

CrisisWatch

A monthly bulletin on current and potential conflicts
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January 2016 – Trends

↓ Deteriorated situations

[Burkina Faso](#), [Cameroon](#), [Guinea-Bissau](#), [Haiti](#), [Korean Peninsula](#), [Yemen](#)

↑ Improved situations

[Iran](#)

February 2016 – Watchlist

💣* Conflict risk alerts

[Moldova](#)

☰ 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.

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	13
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	16
Balkans.....	16
Caucasus.....	16
Eastern Europe.....	17
Western Europe/Mediterranean.....	18
Central Asia	19
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.....	21
MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA.....	23
Eastern Mediterranean	23
Gulf	24
North Africa.....	26

Africa

Central Africa

➔ **Burundi** Govt continued to refuse international intervention saying Burundi is “99% safe”; during 25 Jan UNSC envoys’ visit, President Nkurunziza rejected calls for dialogue with opposition and deployment of AU-proposed 5,000-strong peacekeeping force. AU summit 30-31 Jan shelved peacekeeping mission, but AU will send delegation of African presidents to negotiate with govt. Govt 5 Jan refused to attend second meeting with opposition set for 8 Jan in Arusha, Tanzania to discuss Uganda-mediated peace talks. Govt prevented planned 26 Jan arrival of OHCHR experts; 28 Jan arrested two *Le Monde* journalists, released next day. Violence continued in Bujumbura but at lower intensity than Dec; grenade attacks and shooting throughout month killed at least five. Supreme Court 15 Jan sentenced to life imprisonment four ex-generals involved in May 2015 coup attempt, nine others for 30 years.

- [“African leaders trying to push Burundi to take peacekeepers: officials”](#), Reuters, 27 Jan. 2016.

⬇ **Cameroon** Boko Haram (BH) attacks in Far North increased to pre-Dec levels. 25 attacks killed at least 88 and injured about 100: suicide bombings on mosques 13, 18 Jan killed eighteen; quadruple suicide bombing in Bodo 25 Jan killed 37, wounded 76; suicide bombing in Kerawa 28 Jan killed four. Cameroonian army pursuing BH into Nigeria late Jan reportedly killed 40 Nigerian civilians. At least 30 BH members killed in fighting with security forces and dozens arrested throughout month. Bandits and armed groups from CAR carried out lootings and kidnappings in East, North and Adamawa provinces; armed group 3 Jan abducted seven cattle farmers in Adamawa province. Govt 12 Jan sent troops to Mbere division along CAR border.

- [“Cameroon closes border markets after Boko Haram attack”](#), *Voice of America*, 27 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Central African Republic** National Election Authority (ANE) 7 Jan announced former PMs Anicet Georges Dologuélé and Faustin-Archange Touadéra came first and second in 30 Dec presidential vote. With no absolute majority, both will run in second round 14 Feb. First round losers including André Kolingba, Martin Ziguélé and Karim Mekassoua 12 Jan demanded manual recount; constitutional court 25 Jan rejected their appeals and annulled legislative election results, announced 13 Jan, citing irregularities. Rerun of legislatives will be held 14 Feb. Following 28 Jan call by Alliance of Democratic Forces for Transition (AFDT), hundreds 29 Jan marched through Bangui demanding rerun of presidential vote. Month saw surge in attacks by Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) militia across SE; one killed, over 70 abducted in at least sixteen raids. Looting and kidnapping by CAR rebels in Cameroon prompted Cameroonian army response (see Cameroon). MINUSCA reported advances in pre-DDR: ex-combatants surrendered grenades and military uniforms in Bouar, Nana Mambere prefecture. UNSC 27 Jan adopted Resolution 2262 extending sanctions regime for CAR until 31 Jan 2017.

