cessation of hostilities; Troika (Norway, UK and U.S.) 19 Feb called on all parties to observe ceasefire. U.S. 2 Feb announced unilateral arms embargo on S Sudan. During talks IGAD proposed draft power-sharing agreement between current transitional govt and opposition forces that would create four deputy vice president positions, expand parliament and grant 51% representation in certain state institutions to transitional govt (including opposition currently in govt) and 49% to other opposition groups. Govt criticised proposal saying four deputy vice presidents was unworkable. After fighting near govt-held Nasir town in north east 12 Feb, opposition walked out of talks for one day. Rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition (SPLA-IO) loyal to former Vice President Riek Machar said clashes between its members and govt forces in Yei River state in south 26 Feb left rebel commander dead; govt said clashes between rival opposition groups.

Sudan  FEBRUARY 2018

Govt and rebel faction Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) led by Abdelaziz al-Hilu met for talks in Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa 1-2 Feb, first since Oct 2016, but failed to secure cessation of hostilities agreement, hitting deadlock over humanitarian access to Two Areas (S Kordofan and Blue Nile states). SPLM-N al-Hilu 30 Jan extended its unilateral ceasefire for four months in Two Areas ahead of talks. Rival SPLM-N faction led by Malik Agar protested exclusion from talks. Protests against bread price rises continued, mainly in Khartoum; after EU and U.S. embassies

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Tanzania  FEBRUARY 2018

Amid rising political repression, unidentified attackers killed two opposition politicians. Unidentified assailants abducted official of main opposition party Chadema and party supporter in Dar es Salaam on coast 12 Feb; official found dead 14 Feb and kidnappers released party supporter with injuries. Some 100 civil society groups 21 Feb signed statement alleging “unprecedented” rights abuses, including “attacks, torture and forced disappearances” of activists, journalists and politicians. Unidentified attackers killed with machetes Chadema councillor at his home in Morogoro, about 200km west of Dar es Salaam 22 Feb; Chadema deputy secretary general described killing as “political assassination” part of assault on opposition “by the government ... and the police”. Court 26 Feb sentenced two Chadema politicians to five months in prison for criticising President Magufuli.

Mozambique  FEBRUARY 2018

As result of ongoing talks between govt and armed opposition group Renamo and conceding to its demands for greater powers in central provinces, President Nyusi 7 Feb said he would propose constitutional changes enabling political parties that win provincial parliamentary elections to select regional governors, for approval by president. In second face-to-face meeting since Dec 2016 truce, Nyusi and Renamo leader Afonso Dhlakama at Namadija, 40km from Gorongosa in centre 19 Feb discussed disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of Renamo members and incorporation of its officers into armed forces.
Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of opposition party Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) died of cancer 14 Feb aged 65. MDC-T national executive council next day chose Nelson Chamisa, one of three party vice presidents, to be acting president for twelve months; other vice presidents challenging Chamisa’s leadership, Thokozani Khupe and Elias Mudzuri, did not attend meeting. MDC-T consultative meeting 23 Feb chose Chamisa, former leader of MDC-T youth wing, as presidential candidate in 2018 elections, other senior leaders criticised Chamisa for unconstitutional power grab. MDC-T youth militia known as “Order of the Vanguard”, allegedly Chamisa supporters, assaulted MDC-T leaders at Tsvangirai’s funeral 20 Feb. After policemen shot dead three people in Harare 22 Feb, they used teargas to disperse crowds of protestors who set fire to vehicles. Police arrested 61 students and used teargas and water cannon to disperse protestors at Bulawayo’s National University of Science and Technology 26 Feb.

In Sahel region in north attacks on security forces continued: unidentified assailants ambushed gendarme patrol in Baraboule district, Soum province 29 Jan and attacked police patrol from Déou district police station, Oudalan province 3 Feb; one assailant killed in gunfight. President Kaboré late Jan reshuffled cabinet, notably replacing Simon Compaoré with Clément Sawadogo as security minister. Trial of Generals Gilbert Diendéré and Djibrill Bassolé and 82 co-accused for involvement in Sept 2015 failed coup attempt opened 27 Feb. U.S. designated Ansarul Islam as terrorist group 20 Feb, blocking foreign assets under U.S. jurisdiction and prohibiting U.S. citizens from engaging in business with it. At summit in Brussels 23 Feb, donors increased pledges for G5 Sahel joint force to total of €414mn, with EU increasing its contribution from €50mn to €100mn.
and sentenced 41 out of 147 party supporters accused of ‘rebellion’ to more than 30 years in prison.

**Gambia**  FEBRUARY 2018

Govt 8 Feb rejoined Commonwealth almost five years after former President Jammeh withdrew.

**Guinea**  FEBRUARY 2018

After opposition accused ruling party of fraud in 4 Feb local polls, opposition supporters and strikers clashed with security forces throughout month, at least ten killed. Local elections held for first time since 2005 4 Feb. Opposition next day accused President Condé and his supporters of fraud. In following days, opposition supporters clashed with Condé loyalists and security forces in several places including capital Conakry: young man killed in clashes in Kindia 5 Feb, five children killed in fire started during fighting in Dinguiraye 6 Feb. After teachers resumed strike 12 Feb, clashes between students and security forces in Conakry left two youths and one gendarme dead 12 and 19 Feb respectively. Electoral commission announced results 24 Feb with ruling party Rally for the Guinean People (RPG) winning majority; opposition disputed results. During general strike 26 Feb called by opposition, teachers and Guinea General Union of Workers (UGTG), opposition supporters clashed again with security forces, one protestor killed. Talks between govt and teachers’ union began 28 Feb, to continue 1 March.

**Guinea-Bissau**  FEBRUARY 2018

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YES, I AGREE
Mali  FEBRUARY 2018

Inter-ethnic attacks continued in north and centre: armed men attacked ethnic Doosaak village in Gao region in north 2 Feb, killing four people and abducting three others; after ethnic Dogon hunters killed ethnic Fulani herder in dispute over well late Jan, armed men attacked Tonou village, Mopti region in centre 10 Feb, killing three Dogon. Civilian vehicle triggered improvised mine in Mopti region between Dera and Konna 9 Feb, six people killed. French Barkhane force pursued search and kill strategy against jihadist groups: strike in Ménaka region in east 8 Feb fatally wounded Sidiham Ag Tahama, lieutenant of Ansar Dine’s leader Iyad Ag Ghaly; strike near Algerian border 13 Feb killed another of his lieutenants and 24 alleged combatants. Two French soldiers killed near Indelimane in north east 21 Feb when their armoured vehicle triggered mine, claimed 23 Feb by jihadist coalition Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM). Six Malian soldiers and four UN peacekeepers killed when their vehicles triggered improvised mines in Mopti region 27 and 28 Feb respectively. Opposition party and families accused army of abducting seven civilians at Nangarabakan, Ségou region 21 Feb and later killing them; govt acknowledged civilians had been killed and said it had launched investigation. At summit in Brussels 23 Feb, donors increased pledges for G5 Sahel joint force to total of €414mn, with EU increasing its contribution from €50mn to €100mn.

