

CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts
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December 2014 – Trends

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Gabon](#), [Gambia](#), [India \(non-Kashmir\)](#), [Kenya](#), [Libya](#), [North Caucasus \(Russia\)](#),
[Pakistan](#), [South Sudan](#), [Venezuela](#)

↑ Improved situations

[Colombia](#), [Cuba](#)

January 2015 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Haiti](#), [Sri Lanka](#), [Sudan](#)

☰ Conflict resolution opportunities

CrisisWatch summarises developments during the previous month in some 70 situations of current or potential conflict, listed alphabetically by region, providing references and links to more detailed sources. It assesses whether the overall situation in each case has, during the previous month, significantly deteriorated, significantly improved, or on balance remained more or less unchanged. It identifies situations where, in the coming month, there is a risk of new or significantly escalated conflict, or a conflict resolution opportunity (noting that in some instances there may be both). It also summarises Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers published the previous month.

Arrows and alerts: Up, down and side arrows signify, respectively, improved, deteriorated or unchanged situations. Conflict Risk Alerts (identified with bombs) or Conflict Resolution Opportunities (with doves) are used in addition to arrows: a bomb signifies a risk of escalated violence; a dove an opportunity to advance peace. Both bombs and doves tend to be used where events are moving fast.

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Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Burundi** Eleven members of Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) elected by National Assembly in controversial process 3 Dec; majority allegedly close to President Nkurunziza and ruling party CNDD-FDD. Renewed tension between opposition and govt ahead of mid-2015 elections with allegations of irregularities in voter enrolment process, fraudulent registration, falsified IDs; opposition parties and civil society demanded new voter registration, resignation of electoral commission (CENI); CENI 26 Dec dismissed fraud as minor. Attacks reported in Bugunda, 60km north of Bujumbura 30 Dec; fourteen attackers from DRC reportedly killed, details unclear.

- [“Débats sur les irrégularités dans le processus d’enrôlement”](#), Iwacu, 24 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Cameroon** Parliament 4 Dec passed anti-terrorist bill which opposition denounced as repressive; unauthorised protest against bill in Yaounde 10 Dec. Boko Haram (BH) attacks resumed in Far North early Dec including clashes 6 Dec in Sagme, Gouma, Dambore and Souarem - Sagme and Gouma retaken by security forces; five killed 8 Dec in Yegoua; two BH killed 9 Dec in Fotokol; twenty BH and one soldier killed 11 Dec in Banki. Army reported at least 41 BH killed late Dec after coordinated BH attack on five towns along Nigerian border, brief BH seizure of Achigachia military camp. Several soldiers killed during month by anti-personnel mines. Army 15 Dec attacked BH in Gambaru Ngala, Nigeria.

- [“La démocratie camerounaise en danger”](#), Journal du Cameroun, 22 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Central African Republic** MINUSCA initiatives for negotiation and reconciliation eroded by ongoing violence: 28 killed in skirmishes between ex-Seleka and anti-balaka in Mbrès 16 Dec following reconciliation ceremony four days earlier; talks on hold in Gbotobadia, near Bambari, after clashes erupted between ex-Seleka (UPC faction) and anti-balaka 20 Dec. Chairman of Transition Council attacked by ex-Seleka in Bambari 1 Dec. Anti-balaka remain uncontrolled throughout country. Renewed violence in south west: eight civilians killed 23 Dec in Bondoo and Tanga, two killed in Carnot same day following arrest of anti-balaka member. President Samba-Panza early Dec met UNSG Ban, gave speech at UNGA emphasising fight against impunity, rebuilding judiciary. UNSC 9 Dec insisted elections be held before August 2015.

- [“Divisée, l'ex-rébellion Séléka sera ‘unie’ pour le dialogue national prévu en janvier”](#), Journal de Bangui, 17 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°105, [The Central African Republic's Hidden Conflict](#), 12 December 2014. Away from the international spotlight, the Central African Republic's rural areas are turning into fields of violence as war over territory and livestock hits a highly vulnerable population, with effects increasingly felt in neighbouring Cameroon and Chad.

➔ **Chad** Protests continued in response to fuel shortage, unpaid salaries and rising prices. University professors still on strike; police 11 Dec arrested striking high school students. Lawyers 22 Dec ended month-long strike. Baba Laddé, govt official in southern Chad and former warlord, arrested in CAR by UN forces 8 Dec.

- [“L'ex-rebelle Baba Laddé arrêté en Centrafrique”](#), Afrik.com, 11 Dec. 2014.

➔ **DR Congo** President Kabila 7 Dec appointed national cohesion govt, “Matata II”; interior, defence, justice, finance and budget ministries reshuffled. Kabila gave State of Union speech 15 Dec, repeated call for MONUSCO downscaling, UN and international community to take non-political role. Attacks by suspected ADF-Nalu continued: 37 civilians killed 7 Dec in Oïcha, thirteen killed 8 Dec 30km north of Beni. Local communities 20 Dec asked international community to investigate; MONUSCO and FARDC announced joint operations. Demobilised FDLR combatants arrived in Kisanjani 3 Dec; 150 FDLR combatants voluntarily surrendered 28 Dec in Kivus. M23 rebels being repatriated from Uganda 16 Dec refused placement in Kamina DDR camps in DRC, citing security concerns; about 120 repatriated to DRC, majority staying in Uganda; ICRC and UNHCR refused to host them.

- [“Joseph Kabila nomme le gouvernement de ‘cohésion nationale’”](#), Radio Okapi, 8 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°107, *Congo: Ending the Status Quo*, 17 December 2014. A new consensus and strategy are urgently needed to tackle the numerous, brutal armed groups in eastern Congo and to save the February 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF) in the Great Lakes region.

↓ **Gabon** Violent govt crackdown on protesters demanding President Odimba’s resignation; protesters 20 Dec clashed with security forces in capital Libreville, officials say one killed, protesters report three. Opposition leaders 24 Dec detained by police over organisation of 20 Dec protests.

- [“Tensions simmer in protest-hit Gabon capital”](#), Al Jazeera, 21 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Rwanda** NGO Committee to Protect Journalists 8 Dec released critical report on freedom of speech and ongoing censorship. Govt requested investigation from International Conference of the Great Lakes Region on reported rocket fire from DRC to Rwanda’s Rubavu district 9 Dec. ICTR concluded proceedings, closed 31 Dec.

- [“Censorship or self-censorship?”](#), Deutsche Welle, 9 Dec. 2014.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Ethiopia** Defence ministry said air force helicopter pilot, co-pilot and technician defected to Eritrea 19 Dec.

- [“Ethiopian air force pilot defects to Eritrea with crew”](#), The Africa Report, 24 Dec. 2014.

↓ **Kenya** Suspected Al-Shabaab militants 2 Dec killed 36 non-Muslim quarry workers outside Mandera town; hundreds fled town after attack with some seeking refuge in nearby military bases. One killed, thirteen injured in IED explosion at club in Wajir; IED found at Gilgil army barracks, Nakuru county 9 Dec; police 15 Dec discovered IEDs in Juja and Pangani areas of Nairobi. Some fifteen unidentified men 13 Dec at-

tacked police base in Kilifi county; police officer killed, two injured, weapons and ammunition stolen; Islamist militants 20 Dec opened fire on passenger bus near Witu, Lamu county. President Kenyatta 19 Dec signed contested anti-terror bill into law; U.S. expressed concern over freedom of assembly and media; some 510 NGOs deregistered including fifteen accused of links with terrorism. Opposition coalition 23 Dec filed court challenge to overturn law. Leader of secessionist Mombasa Republican Council arrested 31 Dec, charged with holding illegal meeting. Turkana residents 15 Dec barricaded Kodwar-Kitale road near Kainuk town in protest at attacks by Pokot bandits. One killed, properties burned 7 Dec during intercommunal violence between Nandi and Kabra in Kakamega county. ICC 5 Dec withdrew crimes against humanity charges against President Kenyatta.

- ["Somalia's troubles come south"](#), *Economist*, 2 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Somalia** PM Abdiweli Sheikh Ahmed 6 Dec lost parliamentary no-confidence vote, ending four weeks of political uncertainty; former Transitional Federal Government PM Omar Abdirashidi Ali Shamarke named premier 17 Dec and approved by parliament 24 Dec. Al-Shabaab fighters appear concentrated in regions bordering Kenya following recent AMISOM and Somali National Army offensives in south-central Somalia; Al-Shabaab 9 Dec retook Gadoon-dawe village, Gedo region, despite Kenyan cross-border attacks. Al-Shabaab attacks continued country-wide including: fifteen killed, 30 injured 5 Dec in bomb attack on Baidoa restaurant; at least ten soldiers killed in attack on military base in Warmahan, Lower Shabelle, 15 Dec; Burhakaba District Commissioner and bodyguard killed in ambush near Baledogle, Lower Shabelle 6 Dec; eight Al-Shabaab gunmen 25 Dec infiltrated main AMISOM base in Mogadishu, Halane, killing three soldiers and civilian contractor. Senior Al-Shabaab leader commander Zakariya Ismail Hersi captured late Dec in Elwak, Gedo region; U.S. airstrike near Sakoow, Middle Juba killed top Al-Shabaab leader 29 Dec. Tensions over formation of interim federal administrations continued: govt troops 13 Dec clashed with pro-govt Ahlu Sunna wal Jama'a (ASWJ) militias in Dhusamareb, capital of Galgadud region. New president of Interim South West Administration Sharif Hassan inaugurated 3 Dec, promised inclusive administration and reconciliation.

