

CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts
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December 2015 – Trends

- ↓ **Deteriorated situations**
[Afghanistan](#), [Burundi](#), [Djibouti](#), [Ethiopia](#), [Niger](#)
- ↑ **Improved situations**

January 2016 – Watchlist

- 💣 **Conflict risk alerts**
[Burundi](#)
- ☺ **Conflict resolution opportunities**
[Libya](#)

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.

Table of Contents

AFRICA	3
Central Africa	3
Horn of Africa	4
Southern Africa	6
West Africa	7
ASIA	10
North East Asia	10
South Asia	11
South East Asia	14
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	17
Balkans	17
Caucasus	17
Eastern Europe	19
Western Europe/Mediterranean	19
Central Asia	20
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN	22
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA	25
Eastern Mediterranean	25
Gulf	26
North Africa	28

Africa

Central Africa

📍🇸🇩 **Burundi** Violence in Bujumbura dramatically intensified 11 Dec with coordinated attack on three military camps by unidentified armed insurgents. Security forces swiftly retaliated, army announced 87 killed including eight members of security forces; local sources put death toll at nearly 200 with reports of abuses including extrajudicial executions by security services. Incident prompted international outcry; AU Peace and Security Council 17 Dec decided to deploy 500-strong AU Prevention and Protection Mission (MAPROBU); President Nkurunziza said Burundians would fight any foreign troops. Rebel groups 23 Dec announced formation of “Republican Forces of Burundi (FOREBU)” to oust Nkurunziza. AU called for both govt and opposition to cooperate with peace talks, next round scheduled for 6 Jan. Trial of 28 accused of involvement in May coup attempt began mid-Dec.

- Crisis Group Statement, [“Statement on the AU Authorisation of a Peace Mission to Burundi”](#), 18 Dec. 2015.
- [“Burundians will fight against any AU peacekeepers: president”](#), Reuters, 30 Dec. 2015.

➡ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) attacks in Far North continued killing dozens, including at least seven killed and 27 wounded 11 Dec in attack on Kolofata. Govt early Dec said over 100 BH militants killed, some 900 hostages freed in multinational operation late Nov.

- [“At least 100 Boko Haram militants killed by Cameroon army”](#), *Guardian*, 2 Dec. 2015.

➡ **Central African Republic** Presidential and legislative elections held peacefully 30 Dec after three-day delay due to logistical difficulties. Transitional Constitutional Court 8 Dec rejected 30 candidate applications for presidential vote including former President François Bozizé, anti-balaka leader Patrice Edouard Ngaissona and businessman Amine Michel; Bozizé accused court of banning him because of foreign pressure; demonstrators 12 Dec protested court’s invalidation of Ngaissona’s candidacy. Some 90% approved constitution in constitutional referendum held 13 Dec amid significant technical and logistical challenges. Violence erupted across country same day including in Bangui’s PK5 district where clashes erupted after MINUSCA peacekeepers came under fire, armed men launched repeated attacks in attempt to block vote. Ex-Seleka rebel and current leader of Front patriotique pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC) Nouredine Adam 7 Dec said he would not allow elections to take place in Kaga Bandoro region under his control, 14 Dec proclaimed “Republic of Logone” and said he will seek independence.

- [“War-torn Central African Republic bids for peace in key vote”](#), Bloomberg, 30 Dec. 2015.

➡ **Chad** Boko Haram continued to launch deadly attacks despite strengthening of security measures in Lake Chad region and deployment of significant military forces in area. At least 27 killed and 130 injured 5 Dec when four female suicide bombers targeted market on Koulfoua island. Trade Unions 8 Dec called strike to protest non-payment of salaries; student protests erupted in Pala, SW, violently repressed by secu-

rity forces; students in Abéché in east protested 9 Dec against one-month interruption of classes triggering violent clashes with police. As Chad's economy struggles, IMF 15 Dec approved immediate disbursement of \$28.7mn credit facility; African Development Bank 10 Dec announced \$18mn funding to finance project to support public finances reforms; World Bank same day announced \$50mn pledge to finance budget consolidation program. Opposition leader Saleh Kebzabo late Dec called for political dialogue ahead of April 2016 elections in order to organise credible polls.

- ["Chad reels after suicide bombers target island markets"](#), *Guardian*, 5 Dec. 2015.

➔ **DR Congo** President Kabila gave State of Union speech 15 Dec amid continued political tension, called for support for national dialogue, threatened opposition parties for rejecting talks. Over 27 high-profile Congolese figures, including former governor of Katanga province Moïse Katumbi, 19 Dec formed coalition "Citizen Front 2016" to prevent Kabila running for a third term. Katumbi 10 Dec met with Félix Tshisekedi, international spokesman for opposition Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS), in Paris to discuss upcoming elections. Month saw continued Allied Defence Forces (ADF) activity in Oicha Eringeti area: four killed 13 Dec; group of special envoys from UN, AU, EU and U.S. mid-Dec visited Beni, called for resumption of collaboration between MONUSCO and Congolese armed forces (FARDC); Kabila 19 Dec promised to neutralise ADF rebels. UN 29 Dec appointed South African commander Derick Mbuyiselo Mgwebi head of MONUSCO. International Criminal Court 19 Dec handed over convicted warlords Germain Katanga and Thomas Lubanga to authorities.

- ["Rights abuses likely to undermine Congo poll credibility: U.N."](#), Reuters, 8 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Rwanda** Referendum on constitutional amendment that would allow President Kagame to run for third term held 18 Dec; large majority voted in favour of amendment, with electoral commission reporting 98% of voters supported the change; EU and U.S. condemned vote.

- ["Rwanda votes to give President Paul Kagame right to rule until 2034"](#), *Guardian*, 20 Dec. 2015.

Horn of Africa

↓ **Djibouti** Govt crackdown on opposition followed President Ismail Omar Guelleh's 3 Dec announcement of candidacy for fourth term: peaceful protests against Guelleh's candidacy held 14 Dec in capital; some 50 opposition members 13-16 Dec arrested in Djibouti city. Nineteen reportedly killed, dozens wounded 21 Dec in govt raid on religious gathering in capital; govt said nine killed, violence was in response to attack on security forces.

- ["Up to 19 killed in Djibouti violence"](#), VOA, 21 Dec. 2015.

↓ **Ethiopia** Protests against govt plan to expand Addis Ababa erupted in Oromiya region: some 75 civilians and four police reportedly killed in clashes, hundreds injured and scores arrested throughout month. Ten members of opposition Ginbot-7, designated as terrorist organisation by state, arrested after reported shootout with police 9 Dec in Gonder town. Grenade attack on Grand Anwar Mosque in capital 11 Dec injured 24. Govt early month warned number of people suffering food insecurity due to

drought now ten million. Govt 29 Dec signed agreement with Sudan and Egypt on use of contractors, implementing declaration of principles of Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam.

- [“Ethiopia growth clashes with politics as Oromo protests rise”](#), Bloomberg, 16 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Kenya** Al-Shabaab militants continued to target Kenyan security forces in Mandera and Lamu counties with at least seven attacks and ten fatalities reported in Dec including two police officers killed 27 Dec in ambush on vehicles in Lamu; two killed and three wounded 21 Dec in attack on bus and lorry between Kotulo and Elwak. At least two killed, ten injured and hundreds displaced during 23-28 Dec intercommunal violence in Narok county; govt deployed security forces to area. President Kenyatta and Deputy President Ruto 15 Dec announced plan for new permanent coalition “Jubilee Party”. Electoral commission 21 Dec threatened boycott of elections over inadequate funding.

- [“Al-Shabaab claims responsibility for Lamu attack”](#), *The Star*, 17 Dec. 2015.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°114, [Kenya’s Somali North East: Devolution and Security](#), 17 Nov. 2015.

➔ **Somalia** National Consultative Forum 16 Dec issued conclusions on public consultations on process to form new govt in 2016: included preliminary election framework; detailed agreement to be finalised at 10 Jan conference on elections. Increased Al-Shabaab attacks continued including: assassination of journalist 3 Dec and senior intelligence officer 10 Dec in Mogadishu; one UN staff killed 14 Dec in capital; three killed, at least eight wounded 19 Dec in IED explosion in Mogadishu. Dozens killed as deadly clashes with Somali National Army (SNA) and AMISOM forces continued in Lower Shabelle, Hiiraan and Bay regions throughout month. Three militants including senior Al-Shabaab leader Abdirahman Sandhere killed 2 Dec, one 21 Dec in U.S. airstrikes. Senior militant leaders Muhammad Ferey, Muhammad Ibrahim Dhubow surrendered late month. Govt 7 Dec confirmed 6 Nov surrender of U.S.-born Al-Shabaab member following increasingly visible rift within group between supporters of al-Qaeda and Islamic State (IS); video published online 7 Dec again called for Al-Shabaab members to join IS. Tensions over federal state formation in Galkayo reduced with ceasefire signed 5 Dec by Galmudug and Puntland officials. Breakaway Upper Bakool region formed 25 Dec. At least twenty killed 12 Dec in inter-clan clash in Beledweyne, Hiiraan, reportedly sparked by tensions over pastoral resources; peace agreement signed 18 Dec; some ten killed 31 Dec. Some 30 killed 12-20 Dec in clashes between rival militias in Lower Shabelle, Puntland regions.

- Zakaria Yusuf and Abdul Khalif, [“Galkayo and Somalia’s Dangerous Faultlines”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 10 Dec. 2015.
- [“Somali leaders reach agreement on election framework”](#), VOA, 16 Dec. 2015.