Niger  FEBRUARY 2018

In south east, armed men abducted chief of Assaga village, less than 10km from Diffa. At summit of G5 Sahel (Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania) in Niamey 6 Feb, President Issoufou took over presidency from Malian President Keita for one year and Nigerien Maman Sidikou took over as secretary general. At summit in Brussels 23 Feb, donors increased pledges for G5 Sahel joint force to total of €414mn, with EU increasing its contribution from €50mn to €100mn. Media outlets including

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Boko Haram (BH) insurgents abducted over 100 female students from school in Yobe state as military continued counter-insurgency operations in north east and herder-farmer violence continued, mostly in Benue and Adamawa states. Military 14 Feb said it had killed 186 insurgents since mid-Dec and taken “total control” of former BH stronghold Sambisa forest; 26 Feb said Nigerian and Cameroonian forces killed 35 militants and rescued 906 civilian hostages in joint operation along common border. BH continued attacks: three suicide bombers struck market in Konduga near Borno state capital, Maiduguri 16 Feb, killing at least 21 people; insurgents raided girls’ school in Dapchi town, Yobe state 19 Feb, 110 girls missing, apparently abducted. Two soldiers died from wounds inflicted by BH suicide bombers in Sambisa forest 27 Feb. Federal High Court 16 Feb released 475 people held, some since 2010, on suspicion of involvement with BH, for rehabilitation by state govts. Govt 19 Feb said 205 people convicted for BH involvement, jailed for between three and 60 years. To suppress herder-farmer violence and rural banditry, army 15 Feb launched Operation Ayem Akpatuma (“Cat Race”) to run until 31 March in six states (Benue, Taraba, Kogi, Nasarawa, Kaduna and Niger) but violence continued: Benue state Governor Ortom 26 Feb said herdsmen invaded Guma area previous week, killing over 60 people; herdsmen 27 Feb attacked Gwamba village near Numan, Adamawa state, killing at least seven people; troops responded, killing ten herdsmen. Violence flared in north-west and north-central zones: bandits 14 Feb attacked Birane village, Zamfara state, killing over 40 people; Christian and Muslim youth 26 Feb clashed in Kasuwan Magani community, Kaduna state, at least twelve killed.

After delays and another opposition protest 3 Feb, talks between govt and opposition coalition took place in capital Lomé 19 Feb facilitated by Ghanaian President Akufo-Addo. During talks, govt and opposition said they would suspend protests and, as confidence-building measure, govt said it would release 45 of 92 people detained for involvement in political demonstrations; 41 released by 23 Feb. Talks resumed briefly 23 Feb but made little progress, and were adjourned again for at least two weeks.

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Malaysia reported 10 Feb it had received extradition request from Beijing for eleven ethnic Uighur Chinese who were detained in Malaysia after escaping from a Thai jail in Nov. U.S. called on Malaysia to offer temporary protection to detainees, “who may be subject to torture or persecution if returned against their will”; Human Rights Watch called on Malaysia not to return Uighurs to China, citing threat of imprisonment and torture; Malaysian Bar Association warned that extradition would violate international law. Radio Free Asia reported 7 Feb authorities in Kashgar, southern Xinjiang, requiring unemployed Uighur men to attend political indoctrination classes. Human Rights Watch 27 Feb reported that authorities have deployed big data “predictive policing program” in Xinjiang and detained some individuals flagged as potential threats. Govt announced three-year poverty eradication plan focusing on 22 poorest counties in Xinjiang. In China’s north-west Gansu province, authorities in Linxia county reportedly banned Hui Muslim children from attending religious education during Chinese New Year.

China/Japan  FEBRUARY 2018

Three Chinese coast guard ships 21 Feb patrolled waters near disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands; Japan warned them to leave area.

Korean Peninsula  FEBRUARY 2018

Pyongyang sent 47-strong sporting delegation of athletes and cheerleaders and delegation of senior officials to attend Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in South Korea, part of thawing of bilateral relations between Koreas. Delegation included Kim Jong-un’s sister Yo-jong and titular head of state Kim Yong-nam, highest ranking North Korean official ever to visit South. Start of games saw intense period of multilateral diplomacy: meeting with South Korean President Moon 8 Feb, Chinese Politburo.

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unhappy with Pence’s strong denunciation of North Korea’s human rights record and threats of further sanctions. U.S. 23 Feb announced largest round yet of sanctions against North Korea. Other inter-Korean exchanges included joint pop concerts and cheerleading and taekwondo performances; North and South marched under unified flag during 9 Feb Olympics opening ceremony and fielded joint ice hockey team. North Korean delegation 25 Feb returned to South Korea for closing ceremony, met Moon and said Pyongyang is open to talks with U.S.; U.S. said any talks must lead to Pyongyang ending its nuclear and missile programs. Observers expect resumption of joint U.S.-South Korea military exercises late March to put North-South rapprochement under strain.

- VIDEO: Extending the Korean Winter Olympics Detente

Taiwan Strait  FEBRUARY 2018

Chinese airlines 30 Jan cancelled 176 flights to Taiwan, which had been scheduled to meet Chinese New Year holiday demand, after Taiwanese authorities refused to approve them. Taipei 23 Feb appointed pro-independence politician Chen Ming-tong as China affairs minister to start “new phase” in relations with Beijing.

Afghanistan  FEBRUARY 2018

Unusually intense winter violence by all sides continued. In west, Taliban continued encroachment on Farah provincial capital, reportedly capturing four checkpoints and killing 35 police 19 Feb; over twenty others killed in nearby district 24 Feb. Taliban activities increased in northern Faryab and southern Helmand provinces. Two suicide attacks carried out in Helmand’s Nad Ali district and Lashkarga 24 Feb; in Greshk district, four national intelligence operatives gunned down sixteen colleagues 11 Feb. BBC 30 Jan reported Taliban had active presence in 70% of Afghanistan; govt denied. U.S. and Afghan forces (ANSF) operations and air strikes continued, reportedly killing at least twenty villagers in Kandahar’s Band-i Timor district 31 Jan-1 Feb. U.S. military dropped 24 guided
starting talks without preconditions, reviewing constitution as part of a roadmap to peace. Discord within National Unity Govt continued, while row brewed over rollout of new ID cards. Defiant Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Nur 11 Feb announced massive anti-govt rallies before cancelling them later. Samangan Governor Abdul Karim Khadam 18 Feb announced he would also defy govt order dismissing him, before agreeing to step down next day.

- **COMMENTARY: The Cost of Escalating Violence in Afghanistan**

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**Bangladesh**  FEBRUARY 2018

Tensions between ruling Awami League and opposition Bangladeshi National Party (BNP) increased as Dhaka court 8 Feb convicted BNP leader Khaleda Zia of corruption and sentenced her to five years’ prison, with fears that confrontation with govt could turn violent if Zia is denied bail in March and also barred from contesting next election. Prior to verdict, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion late Jan-early Feb arrested several senior BNP figures. Authorities 6 Feb banned all rallies on day of verdict and 7 Feb prevented BNP supporters entering capital Dhaka; 9-10 Feb arrested over 300 BNP supporters across country amid largely peaceful protests. Seeking to overturn Zia’s conviction, BNP mid-Feb launched agitation plans including hunger strike and petitions, said it would not contest late 2018 general election unless Zia released and allowed to participate. Zia 20 Feb appealed verdict in high court and petitioned for bail; high court 22 Feb agreed to hear appeal against verdict; decision on bail petition pending. In separate graft case, court 26 Feb extended bail to Zia till 13 March. Govt 12 Feb issued warrants in two other graft cases against Zia. PM Hasina 31 Jan reiterated rejection of BNP demands to hold election under neutral caretaker govt; instead outlined framework for smaller “polls-time” govt (to govern during election period) with similar limited jurisdiction to previous neutral caretaker system, which was abolished in 2011. Chief election commissioner 2 February said national election would not be inclusive without BNP participation. Repatriation of Rohingya refugees, scheduled to start 23 Jan, remained stalled; state Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam 12 Feb said govt had signed deal to involve UN in repatriation process. Govt 29 Jan approved draft new Digital Security Act, which journalists and activists warned could be used to silence dissent, particularly as it retained provision banning online publication or transmission of material that may “prejudice” image of state, “deteriorate” law and order, or offend religious beliefs.

- **REPORT: Countering Jihadist Militancy in Bangladesh**

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Security forces clashed with Maoist rebels on several occasions, including 18 Feb clash that killed two soldiers and some twenty suspected Maoists in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh state.