- ["Somalia's parliament approves new prime minister"](#), Reuters, 24 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Somaliland** President Silanyo 20 Dec met with Somali counterpart, agreed to continue talks in Turkey that began 30 Nov.

- ["Somalia, Somaliland leaders continue Djibouti talks"](#), World Bulletin, 21 Dec. 2014.

⚡ **South Sudan** Peace talks reached standstill in face of intransigence from both sides over details of power-sharing deal, while fighting continued despite Nov recommitment to cessation of hostilities agreement. SPLM-IO conference early Dec passed resolution agreeing to share power with Juba govt on condition PM has full executive powers. Conference rejected proposed positions for VP and deputy VP; agreed to federal system of 21 states; established for first time military command structure; also agreed to separate its political and military wings. Ongoing skirmishes in Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity. Push at UNSC to impose sanctions on warring parties 9 Dec

reached impasse over U.S. opposition. National Election Council 1 Dec presented election calendar, insisted elections would be held in 2015; Council of Ministers approved \$517mn election budget.

- [“South Sudan braces for more conflict as leaders fail to agree peace”](#), *Financial Times*, 14 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Africa Report N°221, [South Sudan: Jonglei – “We Have Always Been at War”](#), 22 December 2014. South Sudan’s Jonglei state is emblematic of the regional, national and local challenges to peace and of the limitations of trying to resolve a conflict by engaging only two of the nearly two-dozen armed groups in the country.

➔ **Sudan** Govt-rebel talks failed as govt continued to reject comprehensive approach, raising fears of renewed military offensives. AUHIP-mediated talks between govt and Darfur rebels adjourned 4 Dec; parallel talks between govt and SPLM-N rebels focused on Blue Nile and S Kordofan halted 9 Dec amid increasing violence in S Kordofan. Civilian opposition groups, civil society representatives and armed rebel groups 4 Dec signed “Sudan Call” agreement on preconditions for joining National Dialogue; govt warned political leaders would “pay a price” for alliance with rebels; two Sudan Call signatories, opposition National Consensus Forces chairman Farouk Abu Issa and human rights activist Amin Mekki Madani, arrested 6 Dec along with several other civil society members. Increased govt pressure on UNAMID: two UN officials expelled late-month; UNSG Ban said expulsions “unacceptable”. ICC 12 Dec suspended investigation into Darfur atrocities citing limited resources, UNSC deadlock.

- [“Opposition, rebel forces sign joint declaration for peace and democracy in Sudan”](#), Sudan Tribune, 3 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Uganda** Former PM Amama Mbabazi ousted as Sec Gen of Ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) along with several other party officials 13 Dec; move further bolstered President Museveni as sole NRM presidential candidate for 2016 elections. Mbabazi late Dec filed court challenge to removal. Shia Muslim community leader killed 25 Dec by unknown gunmen, Muslim cleric shot dead 29 Dec in Mayuge district. Clashes over land between Congolese nationals and Bunyoro Kingdom loyalists in Hoima county 4 Dec.

- [“New presidential powers lead to political shakeups in Uganda”](#), VOA, 24 Dec. 2014.

Southern Africa

➔ **Madagascar** President Rajaonarimampianina and former presidents Zafy, Ratsiraka, Ravalomanana and Rajoelina 19 Dec met for reconciliation talks led by Malagasy Christian Council of Churches (FFKM). Despite ongoing tensions, Ravalomanana allowed home under house arrest 24 Dec. Following talks president also pardoned three political prisoners 25 Dec. Next reconciliation meeting planned 13 Jan.

- [“Arrested Madagascar’s ex-president Ravalomanana moved home”](#), AFP, 26 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Mozambique** Opposition Renamo leader Afonso Dhaklama early-Dec threatened to establish parallel govt in provinces where Renamo won majority in Oct elections if ruling Frelimo rejected call for “caretaker govt”, 29 Dec threatened violence if constitutional court validated poll results. Frelimo 12 Dec said establishment of caretaker

govt would allow Renamo to take power “through the back door”. Constitutional Court 30 Dec validated Frelimo and President Nyusi’s victory. Govt-opposition dialogue stalled 2 Dec over disagreements on disarmament and demobilisation: Dhaklama 9 Dec agreed to submit list of Renamo’s “residual forces” for integration into security forces.

- Paula Roque, [“Post-election Mozambique: Here comes an era of uncertainty”](#), Daily Maverick, 11 Dec. 2014.
- [“Mozambique ruling party says opposition wants power through back door”](#), APA, 13 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Zimbabwe** Tensions over President Mugabe’s succession within ruling ZANU-PF persisted. ZANU-PF 6 Dec approved constitutional amendments allowing Mugabe to hand-pick Politburo members. Mugabe 9 Dec demoted VP Joice Mujuru to ordinary party member, eight other ministers fired same day, accused of plotting to oust him; Mugabe 10 Dec named Justice Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa and diplomat Phelekezela Mphoko VPs of ZANU-PF. Ousted former members of ZANU-PF 18 Dec petitioned South African Development Community to intervene in power struggle within party.

- [“Ousted Zimbabwe ruling party bigwigs petition SADC”](#), APA, 18 Dec. 2014.

West Africa

➔ **Burkina Faso** Situation stabilised with establishment of transitional institutions: President Kafando 4 Dec announced creation of National Reconciliation and Reform Commission led by PM Zida; 11 Dec set out transition priorities: twelve-month delay for presidential election; renewed investigation into Thomas Sankara’s 1987 assassination under Compaoré; and continued conflict resolution assistance to Mali. Zida 13 Dec announced nationalisation of several companies including SOCOGIB, considered symbol of alleged Compaoré cronyism and nepotism. Govt 15 Dec suspended former ruling party Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally (ADF-RDA), and pro-Compaoré civil society organisation Federation for Peace and Progress with Blaise Compaoré (FEDAP-BC); 17 Dec dismissed twelve of thirteen regional governors. World Bank pledged \$70mn to support democratic transition.

- [“Quand Zida et Kafando font le ménage dans les écuries de Compaoré”](#), Jeune Afrique, 18 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Côte d’Ivoire** Tensions within opposition Popular Ivoirian Front (FPI) persisted: court 29 Dec invalidated candidacy of former President Gbagbo for FPI presidency following request by fellow candidate Pascal Affi N’Guessan. Divisions within main partner in ruling coalition, Democratic Party of Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI): despite leader Henri Konan Bédié’s call to support President Ouattara, several figures said to be running in 2015 elections; Bédié 18 Dec announced party congress Feb to decide if PDCI candidate will run. Authorities 17 Dec said appealing ICC request to transfer Simone Gbagbo, former president’s wife accused of crimes against humanity for her involvement in 2010 post-electoral violence, to ICC custody; national trial began 26 Dec. ICC 11 Dec announced former Young Patriots leader Charles Blé Goudé charged with crimes

against humanity. Soldiers from Akouédo camp protesting unpaid bonuses arrested 18 Dec; former warlord Salif Troré reportedly connected to protests, arrested 19 Dec.

- [“Confirmation de l'interdiction du congrès du FPI. Affi N'Guessan renforcé”](#), Jeune Afrique, 18 Dec. 2014.

↓ **Gambia** Military foiled coup attempt by group of soldiers who attacked presidential palace in capital Banjul 30 Dec while President Jammeh was out of country. Three coup plotters reportedly killed, dozens of military personnel and civilians arrested and weapons cache found in aftermath. Jammeh 1 Jan said dissidents based in U.S., UK and Germany responsible.

- [“Dozens arrested and weapons cache found’ after failed Gambia coup”](#), *Guardian*, 2 Jan. 2015.

➔ **Guinea** Tensions between govt and opposition persisted ahead of 2015 general elections. Electoral commission 9 Dec discussed with selected parliamentarians €57mn election budget; opposition interpreted decision as sign govt avoiding international oversight, 18 Dec accused govt of planned electoral fraud. Justice Minister Cheik Sacko offered to resume discussions with opposition after opposition threatened nationwide protest 15 Dec if electoral reforms not enacted; opposition 22 Dec set conditions for dialogue, maintained call for 7 Jan protest rally. Govt 18 Dec signed contract with new electoral roll operator GEMALTO.