➔ **South Sudan** Implementation of peace deal began in South Sudan: SPLM/A-IO advance delegation led by chief negotiator Taban Deng Gai 21 Dec arrived in Juba; parties held first meetings of joint peace institutions. Machar 6 Dec unilaterally announced formation of a political party structure amid ongoing debates over whether the SPLM/A-IO should rejoin SPLM or form independent party; Dhieu Mathok appointed Sec Gen, Machar’s wife Angelina Teny appointed chairperson of security and defence committee. Sporadic, low-level conflict continued, largely in Equatoria region.

UNSC 15 Dec extended UNMISS mandate to July 2016, authorising use of drones. In violation of peace deal, president Kiir 24 Dec created 28 states by decree and appointed governors, dissolved previous ten states; announcement was condemned by SPLM/A-IO and alliance of eighteen political parties. Govt 24 Dec announced memorandum of understanding for negotiation with South Sudan Armed Forces/Federal Democratic Party (SSAF/FDP), breakaway group from the SPLM/A-IO, in bid to undermine Machar's SPLM/A-IO.

- Crisis Group Statement, "[South Sudan: On the Brink of Renewed War](#)", 17 Dec. 2015.
- "[S. Sudan welcomes members of SPLM-IO advance team](#)", Sudan Tribune, 21 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Sudan** Govt, opposition claimed AU-supported informal talks 16-18 Dec made some progress, main issues still unclear; both sides agreed to resume discussions this month. SPLM-N and Sudanese Congress Party (SCoP) 26 Dec agreed to boycott the forthcoming National Dialogue preparatory meeting if "Sudan Call" opposition group formed late 2014 is excluded. Govt 31 Dec announced National Dialogue (ND) extension until 10 Feb, ceasefire until 31 Jan; opposition Darfuri New Justice and Equality Movement (NJEM) 20 Dec joined ND; SPLM-N 19 Dec denied plans to join. Fighting between govt and rebels continued in Blue Nile and S Kordofan. Govt forces 13 Dec captured Sudan Liberation Movement-Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM-AW) spokesperson in central Darfur; govt 21 Dec suspended execution of seven members of opposition Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).

- "[SPLM-N rebels repulse fresh government attack in Blue Nile: spokesperson](#)", Sudan Tribune, 20 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Uganda** At least seventeen injured 13 Dec in clashes between supporters of President Museveni and pro-Mbabazi youth in Ntungamo; twenty arrested 21 Dec at Mbabazi party headquarters. Voters' register released 15 Dec caused public controversy over its legality and accuracy, national ID registration, nomination of candidates. Clashes erupted 5 Dec along disputed border with South Sudan after some 300 SPLA soldiers crossed border into Uganda.

- "[Ugandan police arrest supporters of opposition presidential candidate](#)", The Star, 22 Dec. 2015.

Southern Africa

➔ **Madagascar** Senatorial elections held peacefully 29 Dec; electoral commission reported high voter turnout. Administrative tribunal tasked with assessing July municipal election results 18 Dec cancelled election results in Ifanaria community of Ikongo district amid ongoing review of communal poll results. Parliament 14 Dec passed 2016 budget despite initial opposition threats to vote against or boycott session.

- "[Sénatoriales à Madagascar: un début de campagne dans la polémique](#)", RFI, 8 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Mozambique** Parliament 7 Dec rejected opposition Renamo's proposed constitutional amendment to allow leader Dhlakama to appoint governors in provinces where he won most votes in Oct 2014 presidential election. In first media interview since se-

curity forces forcefully disarmed his bodyguards in Oct, Dhlakama 17 Dec threatened to “democratically” seize control of six northern and central provinces, Sofala, Manica, Zambezia, Tete, Nampula and Niassa, from March 2016. Dhlakama ruled out dialogue with President Nyusi, stating all channels had been suspended. Margarida Talapa, head of ruling Frelimo’s parliamentary group, 17 Dec urged Renamo deputies to persuade Dhlakama to accept President Nyusi’s repeated invitations for dialogue.

- [“Once again, Dhlakama threatens to seize provinces”](#), Agencia de Informacao de Mocambique, 17 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Zimbabwe** Divisions within ruling ZANU-PF persisted with series of no confidence votes against VP Mnangagwa’s supporters including: 7 Dec ouster of two ZANU-PF women’s league national executive members, Esphinah Nhari and Monica Mutsvangwa; ZANU-PF member Chris Mutsangwa ousted 14 Dec in no confidence vote. Opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leader Morgan Tsvangirai 21 Dec claimed President Mugabe had been replaced by wife Grace Mugabe in “palace coup”. Rift between Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa and Indigenisation Minister Patrick Zhuwao persisted over indigenisation regulations for foreign owned companies.

- [“VP Mnangagwa allies booted from Zanu-PF women’s league”](#), New Zimbabwe, 8 Dec. 2015.

West Africa

➔ **Burkina Faso** President-elect Roch Marc Christian Kaboré sworn in 29 Dec. Negotiations to form coalition govt began early-Dec following 29 Nov presidential elections: Movement of People for Progress (MPP) won 55 National Assembly seats; runner-up opposition Union for Progress and Change (UPC), with 33 seats, and second runner-up former ruling party Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP) with eighteen seats form main opposition. MPP first VP Dalif Siallo elected speaker of National Assembly 30 Dec. Additional audio recordings of plans for Sept coup allegedly involving coup leader General Diendéré, former FM Djibril Bassolé and Ivorian National Assembly speaker Guillaume Soro leaked throughout month; PM Zida 2 Dec publicly said recordings were authentic. Diendéré indicted for murder 6 Dec and international arrest warrant issued 4 Dec against former President Blaise Compaoré, in exile in Côte d’Ivoire, as part of investigation into assassination of former President Sankara. Govt 25 Dec said attempted prison break to free Diendéré and Bassolé foiled. Three presidential guard (RSP) members indicted and detained 13 Dec in connection to murder of journalist Norbert Zongo. Commission on army reform set up 8 Dec with six-month mandate to produce plan for strategic army reform for 2017-2022.

- [“Kaboré président... et maintenant?”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 10 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Côte d’Ivoire** French judge 5 Dec issued warrant against Ivoirian National Assembly speaker Guillaume Soro following his repeated refusal to answer summons in case lodged by Michel Gbagbo, son of former President Laurent Gbagbo, for illegal detention and ill-treatment in 2011. Govt 8 Dec protested warrant, said Soro had diplomatic immunity; opposition leader Pascal Affi Nguessan 16 Dec called for Soro’s resignation. Unidentified gunmen 2 Dec attacked two military camps in Olodio in SW near

Liberian border, seven soldiers and four attackers killed; three Ivoirian suspects arrested 15 Dec in refugee camp in Liberia. Gunmen 27 Dec attacked army post in Nougoua, near Ghanaian border; no casualties reported.

- Vincent Foucher and Cynthia Ohayon, [“En Guinée et en Côte d’Ivoire, du KO électoral au KO institutionnel”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 8 Dec. 2015.
- [“Guillaume Soro dénonce un ‘outrage’ de la juge française”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 18 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Guinea** President Condé inaugurated 14 and 21 Dec in two-pronged ceremony. PM Fofana 23 Dec resigned to make way for new cabinet; Condé 29 Dec named Mamady Youla as new PM. Govt 7 Dec dismissed five high-ranking economic and education officials for “gross misconduct” in ongoing govt clean-up. Divisions within opposition persisted: Sidya Touré, second-runner up in presidential polls who had initially rejected election results, 7 Dec announced alliance with Condé.

- Vincent Foucher and Cynthia Ohayon, [“En Guinée et en Côte d’Ivoire, du KO électoral au KO institutionnel”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 8 Dec. 2015.
- [“Nouveau gouvernement en Guinée: quels sont les ministres susceptibles d’être reconduits?”](#), *Africaguinée.com*, 9 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Guinea-Bissau** PM Correia 11 Dec presented new govt program amid ongoing tensions with President Vaz, following month-long dispute over composition of govt. Correia failed to obtain majority in 23 Dec parliamentary vote, as opposition Party for Social Renewal (PRS) and 15 MPs of ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) abstained. Failure of second vote, due within two weeks, would result in fall of government.

- [“Le Premier ministre n’obtient pas la majorité au Parlement”](#), *RFI*, 25 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Liberia** Final two Ebola patients discharged 3 Dec from hospital but tensions within communities over virus persisted: govt 14 Dec reported some seventeen suspected Ebola patients missing after attack on treatment centre in Monrovia. Three Ivoirian citizens arrested 15 Dec in refugee camp in Liberia, on charges of recruiting fighters in connection with 2 Dec attack on Ivoirian military base.

- [“Liberia discharges last two Ebola cases: official”](#), *AFP*, 4 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Mali** Fighting between Coalition of Azawad Movements (CMA) and pro-govt armed groups halted following mid-Oct Anéfis peace agreement; campaigns and reconciliation meetings continued throughout month to consolidate and extend peace. Members of Fulani self-defence group Ganda Izo 8 Dec began patrolling Menaka city following mid-Nov clashes between on the one hand Fulani and alleged affiliates of Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), and Daoussak communities on the other. Implementation of Bamako peace accords remains stalled. Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) 2 Dec confirmed re-alignment with al-Murabitun, one of two groups claiming responsibility for 20 Nov Bamako attack, following 2012 split between al-Murabitun leader Mokhtar Belmokhtar and AQIM over leadership feud. French army 20 Dec launched operation against al-Murabitun militants near Menaka, some ten militants captured or killed. Pro-govt armed groups alleged operation caused death of several of their members. Radical Islamist group Ansar Eddine 25 Dec claimed responsibility for 24 Dec attack against CMA position in Talandahaq, Kidal

region; accused militants from armed group Azawad Liberation National Movement (MNLA), part of CMA, of collaborating with French forces.