Militants and Indian security forces clashed throughout month, including 10 Feb militant attack on army base in Indian-administered Kashmir killing at least five soldiers and one civilian. India 12 Feb claimed it had evidence attack was carried out by Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad and threatened retaliation against Pakistan; Pakistan 13 Feb said “any Indian aggression” would be met with “equal and proportionate response”. Gunmen 13 Feb attacked police base in Srinagar (south); gunmen and one soldier killed in ensuing standoff. Suspected militants 25 Feb killed two policemen in separate incidents in Indian-administered Kashmir. India and Pakistan traded fire across Line of Control (LoC) on several occasions, including 19 Feb clash which Pakistan said killed one Pakistani civilian and two Indian soldiers. Pakistani PM Abbasi 21 Jan confirmed his govt plans to take control of anti-India group Jamaat-ud-Dawa’s (JuD, formerly Lashkar-e-Tayyaba) charity operations; Pakistani President Hussain 9 Feb approved expansion of banned terrorist groups list to include groups sanctioned by UN Security Council, including JuD and its Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation; Pakistani govt mid-Feb said it had seized hundreds ofJuD properties and madrasas (see Pakistan).

Govt launched crackdown on opposition and judiciary after Supreme Court (SC) overturned prison sentence of exiled former President Mohamed Nasheed and ordered release of other jailed opposition leaders. SC 1 Feb ruled trials of Nasheed and other opposition leaders were “politically motivated” and in violation of constitution, ordered immediate release of those in prison and fresh trials;
govt to respect SC verdict, China called on parties to resolve differences “through dialogue and negotiation”. Remaining SC judges 6 Feb reversed 1 Feb decision. UN 7 Feb described govt emergency rule as “all-out assault on democracy”. Thousands joined anti-govt protests across country 16 Feb, clashing with police. Parliament 20 Feb approved extension of state of emergency for 30 days in vote boycotted by opposition, who said vote was “illegal” due to lack of quorum; Supreme Court 26 Feb said extension valid. EU 26 Feb threatened “targeted measures” if situation does not improve.

⇒ Nepal  FEBRUARY 2018

UML Chairman KP Oli appointed prime minister 15 Feb following resignation of Sher Bahadur Deuba. Deuba resigned after completion of elections to upper house of parliament 7 Feb where Leftist Coalition of UML and CPN (Maoist Center) won 39 of 59 total seats. Following months of negotiations and some disagreements along ideological lines, UML and CPN agreed 19 Feb on framework for merger of two parties: new party to be named Communist Party of Nepal; Oli and CPN Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal to share prime ministership during parliament’s five-year term. With unified party falling ten seats short of two-thirds majority in lower house of parliament, UML in discussions with Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum-Nepal (SSFN) to join govt; SSFN – a Madhesi-based party with sixteen parliamentary seats – demands amendments to constitution as precondition. Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Nepal 1-2 Feb, meeting with top leaders including Oli and Dahal in efforts to improve relations with Leftist Coalition prior to formation of new govt. China’s Vice Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee Guo Yezhou visited Nepal 21 February and met with Oli and Dahal, expressed China’s readiness to work with new govt.

⇒ Pakistan  FEBRUARY 2018

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YES, I AGREE
promised to hold accountable those involved in Mehsud’s murder. Following Jan diplomatic spat with U.S. over Pakistan’s alleged support for terrorist groups and visit by UN sanctions monitoring team to assess govt measures against terror groups, govt took several steps against militant groups: 9 Feb expanded list of banned terrorist groups to include groups sanctioned by UN Security Council, including anti-India group Jamaat-ud-Dawa’s (JuD, formerly Lashkar-e-Tayyaba) and its Falah-i-Insaniat Foundation; 13 Feb approved measures to freeze bank accounts of banned terrorist groups; mid-Feb reportedly seized hundreds of properties and madrasas owned by JuD. U.S. welcomed steps but said more action needed; after reviewing Pakistani measures 18-20 Feb, Financial Action Task Force decided against placing Pakistan on its non-compliance list, giving it three-month reprieve. U.S. drone strike 8 Feb in FATA’s North Waziristan killed at least three suspected Haqqani Network militants; drone strike near Afghan border 8 Feb killed Pakistani Taliban’s deputy leader, Khan Saeed Mehsud alias “Sajna”. Pakistani Taliban claimed suicide bombing 3 Feb near army base in Swat district (north) that killed eleven soldiers; and 14 Feb attack in Balochistan provincial capital Quetta that killed four Frontier Corps soldiers. Suicide bomb attack near Quetta 28 Feb killed at least four Frontier Corps soldiers. Army 15 Feb said it would deploy “contingent” to Saudi Arabia on “training and advice mission”.

Sri Lanka  FEBRUARY 2018

Unexpectedly strong result for ex-President Mahinda Rajapaksa’s Sri Lanka People’s Party (SLPP) in 10 Feb local elections threw ruling United National Party (UNP)-Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) coalition into turmoil, raising possibility of its collapse and badly damaging prospects for a new constitution and other reforms. SLPP won 44.6% of vote and large majority of local councils across country; PM Wickremesinghe’s UNP won 32.6%; and President Sirisena’s SLFP together with allies in United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) won 13.4%. Elections in Tamil areas, where conflict-affected groups continue to demand post-war reforms, saw significant losses for moderate Tamil National Alliance (TNA). Sirisena responded to SLPP demands to call new elections with attempt to install new SLFP-led govt or UNP govt without Wickremesinghe as PM. Govt 25 Feb announced first stage of cabinet reshuffle, including PM taking over law and order portfolio. Election reportedly one of most peaceful and least corrupt in recent history, but outcome provoked increasingly violent rhetoric among both Sinhala political partisans and Tamil nationalists, as well as post-election violence principally by SLPP supporters against UNP/SLFP rivals. 26-27 Feb attack on mosque and Muslim shops in south-eastern town Ampara raised tensions further. UN human rights chief report 23 Feb

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Cambodian People’s Party (CPP) won 58 out of 62 Senate seats at 25 Feb election conducted by MPs and commune councillors, which members of dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) called a “sham”. National Assembly 14 Feb approved constitutional amendments and changes to criminal code, including lèse majesté law carrying punishment of up to five years’ prison and fine for insulting monarchy; justice minister said it will apply to media outlets carrying defamatory content and to journalists. Other amendments include requiring political parties to “place the country and nation’s interests first” and forbidding individuals from “undermining the country’s interest”. Senate approved changes 21 Feb. Bipartisan group of U.S. senators 8 Feb introduced Cambodia Accountability and Return on Investment (CARI) Act imposing conditions on assistance to Cambodia, expanding visa ban on officials, freezing assets of senior officials, and prohibiting debt relief, until “free and fair parliamentary elections have taken place” including “full and unimpeded participation” of dissolved opposition party. In 21 Feb speech, Hun Sen promised to pursue and beat up protesters if they burn effigies of him at March summit of ASEAN leaders in Sydney, Australia. Germany 22 Feb suspended preferential visas for private travel by members of Cambodia’s govt in response to its crackdown on opposition and civil society, and encouraged other EU member states to impose similar measures. EU Foreign Affairs Council 26 Feb expressed deep concern over “recent worrying political developments and the continuing deterioration of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, including the escalating repression of the opposition, media and civil society”.

Indonesia

Group of religious leaders, human rights activists, researchers and lawyers 20 Feb released joint statement expressing alarm over spate of violent attacks against places of worship around country, including 11 Feb sword attack on Catholic church that injured four people. Court 6 Feb sentenced terrorist Suryadi Mas’ud, alias Montilla Perez, to ten years’ jail for procuring firearms in Philippines and involvement in funding terrorism. Zainal Anshori, head of Islamic State (ISIS)-linked Jamaah Ansharut Daulah, sentenced for seven years 10 Feb by East Jakarta District Court for plans to smuggle weapons from southern Philippines; his group believed to be responsible for several terror plots in Indonesia including deadly Jan 2016 attack in Jakarta.