- [“Élections en Guinée: ‘Ce que nous réclamons relève de nos plein droits’, declare Cellou Dalein Diallo”](#), *Africaguinee.com*, 8 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°106, [Guinea’s Other Emergency: Organising Elections](#), 15 December 2014. Guinea approaches the second free presidential election in its history under difficult circumstances. Unless the government convenes a serious dialogue with the opposition, it risks electoral violence and exacerbating ethnic divisions.

➔ **Guinea-Bissau** Tensions within ruling PAIGC remained high: senior party figures criticised PM Pereira for neglecting party figures, relying on non-party individuals. Former presidential candidate Nuno na Biam late-Nov announced creation of new Assembly of the United People-Democratic Party of Guinea-Bissau (APU-PDG) party. Regional body ECOWAS 15 Dec announced six-month extension of 700-strong peace-keeping presence; President Vaz 17 Dec said peacekeepers would remain until defence, security sector reforms complete.

- [“L’Afrique de l’Ouest prolonge le mandat de sa force en Guinée-Bissau”](#), AFP, 17 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Liberia** Senate elections held 20 Dec following several delays; largely peaceful, low turnout; some instances of pre-election violence early-Dec in Monrovia, riot police sent to polling stations. Preliminary results showed George Weah win over president’s son Robert Sirleaf. President Johnson Sirleaf 4 Dec declared ban on rallies and mass gatherings over fears of Ebola spread; court 7 Dec lifted ban following petition by Senatorial candidates. UN 15 Dec announced extension of UNMIL mission to Sept 2015; mandate adjusted to focus on civilian protection, humanitarian assistance, justice and security sector reform.

- [“Liberian court rejects petition to delay elections over Ebola”](#), *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Mali** Third round of Algiers peace talks suspended 1 Dec, set to resume Jan. Both parties early-Dec criticised provisional peace agreement; disagreements persisted over formal status of north, Azawad Movement Coalition's federalism demands. Attacks multiplied in Gao, Kidal regions early-Dec: French army vehicle hit 17 Dec on road to Tessalit; Chadian soldier vehicle hit near Aguelhok MINUSMA camp in north; rockets 29 Dec fired at MINUSMA and French camps in Tessalit, jihadi rebel group Ansar Ed-dine claimed responsibility for attack. Rockets fired at Tessalit camp 31 Dec, no one killed. Pro-govt forces 26 Dec clashed with pro-Azawad group over Bamba, Gao region. French forces 11 Dec announced death of Ahmed al-Tilemsi, key military figure from Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO) rebel group.

- ["Ce qu'il faut retenir du projet d'accord de paix issu des négociations d'Alger"](#), Jeune Afrique, 8 Dec. 2014.
- For latest briefing, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°104, [Mali: Last Chance in Algiers](#), 18 Nov. 2014.

➔ **Niger** Govt 12 Dec requested international aid for worsening humanitarian crisis in Diffa region following mass influx of Nigerian refugees. Violence continued near border with Mali including three civilians abducted 4 Dec near Inekar.

- ["L'élection d'Amadou Salifou à la tête du Parlement contestée"](#), RFI, 15 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Nigeria** Boko Haram (BH) insurgency continued in north: attacks and suicide bombings left over 300 dead, 190 kidnapped in Borno, Yobe, Gombe, Plateau states. Unidentified armed men 7 Dec freed around 270 inmates in Minna, Niger state. Military 9 Dec said regained control of Mubi, Gombi, Maiha, Hong areas of Adamawa state. Court 17 Dec sentenced 54 soldiers to death for refusing to fight BH. Ruling People's Democratic Party 10 Dec validated President Jonathan's candidacy for 2015 elections; former military leader Muhammadu Buhari 11 Dec elected opposition All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate. Two major oil workers' unions 15-19 Dec staged nationwide strike, protested govt's poor maintenance of refineries. Tens killed in inter-communal violence in middle belt states including: thirteen killed by suspected Fulani gunmen in Ashige, Nasarawa state 2 Dec; twelve killed in communal violence in Taraba state 21 Dec; ten killed by unknown gunmen in Kaduna state, 27 Dec. Six soldiers killed in two attacks 21 and 23 Dec by armed gangs on waterways in Bayelsa state.

- EJ Hogendoorn, ["Boko Haram and Nigeria's collective action problem"](#), Daily Trust, 17 Dec. 2014.
- ["Suspected Boko Haram gunmen kidnap 172 women, children in Nigeria"](#), Reuters, 18 Dec. 2014.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Report N°220, [Nigeria's Dangerous 2015 Elections: Limiting the Violence](#), 21 Nov. 2014.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China (internal)** Urumqi court 8 Dec sentenced eight people to death for role in deadly April/May terror attacks. Three people injured in knife attack in Urumqi, Xinjiang 15 Dec; police detained suspect, did not give motive. Urumqi authorities approved ban on women wearing face-covering veils in public.

- [“Xinjiang terrorist cases must be dealt with ‘harshly and quickly’, says China’s top judge”](#), *South China Morning Post*, 19 Dec. 2014.

➔ **China/Japan** Speaking at first Chinese National Memorial Day for Nanjing Massacre victims, President Xi spoke against hatred of Japan, urged China and Japan to work together for peace. Fifth meeting of Japan-China Policy Dialogue on the Mekong Region and fourth New Japan-China Friendship Committee for 21st Century held early Dec – both forums had been on hiatus since 2011. Newly re-elected Japanese PM Abe 24 Dec appointed as new defence minister Gen Nakatani, who favours stronger pre-emptive strike capability; China’s foreign ministry 25 Dec said Japan should uphold path of peace. Japan proposed resuming talks in Jan on hotline to avoid unforeseen maritime incidents. Japanese and Chinese officials 28 Dec agreed to step up cooperation on energy conservation and environmental measures.

- [“Nanjing confirms thaw in China-Japan ties”](#), Al Jazeera, 13 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** U.S. blamed DPRK for major cyberattack on Sony Pictures 1 Dec, allegedly in response to launch of comedy movie featuring DPRK regime; President Obama said U.S. would “respond proportionally”. DPRK denied role in attack, proposed joint investigation, later blamed U.S. for several internet blackouts in DPRK. UNGA 18 Dec passed resolution calling for UNSC to refer DPRK’s alleged human rights violations to ICC. UNSC 22 Dec discussed human rights situation in DPRK. ROK 29 Dec offered to resume high-level talks with DPRK; DPRK leader Kim Jong-un in New Year’s address said open to talks. DPRK military continued winter military training, described by ROK military sources as “unusually intensive”. DPRK denied involvement in hack of ROK nuclear power operator late Dec.

- [“Transforming the world’s most isolated nation”](#), Al Jazeera, 18 Dec. 2014.

South Asia

➔ **Afghanistan** Unprecedented wave of insurgent attacks continued in Kabul, raising concerns over viability of new govt: suicide bomber 11 Dec killed German citizen, mortally wounded Afghan journalist at French cultural institute; suicide bombers killed at least thirteen Afghan troops in attacks on military transport vehicles 11 and 13 Dec; two NATO troops killed in suicide bombing outside Bagram airbase north of Kabul 12 Dec. UN 20 Dec said record number of civilians killed in 2014: death toll up 19% by late Nov compared to 2013. U.S. Sec Defence Hagel 6 Dec announced 1,000 additional U.S. troops to remain in country past 2014, raising total to 10,800. Delay in

naming new cabinet persisted, indicating continued tensions between supporters of President Ghani and govt “chief executive” Abdullah. Two Taliban leaders reported killed in Baraki Barak district, Logar province 7 Dec; militants next day killed eleven when storming administration complex in Kandahar’s Maiwand district. Security forces mid-Dec began operation in eastern border areas after Pakistani army requested help targeting Pakistani Taliban (TTP) hideouts in response to deadly mid-Dec TTP attack on Peshawar school (see Pakistan); four TTP militants, seven others reported killed in U.S. drone strike 16 Dec.

- [“Afghan civilian casualties ‘hit record high’](#)”, Al Jazeera, 20 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Bangladesh** Opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) late Dec scheduled anti-govt rallies in Dhaka for early Jan, including on 5 Jan anniversary of 2014 elections boycotted by party; senior member of ruling Awami League (AL) Mohammad Nasim mid-Dec warned BNP will not be allowed to “create anarchy”. BNP leader Khaleda Zia 21 Dec called govt “illegal”, requested discussions with opposition to pave way for general elections. Dhaka court 10 Dec issued arrest warrant against Zia’s son, BNP vice chairman Tarique Rahman, for allegedly insulting country’s AL wartime president. Former Jatiya Party minister and senior Jamaat-e-Islami leader sentenced to death over alleged 1971 war crimes late Dec.

- [“BNP alliance plans rallies on Jan 2, 5”](#), Dhaka Tribune, 22 Dec. 2014.