- [“Les islamistes radicaux de plus en plus visibles dans le Nord”](#), RFI, 21 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°115, [Mali: Peace from Below?](#), 14 Dec. 2015. Hesitant steps toward peace in Mali have been helped by the recent pacts signed in Anefis by pro-government armed groups and by rebel representatives. While not sufficient or without risks, they are rooted in local initiatives and tackle issues left out of June’s Bamako accord. This offers a serious opportunity to put the peace process back on track.

↓ **Niger** President Issoufou 17 Dec announced a foiled coup attempt following 15-16 Dec arrest of four high-ranking military officers; civilians including politicians and journalists also arrested in following days. Disagreements between govt and opposition intensified ahead of planned Feb presidential elections. Opposition 7 Dec refused to recognise expertise of ECOWAS envoy Bakary Fofana, appointed early-Dec to assess quality of electoral process following accusations by opposition of pro-govt bias within Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI), said his alleged links with govt made him partial and unreliable. Govt 12 Dec offered to create joint electoral register audit committee (CAFE); opposition 15 Dec left CAFE, asked for independent and credible international agency to assess electoral process. Opposition welcomed 23 Dec CENI decision to request electoral monitoring assistance from the International Organisation of La Francophonie (OIF). Attacks by radical Islamist group Boko Haram (BH) decreased, but insecurity persisted in SE.

- [“9 militaires arrêtés après un coup d’Etat déjoué”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 20 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Nigeria** Clashes 12-13 Dec in Zaria, Kaduna state between soldiers and members of Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN); over 100 killed including senior IMN members. Army alleged clash triggered by IMN attempt to assassinate chief of army staff Lt Gen Tukur Buratai; IMN denied charge, said military assault unprovoked and premeditated. Killings sparked protests in several northern cities and drew international condemnation. IMN 17 Dec issued five preconditions for truce with govt including handover of wounded and detained leader Sheikh Zakzaky. Security forces reported continued progress in campaign against Boko Haram (BH); President Buhari 6 Dec said Dec deadline to end insurgency was only “guide” and 24 Dec said BH had been “technically” defeated. BH attacks continued with raids on Borno state villages and suicide bombings in state capital, Maiduguri, and in Madagali, Adamawa state, over 100 civilians killed. Demonstrations in SE by pro-Biafra separatist youth demanding release of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) leader Nnamdi Kanu escalated: thousands of protesters 2 Dec blocked Niger Bridge at Onitsha, Anambra state; at least eight protesters and two policemen killed. Federal High Court 17 Dec ordered Kanu’s immediate and unconditional release but federal govt 18 Dec filed new six-count charge including allegations of treasonable felony, maintaining unlawful society and illegal possession of items.

- Nnamdi Obasi, [“New Risks on Nigeria’s Shiite Fault Line”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 16 Dec. 2015.
- Nnamdi Obasi, [“Nigeria’s Biafran Separatist Upsurge”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 4 Dec. 2015.
- [“Shiite Muslim sect alleges massacre by Nigeria’s military”](#), *New York Times*, 15 Dec. 2015.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China (internal)** Govt passed new anti-terror legislation late Dec creating national intelligence centre for counter-terrorism and increasing ability to monitor and decrypt online activity.

- [“China approves wide-ranging counter terrorism law”](#), CNN, 28 Dec. 2015.

➔ **China/Japan** Japanese officials 18 Dec confirmed Tokyo will position anti-ship and anti-aircraft missile batteries along 200 islands in East China Sea (ECS) and increase military personnel in area to almost 10,000 over five years, in response to threat from China. Chinese and Japanese officials met in Xiamen, China 7-9 Dec to discuss early implementation of agreed aerial and maritime contact mechanism; agreed to strengthen cooperation and exchanges, but few concrete results. Australian PM Turnbull visited Japan 18 Dec, confirmed agreement to ease cooperation between their armed forces: issued joint statement calling for halt to land-reclamation activities in South China Sea. Japan 30 Dec reported sighting of armed Chinese coastguard ship near disputed islands in ECS.

- [“Japan steps up military presence in East China Sea”](#), *Guardian*, 18 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Korean Peninsula** U.S.-Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies 3 Dec issued report concluding from satellite photos that new work is being carried out on tunnel at DPRK’s Punggye-ri nuclear testing site. U.S., ROK and Japanese nuclear envoys met 4 Dec to discuss denuclearisation of peninsula. U.S. implemented new sanctions 8 Dec, targeting Strategic Rocket Force of Korean People’s Army, also six individuals, three Pyongyang-based shipping firms. Official DPRK news agency 10 Dec reported leader Kim Jong-un declared country has developed hydrogen bomb, currently preparing for tests; claim treated with scepticism. DPRK and ROK 11 Dec held vice-ministerial talks in DPRK, marking first inter-govt dialogue since Aug deal on defusing tension; meeting ended without joint statement. Former secretary of Korean Worker’s Party Choe Ryong Hae reportedly sent to work in mines for “ideological re-education”. DPRK state media reported top aide to Kim Jong-un and key negotiator with ROK Kim Yang Gon killed in traffic accident 29 Dec. UNGA 17 Dec adopted resolution condemning DPRK’s human rights record, further encouraging UNSC to refer country to International Criminal Court. UNSC 10 Dec again discussed DPRK rights situation, despite Chinese opposition.

- [“North Korea’s Kim Jong-un ‘in H-bomb claim’”](#), BBC, 10 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** U.S. 16 Dec authorised \$1.83bn weapons sale to Taiwan, first in four years, despite strong opposition from China. U.S. said package consists almost exclusively of defensive weapons. China called deal “serious violation of international laws ... as well as China’s territory and security interest”, announced sanctions against companies involved in sale.

- [“China protests sale of U.S. arms to Taiwan”](#), *New York Times*, 17 Dec. 2015.

South Asia

♦ **Afghanistan** Fighting raged between govt forces and Taliban in Helmand province. Deputy governor of Helmand 20 Dec said province “on the brink” of Taliban takeover; also reported Taliban had taken control of Sangin district. UK 22 Dec announced deployment of troops to Helmand in advisory role, U.S. 23 Dec launched air-strikes in Sangin district. Taliban 8-9 Dec attacked airport and military base in Kandahar, leaving over 40 killed; 11-12 Dec attacked Spanish embassy guesthouse, killing two Spanish security officials, four police. Six U.S. troops killed by suicide bomber near Bagram air base 21 Dec; three rockets hit govt area of Kabul same day. New Taliban leader Mullah Akhtar Mansour reportedly wounded in argument with rival commanders in Quetta, Pakistan 2 Dec; Taliban denied, released audio message reportedly of Mansour 5 Dec. Clashes reported between Taliban factions in Shindand district 8 Dec, at least 54 reported killed. Senior U.S. commander Gen. John Campbell 15 Dec warned of Islamic State activity in Jalalabad, Nangarhar; Attending “Heart of Asia” conference in Islamabad 8-9 Dec, President Ghani appealed to neighbours to help contain terrorism. Meeting in Paris 1 Dec, Ghani and Pakistani PM Sharif agreed to resume talks with Taliban. National Directorate of Security chief resigned 10 Dec over disagreement with Ghani on forging closer ties with Pakistan. Pakistan army chief Raheel Sharif held talks in Kabul on ways to revive talks with Taliban 27 Dec. One killed, thirteen wounded in Kabul suicide attack 28 Dec. Ghani pledged to hold parliamentary and district council elections in 2016. First new opposition party in fourteen years “Council of Protection and Stability in Afghanistan” formed 18 Dec.

- [“Taliban take control of large parts of Sangin”](#), *Guardian*, 21 Dec. 2015.

♦ **Bangladesh** Govt continued clampdown on dissent, including with ban on several social media sites. During Facebook ban police arrested three for making “derogatory” remarks against govt; ban lifted 10 Dec, paramilitary Rapid Action Battalion same day arrested administrator of satirical Facebook page Refayet Ahmed for “campaigning against the government and state”, released four days later. Further signs of rising extremism, with two temples in northern district Dinajpur attacked 5 and 10 Dec; former attack involved timed bomb, two shot dead in latter. At least six including three naval officers wounded following two explosions at two mosques at Chittagong naval base 18 Dec; two men arrested. Alleged Islamist extremist Jamaat-ul-Mujahedin Bangladesh (JMB) member 8 Dec admitted Oct killing of Japanese national; another JMB member reportedly admitted to Nov attack on Italian priest. Security Forces arrested seven suspected JMB militants in Dhaka 24 Dec; 28 Dec killed two alleged JMB militants in raid outside Dhaka. Police 15 Dec attributed recent attacks including on foreigners and Hindu temples to JMB, claimed no evidence of Islamic State (IS) link despite IS public claims of responsibility. Calls 16 Dec by several civil society organisations for Bangladesh to cut bilateral ties after Pakistan dismissed claims of genocide during 1971 war of independence from Pakistan. Dhaka-based Pakistani diplomat withdrawn 23 Dec after local media reported links to detained JMB operative; Pakistan said charges “baseless”.

- [“Nine injured in attack on Hindu temple in Bangladesh – police”](#), Reuters, 11 Dec. 2015.

► **India (non-Kashmir)** In continued clashes between security forces and Maoists, five security personnel wounded in Maoist ambush in Sukma district, Chhattisgarh 9 Dec; police 17 Dec killed alleged commander of People's Liberation Front of India. Scores of Maoists reportedly surrendered to police in Bastar region. Naxals 16 Dec reportedly killed two civilians in Rajnandgaon district, Chhattisgarh. Two villagers reported killed by Maoists in Malkangari district 25 Dec. New Delhi police 17 Dec arrested three suspected members of al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent including alleged leader.