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Efforts against violent extremism and Islamic State (ISIS) continued. Home affairs ministry 19 Feb ordered immigration department to conduct random checks at airports in Sabah to prevent potential terrorists from entering country, amid concerns that individuals linked to ISIS and from Philippine Abu Sayyaf terrorist group have been entering Sabah from Mindanao before flying to West Malaysia. In series of operations 25 Jan-6 Feb in Johor and Sabah, police arrested ten men and a woman for alleged ISIS links; seven Filipinos among those arrested, including two leading Abu Sayyaf figures, one accused of recruiting Malaysians and Indonesians to group.

Myanmar  FEBRUARY 2018

Return of Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh remained stalled despite bilateral agreement on procedures; number of Rohingya refugees who have fled from Rakhine state to Bangladesh now stands at 688,000, with small numbers continuing to cross. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi 13 Feb told UN Security Council conditions “not yet conducive to voluntary repatriation” with causes of their flight not yet addressed, no substantive progress on addressing deepening exclusion and denial of rights rooted in lack of citizenship. Reuters 8 Feb released report that detained journalists Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo had been working on at time of their Dec arrest: provides detailed reconstruction of extrajudicial execution of ten Rohingya villagers by soldiers, police and ethnic Rakhine villagers, and their burial in mass grave. Report prompted renewed calls from U.S. and UN for independent investigation into events in northern Rakhine. Govt spokesperson 11 Feb stated action would be taken against ten members of security forces, six villagers in connection with killings. Associated Press (AP) 1 Feb reported it had conducted detailed interviews with Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and identified five previously unreported massacres of Rohingya civilians in days after 25 Aug whose bodies had been buried by Myanmar soldiers in mass graves. Govt 2 Feb rejected claims; Rakhine state govt said it was planning to sue AP. Authorities 9 Feb charged prominent Rakhine figures Aye Maung and Wai Hin Aung, both arrested in Jan on charges of unlawful association and incitement, with high treason; sporadic protests across Rakhine state against their prosecution. Three small bombs exploded near govt buildings in state capital Sittwe 24 Feb; no fatalities. Canada announced sanctions 16 Feb against senior Myanmar officer for role in Rohingya crackdown. U.S. Senate committee unanimously passed sanctions bill on Myanmar 7 Feb. EU Foreign Affairs Council 26 Feb called for targeted restrictive measures against senior military officers and strengthening of existing arms embargo. Clashes continued between govt and Kachin Independence Organisation and Ta’ang National Liberation Army, while peace process remained

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YES, I AGREE
Senate completed its consultations on Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) while House of Representatives scheduled public hearings in Mindanao from 1-16 March; legislators hope BBL will be ready for voting before Congress goes on recess 24 March. BBL supporters asked legislators to approve a version of BBL that reflects 2014 peace agreements. Deputy Presidential Peace Adviser Nabil Tan 23 Feb reiterated that passage of BBL will provide current regional govt in Mindanao much-needed boost to prepare for when national govt shifts to federal system. Congress also continued to tackle planned shift from presidential to federal system of govt; President Duterte 25 Jan appointed top magistrates, lawyers, academics and former officials to consultative body on charter change, including Randolph Parcasio, lawyer of Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and founding chairman Nur Misuari. Rehabilitation of Marawi city following 2017 siege continued to face challenges, with local NGOs and ethnic Maranao Muslim traditional leaders opposed to govt’s plan to construct second military camp near main battle area. Marawi residents called on govt to pay them reparation for destroyed properties and allow them to rebuild their own homes. Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Chairman Al-Haj Murad Ebrahim 20 Feb warned that ISIS-linked terrorists (including foreign nationals), with guns and cash looted from Marawi, could seize cities like Iligan and Cotabato; said MILF was battling pro-ISIS groups for influence in schools, and repeated his plea for govt to approve BBL immediately. Police 16 Feb arrested Fehmi Lassqued, Egyptian believed to be ISIS recruiter. Six Abu Sayyaf members killed in clash with govt troops in Basilan 24 Feb; authorities arrested Jurome Dongon, widow of slain Malaysian terrorist Zulkifli Bin Hir alias Marwan, during raid in Tubod, Lanao Del Norte 25 Feb. Military 25 Feb overran Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters camp in North Cotabato.

South China Sea

China’s continued militarisation of South China Sea (SCS) features drew further international concern. Official Chinese newspaper 2 Feb announced China’s South China Sea Fleet had signed deals with Chinese firms to upgrade communications systems in Paracel (Xisha) and Spratly (Nansha) archipelagos. Philippine newspaper 5 Feb published detailed photographs of Chinese-built structures in Spratly Islands and said China will soon have seven “military bastions” from which it can project power. China 7 Feb announced it had deployed advanced Su-35 fighter jets to SCS for first time. UK 13 Feb said Royal Navy frigate will conduct freedom of navigation operation in SCS in March. Philippine President Duterte 8 Feb banned all scientific research off country’s Pacific Coast, despite earlier allowing Chinese oceanographers access. In second planned series of bilateral consultations, Chinese
Thailand  FEBRUARY 2018

As violence continued in southern insurgency, Thai delegation in peace dialogue with MARA Patani (umbrella group of five Malay-Muslim separatist groups in exile) 15 Feb announced they had agreed on an unnamed district to serve as pilot safety zone, almost two years after announcing framework agreement establishing safety zones. Main militant group Barisan Revolusi Nasional Patani Melayu not party to dialogue. Violence continued in Southern insurgency, with incidents including: in Pattani, rubber tapper shot dead by gunmen in Mae Lan district 3 Feb; assistant village head shot dead in Muang district 5 Feb; assistant village headman and family member shot dead by gunmen in Mayo district 6 Feb; series of six bomb explosions wounded six people in Yaring district 10 Feb, followed by two bombs in Yarang district; three other bombs discovered and disarmed in Saiburi district. In Yala province, small roadside IED exploded near school in Yaha district, injuring defence volunteer, mother and young student 6 Feb; IED in Muang district 15 Feb wounded two defence volunteers. In Narathiwat province, two Muslim men shot dead in Si Sakhon district 13 Feb; four soldiers wounded by IED in Chanae district 17 Feb; rubber tapper shot dead in Yi-ngo district 17 Feb. Following Jan postponement of general election until early 2019 at earliest, protests against junta and demonstrations demanding general election in 2018 continued to grow in size and frequency, including several hundreds attending rallies in Bangkok 10 and 24 Feb. “We Walk” marchers, protected by late Jan Administrative Court ruling instructing police not to obstruct them, reached Khon Kaen in north east 17 Feb and staged rally calling for elections and end to military rule. Luxury watch scandal surrounding Deputy PM and Defence Minister General Prawit Wongsuwon continued to burden National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) govt.

Europe & Central Asia

Bosnia And Herzegovina  FEBRUARY 2018

EU 6 Feb launched new enlargement strategy for Western Balkans. calling on countries to “urgently
concern, suggested RS President Dodik attempting to establish “some kind of armed formations”; Dodik called remarks “notorious falsehoods”. Dodik 15 Feb confirmed he will run as candidate for elections to tripartite state-level presidency in elections due Oct; said he would work to reduce size of national army from 16,000 to 3,500. RS late Feb announced that elementary schools in entity will adopt unified curriculum with Serbia for four “national” subjects including language and history, prompting criticism from Bosniak politicians.