⚡ **India (non-Kashmir)** Separatist Bodo militants 23 Dec killed over 70 in several attacks across north-eastern state Assam; attacks reportedly targeted Adivasi settlers and followed recent killings of Bodos during army counter-insurgency operation. Three reported killed by police during protests against Bodo attacks next day, at least eight Bodos killed in retaliatory attacks; govt pledged to intensify army operation, requested help from Bhutan, Myanmar in combatting militants in border areas. Officials strongly criticised Pakistani court’s mid-Dec decision to grant bail to Lashkar-e-Taiba commander behind deadly 2008 Mumbai attacks, later detained on other charges (see Pakistan); both houses of parliament adopted resolutions condemning bail decision. Maoist militants 1 Dec killed at least fourteen police in Chhattisgarh’s Sukma district. Final four phases of Jharkhand state elections held 2-20 Dec; PM Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won, taking 37 seats.

- [“Army begins operation to flush out Bodo militants”](#), *Times of India*, 28 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Kashmir** Final four phases of Jammu and Kashmir state elections held 2-20 Dec; People’s Democratic Party (PDP) won 28 seats, PM Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) second with 25 seats. Militants launched several deadly attacks during election period, including at least 21 reported killed in four separate attacks 5 Dec. Four Pakistani, one Indian soldier reported killed in cross-border firing 31 Dec.

- [“21 killed as terrorists stage serial attacks to disrupt Kashmir polls”](#), *Times of India*, 6 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Nepal** Political Dialogue and Consensus Committee (PDCC) early Dec admitted failure to reach consensus between political parties ahead of 22 Jan deadline for drafting constitution; task force consisting of representatives of main parties late month failed to resolve disputes.

- [“Deliberations begin for new Nepal constitution”](#), IANS, 15 Dec. 2014.

⚠ **Pakistan** Pakistani Taliban (TTP) 16 Dec killed at least 148, including 132 children, in unprecedentedly deadly attack on military-run school in north-western city Peshawar; TTP called attack retaliation for army killings during operation against militants in NW. Military campaign escalated following attack, including scores reported killed in Khyber agency 18-19 Dec; militant suspected of involvement in Peshawar attack reported killed 26 Dec. PM Sharif lifted moratorium on death penalty: six non-TTP militants, allegedly responsible for attacks on military, executed 19-21 Dec, including five over failed 2003 assassination attempt against former President Musharraf; Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan 22 Dec said preparations underway for executions of nearly 500 terrorism convicts. Interior ministry late Dec claimed to have arrested several militants in relation to Peshawar attack; issued arrest warrants for TTP leader Mullah Fazlullah and former spokesperson Shahidullah Shahid over June 2014 Karachi airport attack. At least twenty TTP militants reported killed by police in Karachi 18-21 Dec. Parliamentary committee 24 Dec reached agreement on several counter-terrorism measures, including setting up special military courts to hear terrorism cases; Senate opposition leaders opposed setting up military courts through constitutional amendment that would curtail fundamental rights. Govt announced PM Sharif will head committee supervising implementation of new counter-terrorism “National Action Plan”. Supreme Court 9 Dec dismissed all petitions for PM Sharif’s removal, including from Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). PTI mid-month organised anti-govt protests in Karachi and Lahore before calling off further protests in response to Peshawar attack. Court 18 Dec granted bail to Lashkar-e-Taiba commander Zakiur Rehman Lakhvi, behind deadly 2008 attacks in Mumbai, drawing strong reactions from India (see India); Lakhvi later detained on other charges. U.S.-wanted al-Qaeda leader reported killed by army in S Waziristan 6 Dec; four reported killed in U.S. drone strike next day, at least dozen more killed in N Waziristan late month.

- [“Pakistani forces kill alleged organizer of school massacre”](#), *Washington Post*, 26 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Joint opposition presidential candidate Maithripala Sirisena mounted significant challenge to President Rajapaksa ahead of 8 Jan election; tight race raised concerns about serious election day and post-election violence. Rajapaksa 22 Dec promised peaceful transition in case of defeat despite numerous reports of intimidation of opposition, including almost daily violent attacks on activists, rallies; persistent allegations of large-scale illegal use of state resources and workers for pro-Rajapaksa campaigning. Race tightened throughout month with continued defections from ruling United People Freedom Alliance (UPFA) alliance, many blaming govt corruption. Sinhala nationalist Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) 1 Dec announced support for Sirisena; govt lost two-thirds parliamentary majority with 22 Dec departure of All Ceylon Muslim Congress (ACMC), followed 27 Dec by Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), both criticising govt failure to protect Muslims. Sirisena 19 Dec released cam-

paign manifesto: pledged reduction of presidential powers, other governance reforms; no mention of devolution of power or other key Tamil concerns; announced no cooperation with any international efforts to prosecute govt or military leaders for alleged war crimes. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) 30 Dec pledged support for Sirisena; smaller All Ceylon Tamil Congress (ACTC) called for election boycott. Elections Commissioner Mahinda Deshapriya mid-Dec announced EU request to monitor elections denied; 19 Dec said election monitors will only be allowed at 300 of 1,115 ballot counting centres.

- Alan Keenan, [“Sri Lankan election- The tighter the race, the more violent it threatens to be”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 11 Dec. 2014.
- [“For Sri Lankan President, renounced by aides, confidence of re-election dims”](#), *New York Times*, 25 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°145, [Sri Lanka's Presidential Election: Risks and Opportunities](#), 9 December 2014. Sri Lanka's upcoming presidential election promises more competition than was initially anticipated. But with that comes a great risk of violence. Long-term stability and post-war reconciliation can only be achieved through a peaceful election resulting in a government committed to serving the interests of all Sri Lankans.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** Five teenagers killed, at least 17 reported injured in clash between protesters and security forces in Enarotali, Papua 8 Dec; rights groups accused police of opening fire. Sixth person died of injuries 10 Dec. Attending Christmas celebration in Papua 27 Dec, President Widodo said shooting deaths unacceptable, promised investigation.

- [“Jokowi breaks silence on killings in Paniai, pledges to resolve shootings”](#), *Jakarta Globe*, 28 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Myanmar** Govt and armed ethnic groups resumed ceasefire talks 22 Dec in Yangon, postponed since 19 Nov army shelling of Kachin Independence Army training camp. Commander in Chief 29 Nov held latest in series of meetings with Gen. Mutu and other leaders of Karen National Union (KNU) in Naypyitaw. UNFC alliance of armed groups (which KNU has suspended its membership of) 29 Nov announced reactivation of combined Federal Army; criticised by govt peace negotiators and military. Ethnic Kokang rebels of Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army 10 Dec killed at least seven soldiers in Shan state. Ruling USDP 20 Nov submitted bill proposing referendum on constitutional reform, slated for May 2015; unclear what changes will be put to vote. Bill followed existing election laws in giving Temporary Registration Card (“White Card”) holders – form of ID carried by most Rohingya – right to vote in referendum; NLD representative then submitted proposal, which was adopted, removing right of White Card holders to vote in referendum. Following 14-party talks among national leaders convened by president 31 Oct, legislature 25 Nov adopted proposal to hold smaller 6-way talks; rejected by president. President 26 Nov submitted to legisla

ture texts of four controversial “protection of race and religion” bills; will be debated Jan. UNGA resolution on human rights in Myanmar adopted by consensus 21 Nov; govt objected to use of word “Rohingya”.

- [“Top ethnic leaders, Burma army reps absent from ceasefire talks”](#), Irrawaddy, 22 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Philippines** Chair of House of Representatives ad hoc committee on Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL) 28 Dec said chamber will pass it by March 2015, following removal of provisions that go against constitution and completion of public hearings. Senate president also said he expects approval of BBL in first semester of 2015. MILF peace panel chair said group will begin decommissioning arms and fighters in Jan. Further attacks by splinter rebel groups opposed to peace agreement; bombing of bus in Mindanao 9 Dec that killed ten blamed on Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF); BIFF also denied involvement in 26 Dec ambush in Maguindanao in which three civilians killed. Eleven militants reported killed in clash between military and Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) in Basilan 4 Dec. Two soldiers and paramilitary killed in suspected New People’s Army attack in Compostela Valley 29 Dec. Two people killed, over 30 injured in bomb blast in Mlang, North Cotabato 31 Dec.

- [“House to remove unconstitutional BBL provisions”](#), Philippine Star, 29 Dec. 2014.