- ["Mass surrender of Maoists, 70 give up gun"](#), *Times of India*, 25 Dec. 2015.

► **Kashmir** Indian and Pakistani national security advisers met in Bangkok 6 Dec, discussed peace and security, terrorism, Kashmir, Line of Control (LoC). Indian FM Sushma Swaraj 8-9 Dec attended conference in Islamabad in first visit by Indian diplomat to Pakistan in three years; issued joint statement saying both countries "condemned terrorism and resolved to cooperate to eliminate it", agreed to "Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue". Indian PM Modi paid surprise visit to Pakistan PM Sharif's Lahore residence via Kabul 25 Dec, first by an Indian leader in almost twelve years; agreed to foreign secretaries meeting mid Jan. Pakistan defence secretary Alam Khattak 4 Dec told Senate's standing committee on defence India had violated ceasefire 247 times since PM Modi's election in May 2014: 163 along LoC and 84 along Working Boundary; resulted in at least 39 Pakistani civilians killed, 150 wounded. One civilian and six Indian security officials injured in terrorist attack on Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) convoy 7 Dec in Anantnag district; two militants killed 8 Dec in clashes with police and CRPF in Pulwama district; Indian army reportedly prevented infiltration attempt 4 Dec in Poonch district, three guerrillas killed. Indian security forces 4 Dec launched anti-militancy operation in Kupwara district, two militants and soldier killed.

- ["Narendra Modi of India meets Pakistani Premier in surprise visit"](#), *New York Times*, 25 Dec. 2015.

► **Nepal** Protests against new constitution by Madhesi groups, disruption of imports across Indian border, and clashes between demonstrators and police continued along southern plains. Protesters 16 Dec attacked President Bidya Bhandari's motorcade in Dhanusha district. One protester killed in police firing 20 Dec in Rautahat district; at least 50 protest-related deaths since Aug. Veteran Madhesi leader Rajendra Mahato injured in 26 Dec clash with police. Madhesi leaders 5 Dec met Indian FM Sushma Swaraj in New Delhi, urged India to play diplomatic role in resolving crisis. Coalition of Madhesi parties criticised Constitution Amendment Bill tabled 15 Dec for not addressing demands regarding citizenship, proportional inclusion in state bodies, and redrawing of provincial boundaries; intensified protests beginning 18 Dec; rejected Govt's 20 Dec "ambiguous" three-point roadmap that included formation of political committee to resolve state restructuring dispute despite Indian Foreign Ministry welcoming govt decision. Amid ongoing criticism of UML-led govt over deteriorating humanitarian situation following April/May earthquakes, eight displaced people living in temporary shelters died as temperatures dropped throughout Dec; Reconstruction Authority Bill passed 16 Dec to expedite reconstruction work. Ruling-coalition member UCPN (Maoist) reportedly dissatisfied with PM Oli's 24 Dec cabinet expansion.

- ["Dousing the flames"](#), *Nepali Times*, 18 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Pakistan** Four men hanged 2 Dec for involvement in Dec 2014 Peshawar school attack, first executions in connection to attack. Attacks in FATA included: at least 23 suspected militants killed 15 Dec in airstrikes in Khyber Agency; bomb targeting Shias in Parachinar 13 Dec killed at least 22, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) and S Waziristan-based Ansar ul Mujahidin both claimed responsibility. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) police 12 Dec reportedly arrested over 500 for suspected terrorism links. At least 22 killed in suicide bomb in KPK's Mardan 29 Dec; Pakistani Taliban faction Jamaat-ul Ahrar claimed responsibility. Sindh's civil-military provincial apex committee 2 Dec announced creation of 30 anti-terrorism courts and hiring of 8,000 police and twenty prosecutors to support Karachi operation. Sindh assembly 16 Dec extended Rangers' policing powers in Karachi, though with conditions and limitations following intense criticism of Rangers' methods and overreach. Police 1 Dec killed four suspected militants in raid targeting al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent in S Punjab; 11 Dec killed five suspected LeJ members in Lahore. Nine suspected militants with alleged ties to Islamic State (IS) arrested in Punjab 28 Dec. Attacks on journalists continued, including grenade attacks on television network offices in Lahore 1 Dec injuring four, and 7 Dec attack in Punjab's Sargodha district. Lahore High Court 9 Dec acquitted Sunni extremist Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan's (SSP) Qari Muhammad Yousaf, overturning May 2015 sentence by anti-terrorism court. Balochistan govt 7 Dec extended paramilitary Corps' policing powers; continuing violence in province included: gunmen 8 Dec killed two National Party members in Khuzdar district; security forces 14 Dec killed at least thirteen suspected militants in Awaran district. Pakistan military 11 Dec test-fired intermediate range nuclear-capable ballistic missile.

- ["Sunni militants claim deadly attack at market in Pakistan"](#), *New York Times*, 13 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Sri Lanka** Govt's first budget passed 3 Dec with over two-thirds majority; addressed some serious fiscal and economic challenges, but widely perceived as transitional step toward deeper reforms. Responding to public pressure, govt 18 Dec agreed to withdraw legislation criminalising hate speech; civil society groups and Tamil National Alliance (TNA) objected to adoption of language resembling that of Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), used to imprison dissidents. Govt 17 Dec announced establishment of new secretariat for coordinating development of various "reconciliation mechanisms", including missing persons office and "truth, reconciliation and prevention of conflicts commission". Sri Lanka 10 Dec signed international convention on disappearances. Presidential commission on missing persons resumed public hearings in Jaffna mid Dec, amid new protests by affected families. Despite repeated promises and renewed hunger strikes by prisoners, no further releases of the more than 200 detainees held under PTA. Officials denied new allegations by Tamil politicians and activists of secret detention camps. Failure to release more military-occupied land has also fuelled discontent among Tamils in north; govt officials reiterated FM's 3 Dec pledge that further 6,000 acres would be released for resettlement, but without date/location. 19 Dec formation of "Tamil People's Council", composed of civil society and political party leaders and co-chaired by Northern Provincial Council Chief Minister C.V. Wigneswaran, seen as having potential to pose strong challenge to TNA.

- ["Body to coordinate reconciliation in Sri Lanka"](#), *The Hindu*, 18 Dec. 2015.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** Non-governmental organisations reported alleged killings and other abuses by security forces on day marking West Papuan Independence celebrations 1 Dec. Follows Nov release of West Papua activist Filep Karma, jailed eleven years for raising Morning Star flag. Three police reported killed by gunmen in attack on police station in Puncak district 27 Dec. President Widodo conducted official visit to Papua/West Papua 29-31 Dec. Guerrilla leader Din Minimi and over 100 former separatist fighters, reportedly splinter elements from Free Aceh Movement which signed peace agreement with govt in 2005, and accused of criminal activities including extortion over the past year, surrendered to Aceh authorities late Dec.

- [“Freed Papua activist vows to reinvigorate movement for independence from Indonesia”](#), Reuters, 1 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Myanmar** Following National League for Democracy (NLD)’s Nov electoral victory, party leader Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) met with president 2 Dec to discuss formation of transition teams to ensure smooth and efficient handover of responsibilities, and try to set precedent of constructive handover of power after future elections; govt and NLD transition teams established following week. ASSK also met commander-in-chief 2 Dec, without observers; content of discussion unknown, but mood afterward appeared positive. ASSK met with former military ruler Than Shwe 4 Dec, after which he signalled his support of ASSK. ASSK met with chief peace negotiator Aung Min 7 Dec for briefing on peace process. More generally, ASSK hinting she may keep some existing ministers on; and that some posts will go to non-Burmans; has told NLD MPs they should not expect to be appointed to executive. Election commission released final details on election 2 Dec, showing nationwide turnout of 69.7%, high variation across states. Following six-point agreement between Shan State Army-North (SSA-North) and govt late Nov security situation calm, though tensions remain; 6,000-10,000 villagers still displaced. Attack in main Kokang town Laukkai 27 Nov; no casualties reported. Several rounds of clashes between Ta’ang National Liberation Army (TNLA) and SSA-South after initial deadly shootout between them 27 Nov; tensions likely exacerbated by suspicions after SSA-South signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) mid-Oct and TNLA did not. Rapid movement on procedural follow-up to NCA, with framework agreement for next step, the political dialogue, agreed 15 Dec, in line with deadline included in NCA; political dialogue scheduled to start 12 Jan.

- [“After victory in Myanmar, Aung San Suu Kyi quietly shapes a transition”](#), *New York Times*, 21 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°147, [The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications](#), 9 Dec. 2015. Aung San Suu Kyi’s landslide electoral victory was a historic success for Myanmar. To meet the high expectations that resulted, the country’s new leaders will need to balance carefully ties with China with those with the West, credibly lead a fragile peace process and above all handle wisely their relations with a still-powerful army.

➔ **Philippines** Congress failed to pass proposed Basic Law on the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region (BLBAR) by 16 Dec when house adjourned, though did complete plenary debates. Despite widespread concerns that law now unlikely to be passed under President Aquino’s administration, speaker of parliament said he was hopeful that

BLBAR would be passed when congress resumes session 18 Jan, prior to long recess ahead of May 2016 national elections. Leaders of Moro rebel factions MILF and MNLF gathered in Mindanao mid-Dec to discuss concerns over Bangsamoro peace agreement, attempts to unify movements to increase pressure on govt to pass BLBAR. EU 9 Dec pledged continued support for peace process, alongside EUR5.5mn aid for peace-building in Bangsamoro region. Six people reported killed in MILF attack in Tulunan town, North Cotabato 8 Dec, police said clash motivated by longstanding land conflict. Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters reportedly killed nine villagers in south 26 Dec, while govt forces killed at least five rebels in Mindanao clashes. At least fifteen al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) rebels and three soldiers reported killed in clashes in Basilan mid-month; ten ASG and several soldiers reported killed in Jolo island clash 30 Dec.