- [“No one is in charge of the Central African Republic”](#), *Economist*, 8 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Chad** Electoral commission (CENI) 23 Jan announced calendar for presidential elections: first round 10 April, possible second round 9 May. Opposition 21 Jan criticised new biometric voter registration system as unreliable, saying it opened window

for fraud. Nevertheless, three opposition leaders, Kassiré Koumakoye, Malloum Yobode and Clément Djimet Bagaou, declared candidacy; Saleh Kebzabo also expected to run. Two Boko Haram (BH) suicide attacks 31 Jan killed three, wounded 56. In mounting social unrest, unions of teachers and social and health workers 18 Jan went on strike in Salamat region, protesting payment arrears. Army intervened in Batha region mid-Jan after clashes over new gold discoveries left ten dead. AU summit 30 Jan appointed President Déby AU chairman for one year.

- [“Boko Haram et les territoires perdus de la modernisation postcoloniale”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 12 Jan. 2016.

➔ **DR Congo** Month saw escalating tensions between govt and opposition and continued armed group activity in east. Opposition alliance “Citizen Front 2016” 9 Jan announced protests to demand President Kabila step down at end of second mandate come Dec 2016. Opposition groups responded negatively to 13 Jan call by former Katanga governor Moïse Katumbi to choose single opposition candidate. “G7” opposition platform 14 Jan called for elections within constitutional timeline and international financial support. Catholic Church 13 Jan cancelled “March of the Christians” to commemorate 1992 march set for 16 Feb, but opposition maintained call for 16 Feb rally. Ruling Party for Reconstruction and Democracy (PPRD) announced “March for Peace” also on 16 Feb, raising security risks. AU 14 Jan chose its Panel of the Wise member Edem Kodjo to hold consultations in support of political dialogue. Security forces in Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Bukavu 19 Jan broke up opposition commemoration of 2015 anti-govt protests. Govt 28 Jan said it would update voter lists, increasing opposition fears of election delay. Increased insecurity in N Kivu: attack attributed to Rwandan FDLR rebels 6-7 Jan killed at least fifteen civilians in Lubero; Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) carried out hit-and-run attacks on Congolese armed forces (FARDC), and 13 Jan allegedly killed four FARDC soldiers near Beni; 11 Jan fired at MONUSCO helicopter in Beni, no casualties. FARDC 11 Jan launched offensives against Mai Mai Nyatura in Masisi. FARDC and MONUSCO 28 Jan agreed to resume military cooperation against FDLR. Following persistent calls from govt, UN SRSG Sidikou 14 Jan proposed reduction of MONUSCO troops by 1,700. Govt 18 Jan said it would explore other allegations against convicted warlord Germain Katanga, due to leave prison same day.

- [“Congo opposition to hold rallies to raise pressure on Kabila”](#), Reuters, 8 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Rwanda** U.S. 2 Jan expressed disappointment at President Kagame’s third term bid; opposition Green Party said Kagame has violated democratic principles. Burundi President Nkurunziza 22 Jan in meeting with UNSC envoys accused Rwanda of supporting rebels and arming Burundian refugees in Rwanda; which Rwanda has denied. Police 25 Jan shot and killed deputy imam suspected of recruiting for Islamic State (IS), 30 Jan arrested people with suspected links to IS.

- [“U.S. ‘deeply disappointed’ Rwandan president will seek third term”](#), Reuters, 3 Jan. 2016.

Horn of Africa

➔ **Djibouti** Preparations for 8 April presidential elections continued: govt 10 Jan reactivated election commission (CENI), 12 Jan appointed chairman. Opposition Un-

ion pour le salut national (USN) 15 Jan threatened election boycott if CENI not reformed. Dozens of journalists, activists, opposition members reportedly arrested throughout month. Govt 6 Jan announced cutting diplomatic ties with Iran over Tehran attack on Saudi embassy (see Iran).

- [“Tensions autour de la campagne électorale”](#), RFI, 13 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Ethiopia** Protests against govt continued in Oromia region despite Oromo People’s Democratic Organisation (OPDO) regional govt 12 Jan announcing cancellation of controversial Addis Ababa development plan. Some 140 protesters reportedly killed by security forces since mid-Nov. Five reported killed, 30 injured in grenade attack on Jimma university, Oromia region 10 Jan. At least 27 reportedly killed 28-30 Jan during ethnic clashes between Nuer and Anyuak groups in Gambella region.