➔ **South China Sea** China released position paper 7 Dec explaining extensively for first time its stance on case initiated by Philippines through Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, although reiterating its refusal to participate. States that court has no jurisdiction; UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) cannot be used to decide South China Sea (SCS) sovereignty issues; China in 2006 declared it doesn’t accept compulsory settlement procedures provided for by UNCLOS; Philippines has breached existing agreements to settle SCS dispute. Vietnam submitted statement to tribunal listing three objections to China’s stand and lending support to Manila’s case. China ignored 15 Dec deadline to submit defence to Permanent Court of Arbitration. U.S. House of Representatives 3 Dec passed resolution calling for peaceful resolution of territorial disputes in South and East China Seas; U.S. State Dept 5 Dec published report contesting validity of Chinese nine-dash line claiming most of SCS and offering support for aspects of Philippines case. Satellite data emerged late Nov showing large-scale Chinese land reclamation project on Fiery Island Reef, part of disputed Spratly Islands. U.S. called for Beijing to stop, pursue diplomatic engagement with other claimants; Beijing stated its “indisputable sovereignty” over islands. China late Dec told Vietnam all disputes would be settled amicably via talks.

- [“Vietnam launches legal challenge against China’s South China Sea claims”](#), *Diplomat*, 12 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Thailand** Deputy PM Wissanu Krea-ngam 23 Dec said next general election will be held Feb 2016 at earliest. Seven police officers arrested late Nov on charges including bribery, money laundering, misconduct and lèse-majesté; senior officer arrested, Police Lt General Pongpat Chayaphan, accused of running criminal network, is uncle to Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn’s third wife, Srirasmi. Investigation widened through Dec, over twenty people arrested, including several of Srirasmi’s relatives. Srirasmi resigned royal title 11 Dec, divorced 13 Dec. Appointed National Legislative Assembly (NLA) 28 Nov voted to open impeachment proceedings against former PM Yingluck

Shinawatra for alleged negligence leading to losses from her gov't's rice-pledging scheme; proceedings to begin 9 Jan. Impeachment proceedings against former Senate and House speakers for role in helping pass amendment for fully elected senate scheduled to begin 8 Jan. NLA 18 Dec dropped bid to impeach 310 former lawmakers for misuse of power for supporting amnesty bill. PM Prayuth Chan-ocha 1 Dec visited Malaysia to discuss dialogue with Malay-Muslim insurgents; junta intends to restart dialogue in Jan with insurgent leaders in exile, Malaysia to act as facilitator. Several civilians and members of security forces killed/wounded in insurgent attacks and clashes during month.

- [“No Thai election until at least February 2016: Deputy prime minister”](#), *Diplomat*, 24 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°263, [A Coup Ordained? Thailand's Prospects for Stability](#), 3 December 2014. Martial law has brought calm but not peace to Thailand's febrile politics. The military regime's stifling of dissent precludes a frank dialogue on the kingdom's future and could lead to greater turmoil than that which brought about the May 2014 coup.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Lower house of new parliament 9 Dec elected as speaker Sefik Dzaferovic from mainly Bosniak Party of Democratic Action (SDA), and deputy speakers from Croatian Democratic Union and Serbian Democratic Party. SDA 18 Dec named Denis Zvizdic president of Council of Ministers (in effect PM). EU foreign policy chief Mogherini and enlargement commissioner Johannes Hahn visiting early month urged progress on reform agenda. EU Foreign Affairs Council 15 Dec backed UK-German initiative to revive Bosnia's EU accession bid. Republika Srpska formed new govt. UNSC extended deployment of EUFOR troops for another year.

- [“SDA names Bosnia's new Prime Minister”](#), *Turkish Weekly*, 19 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Kosovo** Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) 8 Dec signed power-sharing agreement, allowing formation of new govt. Parliament 9 Dec appointed former Pristina mayor and LDK leader Isa Mustafa new PM; former PM and PDK leader Hashim Thaci appointed deputy PM and FM. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini said looking forward to resumption of high-level Pristina-Belgrade dialogue. Pristina police seized explosives in car belonging to Serbian national in suspected bombing attempt. Transparency International Global Corruption index ranked Kosovo and Albania most corrupt countries in region.

- [“Kosovo's new government: in with the old, in with the new”](#), *Financial Times*, 10 Dec. 2014.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Parliament 4 Dec voted 103-7 to join Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), despite protests. EEU came into force 1 Jan; agreement stipulates disputed Nagorno-Karabakh territory not part of EEU. EU announced €10mn in new initiatives to assist Armenia. Weakening Russian rouble creating increasing hardship with exports and remittances falling, currency depreciating.

- [“As rouble tanks, Yerevan asks Santa for economic boost”](#), *Eurasianet*, 16 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Azerbaijan** U.S. 1 Dec said “increasingly concerned” over Baku's record on human rights, restrictions on civil society, later in month said Baku's crackdown threaten relations between countries. Court 5 Dec ordered investigative journalist with RFE/RL Khadija Ismayilova to be held in pre-trial detention two months on charges of pressing man to commit suicide. Authorities late month ransacked and shut down Baku office of RFE/RL, detained twelve journalists. Opposition held protest 14 Dec calling for release of political prisoners, amid reports of worsening health of jailed activist Leyla Yunus. President Aliyev 29 Dec pardoned 87 prisoners, including some considered political prisoners by rights groups.

- [“RFE/RL journalists detained, questioned by Azerbaijani authorities”](#), *RFE/RL*, 28 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** N-K authorities reported soldier killed in clash with Azerbaijani forces 8 Dec; reported another soldier killed 21 Dec on front-line. Azerbaijan and Armenia accused each other of hundreds of ceasefire violations during month. Armenian defence ministry accused Azerbaijan of sabotage and infiltration attempt on contact line 25 Dec; Azerbaijan denied. Azerbaijani military claimed to have foiled infiltration attempt 26 Dec and taken Armenian soldier hostage; N-K authorities denied. Outgoing U.S. ambassador to Armenia reiterated only way to resolve N-K conflict is through talks; Collective Security Treaty Organisation Sec Gen also said conflict can only be resolved peacefully. Bonn International Center for Conversation's Global Militarization Index 2014 showed Armenia third most militarised country in world, Azerbaijan tenth.

- ["Armenia violates ceasefire with Azerbaijan around 40 times within 24 hours"](#), Trend, 22 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Georgia** Govt issued note protesting Russian military exercises conducted in breakaway republic South Ossetia (SO) early Dec. SO leader Leonid Tibilov 10 Dec said would probably sign treaty increasing integration with Russia early 2015. European Parliament 18 Dec endorsed EU association agreement with Georgia. Latvian FM said EU may grant visa-free access for Georgians in 2015. Currency continued to depreciate with Russia rouble. Ethnic Chechen became eighth Georgian reported killed fighting in Syria.

- ["Georgian militant fighting with IS reported killed in Kobani"](#), RFE/RL, 8 Dec. 2014.

⚡ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Fifteen police, two civilians and eleven militants killed, 36 police injured in shootout between rebel gunmen and police in Chechen capital Grozny in early hours of 4 Dec, largest militant attack in NC since 2005. Islamist group claimed responsibility, said attack was to avenge oppression of Muslim women. Chechen leader Kadyrov said militants' relatives would be punished: houses destroyed, expelled from republic; sixteen houses of insurgent relatives reportedly destroyed. Grozny office of human rights group which criticised Kadyrov's response set on fire 13 Dec. President Putin 18 Dec voiced disapproval of extrajudicial reprisals against militants' families; reprisals continued. Kadyrov gathered 15,000 armed Chechen "*volunteers*" in Grozny stadium and proposed creation of "Vladimir Putin's infantry" to help defend Russian interests anywhere in world. Authorities reported four suspected militants killed during special operation in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria 11 Dec, three militants killed in operation in Baksan district 18 Dec. Security forces reportedly killed leader of Makhachkala insurgency group 9 Dec, two suspect insurgents killed in Makhachkala and two in Izberbash 10 and 12 Dec, five suspect militants, including woman, in eastern Dagestan 12 Dec. Four militants killed in Sunzhensk district, Ingushetia late Dec. Leader of Caucasus Emirate's Dagestan network and two insurgency leaders from eastern Chechnya pledged loyalty to Islamic State leader al-Baghdadi.

- ["Gun battles in Chechen capital leave 19 dead"](#), AP, 4 Dec. 2014.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Belarus** Trade dispute broke out with Russia late Nov after Russia banned imports of meat and milk from Belarus; Belarus claimed ban politically motivated. Parliament passed law making it easier for authorities to close internet news sites. Journalist Alyaksandr Alesin remanded on charges of collaborating with foreign intelligence.