- [“MILF gunmen attack Philippine village, 6 killed”](#), Mindanao Examiner, 8 Dec. 2015.

➔ **South China Sea** Beijing 19 Dec reported two U.S. B-52 bombers flew within two nautical miles of Chinese-built artificial island in Spratly islands 10 Dec, in what it called “serious military provocation”; U.S. said overflight unintentional. Australia mid-Dec confirmed it conducted freedom of navigation operations in SCS late Nov. Chinese FM 19 Dec urged countries outside region to steer clear, avoid aggravating tensions. U.S. 25 Nov announced it increased military aid to Philippines in 2015 to \$79mn from previously announced \$50mn. U.S. deployed first P-8 Poseidon surveillance plane to Singapore 7-14 Dec, following announcement of new defence cooperation agreement. At conclusion of Philippine legal argument to UN Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague 30 Nov, tribunal gave China until 1 Jan to comment on Philippines’ arguments. AP 6 Dec reported satellite photos show three additional Chinese airstrips under construction in SCS. Taiwan 12 Dec unveiled new lighthouse, harbour and memorial tablet declaring its sovereignty in disputed Spratly islands 12 Dec, prompting protest from Vietnam, which reiterated its sovereignty. Japanese and Indian PMs 12 Dec issued joint statement on SCS calling for countries to avoid unilateral actions that could inflame tensions. China conducted naval exercises in SCS mid-Dec. Indonesia 15 Dec announced plans to boost defense capabilities on Natuna Islands, whose EEZ overlaps with China’s nine-dash line.

- [“Are South China Sea tensions triggering an arms race?”](#), DW, 18 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Thailand** King Bhumibol Adulyadej appeared in public 14 Dec for first time since Sept 2015 to swear in new judges. Junta faced continued criticism for alleged graft in army-sponsored project to build park near Hua Hin to commemorate seven Thai kings. Soldiers 30 Nov arrested three United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) leaders as they were talking with reporters en route to park – first instance of open UDD defiance of military orders to avoid “political gatherings” since May 2014 coup. Soldiers 7 Dec halted train heading to Hua Hin to prevent group of student activists from reaching Rajapkahti Park; arrested 38 including group leader. Leaked police memo early Dec revealed Thai police received warning from Russia’s state security agency that ten Syrians linked to Islamic State could stage attacks in Thailand on targets associated with Russia and others, in Bangkok, Pattaya, and Phuket. Several casualties reported in ongoing insurgent attacks in Deep South. Internal Security Operations Command 4 Dec announced suspected militant died while being interrogated in

Pattani's Nong Chik district, third detainee to die in military custody in past two months.

- ["Royal park issues haunt Thai military"](#), Straits Times, 19 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°274, [Thailand's Lengthening Roadmap to Elections](#), 10 Dec. 2015. Thailand's military regime promised a return to democracy, but keeps prolonging its power by delaying general elections. Beyond a new constitution, Thailand needs a new social contract to resolve the crippling struggle between elected politicians and an unelected establishment that includes the army, bureaucracy and palace.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Bosnia** Crisis over Bosnian Serb leaders' demands for reform of Constitutional Court (CC) to remove foreign judges continued; Republika Srpska (RS) leader Milorad Dodik 1 Dec threatened to withdraw entity's representatives from state institutions if reforms not adopted in 120 days. RS 10 Dec announced it was suspending cooperation with state-level police and court in response to arrest of five Serbs for war crimes; signed agreement renewing cooperation 16 Dec following intense international criticism.

- ["Serb leader warns Bosnia could break up"](#), Balkan Insight, 2 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Kosovo** Opposition parties continued to disrupt parliament in protest over Aug EU-brokered agreement to set up Association of Serbian Municipalities. Opposition MPs set off further tear gas attacks in parliament 14 Dec, disrupting two sessions; opposition supporters clashed with police outside parliament. Police arrested more opposition MPs over attacks. Several govt-owned cars set on fire 12 Dec. U.S. Sec State Kerry 2 Dec said U.S. backs Aug agreement, urged opposition to use democratic methods to express its opposition. Constitutional Court 23 Dec endorsed Aug agreement, but said some parts of deal violate constitution. Two Serb homes and memorial in Gorazdevac village damaged by gunshots 7 Dec. EU decided against awarding Kosovo citizens visa-free travel status in 2016; govt called decision "insult".

- ["Kosovo opposition lawmakers release tear gas in parliament"](#), AP, 15 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Macedonia** Implementation of July agreement to end political crisis continued. Electoral commission appointed after PM Gruevski and opposition leader Zoran Zaev 15 Dec agreed on names of independent experts. Parliamentary commission investigating mass illegal wiretapping scandal began calling witnesses. Ruling party 2 Dec walked out of EU-backed talks with opposition on media reform, after opposition leader said mainstream media biased. Gruevski mid-Dec said govt willing to "open dialogue" with Greece to find solution to name dispute; FMs met 18 Dec.

- ["Name that country: What to call Macedonia?"](#), *Financial Times*, 18 Dec. 2015.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Ahead of 6 Dec referendum on President Sargsyan's proposal to change constitution to make country a parliamentary democracy, opposition organised protests, claiming proposed changes aim to allow Sargsyan to continue to hold power after end of his second term in 2018; govt says changes aimed at greater democratisation. Election Commission reported 63.5% voted in favour of changes 6 Dec. Opposition Armenian National Congress (HAK) rejected result, amid reports of widespread irregularities; other opposition parties also challenged official report of 50.51% turnout. Election commission 13 Dec said constitutional amendments adopted. Protests con-

tinued late month demanding govt resign over alleged corruption. Russia deployed military hardware to reinforce its air base in Armenia.

- [“Will anger over apparent rigging of constitutional referendum revive support for Armenian opposition?”](#), RFE/RL, 8 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Rights activist Leyla Yunus released early from jail on medical grounds after serving a year of sentence on charges including fraud, tax evasion. Journalist Rauf Mirkadirov sentenced to six years’ jail 28 Dec on charges of spying for Armenia; lawyer said charges politically motivated. Council of Europe launched official inquiry into Azerbaijan’s compliance with European Convention on Human Rights. Authorities conducted further raid on Shiite settlement Nardaran outside Baku 1 Dec, several reportedly detained. Prominent opposition figure Fuad Qahramanli arrested in Baku 8 Dec, charges include publicly calling for overthrow of govt; lawyer said arrest linked to social media comments about Nardaran raid. Manat fell 48% against dollar 21 Dec after central bank abandoned currency peg.

- [“Renewed scrutiny of human rights in Azerbaijan”](#), IWPR, 19 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** N-K de facto officials reported one of their soldiers killed in clash with Azerbaijani forces 4 Dec; Azerbaijan accused NK forces of attempted attack on its positions, said one of its officers wounded. Azerbaijan reported one officer killed in shootout along contact line with NK 7 Dec. Baku 9 Dec reported it had used tanks to shell NK positions for first time in 21 years, in response to Armenian mortar fire; one Armenian soldier killed. Armenian and Azerbaijan presidents met in Berne, Switzerland 19 Dec to discuss NK conflict, first meeting since Oct 2014, under OSCE Minsk Group auspices; no concrete progress reported. UNSG Ban urged sides to cooperate with Minsk Group on de-escalation of conflict, avoid new violence. Sec Gen of Collective Security Treaty Organization 28 Dec said NK conflict source of great concern.

- [“Armenia, Azeri leaders meet in Switzerland over Karabakh dispute”](#), Reuters, 19 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Georgia** Defence ministry 10 Dec said Russian helicopter violated Georgian airspace near breakaway republic South Ossetia previous day; Moscow denied claim. EU 18 Dec decided to award Georgian citizens visa-free travel status by mid-2016.

- [“EU backs visa-free access for Ukraine, Georgia”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Dec. 2015.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Chechen man beheaded on 2 Dec Islamic State (IS) video; IS claimed he was Russian spy, threatened Moscow with attacks in response to Russian airstrikes in Syria. Russian FM Sergey Lavrov 9 Dec reportedly said terrorists training in Turkey are threat to North Caucasus (NC). NC Regional Military Court 1 Dec jailed six men for up to seven years for IS recruitment. Attacks continue in Dagestan: unknown assailants 1 Dec shot dead imam in Khasavyurt city, third imam killed in five months; police reportedly killed three gunmen in Kizilyurt 16 Dec; five suspected militants and supporters killed in other clashes during month. Five firemen attacked in Derbent district 16 Dec; IS claimed responsibility for another attack in Derbent city centre 30 Dec which left one dead and eleven injured, including tourists. Up to 100 parishioners detained in Shamkhal mosque after Friday prayer 11 Dec, later released. Three suspected militants killed in Chegem district, Kabardino-Balkaria 22 Dec, another three in Adyghe-Khabl district, Karachay-Cherkessia 24 Dec. Moscow

Court 16 Dec upheld arrest of Ruslan Mukhudinov, Chechen security official suspected of organising killing of politician Boris Nemtsov.

- Ekaterina Sokirianskaia, [“To the Islamic State and Back”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 1 Dec. 2015.
- [“Russia and radicalisation: Homegrown problem”](#), *Financial Times*, 7 Dec. 2015.