- [“Ethiopia abandons development plan for capital after unrest”](#), Bloomberg, 13 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Eritrea** Opposition armed group Red Sea Afar Democratic Organisation (RSA-DO) 28 Jan reportedly killed six security forces in Northern Red Sea region.

- [“Eritrean rebels raid military base, kill intelligence agents”](#), *Sudan Tribune*, 28 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Kenya** Communal violence over cattle theft and grazing grounds continued from late Dec; five reported killed 7 Jan in clashes near border of Kisumu and Nandi counties; three killed 23 Jan near border of Isiolo and Laikipia counties. Police 20 Jan killed four suspected Al-Shabaab militants, recovered weapons and ammunition in Malindi town, Kilifi county. Suspected Al-Shabaab 27 Jan killed six police officers in eastern Lamu county with remote-controlled IED; 31 Jan killed three civilians in Pandanguo village, Lamu county.

- [“Police kill four most wanted terrorists in Malindi”](#), *Daily Nation*, 20 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Somalia** Al-Shabaab inflicted heavy losses on AMISOM, while Somali leaders reached agreement on electoral process. In major attack 15 Jan on AMISOM forward base in El-Adde, Gedo region Al-Shabaab claim to have killed some 100 Kenya Defence Forces (KDF). KDF 16-24 Jan launched offensive in Gedo region, senior militant reportedly killed; Somali officials late month accused KDF of killing civilians in airstrikes. KDF 25-26 Jan withdrew from El-Adde town and Badhadhe district following attacks. Other Al-Shabaab attacks in Mogadishu 2-10 Jan killed at least six civilians; 21 Jan attack on Mogadishu restaurant killed twenty civilians, four attackers also killed. Clash between Al-Shabaab and clan militia 20 Jan in Middle Shabelle region left seven dead. Six militants arrested, ammunition recovered 13 Jan in joint AMISOM/Somali National Army (SNA) security operation in Leego town, Lower Shabelle region. Islamic State 12 Jan released another video encouraging Al-Shabaab members to join. Following 24-27 Jan meeting in Mogadishu, Somali political leaders agreed on model for Aug 2016 elections: 275 seats in Lower House (based on current clan-based power-sharing formula) and 54 seats in Upper House (48 to be shared equally among existing/emerging federal states, six between Puntland and Somaliland). Puntland rejected proposal, protests against it held in Puntland cities, Garowe and Bosaso 28 Jan.

- [“Al-Shabab attacks African Union base in Somalia”](#), Al Jazeera, 15 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Somaliland** Govt troops 15 Jan seized Bali Cad town including HQ of self-declared autonomous Khatumo state to disrupt meeting. Voter registration started 17

Jan in Burco, Toghdeer towns. President Silanyo in address to parliament 11 Jan accused Somali govt of creating instability.

- [“Somaliland troops seize Khaatumo administration’s H.Q.”](#), *Hiiraan*, 15 Jan. 2016.

➔ **South Sudan** 22 Jan deadline for formation of transitional govt under Aug 2015 peace agreement missed: President Kiir 7 Jan appointed 50 members of opposition SPLM/A-IO to parliament; distribution of ministries between govt and opposition groups announced same day. Some ethnic communities, IGAD, AU, U.S., UK and Norway criticised establishment of 28 states. Sudan govt 21 Jan announced willingness to renegotiate oil fees; South Sudan now losing money exporting oil. Setting conditions for negotiations, South Sudan troops 26 Jan moved five miles south of Sudan/South Sudan border and border opened 27 Jan in accordance with 2012 deal. Ugandan President Museveni 26 Jan received SPLM/A-IO head Riek Machar in Uganda to discuss Aug deal and Sudan-South Sudan-Uganda relations. 21 Jan UN report accused all conflict parties of war crimes; UN sanctions panel 26 Jan recommended arms embargo, sanctions on Kiir, Machar and top commanders.