- [“Moscow, Minsk spar over bans on Belarusian imports”](#), RFE/RL, 4 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Ukraine** Fighting abated during month, though violence started to pick up toward end Dec. Leaders from Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany 22 Dec announced another round of peace talks to be held in Minsk. Moscow and Kyiv said leaders had agreed on need to respect ceasefire, separate armies, pull out troops and heavy weapons and release prisoners. Talks on 24 Dec however produced little progress. 26 Dec talks cancelled, though planned prisoner swap did take place. Germany 28 Dec called on Russia to use influence on separatists to implement ceasefire. Govt late Dec announced police and military anti-terror operation in Odessa, scene of several small bombings, at least one fatal. Other suspected terrorist incidents, so far relatively small, reportedly recently in Kharkiv and elsewhere; seen as pro-separatist efforts to undermine Kyiv govt. Parliament 22 Dec voted 303-8 to drop country’s non-aligned status and seek NATO membership, prompting anger in Moscow. EU, U.S. and Canada 18-19 Dec introduced further sanctions on investment and trade with Crimea and further individuals and companies; Russia said it would not give up Crimea. Russian rouble continued to lose value. Ukrainian parliament early Dec approved new govt to be headed by PM Arseniy Yatsenyuk. French and German leaders called on Kyiv to move on economic reforms. Russian President Putin 26 Dec signed new Russian military doctrine saying that country faces threats from foreign nations installing hostile govts in neighbouring countries. Russia resumed supplies of gas to Ukraine, suspended in June.

- [“Tusk: EU needs long-term strategy to deal with Russia”](#), RFE/RL, 19 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Europe Report N°235, *Eastern Ukraine: A Dangerous Winter*, 18 December 2014. Winter in Ukraine is injecting further uncertainty into an already volatile conflict. After well over 5,000 deaths and eight months of war, eastern Ukraine – particularly the separatist-held parts of Donetsk and Luhansk – now runs the risk of a humanitarian crisis. All parties involved in the conflict should refrain from offensive operations, concentrating instead on helping the population survive the winter, and laying the groundwork for a political settlement.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Reunification talks remain suspended; no visible improvement in tensions over Turkey’s Oct deployment of warship to shadow offshore rig off Republic of Cyprus’ SE coast citing concerns about Turkish Cypriots’ right to hydrocarbons. Turkish PM Davutoğlu 25 Nov suggested joint committee between Turkish Cypriots and

Greek Cypriots to deal with use of natural resources, brushing aside Greek Cypriot objections to this before reunification deal. Turkey's EU Minister Bozkuř 3 Dec said Turkey would not budge from its position on issue.

- ["Turkish PM calls for deal with Greek Cypriots over energy deposits"](#), Reuters, 5 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Turkey** Deputy PM Akdođan 19 Dec said peace process with PKK could finalise before summer 2015 elections, underlined strong will for solution. PKK's jailed head Öcalan late Nov presented plan for negotiations, underlined need for negotiated cease-fire and monitoring board. Three people killed, three injured in 27 Dec clashes between PKK and Islamist Kurds from Hıda-Par in south-eastern Turkish Şırnak province, new spillover from Kurdish-Islamic State clashes in Syria. FM Çavuşođlu 19 Dec said Turkey could begin training, equipping moderate Syrian opposition fighters in collaboration with U.S. before March. Second group of 150 peshmerga fighters from Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government crossed into Kobani, Syria from Turkey 2 Dec. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini 8 Dec pledged €70m aid to Syrian refugees in Turkey. Turkey 14 Dec arrested around 30 journalists linked with U.S.-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen, leading to EU criticism; chilling EU accession process yet further, President Erdoğan told EU to "keep their views to themselves ... we don't care whether the EU allows [us into the union] or not".

- Hugh Pope, ["Turkey, Syria and Saving the PKK Peace Process"](#), Istituto Affari Internazionali, 10 Dec. 2014.
- ["Media freedom, RIP?"](#), *Economist*, 20 Dec. 2014.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Report N°234, ["Turkey and the PKK: Saving the Peace Process"](#), 6 November 2014.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** President Nazarbayev 22 Dec met with Ukrainian President Poroshenko in Kyiv, agreed to restore economic ties, resume military-technical cooperation. Nazarbayev 21 Dec said Kazakhstan could become mediator between Russia and Ukraine, during Kyiv visit reportedly called on Moscow and Kyiv to find compromise and "preserve Ukraine's territorial integrity". Russian, Ukrainian, French and German leaders to meet in Astana 15 Jan. Kazakh citizen sentenced to five years jail 12 Dec for fighting alongside pro-Russian militias in eastern Ukraine. Nazarbayev's grandson Nurali Aliyev appointed deputy mayor of Astana 19 Dec.

- ["The presidents of Kazakhstan and Ukraine hold talks in Kyiv"](#), Euronews, 22 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** During 1 Dec interview President Atambayev insisted Kyrgyzstan no longer a poor country; also said some NGOs may pose threat to national security. Atambayev 23 Dec signed agreement in Moscow to join Eurasian Economic Union. Depreciation of Russian rouble causing increasing difficulties for families reliant on remittances from relatives working in Russia. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan held border cooperation talks 9 Dec in Batken.

- ["From Central Asia to Syria: A Teenage Girl's Jihad"](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 31 Dec. 2014.
- ["Kyrgyzstan signs up for Eurasian Union, with another delay"](#), *Eurasianet*, 23 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Tajikistan** Four Tajik border guards taken hostage 21 Dec by Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan's Kunduz province, where they were reportedly collecting firewood. President Rahmon mid-Dec expressing increasing concern about Islamic State (IS) recruitment among young Tajiks; reportedly called Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) "modern plague". 46 men arrested in Sughd province on suspicion of joining IS. Tajikistan 23 Dec assumed presidency of Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

- ["Central Asia and Afghanistan as the drawdown deadline arrives"](#), RFE/RL, 28 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Turkmenistan** Concerns after Khamyab district in Afghanistan's Jowzan province adjacent to border fell under Taliban control 14 Dec. Also in Jowzan province, villagers 17 Dec threatened to attack Turkmen border guards who they claimed were moving border posts and depriving them of grazing pastures.

- ["Afghan villagers threaten to attack Turkmenistan"](#), RFE/RL, 17 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Uzbekistan** President Karimov and Russian President Putin met in Tashkent 10 Dec; agreed on enhanced military technical cooperation, Moscow wrote off \$865m in Uzbek debt. Karimov met U.S. Asst Sec State Nisha Biswal in Tashkent 2 Dec; Biswal's visit criticised by rights groups. Parliamentary elections 21 Dec saw reported turnout of 89%: victorious candidates all from parties supporting President Karimov.

- ["Uzbekistan election likely to tighten Karimov's grip on power"](#), *Moscow Times*, 22 Dec. 2014.

Latin America and Caribbean

↑ **Colombia** FARC 17 Dec declared unilateral ceasefire entering into force 20 Dec, to be indefinite unless military attacks guerrilla forces; requested national and international monitors to verify ceasefire, including ICRC, UNASUR, Community of Latin American States and civil society umbrella group Broad Front for Peace. Govt welcomed ceasefire but rejected third party verification, said security forces would continue operations; FARC 31 Dec warned that “provocative movements” of state troops could jeopardise ceasefire. Hours before truce entered into force FARC killed five soldiers and captured one in ambush in Cauca department; kidnapped soldier unilaterally released 26 Dec in another “step in the right direction”, according to President Santos. Following temporary suspension triggered by kidnapping of General Alzate, talks in Havana between gov't and FARC reinitiated 10 Dec with short-term aim of de-escalating conflict and establishing permanent mechanism to solve future crises. Fifth and last group of conflict victims 16 Dec gave inputs on transitional justice; round ended with commitment to victims' rights. FARC 18 Dec recognised responsibility for emblematic Bojayá massacre in 2002 and promised reparations. FARC 28 Dec confirmed that Secretariat member and Southern Block commander Joaquín Gómez had joined negotiating team. Santos early Dec called for flexibility to accommodate drug trafficking in connection to political crimes; opposed by Inspector General and opposition. Peace talks with ELN appear remote after ELN commanders 2 Dec referred to continuing “deep differences” with gov't, but expectations building again following 29 Dec ELN statement promising “special announcement” for 7 Jan.

- [“Las recomendaciones a la mesa de La Habana”](#), El Espectador, 12 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Latin America Report N°53, *The Day after Tomorrow: Colombia's FARC and the End of the Conflict*, 11 December 2014. As they move toward a final peace agreement, the negotiators of the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) face the challenge of laying out a credible path for guerrilla fighters to abandon arms and reintegrate into society.

↑ **Cuba** Dramatic improvement in U.S.-Cuban relations with U.S. move 17 Dec to normalise ties, and possibility of end to decades-long U.S. embargo of the island, set to transform political relations across hemisphere.

- Javier Ciurlizza and Mark Schneider, [“Cuba and the U.S.: Turning the Page”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 19 Dec. 2014.
- [“Cuba thaw lets rest of Latin America warm to Washington”](#), *New York Times*, 18 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Guatemala** International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) postponed dialogue on justice reform, planned for Dec, until Jan. Commissioner Iván Velásquez plans to convene authorities and civil society to discuss laws to strengthen judicial sector. Former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt scheduled to face new trial on charges of genocide and war crimes in Jan. Asset recovery court ordered confiscation of 15 properties belonging to accused drug trafficker Jairo Orellana Morales in Gualán, Zacapa and Petén departments. Guatemala and Belize signed 13 agreements designed

to restore trust. Guatemala commemorated 18 years since 1996 peace agreements, but murders in post-conflict period amount to 6,000 per year.