Eastern Europe

➔ **Ukraine** UN reported death toll from conflict in east now over 9,000 since April 2014, also reported “significant reduction of hostilities” in some areas with limited pullback of heavy weaponry, but reported “continuing inflow of ammunition, weaponry and fighters from Russian Federation”. Despite holiday ceasefire agreed 22 Dec, Ukrainian authorities 27 Dec reported one soldier, one civilian killed in fighting north of Donetsk; separatists claimed two civilians died. OSCE said an observer came under fire near Mariupol 27 Dec. Security officials reported one officer killed during special operation against alleged saboteurs, including three Russian and four Ukrainian citizens, in Kharkiv 9 Dec. Russian President Putin visited Crimea 2 Dec, promised new supplies of electricity following Nov damage of Crimean power lines. PM Yatsenyuk 16 Dec said Ukraine will suspend trade with Crimea. Prominent Luhansk separatist commander Pavel Dryomov killed in car bomb 12 Dec. EU ambassadors 18 Dec agreed to six month sanction extension on Russia; U.S. 22 Dec expanded list of individuals and companies on sanctions list. Visiting Kyiv early month, U.S. VP Biden announced \$190mn new financial aid, called for continued reforms. U.S. and Russian FMs mid-Dec discussed implementation of Minsk agreements. PM Yatsenyuk 18 Dec said Ukraine would not repay \$3bn debt owed to Russia despite Russia’s threat to sue; followed failure to agree on restructuring of Russian debt. Moscow announced it would suspend free trade zone with Kyiv in response to EU-Ukraine free trade agreement, President Poroshenko said Kyiv “ready to pay the price”; parliament 24 Dec approved trade embargo against Russia. EU 18 Dec backed visa-free travel for Ukraine; but will need sign-off of EU parliament and EU member parliaments.

- [“Kiev ‘ready to pay price’ after Russia curbs trade ties over EU deal”](#), Reuters, 16 Dec. 2015.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Reunification talks continued between Republic of Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades and Turkish Cypriot counterpart Mustafa Akinci. Anastasiades 6 Dec suggested elections planned for May 2016 could be delayed by two or three months. UN SRSG Espen Bath Eide 8 Dec met with Turkish PM Davutoğlu to discuss talks.

- [“Cypriot leaders aim for peace deal in 2016”](#), AFP, 20 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Turkey** Violence between security forces and PKK continued at high intensity in south east with some 44 civilians, 25 security forces killed in clashes throughout month; PKK’s armed wing People’s Defence Force (HPG) reported at least eleven in-

surgents killed. Security forces 2 Dec declared curfew in Diyarbakır's Sur district following late-Nov killing of prominent pro-Kurdish lawyer and rights activist Tahir Elçi. Insecurity remains high in urban areas: security forces 11 Dec declared curfew in seven cities throughout SE, as govt promised to continue operations; police intelligence reported over 100,000 displaced and 1.3 million affected by curfews since Aug. Govt 12 Dec launched airstrikes on PKK positions in SE, at least two civilians killed. PKK leader Murat Karayılan 15 Dec said PKK not planning unilateral ceasefire unless govt ends military operations. Media crackdown continued following 1 Nov elections: prominent opposition journalists Can Dündar and Erdem Gül arrested late-Nov on charges of being members of a terror organisation, espionage and revealing confidential documents. Tensions with Russia persisted: Russia intensified airstrikes against Turkish-backed Syrian rebel groups and imposed sweeping embargoes on Turkish imports. Crackdown on Islamic State (IS) militants continued: 67 IS-linked suspects charged 18 Dec in investigation into IS activities; govt 10 Dec reportedly pledged to build 82km wall along IS-held border with Syria. EU 14 Dec opened negotiations with Ankara on Chapter 17, aimed at bringing Turkey in line with EU's economic and monetary policy. Turkey and Israel 17 Dec reached preliminary deal to normalise relations.

- [“Over ‘100 dead’ as Turkey presses major offensive against PKK”](#), AFP, 20 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°77, [A Sisyphean Task? Resuming Turkey-PKK Peace Talks](#), 17 Dec. 2015. New clashes between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) have deepened the country's social cleavages, killed hundreds, and helped the Islamic State. Neither side can win militarily. To end the conflict, Turkey needs more than just a new ceasefire: a clearly defined peace process and, in parallel, a reform agenda addressing Kurdish rights.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** Amid ongoing economic crisis, Chinese company 14 Dec bought controlling stake in state-owned oil and gas company KazMunaiGas, part of package of deals worth \$4bn. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini 21 Dec chaired eleventh EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting in Astana, signed EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

- [“EU-Central Asia relations priority, Federica Mogherini says”](#), Trend News Agency, 21 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** Two unnamed suspects shot dead by Special Forces 10 Dec in Bishkek after opening fire on officers; suspects said to be responsible for 19 Nov murder of Bishkek policeman, declared to be members of extremist group Jaysh al-Mahdi linked to Nov 2010 bomb blast in Bishkek and to July 2015 anti-terrorist operation in Bishkek.

- [“Kyrgyzstan looks to curb radical Islamism”](#), Silk Road Reporters, 16 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Tajikistan** Interior Minister 14 Dec reiterated claim that opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) funded renegade former Deputy Defence Minister Nazarzoda, killed by security forces in man-hunt mid-Sept. Exiled IRPT leader Mukhiddin Kabiri's extended family in Tajikistan, including 95-year-old father, de-

tained 15 Dec, released two days later. President Rahmon's late Nov defence ministry reshuffle believed to be linked to doubts over loyalties of senior staff in wake of Nazarzoda affair. Seven men from Khatlon province sentenced 1 Dec to 27 years' jail for raising black Islamic flag in district near Afghan border. Parliament 9 Dec approved draft law granting President Rahmon "Founder of Peace and Harmony: Leader of the Nation", immunity from prosecution for life, right to veto decisions; president signed bill into law late Dec.

- ["Tajik president and his family to get life-long legal immunity"](#), *Guardian*, 11 Dec. 2015.
- ➔ **Turkmenistan** Ceremony marking start of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline construction held 13 Dec.
- ["Turkmenistan launches \\$10bn gas pipeline to South Asia"](#), *Al Jazeera*, 13 Dec. 2015.
- ➔ **Uzbekistan** Arrests on suspicion of supporting Islamic State continued, after over 500 people reportedly arrested nationwide in Nov. Taliban 10 Dec released photo of dead Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan leader Usman Ghazi, reportedly found in Zabul province, Afghanistan.
- ["Central Asia fears Afghan contagion"](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 17 Dec. 2015.

Latin America and the Caribbean

► **Colombia** Progress continued in govt-FARC peace talks: agreement on “victims” announced 15 Dec outlining several victim-centred mechanisms tasked with “finding truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-repetition in context of conflict”. Agreement confirms those responsible for most serious crimes would be prosecuted under special jurisdiction; amnesty law to be passed for political and other connected crimes. Truth commission, special mechanism to search for disappeared and set of undetermined reparations measures will complement transitional justice institutions. Human Rights Watch 22 Dec issued statement strongly criticising agreement. Further negotiations will address two outstanding issues: end of conflict measures (DDR), and verification, implementation and ratification of peace agreement. President Santos 16 Dec pushed back bilateral ceasefire date, originally planned to begin same day, after “end of conflict” agenda points not resolved. Govt negotiator Jorge Enrique Mora 1 Dec rejected FARC proposal for special areas “Terrepaz” where insurgents can formally give up their arms. Choice of mechanism to confirm peace agreement remains contentious: Congress 14 Dec approved govt-supported bill for plebiscite on ratification of peace, as FARC reiterated need for constituent assembly. National Liberation Army (ELN) top commander Antonio García 9 Dec signalled willingness to fully commit to peace during interview amid ongoing exploratory ELN talks with govt; Ombudsman’s office 7 Dec warned of increased ELN violence in Pacific region.

- [“Colombia president hails Farc war victims reparation deal”](#), BBC, 16 Dec. 2015.

► **Guatemala** Public Ministry 9 Dec presented formal charges against former President Pérez Molina and former VP Baldetti for illicit association, customs fraud and bribery. Pérez Molina 15 Dec claimed innocence, blamed U.S. saying International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) was instrument of Washington. President-elect Jimmy Morales 14 Dec postponed for second time announcement of future cabinet, said names would only be public after his inauguration 14 Jan. Two Costa Rican CICIG prosecutors resigned in Nov to join private law firm reportedly financed by political operative with links to efforts to interfere in judicial selection process on behalf of Pérez Molina. Prison riot broke out between rival gang members late-Nov in Escuintla, south of Guatemala City; some seventeen inmates killed.

- Mary Speck, [“A Civic Awakening in Guatemala”](#), *Miami Herald*, 16 Dec. 2015.
- [“Otto Pérez Molina arremete contra la CICIG y el MP”](#), *el Periodico*, 16 Dec. 2015.

► **Haiti** Provisional Electoral Commission (CEP) 21 Dec pushed back second round of presidential elections, originally scheduled for 27 Dec; said it was awaiting results of electoral process audit. President Martelly 1 Jan said presidential run-off scheduled for 17 Jan. Postponement followed PM Evans Paul’s 17 Dec call for creation of independent electoral commission to “guarantee credibility of process” amid uncertainty over allegations of massive fraud during Oct first round of presidential and legislative elections; opposition rejected initial proposal stating it fails to resolve post-electoral impasse. Senate 16 Dec asked outgoing President Martelly to suspend publication of final election results until independent commission can be mounted to audit vote; CEP 19 Dec published final results of 9 Aug legislative elections, triggering violence and vandalism in some five states, one protester reportedly killed. Alliance of eight former

presidential candidates 15 Dec sent letter to CEP reiterating demands to resolve political crisis.