**Kosovo** February 2018

EU 6 Feb launched new enlargement strategy for Western Balkans, calling on countries to “urgently redouble their efforts, address vital reforms and complete their political, economic and social transformation”. Said normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia “urgent and crucial” for both countries to progress on European path. EU-mediated normalisation talks between Kosovo and Serbia resumed late Feb. Kosovo and Montenegro 16 Feb announced agreement on process for resolving disputes over 2015 border demarcation agreement, which Kosovo still needs to ratify to gain visa-free travel to EU; announcement welcomed by EU, however parliament again postponed vote on ratifying deal 22 and 28 Feb. Kosovo celebrated ten years since declaration of independence 17 Feb; previous day, Barbados became 116th country to recognise Kosovo, while Serbian President Vučić said his country unlikely to support full recognition despite it being a condition for Serbia to join EU.

President Thaci 1 Feb said law establishing new special court at The Hague to prosecute alleged war crimes by members of Kosovo Liberation Army during 1998-1999 war cannot be stopped, even though he is against it.

**Macedonia** February 2018

Month saw further progress toward resolution of longstanding name-dispute with Greece, which would unblock path to launch of EU accession talks and NATO membership. Macedonia 6 Feb

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140,000 people joined protest 4 Feb against use of name “Macedonia” by northern neighbour; in Skopje, several thousand protested against name change 27 Feb. European Commission President Juncker during late Feb visit praised progress on name dispute and pace of govt reforms. EU 6 Feb launched new enlargement strategy for Western Balkans, calling on countries to “urgently redouble their efforts, address vital reforms and complete their political, economic and social transformation”.

**Armenia**  FEBRUARY 2018

Ahead of its election of new PM 17 April, who under new constitution will effectively lead country, National Assembly 8 Feb passed in first hearing amendments to several laws, including: reviewed law on Security Council to guarantee PM’s exclusive responsibility for defence policy, and established new position of vice PM. Current President Sargsyan widely expected to be elected PM. Armen Sarkissian 16 Feb officially confirmed his candidacy for presidential elections in National Assembly 2 March; also widely expected to win. Speaking at Munich Security Conference 17 Feb Sargsyan confirmed his readiness to denounce 2009 Zurich Protocols by end of his current term early April; Protocols were signed by Armenia and Turkey as part of planned normalisation process supported by U.S. and Russia.

**Azerbaijan**  FEBRUARY 2018

President Aliyev early Feb issued order bringing forward presidential elections from Oct to 11 April. Many of the thirteen candidates registered to run against incumbent Aliyev have already praised his candidacy.

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Presidential elections; Georgian govt and relatives denied. De facto officials voiced readiness to hand over body after post-mortem by Russian experts; relatives and political activists 26 Feb protested by briefly blocking two roads connecting South Caucasus to Russia, demanding handover of body. Co-chairs of Geneva talks (conflict settlement platform that allows Georgian, Russian, Abkhaz and Ossetian participants to discuss security and humanitarian issues since 2008 war between Russia and Georgia) expressed strong concern over Tatunashvili’s death and called for more intensive exchange of information between sides, including at 1 March Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism meeting in Ergekut. EU and foreign embassies in Georgia also voiced concern. Georgian parliament prepared special resolution condemning incident; some MPs discussed creation of “black list” of people involved in crimes against ethnic Georgians in breakaway regions to restrict their travel and access to Georgia-provided medical and social benefits. After latest round of Swiss-mediated Georgia-Russia talks on transit trade through South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia 2 Feb confirmed its intention to sign contract with Swiss private company that will conduct monitoring of customs at crossing points leading to breakaway regions, previously controlled by Russians and separatist de facto officials. Georgia already signed contract in Dec. Transit deal would clear way for launch of transit trade through South Ossetia, based on 2011 Customs Agreement; would represent first serious breakthrough in Georgia-Russia relations since 2008 war and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; and potentially open opportunities for more communication through de facto regions, currently largely dependent on Russia.

Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)  FEBRUARY 2018

Baku and Yerevan both continued exchange of harsh statements. Azerbaijani President Aliyev 8 Feb told congress of ruling New Azerbaijan Party that Armenia’s capital, Yerevan, and some Armenian regions were Azerbaijan’s historic lands and “... we, the Azerbaijanis, must return to these historical lands”. Statement produced outcry in Armenia; President Sargsyan at Munich Security Conference 17 Feb portrayed it as new territorial demand. Heated rhetoric came as Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) de facto govt staged rallies in region’s main towns to celebrate 30th anniversary since start of Armenian Karabakh movement street protests in 1988; and comes ahead of electoral tests in March/April for Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders. Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group co-chairs early Feb toured five territories adjacent to NK in its Soviet administrative borders, which Azerbaijan declares “occupied” and wants to retake from Armenian side's control; many on Armenian side consider these territories “liberated”. Following tour, co-chairs issued

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In Dagestan, Islamic State (ISIS) claimed responsibility for 18 Feb attack on Orthodox church in Kizlar town, in which gunman shot at Sunday worshippers, killing five women and wounding five people including three police; gunman shot dead by police. Dagestan's chief mufti condemned attack. National Antiterrorism Committee 15 Feb reported counter-terrorism operation in Untsukil district, central Dagestan, had resulted in one armed gang leader and one member of security forces killed. Federal Security Service (FSB) reported nine ISIS-linked militants sentenced to jail terms from five to nineteen years on terrorism-related charges in Ingushetia 6 Feb. European Parliament 8 Feb called for Russian authorities to release Oyub Titiyev, director of human rights group Memorial who was arrested in Chechnya in Jan and is being held on drug possession charge. Dagestan republic's PM and two deputies arrested early Feb, suspected of large-scale embezzlement of funds.

- **OP-ED: Russia a Reluctant Driver in the Syrian War**

PM Filip speaking at Munich Security Conference 17 Feb reiterated call for Russia to withdraw military forces and munitions from Moldova's separatist Transdniestria region; said country seeks "balanced, friendly" relationship with Russia. Parliament Speaker Andrian Candu 9 Feb accused Russia of interfering in Moldovan politics ahead of 2018 elections; came day after parliament adopted declaration condemning alleged Russian cyberattacks and financing of political parties.
occupied territory; gives president authority to impose martial law throughout country and use military to retake separatist-held areas. Poroshenko issued tweet saying “this is a signal for both Donbas and Crimea: you are an integral part of Ukraine”. Russia and Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics (DNR and LNR) proxies criticised law: DNR leader Aleksandr Zakharchenko said Ukraine “doesn’t want a peaceful solution”; LNR official Pavel Deynevo called law “late attempt to legalise violence” against Donbas residents. Russian foreign minister said law “side lines implementation of the Minsk agreements”. Disagreements over potential peacekeeping mission remain entrenched. Foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine held closed-door meeting 16 Feb: Lavrov complained Kyiv and the West were pushing large-scale mission to reintegrate Donbas via international administration whereas Minsk agreement foresaw reintegration via direct dialogue between Kyiv and separatist leaders. Kyiv lawmakers accused Russia, U.S. of ignoring Ukrainian concerns in search for peacekeeping deal. Violence increased in Donbas after relative calm in Jan, with both sides using heavy weaponry. Daily ceasefire violations rose from average 190 explosions per day in Jan to 450 1-26 Feb. Ukraine’s defence ministry reported eleven soldiers, one medic killed 20 Jan-27 Feb; separatists say at least nine dead including two civilian medics. Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) reported one civilian killed, twelve injured 20 Jan-27 Feb. OSCE monitoring mission faced aggression by both sides. At 14 Feb Trilateral Contact Group meeting in Minsk, OSCE Special Representative Martin Sajdik said Ukraine and separatists should lift their mutual trade blockade. Authorities deported former Odesa oblast Governor and ex-Georgian President Saakashvili to Poland 12 Feb, after Ukrainian courts refused his request for asylum. Thousands marched in Kyiv 18 Feb to demand Poroshenko’s resignation. Police report fourteen officers injured in clashes with protesters outside parliament 27 Feb.