- [“Guatemala y Belice reconocen esfuerzos por mejorar relaciones”](#), Prensa Latina, 17 Dec. 2014.

➡ 🇸🇩 **Haiti** Political crisis over long-overdue elections intensified. Thousands of protesters 6 Dec clashed with police in Port-au-Prince, demanding President Martelly and PM Lamothe resign and elections be held; Lamothe resigned 14 Dec, further protests took place demanding Martelly’s resignation. Martelly 25 Dec nominated former Port-au-Prince mayor and veteran politician Evans Paul PM in latest attempt to resolve political crisis. To prevent shutdown of govt if elections are not held before 12 Jan, Martelly reached deal with senate and chamber of deputies 30 Dec to extend their mandate; lawmakers still need to approve deal. Fears of violence if parliament shuts down and Martelly rules by decree.

- [“In Haiti, only the face of power has changed”](#), *Los Angeles Times*, 26 Dec. 2014.

➡ **Mexico** Protests in Guerrero following Sept disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa teachers college continued, including takeovers of state’s electoral institute, radio stations, several highways and police academy. Mexico City police chief resigned 5 Dec amid criticism over handling of protests in capital. Scientists dispute prosecutors’ claim that students’ bodies were incinerated at local dump. Investigation by magazine *Proceso* published 14 Dec claimed federal police knew about attacks while they were happening but did nothing to stop them. Shootout between rival vigilante groups in La Ruana town, Michoacán state 16 Dec left 11 dead. Those involved included members of rural police force created by govt in April under agreement to disarm “self-defence” groups, and who blocked highways two days earlier demanding authorities to take action against criminal gangs. New ties emerged 11 Dec between finance minister Luis Videgaray and govt contractor at centre of influence-peddling allegations. Raúl Salinas de Gortari, brother of former president, cleared of embezzlement charges 12 Dec. Alleged leader of Jalisco New Generation Cartel Omar Espejo arrested 18 Dec in connection with Nov 2013 disappearance of two federal police.

- Javier Ciurlizza. [“Punto de inflexión”](#), *El Colombiano*, 16 Dec. 2014.
- Mary Speck, [“Upheavals and Paralysis”](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 19 Dec. 2014.
- [“Policías federales y militares participaron en el ataque a normalistas: ‘Proceso’ \(nota y videos\)”](#), *Aristegui Noticias*, 14 Dec. 2014.

⚠ **Venezuela** President Maduro’s govt made key appointments with simple majority vote, violating legal and constitutional requirements designed to ensure that nominees are impartial, and installing govt allies in judiciary and other branches of state. Govt 22 Dec appointed new attorney general, ombudsman and comptroller; 28 Dec appointed 16 new judges to Supreme Court, again by simple majority vote. Supreme Court 27 Dec appointed three new members of electoral commission, retaining 4:1 govt majority. Opposition MUD alliance abstained in all appointments in protest. With price of oil continuing to fall, country seen as at risk of defaulting; central bank end-Dec reported economy in recession, inflation at 63.6% in twelve months to Nov. U.S. President Obama 18 Dec approved sanctions against Venezuelan officials guilty of rights violations during early 2014 opposition protests, including cancellation of visas, freezing of assets; condemned by President Maduro, however announcement by U.S.

and Cuba that countries would restore relations caused Maduro to moderate temporarily anti-U.S. rhetoric. European Parliament 18 Dec approved resolution condemning political persecution in Venezuela, demanding release of opposition protesters.

- [“Sanciones de EEUU minan las bases del chavismo”](#), El Nuevo Herald, 21 Dec. 2014.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Palestinian President Abbas 31 Dec signed applications for membership of Rome Statute of International Criminal Court and several other international agreements, following failure of Jordanian-submitted Palestinian draft resolution to secure required three-fifths support during 30 Dec UNSC vote; Jordanian resolution called for negotiated resolution to conflict within twelve months, full withdrawal of Israeli forces from future Palestinian state by end of 2017. Tensions decreased in W Bank and Jerusalem, seemingly aided by Israel's continued removal of restrictions on Palestinian access to al-Aqsa Mosque. PA minister Ziad Abu Ein died following altercation with Israeli soldiers during peaceful protest in W Bank 10 Dec. Israeli troops 16 Dec shot dead Palestinian in W Bank refugee camp Qalandiya; 29 Dec killed stone-throwing teenager near Tapuah settlement. EU General Court 17 Dec reversed EU designation of Hamas as terrorist organisation; several European states pledged to ensure Hamas remains on terror list. Gaza reconstruction proceeded slowly, PA official 22 Dec said over 90% of donor funds not delivered despite Oct pledges. Hamas continuously warned of return to violence if Gaza crisis remains unresolved. Israeli airstrikes 20 Dec targeted Gaza cement factory after Gaza militants fired rocket across border, no casualties; Hamas militant killed in clash with Israeli soldiers along border 24 Dec. Israeli PM Netanyahu 2 Dec requested early elections, confirmed by Knesset for 17 March.

- ["Palestinians request membership of ICC"](#), Al Jazeera, 31 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Lebanon** Syria-based jihadi group Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) 5 Dec executed Lebanese policeman, held captive since Aug, in response to army's arrest of wife and children of JN commander Abu Ali al-Shishani, ex-wife and children of Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; 26 Lebanese servicemen remain in JN or IS captivity. Govt failure to manage hostage crisis resulted in civilians resorting to vigilantism following execution: blocked eastern roads, encircled border town Aarsal; retaliations against Syrian refugees escalated including Syrian boy shot dead 7 Dec, refugee camp torched. Militants 2 Dec killed six soldiers near Syrian border; army shelled militant positions in area, arrested at least ten. Three militants reported killed by army near Aarsal 26 Dec, including Syrian JN member.

- ["Syrian child shot dead, camp torched after Lebanon captive killed"](#), *Daily Star*, 7 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Syria** Al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) continued to advance in Idlib province following Nov expulsion of forces loyal to U.S. and Saudi-backed rebel commander Jamal Marouf from stronghold in Jabal al-Zawiya region: most recipients of U.S. support either evicted from province, disarmed, subordinated to JN or forced to seek protection from Islamist group Ahrar al-Sham (AS) by early Dec; U.S. cut support to groups in Idlib and neighbouring Hama province as JN advance left remaining U.S. allies unable to guarantee safety of supply lines. JN, AS mid-month captured two regime bases in southern Idlib after over eighteen months of attempts by U.S.-backed

rebels; around 180 killed according to Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) NGO. Former recipients of U.S. support joined Idlib operation, resulting in U.S.-supplied arms being employed under JN leadership. Mainstream rebel alliance “Revolutionary Command Council” (RCC), covering broad array of rebel factions including U.S.-backed groups and AS, took further steps toward forming representative umbrella organisation; RCC president Qais Abdullah Sheikh early Dec met UN Syria envoy De Mistura in Turkey along with other rebel leaders following late Nov RCC election. Clashes between regime, Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) continued: scores reported killed in IS attacks on military base in Deir az-Zour province. Mass grave reportedly discovered in east mid-month containing hundreds of members of Sheitat tribe, executed by IS. Deadly regime airstrikes continued including scores reported killed around Homs city 17 Dec.

- [“Nusra takes two Syrian bases in major blow to regime”](#), AFP, 15 Dec. 2014.

Gulf

➔ **Bahrain** Two killed, including policeman, in separate bomb attacks south east of Manama 8-9 Dec, another three police injured 19 Dec; govt blamed “terrorists”. Opposition al-Wefaq 26 Dec held general congress, re-elected leader Sheikh Ali Salman; authorities 28 Dec detained Salman on incitement charges, prompting clashes between supporters and police. Hundreds 6 Dec protested in Sitra against regime agreement to open permanent UK naval base; demonstrators dispersed by police using tear gas. Activists Maryam and Zainab al-Khawaja handed prison sentences early Dec, former in absentia for assaulting police, latter for insulting king; court 29 Dec sentenced two to death over Feb 2014 killing of policeman.

- [“Deadly bomb blast hits Bahrain village”](#), Al Jazeera, 9 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Iran** Nuclear negotiations between Iran and P5+1 (also known as EU3+3) resumed in Geneva mid-month: bilateral Iran-U.S. talks held 15-16 Dec, multilateral Iran-P5+1 talks 17 Dec; progress unclear, Iranian negotiators called meetings “very useful”. Confidential UN report 9 Dec accused Iran of making illicit purchases for Arak heavy water reactor in violation of UN sanctions, U.S. said move not in violation of Joint Plan of Action (JPA) interim agreement with P5+1. UN report prompted further criticism of Iran by U.S. Congress members following Nov news reports claiming Iran violated JPA – with moves which, it was later clarified, did not violate JPA, due to ambiguity in agreement. U.S. Sec State Kerry early month called reported Iranian airstrikes against Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) in Iraq “positive”; Iranian officials denied reports. Signs of govt effort to find regional solution to Syrian crisis: FM Zarif 9 Dec held trilateral meeting with Syrian, Iraqi counterparts in Tehran, followed by visits of Syrian PM Halqi, speaker of Iraqi council of representatives Salim al-Jabouri and Turkish FM Çavuşoğlu.