- [“South Sudan misses deadline to form unity government”](#), BBC, 23 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Sudan** Informal talks 22-23 Jan in Germany between govt and opposition Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) on South Kordofan and Blue Nile made no progress on issues of National Dialogue (ND), security and humanitarian arrangements. Govt 23 Jan opened talks with opposition Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement-Minni Minawi (SLM-MM) in Ethiopia. Ruling National Congress Party (NCP) official 12 Jan claimed govt open to early elections after ND. Local security forces 10 Jan killed twelve during IDP protests against pro-govt militia violence in West Darfur state. Security forces mid-month clashed with rebel Sudan Liberation Movement led by Abdel Wahid al-Nur (SLM-AW) in Central Darfur state. Govt 4 Jan severed diplomatic ties with Iran over Tehran attack on Saudi embassy (see Iran). Following talks with South Sudan, President Bashir agreed to renegotiate fees for oil transit in light of global price drop; Sudan-South Sudan border reopened 27 Jan, closed prior to South Sudan’s 2011 secession (see South Sudan).

- [“Sudan’s ruling party accuses SPLM-N of succumbing to foreign powers”](#), *Sudan Tribune*, 24 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Uganda** National and international human rights organisations 13 Jan called on govt to end recruitment into controversial “crime preventers” civilian militia. President Museveni 26 Jan received South Sudanese SPLM/A-IO leader Riek Machar, discussed South Sudan peace deal and relations between Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda. Security forces 31 Jan arrested former intelligence chief General David Sejusa for partisan political activity.

- [“‘Crime preventers’ cause stir ahead of Uganda elections”](#), *East African*, 16 Jan. 2016.

Southern Africa

➔ **Madagascar** Constitutional Court (HCC) 22 Jan published results of 29 Dec senatorial elections; ruling New Forces for Madagascar (HVM) won landslide victory with 34 of 42 seats. Elections allow for first establishment of Senate since its dissolu-

tion following 2009 coup. Opposition criticised results and appealed to HCC to annul vote over fraud allegations; HCC rejected appeals.

- [“Large victoire du parti présidentiel aux élections sénatoriales”](#), AFP, 22 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Mozambique** Tensions between govt and opposition Renamo increased following 20 Jan alleged assassination attempt of Renamo Sec Gen Manuel Bissopo by unidentified gunmen in Beira; Renamo leader Dhlakama alleged Frelimo was responsible for attack. Attack followed press conference at which Bissopo denounced alleged atrocities committed by defence and security forces against Renamo members and supporters in recent weeks. Dhlakama 14 Jan said his decision to seize control of six northern provinces from March 2016 is “irreversible”; ruled out possibility of talks with President Nyusi. Renamo gunmen 28 Jan clashed with security forces in Zero village, Zambezia province, no casualties reported. UNHCR 15 Jan reported significant increase in recent weeks of people fleeing intensified clashes between govt and Renamo, seeking refuge in Malawi.

- [“Renamo general secretary shot in Beira”](#), Agência de Informação de Moçambique, 21 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Zimbabwe** Factionalism intensified within ZANU-PF between potential successors of President Mugabe, First Lady Grace Mugabe and VP Emmerson Mnangagwa: three ministers supportive of first lady mid-Jan filed complaint to Midlands province alleging intimidation by Mnangagwa supporters and seeking expulsion of three of Mnangagwa’s strongest allies. Mugabe returned from Far East 22 Jan, dismissing media reports he had suffered heart attack.

- [“Feuding Zanu PF camps take succession battle to VP Mangagwa’s doorstep”](#), *The Zimbabwe Mail*, 16 Jan. 2016.

West Africa

↓ **Burkina Faso** In unprecedented terrorist attack, gunmen 15 Jan attacked Splendid Hotel and Cappuccino coffee shop in central Ouagadougou: 30 civilians, mainly foreigners, killed; attack claimed jointly by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and al-Mourabitoun (AQIM splinter group). Earlier same day gendarmerie post in Tin Akoff, northern Sahel region attacked, one gendarme and one civilian killed; and Australian couple abducted in Djibo. Former members of now defunct presidential guard (RSP) 22 Jan attacked arms depot in Yimdi outside Ouagadougou and stole weapons; all later arrested. President Kaboré 7 Jan appointed Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) official Paul Kaba Thieba as PM; PM 13 Jan named new govt with former Ouagadougou Mayor Simon Compaoré as minister of security and territorial administration. Military court investigating Sept 2015 coup 15 Jan issued arrest warrant for Ivoirian Assembly Speaker Guillaume Soro; Ivoirian authorities said move “unfriendly” but it would be resolved “diplomatically”. Eddie Komboigo, president of former ruling Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), arrested 23 Jan on return to country and indicted 29 Jan for complicity in Sept coup.