Cyprus  FEBRUARY 2018

Month saw spat over gas explorations as Greek Cypriot energy minister 8 Feb announced Italian and French companies had discovered “extensive” pure gas reserves off Cyprus; Cypriot authorities accused Turkish navy 9 Feb and 23 Feb of blocking drilling ships. Ankara 11 Feb said it will not abandon Turkish and Turkish Cypriots’ rights over hydrocarbon reserves off Cyprus to unilateral Greek Cypriot actions. European Council President Donald Tusk 12 Feb called on Ankara to avoid threats, refrain from damaging relations. Greek Cypriot leader Anastasiades 21 Feb urged Turkey to lift blockade on offshore gas explorations activities and called for return to the negotiation table; 28 Feb said resumption of peace talks “impossible” at present due to Turkey’s and Turkish Cypriot side’s “violations of international law and unacceptable demands”. Following 7 Jan snap parliamentary

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YES, I AGREE
Spain  FEBRUARY 2018

Parties in Catalan parliament continued negotiations on new president, after Constitutional Court ruled that deposed former regional President Carles Puigdemont could only be sworn in as president if physically present and with permission of a judge.

Turkey  FEBRUARY 2018

Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) claimed 1 Feb explosion at tax office in Ankara which slightly injured three civilians. Military operations against PKK militants in rural areas of south east continued but with few fatalities, most likely due to harsh winter conditions and shift of focus to Ankara’s Afrin operation which began 20 Jan. Crackdown against Democratic People's Party (HDP) functionaries and Kurdish movement members continued, including launch of criminal investigation into newly-elected HDP co-chair Pervin Buldan and MP Sırrı Süreyya Önder over their criticism of military operation in Afrin during HDP party congress 11 Feb. Some 900 individuals, mostly Kurdish movement members or supporters, detained during month charged with spreading “terrorism propaganda” for sharing social media posts critical of Afrin operation. Ankara continued military incursion into northern Syria’s Afrin district (see Syria); military 25 Feb announced it had “neutralised” more than 2,000 militants so far; 26 Feb reportedly took control of area around Afrin, circling it from three sides. Turkish media 24 Feb reported 32 soldiers killed in operation. President Erdoğan 20 Feb said offensive would continue into Afrin city centre. Erdoğan and other officials during month said they would move forward with operation into Manbij to expel Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG). Turkish-U.S. relations remained strained: Ankara reacted strongly to Pentagon’s 12 Feb request for some $300mn to train and equip YPG-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), while U.S. complained Afrin operation was hampering efforts to maintain focus on fight against ISIS and had increased security risk for U.S. special forces; U.S. Secretary State Rex Tillerson’s 15-16 Feb visit to Ankara helped ease tensions. Crackdown on individuals suspected to have connections to jihadist networks in Turkey continued, including reported detention of over 100 ISIS suspects, mostly foreign nationals, during police operations in Istanbul 2 and 17 Feb.

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Police arrested Kyrgyz MP Damirbek Asylbek-Uulu along with 35 others including border guards, customs officials and representatives of crime groups, during extensive anti-smuggling operation led by National Security Committee and Anti-corruption Bureau 15-16 Feb. Asylbek-Uulu, detained in Kazakhstan and charged with smuggling and being member of organised criminal group, denied charges; responding to request for clarification from Kyrgyz foreign minister, Astana confirmed MP’s arrest, adding he holds Kazakh and Kyrgyz passports.

Kyrgyzstan  February 2018

Security services detained 26-year-old man returning from Syria where he allegedly received “suicide training” with Islamic State (ISIS). MP Damirbek Asylbek-Uulu arrested in Kazakhstan mid-Feb, charged with smuggling (see Kazakhstan).

Tajikistan  February 2018

Authorities in city of Isfara late Jan shut down 45 mosques; mayor invoked sanitary conditions, also noted Isfara is home to many Tajiks known to be participating in armed conflicts in other countries. Ahead of 2020 elections, parliament 7 Feb approved amendment lowering presidential candidacy age from 35 to 30, which would allow candidacy of President Rahmon’s 30-year-old son Rustam Emomali, mayor of Dushanbe.

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Uzbekistan FEBRUARY 2018

Following his removal late Jan, Rustam Inoyatov, formerly head of National Security Service (SNB), appointed advisor to president on political and legal issues and member of Senate, granting him legal immunity. Media reported sweeping reforms of SNB, including dismissal of highly trained officers and closure of Department on Combatting Corruption.

Latin America & Caribbean

Colombia FEBRUARY 2018

Attacks by National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group continued at slightly higher rates than usual, while violence in Tumaco continued at extreme levels. Peace talks between govt and ELN remained suspended following late Jan attacks, however informal communication channels stay open. ELN continues to deny it violated any agreement but did announce a unilateral ceasefire between 9 and 13 March to coincide with legislative elections, a move which President Santos praised. ELN attacks included “armed stoppage” in areas under its control 10-13 Feb, during which it carried out attacks and prohibited transportation; various attacks during month resulted in one soldier and two ELN fighters killed. ELN attack in Norte de Santander province killed five soldiers and wounded ten 26 Feb. Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) reported ELN killed three of its members in Nariño (south west) 1 Feb and one in Bolívar (north west) 8 Feb. FARC political party 9 Feb announced suspension of its electoral campaign after attacks against it including verbal threats, vandalism against its offices in Valle del Cauca province. FARC dissident factions continued to grow in Arauca (north east) and Nariño (south west) provinces and were also confirmed in Antioquia (north west). Crop substitution agreements were signed in nine municipalities in Putumayo (south west) and Piamonte, Cauca (south west), involving 20,000 families and 15,000 ha. Killings of social leaders

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Formal talks between govt and opposition in Dominican Republic broke down 7 Feb, following govt’s unilateral announcement in Jan that it would hold early presidential elections in April, and after Mexico and Chile pulled out of their facilitation roles. Electoral Commission 7 Feb announced election date of 22 April. Opposition remains split over whether to participate. Opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance 21 Feb announced it would not take part and demanded govt postpone elections until second half of 2018, as well as guarantee independent international electoral observers, vote for Venezuelans abroad, equal access to media, and lifting of ban on opposition parties and candidates. However, leader of Avanzada Progresista party Henri Falcon 16 Feb announced intention to stand. Lima Group of fourteen nations formed to press for restoration of democracy in Venezuela expressed “firm rejection” of election plan 13 Feb, saying poll would “lack legitimacy and credibility”. Peru 13 Feb withdrew President Maduro’s invitation to Summit of Americas in Lima 13-14 April; govt said Maduro will attend summit regardless. During regional tour, U.S. Secretary State Rex Tillerson 4 Feb proposed oil embargo against Venezuela, however most regional govts have reservations. Tillerson also said U.S. and Canada working on ways of providing alternative energy sources to the Caribbean to reduce dependence on Venezuela. Colombia and Brazil 8 Feb both announced fresh measures to cope with mass influx of Venezuelans into their countries.

Tensions between supporters and opponents of anti-corruption campaign continued to create political strain. Attorney general and International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) presented more major cases, including on 13 Feb “Transurbano” case against former president Álvaro Colom, twelve members of cabinet and three members of Urban Bus Businesses Association, allegedly part of a scheme that embezzled €75mn. Foreign minister 1 Feb met with UN
Honduras  FEBRUARY 2018

UN Secretary-General appointed three experts to conduct exploratory mission 6-9 Feb to evaluate conditions for dialogue between govt and opposition, following request from President Hernández to UN and Organization of American States (OAS). OAS tried to launch similar effort, but mission leader, former Guatemala President Álvaro Colom, was arrested 13 Feb. UN envoys concluded there were no conditions for dialogue in a 22 Feb report, invited main political forces to establish consensus over goals of any future dialogue mission. Opposition party Alianza Contra la Dictadura 11 Feb declared “total insurrection” and notified creation of 10,000 “commandos”, allegedly including armed cells. Hernández 15 Feb announced plan to revise criminal legislation and approve harsher sentences for gang members, amid rise in violence, with nine mass murders in 2018 killing over two dozen people. OAS-backed Support Mission against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH), which joined widespread condemnation of “immunity pact” passed by Congress in Jan shielding lawmakers from last three administrations from embezzlement charges, 5 Feb announced that 140 lawmakers and 30 NGOs are involved in embezzlement cases. In further setback in fight against corruption, MACCIH’s head Juan Jiménez Mayor resigned 15 Feb, alleging lack of support from OAS Secretary General Luis Almagro.