- Ali Vaez, [“Iran Nuclear Talks: The Beginning of the Endgame?”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 11 Dec. 2014.
- [“Iran honors nuclear deal with powers, IAEA report shows”](#), Reuters, 19 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°43, *Iran Nuclear Talks: The Fog Recedes*, 10 December 2014. When twelve months of intense negotiations between Iran and the P5+1/EU3+3 ended with yet another extension, sceptics saw this as confirmation that the talks are doomed. But it would be as grave a mistake to underestimate the real progress as to overstate the chances of ultimate success. A landmark agreement is still within reach if both sides adopt more flexible postures on enrichment capacity and sanctions relief.

➔ **Iraq** Battle against Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) continued in central, northern Iraq: IS advanced in Anbar province including capturing town of al-Wafa 13 Dec; Kurdish forces claimed advances in north including breaking siege of Sinjar mountain freeing hundreds of trapped Yazidis 18 Dec. U.S. same day claimed three senior IS leaders killed in coalition airstrikes over past month, including deputy to group's leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Doubts persisted about U.S. approach to IS despite Pentagon late Nov revealing plans to spend \$24.1mn on training and arming Sunni tribes with light weapons; observers pointed to need for combination with increased Sunni political participation, reinstatement of state services for Sunnis in IS-controlled areas. PM Abadi 1 Dec visited Brussels, requested further NATO training assistance; former PM Maliki next day met Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Lebanon, underscoring Iraq's continued alignment with Iran, Shiite allies. IS executions of anti-IS Sunni tribesmen continued, including sixteen members of Albu Nimr tribe reported killed 6 Dec in Anbar. Deadly bombings continued in and around Baghdad including at least 38 anti-IS Sunni fighters reported killed by suicide bomber 24 Dec. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Baghdad central govt 2 Dec reached compromise in oil dispute despite continued disagreement on hydrocarbons law: KRG to hand over 250,000 barrels per day (bpd) to be sold by Baghdad, 300,000 bpd to flow through pipeline connecting KRG to Turkey; govt to resume outstanding payment of 17% of national budget to KRG.

- ["Iraqi Kurds retake more ground from ISIL"](#), Al Jazeera, 20 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Yemen** Northern Huthis continued expansion, directly challenging President Hadi and authority of new govt, while further galvanising southern calls for independence. Huthis continued push to consolidate power in north: leader Abdulmalik al-Huthi 15 Dec called President Hadi "umbrella for corruption", demanded Huthis be allowed to oversee state finances. Huthi supporters subsequently tightened control of Sanaa, prevented newly appointed chief of staff from entering defence ministry; 16 Dec dismissed editor of main state news outlet; 17 Dec stormed Central Bank, Civil Status and Registration building and nationally owned Safer oil company. PM Bahah same day threatened to resign along with rest of govt. Parliament 18 Dec passed vote of confidence in favour of govt. Huthis mid-month seized northern city Arhab, stronghold of Sunni Islamist party Islah, after intense clashes; tightened control over strategic Red Sea port of Hodeidah, including dismissing governor and port facility director. Clashes between Huthis and al-Qaeda (AQAP) militants continued in Baydah province's Radaa city; dozens killed in car bombings targeting Huthis 16 Dec, including fifteen school-girls. Suicide bomber 31 Dec killed dozens at Huthi-organised religious celebration in Ibb city. Independence protests continued in south; army 15 Dec killed separatist leader in Aden city. American and South African hostage held by AQAP killed along with at least eleven others during U.S. rescue attempt 6 Dec in Shebwa province; AQAP blamed deaths on U.S., launched attack on air force base outside Aden known for sup-

port of U.S. drone operations. Saudi Arabia continued withholding aid due to Huthi expansion, raising fears of impending govt financial collapse.

- April Longley Alley, [“Yemen’s Houthi Takeover”](#), Middle East Institute, 22 Dec. 2014.
- [“Yemeni premier suggests he could resign as Houthis tighten grip”](#), Reuters, 17 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** Militants 14 Dec shot dead policeman near majority Shia eastern town of Awamiya; four suspects, one bystander reported killed in police raid 20 Dec. Supporters of jihadi group Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL) early Dec claimed late Nov non-fatal shooting of Danish citizen in Riyadh; three suspects arrested 11 Dec.

- [“Islamic State followers say they were behind Riyadh shooting”](#), Reuters, 2 Dec. 2014.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Govt continued to toughen stance on illegal immigrants, began repatriation of some 3,000 Nigerien migrants. Defence ministry 2 Dec announced army arrested over 50 foreign smugglers near Niger border. Security forces late Dec reportedly killed Gouri Abdelmalek, leader of Jund al Khilafa militant group responsible for Sept kidnapping and beheading of French tourist.

- [“Algeria border woes affect region”](#), Maghrebica, 12 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Egypt** Govt 10 Dec finished drafting electoral districting law after five-month delay; political parties not consulted. Election commission expected to announce elections timetable within weeks after President Sisi issued law 23 Dec. Political parties criticised law, including for favouring return of Mubarak-era National Democratic Party members. Military prosecutors early Dec referred at least 820 to military trials in Ismailia, Beheira and Minya, signifying marked shift toward using military justice system. Sentencing related to Aug 2013 violence following ouster of former President Morsi continued: court 2 Dec sentenced 185 Muslim Brotherhood (MB) supporters to death over attack on Cairo police station; seven Islamist militants sentenced to death 6 Dec over attack on police near Israeli border. MB supporter reported killed in clash with police 12 Dec in northern province Kafr al-Sheikh. New Sinai-based militant group Katibat al-Rabat al-Jihadiya 15 Dec announced split from Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM) due to disagreement over ABM’s mid-Nov pledge of allegiance to Islamic State (IS, formerly ISIL). Police 21 Dec reportedly killed five ABM militants in Nile Delta’s al-Sharqia district; two soldiers killed in bomb attack in northern Sinai 25 Dec. Two police, two gunmen killed in shootings in Cairo and Alexandria late Dec.

- [“Parties concerned over Egypt’s draft parliamentary constituencies law”](#), Ahram Online, 10 Dec. 2014.

↓ **Libya** Conflict between Libya's two rival political bodies and their military allies intensified, with heavy clashes and multiple new frontlines emerging across country. Coalition of fighters from Misrata, key component of Tripoli-based Libya Dawn coalition, along with fighters from Awlad Suleiman tribe and Ansar Sharia, 13 Dec attacked forces allied with Tobruk-based parliament in eastern Sirt basin in bid to take control of Sidra and Ras Lanuf oil export terminals. Sidra's oil storage tanks caught fire following 26 Dec fighting; international help requested to extinguish fire. Tebu and Tuareg gunmen, allied with Tobruk parliament and Libya Dawn respectively, clashed repeatedly in south throughout month. Libya Dawn fought pro-Tobruk armed groups rebranded "Libyan National Army" (LNA) in west for control of Ras al-Jdeir border post with Tunisia and al-Witiya airbase. Dozens killed in fighting in west and Benghazi; at least 30 killed in oil terminal clashes. UN-sponsored political dialogue meeting scheduled 9 Dec again postponed.

- ["Hundreds of civilians killed in Libya fighting as crisis deepens: UN"](#), Reuters, 23 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Mauritania** Govt ministers, military officials and other representatives 15 Dec met senior NATO officials in Nouakchott to discuss terrorism, illegal trafficking and other regional security issues.

- ["Mauritania strengthens partnership with NATO"](#), Maghrebia, 19 Dec. 2014.

➔ **Tunisia** Beji Caid Essebsi, leader of secular party Nida Tounes, won second round of presidential elections 19-21 Dec with 55.68% of vote, sworn in 31 Dec. Poll polarised country, sparking protests in south after Essebsi late Nov claimed incumbent candidate Moncef Marzouki's campaign and electoral base driven by Islamists and Salafi jihadis. Nida Tounes' Mohamed Ennaceur elected parliament speaker. Security forces 14 Dec reportedly arrested seven militants in Kebili, another five arrested in Kasserine.

- ["Essebsi wins Tunisia's presidency"](#), Al Arabiya, 21 Dec. 2014.

New Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Briefing N°44, [Tunisia's Elections: Old Wounds, New Fears](#), 19 December 2014. Tunisia's presidential election highlights the multiple divides that trouble the country and region. Unless the winner governs as a truly national leader, representing all Tunisians and not just his base, current tensions could escalate into violence.