- [“Attaque au Burkina Faso: le point sur l’enquête”](#), RFI, 19 Jan. 2016.

New Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°116, *Burkina Faso: Transition, Act II*, 7 Jan. 2016.

Burkina Faso's democratically elected new government faces great challenges to deliver on justice, socio-economic needs and regional security. To succeed, authorities must resist the temptation to establish a new one-party hegemony. Instead, they should engage in social dialogue and political reconciliation, military reform, and friendly relations with Côte d'Ivoire.

➔ **Côte d'Ivoire** Much-awaited ICC joint trial of former President Laurent Gbagbo and former youth leader Charles Blé Goudé opened 28 Jan; both pleaded not guilty on four counts of crimes against humanity. President Ouattara 12 Jan made limited cabinet reshuffle, including replacing FM Charles Diby Koffi with Albert Toikeuse Mabri. UNSC 20 Jan voted to reduce UN mission (UNOCI) to 4,000 troops by end March. High-level summit held 18 Jan in western Guiglo to address border insecurity with Liberia following early-Dec attack on military post near border. President Ouattara said border would reopen in March; asked for extension of UN mission in Liberia (UNMIL) mandate.

- ["Un remaniement ministériel sans grande surprise"](#), *Le Monde*, 13 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Guinea** New PM Youla 4 Jan formed cabinet, including sixteen new ministers out of 33. President Condé 2 Jan designated opposition Union of Republican Forces (UFR) President Sidya Touré as his "high representative"; leading opposition party Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) responded by calling on opposition activists to reject what it called Condé's attempts at co-optation. Tensions arose within ruling Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) over cabinet choices, with party militants 9 Jan blocking party's weekly meeting in Conakry calling for removal of all newcomers in govt. Protests quickly petered out and RPG party meeting eventually held 16 Jan. Authorities and RPG 13 Jan took part in follow-up committee of 20 Aug political agreement; Justice Minister Sacko reiterated govt's commitment to hold local elections in second quarter of 2016.

- ["Ce que veulent les frondeurs du RPG Arc-en-ciel"](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 18 Jan. 2016.

⚡ **Guinea-Bissau** Factional struggle within ruling African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) deepened; parliament's 28 Jan adoption of govt program, in vote boycotted by opposition and fifteen PAIGC dissidents, avoided govt dissolution, but political institutions remain fragile. Following PM Correia's 23 Dec failure to win majority, a second failure to adopt program would have entailed, under constitution, dismissal of government. Leading opposition Party for Social Renewal (PRS) argued constitution required second vote be held 5 Jan, but PAIGC delayed it until 18 Jan. PRS responded to delay by denouncing Correia's govt as unconstitutional. PAIGC 14 Jan voted to exclude its fifteen dissident MPs from party. Parliament committee 15 Jan cancelled dissidents' mandates, and PAIGC replaced the MPs. PAIGC dissidents 18 Jan defied ruling and attended National Assembly session, prompting dominant PAIGC faction to suspend session; PRS and dissident PAIGC MPs continued session, voted to install new assembly leadership with PRS President Alberto Nambéia named speaker. Bissau court 27 Jan confirmed dissident MPs had lost their mandate.

- ["Nouvelle crise politique au sein du parti au pouvoir"](#), RFI, 19 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Mali** Delays in implementation of Bamako peace agreement led leader of international mediation, Algeria, to organise emergency meeting 17-18 Jan to address implementation challenges. Govt 19 Jan appointed governors for newly created northern re-

gions Menaka and Taoudeni, in step toward decentralisation and reestablishing state administration in north. Tensions between pro-govt armed groups and French operation Barkhane still high following latter's late-Dec attack on alleged jihadi convoy in Menaka region, which pro-govt groups claimed killed eight fighters. Jihadi attacks on armed groups, security forces (FAMA) and peacekeepers continued, including: 15 Jan attack on FAMA convoy en route to Goundam, Timbuktu region killed two soldiers and two civilians; separate attacks 28 Jan on FAMA soldiers in Timbuktu and Gao killed four.