El Salvador  FEBRUARY 2018

Debate about future of “extraordinary measures” against gangs and recommendations of UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions dominated security debate during month. Following two-week tour, UN Special Rapporteur Agnes Callamard 5 Feb issued report noting extrajudicial killings and excessive use of force against gang members by security officers, condemning “deplorable conditions” of Salvadoran jails and calling for end to “extraordinary measures” in specific jails. Ruling party FMLN and Nationalist Republic Alliance ARENA 6 Feb expressed disagreement and defended extension of March 2016 “extraordinary measures” plan; attorney general argued it helped reduce mobile communications from inside jails by 97%. Local court 9 Feb condemned six police officers for killing alleged gang members. Responding to concerns about excessive use of force by police, govt 14 Feb launched new elite police unit Specialized Police Tactical Unit (UTEP) and disbanded Rapid Reaction

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Haitians continued to seek refuge abroad, despite some indicators of improved humanitarian situation during 2017 reported by UN humanitarian affairs office (OCHA) 29 Jan. Dominican Republic early Feb confirmed it had deported 15,778 undocumented Haitian migrants in Jan. Estimated 50,000 undocumented Haitians threatened with expulsion from Bahamas, which passed new measures to expel all foreigners without residence papers 1 Jan. Inter-American Dialogue 25 Jan reported 15% increase in remittances from Haitians in U.S. to their home country in 2017, interpreted as result of threat of deportation from U.S..

Secretariat of Public Security 22 Feb reported 2,156 homicides in Jan, making it most violent month since 1997; also reported homicides in most deadly cities including U.S. border city Tijuana and Los Cabos, both in Baja California; and in south, Ixtapa Zihuatanejo in Oaxaca state, Acapulco and Chilapa in Guerrero state, and Manzanillo and Tecomán in Colima state; rising violence attributed to fight for control of territory by Cartel Jalisco New Generation and political violence in run-up to 1 July election. Francisco Rojas, federal deputy from Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and possible mayoral candidate in Mexico state, shot dead 6 Feb, bringing number of politicians murdered since Dec to at least twelve. National Electoral Institute reported states that could be especially vulnerable to political violence are: Chihuahua, Guerrero, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, and some regions of Veracruz. Six people died after attack by ten hitmen on restaurant in Tlaquepaque, Jalisco (west) 8 Feb, possibly in revenge for arrest of several Cartel Jalisco New Generation leaders. In west, Nayarit state authorities 15 Feb reported discovery of suspected remains of two federal agents abducted by Cartel Jalisco New Generation. Six people were killed in 24 hours 15 Feb in areas around Guadalajara, Jalisco. Five decapitated bodies found in Guachochi, Chihuahua (north) 7 Feb. Murder of two Catholic priests in Guerrero 5 Feb spurred Church authorities to call for investigation to denounce targeted violence against priests. Extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations continued unabated. Local
Middle East & North Africa

Israel/Palestine  FEBRUARY 2018

In Gaza, four Israeli soldiers were injured by explosive device on Israel–Gaza border 17 Feb; in response Israeli tanks and planes same day attacked some eighteen targets in Gaza, most Hamas sites, killing two Palestinians. Palestinian protester, wounded by Israeli forces 16 Feb, died from injuries 21 Feb. Israeli forces killed Palestinian fisherman off Gaza coast 25 Feb. Violence increased in West Bank: Palestinian citizen of Israel stabbed to death Israeli rabbi near Ariel 5 Feb; Israeli forces killed six Palestinians – one in Ramallah 30 Jan, two in Jenin area 3 and 6 Feb, one in Nablus 6 Feb, one in Karmei Tzur 6 Feb and one in Jericho 22 Feb. At UN Security Council meeting 20 Feb, Palestinian Authority President Abbas proposed international peace conference by mid-2018; U.S. rejected Abbas’s plan and said it was finalising details of its own peace plan. Tensions between Israel and Iran escalated over Syrian conflict: after Israel shot down alleged Iranian drone launched from Syria, which entered Israeli air space 10 Feb via Jordanian airspace, Israeli jets carried out retaliatory raid on Iranian drone control site in Syria. Syrian anti-aircraft missile shot down Israeli jet on its return. Israel launched second, more intense bombing raid against Syrian and Iranian targets in Syria. Israeli PM Netanyahu 18 Feb warned Israel would, “if necessary”, act against Iran itself, not just its proxies. Dispute between Israel and Lebanon over land and maritime border escalated, particularly in relation to offshore drilling: Lebanon 6 Feb said border wall being built by Israel infringed on Lebanon’s sovereignty; Lebanon 9 Feb struck deal with foreign firms to explore Mediterranean gas field claimed by Israel; Hizbollah 16 Feb said it could take out Israeli oil facilities “within hours”; Lebanon rejected U.S.-mediated deal, which would have granted Lebanon most of disputed maritime area, instead demanding settlement of all border issues, including relating to disputed land border, under UN framework.

- VIDEO: Video: Israel, Hizbollah and Iran: Preventing Another War in Syria

Jordan  FEBRUARY 2018

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Tensions escalated between govt and Israel over disputed land and maritime borders, particularly in relation to offshore drilling. Govt 6 Feb said border wall being built by Israel infringed on Lebanon’s sovereignty. Next day defence council said it would stop wall’s construction, which it described as “assault on Lebanese land”. Govt struck deal with foreign firms 9 Feb to explore Mediterranean gas field claimed by Israel. Hizbullah 16 Feb said it could take out Israeli oil facilities “within hours”. UN Secretary-General 19 Feb warned unintentional escalation could provoke direct conflict between Hizbollah and Israel. Same day army chief Joseph Aoun said army would use all means available to confront “Israeli aggression” over resources. Lebanon rejected U.S.-mediated deal, which would have granted Lebanon 75% of disputed maritime area, and instead demanded settlement of all border issues, including relating to disputed land border, under UN framework.

Regime intensified bombing of rebel-held Damascus suburb and, with Turkey expanding and entrenching its position in north west, U.S. and Russian-aligned forces clashing in east and Israel and Iran-aligned forces in south, Feb saw marked internationalisation of conflict, increasing risk of regional escalation in March. In Damascus, regime 18 Feb escalated aerial bombardment of Eastern Ghouta; over 580 civilians reported killed 18-27 Feb and rebel shelling killed at least seventeen civilians in regime-held areas of city. UN Security Council’s 24 Feb resolution demanding 30-day countrywide ceasefire went unheeded. Russia called for daily five-hour local truces in Eastern Ghouta from 27 Feb to allow humanitarian access; pro-regime bombing and rebel retaliatory shelling continued 27 Feb, regime halted airstrikes during five-hour truce 28 Feb but resumed afterwards and launched ground offensive on enclave’s eastern edge. In north west, Turkey and allied rebels continued offensive against Kurdish-held Afrin enclave, expanding narrow zone of control along its edge. Amid negotiations between Kurds and govt over Afrin’s defence, govt-aligned forces 20 Feb entered enclave to help repel Turkish assault, but do not appear to have slowed Turkish gains. U.S. increased visible military presence in Kurdish-controlled Manbij, about 100km east of Afrin, which

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conflict line separating U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and govt-aligned forces backed by Russia and Iran; U.S. strikes reportedly killed over 100, including many Russian mercenaries. U.S. airstrikes 25 Feb on Islamic State (ISIS)-held Al Shaafah village, Deir al-Zour, reportedly killed 25 civilians. After Iranian drone allegedly entered Israeli airspace from Syria 10 Feb, Israeli jets carried out retaliatory raid on alleged Iranian drone control site in Syria; govt anti-aircraft missile shot down returning Israeli jet; Israel launched second raid against govt and Iranian targets. Israeli PM Netanyahu 18 Feb warned Israel would “if necessary” act against Iran itself, not just its proxies.