- [“Haiti postpones presidential, legislative elections”](#), *Miami Herald*, 21 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Mexico** Prosecutors in Guerrero state 15 Dec reported discovery of some seventeen bodies in ravine. Govt early-Dec deployed about 200 additional police to Tierra Caliente region in NW Guerrero in attempt to control rising violence. Group of experts appointed by Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to review investigation into Sept 2014 student disappearance 7 Dec said satellite photos appear to contradict prosecutors’ claim that bodies of missing students were incinerated at municipal dump. Court 31 Dec charged Cesar Penalzoza Santana, former mayor of Cocula town (Jalisco state) linked to students’ disappearance, of ties to organised crime. President Peña Nieto 14 Dec sent legislation to Senate to harmonise and toughen sanctions for crime of disappearance and torture; proposal would establish national protocols requiring police and other officials to mobilise searches within hours of reported disappearance. Govt 22 Dec issued first licenses permitting cultivation and possession of marijuana for personal use; only four plaintiffs who won favourable Supreme Court ruling eligible for permits.

- [“Mexico finds 17 bodies dumped in ravine”](#), AFP, 15 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Venezuela** Parliamentary elections held 6 Dec; opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) won 112 of 167 seats, giving party two-thirds “super-majority”, control of National Assembly (AN) for first time in fifteen years. Ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV) won only seven of 24 states. President Maduro same day admitted defeat, attributed loss to “economic war” he claims is being waged against him by opposition and foreign allies. Govt later claimed fraud and vote-buying by opposition: PSUV campaign chief Jorge Rodríguez 16 Dec broadcast alleged recording of official of opposition-led Amazonas state govt admitting vote-buying. Maduro 15 Dec vowed not to allow “electoral coup” and repeated threat to take to streets to resist decisions by new parliament. Supreme Court 31 Dec suspended inauguration of three MUD MPs following legal challenge from ruling PSUV; suspension removes MUD’s “super-majority”; opposition same day called move “judicial coup”. Outgoing AN 23 Dec appointed thirteen Supreme Court (TSJ) justices, with aim to prevent opposition gaining control of TSJ; 15 Dec installed “National Communal Parliament” in legislative chamber formerly occupied by Senate. Body appears to be parallel legislature; opposition downplayed move as “show”. MUD said new AN to begin work 5 Jan, first tasks including amnesty for political prisoners, and “social” legislation. Nephews of First Lady Cilia Flores, accused in Nov of drug trafficking by U.S. authorities, 17 Dec pleaded not guilty in U.S. federal court to charges of attempt to smuggle cocaine to U.S. through Haiti and Honduras. Reuters 15 Dec reported head of National Guard, Gen. Néstor Reverol and another general would be indicted on charges of drug trafficking; no official confirmation.

- Crisis Group, [“6 December Elections: High Stakes for Venezuela”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 5 Dec. 2015.
- Phil Gunson, [“Venezuela: Chavismo in Crisis”](#), The New York Review of Books, 7 Dec. 2015.
- Phil Gunson, [“Venezuelan Poll Surprise Opens Prospect of Peaceful Change”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 7 Dec. 2015.

- [“Venezuela’s opposition won the election – but the real difficulties still lie ahead”](#), *Guardian*, 15 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Latin America Briefing N°34, [The End of Hegemony: What Next for Venezuela?](#), 21 Dec. 2015. After a crushing defeat in parliamentary elections, Venezuela’s Chavista government needs to move away from confrontation. The executive must join the new legislative majority in a cooperation pact that can lead the country from deadlock to open democracy, and save it from a looming economic and humanitarian disaster.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Month saw continued wave of almost daily stabbings, vehicle attacks and, increasingly, shootings by Palestinians targeting Israelis in West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. Gaps emerging between PM Netanyahu, military and intelligence chiefs over tactics used to stop violence, which has seen over 130 Palestinians and some twenty Israelis killed since 1 Oct. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas 14 Dec said attacks result of “despair” of Palestinian youths and Israeli visits to al-Aqsa Mosque. U.S. Sec State Kerry 5 Dec warned of collapse of PA and its impact on Israel. Israel held talks with Quartet delegation in Jerusalem mid-Dec; no concrete result. Turkish President Erdoğan and Hamas leader Khaled Meshal met in Istanbul 19 Dec, day after Israel and Turkey announced they are working to restore relations following five-year rift; several unresolved issues still outstanding. Greek parliament 22 Dec approved non-binding resolution calling on govt to recognise state of Palestine in vote attended by Abbas. Relations between Hamas and Egypt continued to deteriorate, following claims of cooperation between Hamas and Islamic State (IS) in Sinai. Three rockets fired into Israel from S Lebanon 20 Dec, hours after Hizbollah claimed Israeli airstrike inside Syria killed leading Lebanese militant Samir Kuntar 19 Dec. Israel 21 Dec announced it will deploy new medium-range missile interceptor by mid-2016.

- [“Two Palestinians shot dead by Israeli forces as violence flares”](#), AP, 18 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Lebanon** Amid ongoing political stalemate, former PM and Future Current (FC) leader Saad Hariri 3 Dec backed initiative supporting contested candidacy of Marada Movement leader Suleiman Frangieh, friend of Syrian President Assad and member of rival March 8 coalition, in move straining FC’s ties with Christian allies and with Lebanese Forces. Parliament failed to elect new president again 3 Dec and 16 Dec due to lack of quorum. Govt 21 Dec agreed to export country’s waste in move that could end garbage crisis, which began mid-July. Army and Hizbollah continued offensive against militants along NE border with Syria: Hizbollah 9 Dec reportedly killed al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) commander and eight fighters following attack on convoy; army and Hizbollah 15 Dec reportedly killed five Islamic State (IS) fighters; army 17 Dec reportedly killed three militants. JN 1 Dec released sixteen soldiers and police, held since Aug 2014, under Qatari-mediated deal, in exchange for release of thirteen Islamist-leaning prisoners in Lebanon and Syria; IS continued to hold nine hostages. Suicide blast 5 Dec reportedly killed three, wounded several soldiers during army raid in northern city Tripoli. U.S. 11 Dec urged citizens to avoid travel to Lebanon due to security concerns. Hizbollah 21 Dec vowed to retaliate for killing of prominent militant Samir Kuntar in alleged Israeli airstrike inside Syria 19 Dec (see Israel).

- [“Commander of Hezbollah freed by Israel is killed in Syria”](#), *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Syria** Russia expanded airstrikes targeting areas held by anti-Islamic State (IS) rebels allied with Turkey in northern Syria, part of multi-front offensive by the Assad regime and its foreign backers; attacks generating devastating civilian casualties, in-

cluding scores reported killed in Russian airstrike on Idlib 20 Dec. Long-awaited opposition conference in Saudi Arabia, 8-10 Dec, generated minor breakthrough toward more coherent rebel representation, with unprecedented range of armed and political factions in attendance. Syrian ex-PM Riad Hijab elected opposition negotiator; joint statement outlined commitment to pluralistic Syrian future without President Assad and conditional willingness to engage in political process outlined in Vienna 11-14 Nov. Meeting between opposition and govt tentatively scheduled late Jan; Assad 11 Dec declared he would not negotiate with armed groups. UNSC 19 Dec unanimously approved resolution endorsing international roadmap for peace process. Govt and rebels 2 Dec reached local truce in Homs neighbourhood al-Waer, following two years of siege. U.S.-led coalition airstrikes 6 Dec killed at least 32 IS fighters in Raqqa province, days after Germany and Britain agreed to join anti-IS campaign early Dec; NATO 7 Dec ruled out sending ground troops. IS attacks continued including at least 50 killed in Kurdish YPG-controlled town Tel Tamer 11 Dec; at least sixteen killed in govt-controlled Homs 12 Dec.

- Noah Bonsey, [“What Should Be Discussed at the Syria Peace Talks”](#), *Newsweek*, 17 Dec. 2015.
- [“U.N. endorses Syria peace plan in rare show of unity among big powers”](#), Reuters, 19 Dec. 2015.

Gulf

➔ **Bahrain** Man sentenced to death, 22 others sentenced to life in prison 31 Jan in connection to 2014 bomb attack in Dimistan village; 29 sentenced from five to 25 years in prison for involvement in Dec 2014 bomb attack in al-Budaiya.

- [“Bahrain sentences man for forming ‘terror group’”](#), AFP, 31 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Iran** IAEA 2 Dec released long-awaited report, concluded Iran conducted coordinated “range of activities relevant to development of nuclear explosive device” prior to late 2003, some activities continued between 2003 and 2009. IAEA board of governors 15 Dec passed resolution ending twelve-year investigation into Iran’s nuclear weapons research; President Rouhani 16 Dec said closure of probe was “political victory”. Iran 19 Dec announced plans to ship out enriched uranium stockpile to Russia and Kazakhstan as part of July nuclear deal implementation in order to secure relief from international sanctions. U.S. mid-Dec condemned Iran’s reported test-firing of second medium-range ballistic missile capable of delivering nuclear warhead late Nov in violation of UNSC Resolution 1929. FM Zarif 18 Dec called on U.S. and Britain to “join hands” to defeat Islamic State (IS) and end war in Syria. Security forces reportedly arrested 53 people for running pro-IS websites.

- [“US could start lifting Iran sanctions in January under nuclear deal”](#), AP, 17 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°166, [Iran After the Nuclear Deal](#), 15 Dec. 2015. Some in the West hope the nuclear deal with Iran will empower the country’s moderates. But playing Iranian domestic politics directly could backfire. The West should recognise that any change will be gradual, best supported by implementing the nuclear accord, resuming trade, and diplomacy that balances Iranian and Arab interests in the Middle East.