- VIDEO: Video: Israel, Hizbollah and Iran: Preventing Another War in Syria

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**Bahrain**  
**FEBRUARY 2018**

Four men arrested 7 Feb for alleged involvement in 10 Nov bombing of oil pipeline 10km south west of capital Manama with Iranian assistance. Prominent activist Nabeel Rajab, already serving two-year term for separate charge, sentenced to five years in prison during his appeal hearing 21 Feb for tweet alleging misconduct by Saudi Arabia in Yemen.

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**Iran**  
**FEBRUARY 2018**

U.S. sought commitment from European signatories of 2015 nuclear deal (UK, France and Germany) to address what it sees as flaws in deal in return for renewing U.S. sanctions relief in May, Reuters reported 18 Feb. EU 8 Feb said it could reintroduce “blocking regulations” to protect European firms doing business in Iran if U.S. restores extraterritorial sanctions. Tensions escalated between Iran and Israel. Israel 10 Feb claimed to have shot down Iranian drone, which it said entered Israeli airspace; Iran denied. In response, Israeli jets same day carried out airstrikes in Syria; Syrian anti-aircraft missile shot down one jet on its return, which crashed in northern Israel. Israel launched second, more intense bombing raid on Syrian and Iranian targets in Syria. Israeli PM Netanyahu 18 Feb

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Islamic State (ISIS) continued to launch sporadic attacks: assault on barber shop in Khanaqin, Diyala governorate in east near Iranian border 9 Feb left nine people dead; militants killed at least 27 members of govt-aligned Shia militias Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) in Kirkuk 20 Feb; suicide bomber 24 Feb reportedly killed two policemen at Kirkuk oil field. Kurdistan Regional Govt (KRG) representatives met with PM Abadi in Munich 17 Feb but failed to resolve standoff; federal govt maintained restrictions on KRG, including international flight ban, and Kurds refused to relinquish control of their territory’s border crossings. In south, recurrent tribal conflict in Basra and neighbouring provinces threatened stability, at times resulting in revenge killings and firefight: clans and tribes clashed over water quotas in Dhi Qar province early Feb.

- REPORT: Winning the Post-ISIS Battle for Iraq in Sinjar

Court released on bail 44 defendants charged with storming parliament in 2011 until next hearing planned for 4 March; most of other 25 accused have left country.

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YES, I AGREE
After United Arab Emirates (UAE)-aligned separatist Southern Transition Council (STC) took control of Aden from govt forces late Jan, UAE and Saudi Arabia imposed truce; STC is demanding changes to govt, to have input on appointment of local officials in south and to take part in any UN-led peace talks. Fighting continued on all major fronts; anti-Huthi fighters 5 Feb captured Hays district in southern part of Hodeidah province on Red Sea coast and made gains in eastern part of Bayda province in south. Saudi-led coalition maintained airstrikes on Huthi-held areas in north, especially around Saada, west and south, reportedly killing tens of people including civilians. Saudi-led coalition said Saudi Arabia 5 Feb shot down ballistic missile fired by Huthis toward Khamis Mushait city in south-west Saudi Arabia and that Saudi forces repelled several ground incursions across border into Saudi’s Najran and Jizan regions. Tarik Saleh, former Special Forces commander and nephew of late President Saleh, met southern and local Tihama fighters in coastal city of Mokha 19 Feb to coordinate efforts in campaign against Huthis. At least fourteen people killed and over 40 injured in Islamic State (ISIS)-claimed attack on Yemeni counter-terrorism headquarters in Aden 24 Feb. UN Security Council 15 Feb approved appointment of former UK diplomat and Executive Director of European Institute of Peace Martin Griffiths as UN envoy for Yemen from March.

In east, improvised mines killed five soldiers south of Bir el-Ater, Tebessa province 14 Feb and two soldiers in Cherchar, Khchala province 19 Feb. Army killed al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) propaganda chief Adel Seghiri, alias Abu Rouaha al-Qassantini, in Jijel, 400km east of Algiers on Mediterranean coast late Jan. After several months of general strike against military and civil service working conditions, over 1,000 doctors held sit-in protest in centre of Algiers 12 Feb. Govt mid-Feb said 581 teachers had been sacked for taking part in illegal strike.

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Military 9 Feb launched major counter-terrorism operation in Sinai, 24 Feb said 60,000 soldiers involved in operation, 27 Feb said it had killed 82 Islamist militants and arrested 2,900 while ten soldiers had been killed. Islamic State (ISIS) 12 Feb released video calling on citizens not to vote in presidential election, first round planned for 24-27 March, threatening attacks on polling stations. In run-up to election, govt continued crackdown on opposition. After arresting opposition candidate Lt Gen Sami Anan in Jan, security officials 7 Feb temporarily detained and interrogated his son and 13 Feb arrested former head of govt audit agency Hisham Geneina, whom Anan had chosen to run for VP. Judiciary 6 Feb announced investigation into several opposition leaders who had called for boycott: Strong Egypt Party’s deputy Mohammed el-Qassas arrested 9 Feb; Strong Egypt Party head, former Muslim Brotherhood member and 2012 presidential candidate, Abdelmoneim Aboul Fotouh, arrested 14 Feb for allegedly plotting to overthrow regime; Cairo Criminal Court added him to terror list 20 Feb. Only contender to President Sisi remained his ally Moussa Mohamed Moussa, head of New Tomorrow Party.

- **COMMENTARY:** Tackling the MENA Region’s Intersecting Conflicts

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UN envoy Ghassan Salamé 8 Feb said many requirements, including developing “constitutional framework”, still to be met before legislative and presidential elections can be held. Supreme Court 14 Feb blocked legal challenges from lower courts to draft constitution voted by Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA) in July 2017, paving way for possible referendum on draft and move toward elections. Members of eastern Tobruk-based parliament House of Representatives 19 Feb rejected CDA, calling instead for creation of expert committee to amend 1951 constitution. Forces allied with Libyan National Army (LNA) of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, de facto ruler in east, clashed with suspected Islamic State (ISIS) militants near Dahrha oil field in south east 2-3 Feb, two LNA-allied fighters and three suspected militants killed. LNA commander Mahmoud Warfalli, under International Criminal Court arrest warrant for alleged summary execution of dozens of people, handed himself in to Haftar’s military police 7 Feb. LNA fighters in Benghazi in east protested against his detention 8 Feb; Warfalli released same day. Twin bomb blasts struck mosque in Benghazi 9 Feb, killing at least two. Suicide bombing targeted LNA checkpoint 22km west of Waddan city in centre 21 Feb, three soldiers killed; ISIS claimed responsibility 22 Feb. Heavy clashes took place in Sabha 27-28 Feb after month of tensions between LNA-affiliated militia composed of members of Arab tribe Awlad Suleiman and tribesmen loyal to LNA, killed 2 tribal fighters 26 Feb. Unofficial killed.

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Tunisia  FEBRUARY 2018

European parliament 7 Feb voted to keep country on money laundering and terrorism financing blacklist.

Western Sahara  FEBRUARY 2018

European Court of Justice 27 Feb ruled that EU’s fisheries agreement with Morocco is valid, but that it does not cover waters adjacent to Western Sahara since they are “not part of the Moroccan fishing zone”. High Court of South Africa 23 Feb ruled that shipment of New Zealand-bound phosphate seized in May 2017 belongs to Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), not Morocco.