➔ **Iraq** Coalition air-bombings helped government forces to retake central neighbourhoods of Ramadi, Anbar province capital, seized in May by Islamic State (IS), on 28 Dec. Despite Iraqi govt's celebration, liberation remains incomplete: most govt infrastructure heavily damaged and portions of city remain under IS control. Coordinated assault by IS on Kurdish peshmerga positions near Mosul repulsed by Kurdish forces backed by coalition airstrikes mid-Dec. Regional and international tensions continued as Turkey, with tacit agreement of Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) leadership, deployed some 150-300 soldiers and 25 tanks to Ninewa province, northwest; Russia 7-8 Dec forced Iraqi Kurdistan to shut down its airspace. PM Abadi denounced Turkey's move as violation of sovereignty, appealed to UN, issued ultimatum for troops to be withdrawn within 48 hours; Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani 11 Dec condemned foreign intervention in Iraq in any form. Turkey mid-Dec began to withdraw troops, late Dec said it would continue withdrawal but PM Abadi 30 Dec said Turkey has not withdrawn. Qatar stepped up efforts to unite Iraq Sunni forces by organising a second meeting in its capital to devise a post-IS plan for Iraq's Sunni provinces; triggered prompt reaction from Iran-affiliated forces in south Iraq. Some 100 gunmen 16 Dec kidnapped 26 Qatari nationals hunting in south near Saudi Arabia border.

- ["Iraq celebrates recapture of Ramadi but victory comes at a cost"](#), *Guardian*, 29 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Yemen** Second round of UN-sponsored peace talks between warring parties in Switzerland 15-20 Dec failed to produce diplomatic breakthrough following disagreements over proposed prisoner exchange and repeated violations of a ceasefire; Hadi govt remains focused on implementing UNSC Resolution 2216, Huthi/Saleh bloc on changing govt. Military stalemate continued despite some gains by anti-Huthi forces in the north. Saudi-led coalition 15 Dec announced seven-day ceasefire, immediately broken by both sides; ceasefire announcement came day after coalition airstrikes reportedly killed at least nineteen civilians in north and south. Huthis and aligned military forces increased cross-border attacks into Saudi Arabia; rocket attack near Bab al-Mandeb 14 Dec killed dozens of coalition forces, including two senior Saudi and Emirati army commanders. Huthi/Saleh bloc continued blockade of Taiz, repelling ground campaign organised by coalition to capture city. Govt/Saudi-led coalition 15 Dec launched offensive on Huthi strongholds in north, gaining territory in Hajjah, Jawf and Marib and pushing into Sanaa province 21 Dec. Fighting between Huthi/Saleh bloc and govt/Saudi-led coalition 19 Dec killed at least 68 including 28 govt troops and 40 Huthi fighters near NW town of Haradh.

- ["Yemen government forces take northwestern city, U.N. concern at truce violations"](#), Reuters, 19 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** At least seventeen women reportedly elected to municipal councils in 12 Dec elections; marked first time women in country allowed to run for public office. Military operations against Huthis in Yemen continued (see Yemen).

- ["Saudi Arabia's mounting security challenges"](#), Al-Monitor, 28 Dec. 2015.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Speculation over who holds true power in presidency continued following President Bouteflika's 3-5 Dec visit to France for medical check. Bouteflika 14 Dec chaired meeting with ministers and advisors discussing constitutional reforms: President Bouteflika 28 Dec approved draft constitutional revision; National Liberation Front Sec-Gen Amar Saadani 18 Dec said constitutional reforms to be presented next month. FM Ramtane Lamamra 1 Dec said foreign intervention in N Africa may contribute to greater problems rather than be a solution. Defence Ministry publication 28 Dec said 109 alleged terrorists killed, 36 arrested in 2015.

- ["Algeria's next succession"](#), *Foreign Affairs*, 15 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Egypt** Criticisms of security officials' brutality continued: protests erupted in Luxor following death of man in police custody 1 Dec; President Sisi 3 Dec promised punishment of guilty police officers; nine police arrested 6 Dec in connection with case; two police officers 12 Dec convicted of torturing lawyer accused of links to Muslim Brotherhood (MB) to death in Feb. One soldier killed, four wounded in explosion after military vehicle hit IED in N Sinai 6 Dec; Islamic State affiliate "Sinai Province" claimed responsibility. Army 27 Dec announced security forces killed two suspected militants in N Sinai. Egyptian investigators 14 Dec reported no proof of terrorism behind Russian plane crash in 31 Oct in Sinai. Sisi 31 Dec called for new parliament elected late 2015 to assemble on 10 Jan in 2016, first time since old Islamist-dominated parliament dissolved mid-2012. At least twelve killed, six wounded after firebomb thrown into restaurant in Cairo 4 Dec. Court 3 Dec overturned death sentence and ordered retrial of MB leader Mohamed Badie and 36 co-defendants. 120 supporters of former President Morsi sentenced 7 Dec to two years in prison for rioting in 2013. Researcher Ismail Alexandrani arrested 2 Dec, charged for spreading false news; Committee to Protect Journalists 15 Dec recorded more journalists arrested in 2015 than previous years. Govt 3 Dec opened borders with Gaza strip, following months of closure.

- ["Egypt's president vows to punish officers who make mistakes"](#), AP, 3 Dec. 2015.

➔  **Libya** Representatives of rival parliaments House of Representatives (HoR) and General National Congress (GNC) 17 Dec signed UN-brokered agreement. Agreement, endorsed by UNSC 23 Dec, establishes a new govt of national unity headed by PM Faez Serraj; lawmakers who support agreement to remain in office under new power-sharing framework. Uncertainties remain over level of support for agreement: HoR and GNC parliament chiefs 15 Dec met and rejected agreement, devising separate peace plan; GNC president 16 Dec said delegates intending to sign UN deal lacked legitimacy. Tripoli remained tense: fighting erupted in Tajoura suburb and near airport road; clashes in Ajdabiya increased between forces loyal to Libyan National Army, which opposes UN-brokered agreement, and local groups who support new govt. UN 1 Dec warned of increasing Islamic State (IS) presence in Libya; IS 14 Dec killed Palestinian man in Sirte for alleged spying. Western govts urged Libyan factions to authorise airstrikes against IS in Libya but country's envoy to UN Ibrahim Dabbashi 23 Dec said Libya does not plan to request Western airstrikes any time soon.

- Crisis Group Statement, ["Statement on a Political Deal for Libya"](#), 12 Dec. 2015.

- Jean-Marie Guéhenno and Emma Bonino, [“The Risks of Rushing a New Libyan Deal”](#), Politico Europe, 12 Dec. 2015.
- Issandr El Amrani, [“Chaos in Libya: It’s the oil, stupid”](#), Reuters, 13 Dec. 2015.
- Claudia Gazzini and Issandr El Amrani, [“What Could Possibly Go Wrong in Libya?”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 18 Dec. 2015.
- Crisis Group, [“The Prize: Fighting for Libya’s Energy Wealth”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 3 Dec. 2015.
- [“Libya’s rival factions sign deal for unity government”](#), *New York Times*, 17 Dec. 2015.

New Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°165, [The Prize: Fighting for Libya’s Energy Wealth](#), 3 Dec. 2015. The imminent collapse of Libya’s economy could impoverish millions, foster chaos and more radicalisation. At the heart of Libya’s misery is frenzied competition for control over the country’s oil resources. Ongoing UN-led talks should urgently prioritise economic governance, local ceasefires and armed defence of oil facilities.

➔ **Mauritania** Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) 7 Dec released a video of Mauritanian and two Malian nationals allegedly confessing to spying for the French and Mauritanian military; all three executed. Govt 11 Dec called for establishment of courts specifically for slavery cases.

- [“Mauritania creates new courts to try slavery cases”](#), AFP, 11 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Morocco** Moroccan authorities 11 Dec announced “terrorist cell” reportedly linked to Islamic State dismantled, nine arrested in several Moroccan towns.

- [“Morocco says IS-linked cell dismantled”](#), AFP, 11 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Tunisia** Govt 1 Dec dismissed five senior officials including sec of state for security and interior ministry’s security chief following Nov bomb attack on bus that killed twelve in Tunis; authorities arrested dozens, placed several suspected militants under house arrest; Interior Ministry said 17,046 arrested in Nov on various charges. State of emergency extended 22 Dec for two months. Two suspected jihadis arrested 4 Dec allegedly planning suicide attacks in Tunis. Govt 21 Dec announced terrorist cell dismantled in Bizerte after anti-terrorist units launched operations against radical Islamist network, four arrested. Tensions between security forces and judges increased as police trade unions blamed judges for releasing terrorist suspects, including perpetrator behind Nov bus attack. Anti-Islamist discourse targeting Ennahda Party intensified. Tensions inside President Essebsi’s party Nida Tounes growing: Gen Sec of Nida Tounes Mohsen Marzouk resigned 15 Dec. Former President Moncef Marzouki claimed “catastrophic” situation in country highlighting poverty issues and jihadi threats, 20 Dec launched new political party. Several protest movements erupted in south amid ongoing conflicts over agricultural lands following imposition of Libyan tax on Tunisian vehicles entering Libya.

- Michaël Béchir Ayari, [“La Tunisie saura-t-elle montrer l’exemple?”](#), *Le Monde*, 2 Dec. 2015.
- [“Two arrested on suspicion of planning suicide attacks in Tunisian capital”](#), Reuters, 4 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Western Sahara** Polisario Front 11 Dec welcomed European Court of Justice's 10 Dec order annulling 2012 EU and Morocco trade deal due to inclusion of Western Sahara.

- ["Algeria, Polisario Front welcome EU cancellation of trade deal with Morocco"](#), Middle East Monitor, 12 Dec. 2015.