- [“Alger convoque une réunion d’urgence des signataires de l’accord de paix”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 14 Jan. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°115, [Mali: Peace from Below?](#), 14 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Niger** Defence Minister Karidjo Mahamadou 13 Jan said govt has evidence of thirteen individuals' involvement in Dec alleged coup attempt, amid opposition claims that arrests are part of govt attempt to retain power ahead of Feb presidential vote. Concerns over govt's authoritarian tendencies persisted including statement by influential tribal leaders 7 Jan expressing concern over deteriorating political climate following 31 Dec arrest of opposition figure Amadou Boubacar Cissé. Govt 10 Jan banned opposition protests citing security risks; opposition accused govt of trying to muzzle opposition. International Organisation of the Francophonie (OIF), tasked with reviewing electoral process, 4 Jan published report underlining shortcomings in voter rolls; said flaws could be fixed before elections, but opposition claimed that “mistakes” in voter rolls signalled govt's attempt to hijack electoral process. Presidential campaigns launched 30 Jan ahead of planned 21 Feb elections. Govt 30 Jan extended state of emergency in Diffa region for three months as security and humanitarian situation remained critical amid slowed but ongoing Boko Haram attacks.

- [“Coup d’État déjoué au Niger: quatre personnes sont passées aux aveux selon Niamey”](#), *Jeune Afrique*, 14 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Nigeria** Chief of Defence Staff General Gabriel Olonisakin 11 Jan said Boko Haram (BH) no longer capable of carrying out coordinated attacks, however at least 125 civilians killed in multiple attacks during month. Army 15 Jan repelled BH attack on 120 Task Force Battalion at Goniri, Yobe state with one soldier and fourteen insurgents killed; army 22 Jan claimed about 70 insurgents killed and 370 hostages freed in several operations; 24 Jan repelled attack on Babangida town, Yobe state, with several insurgents killed. BH attacks continued on villages and IDP camps in Borno state killing at least 105 and in Adamawa state killing 30. Govt 14 Jan extended amnesty program for former Niger Delta militants, scheduled to end Dec 2015, for another year. Armed men blew up several major oil and gas pipelines 14-16 Jan in Warri area of Delta state; attack followed court-ordered arrest of prominent ex-militant leader Government Ekpemupolo. Members of separatist organisation Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) 18 Jan clashed with security operatives in Aba, Abia state; IPOB reported eight members killed, 30 wounded, 26 arrested. Investigation of alleged massive fraud in arms procurement under previous administration continued: former air force chief, Air Marshal Olusola Amosu, arrested 27 Jan and detained by federal anti-graft agency, EFCC.

- [“We have decimated Boko Haram – Chief of Defense Staff”](#), *The Sun*, 12 Jan. 2016.

Asia

North East Asia

➔ **China/Japan** Japanese defence ministry 12 Jan said Chinese intelligence-gathering ship was seen sailing outside contiguous zone of disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands; Japan's chief cabinet secretary said Tokyo "went through diplomatic channels" to express interest. Followed late Dec incident in which Chinese coast guard vessel equipped with gun turrets entered territorial waters of Diaoyu/Senkaku islands 26 Dec, prompting Tokyo to deliver "strong protest". Chinese foreign ministry said Chinese patrols were "beyond reproach", vessel carried "standard equipment." Japanese defence minister warned that Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) would be deployed if Chinese naval vessels enter Japanese sea territory; Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said China has right to conduct normal operations near disputed islands.

- ["Japan sends China warning over incursions near disputed isles"](#), Reuters, 12 Jan. 2016.

⚡ **Korean Peninsula** DPRK state media 6 Jan announced successful test of hydrogen bomb in underground testing facility; leader Kim Jong-un 10 Jan said test "self-defensive step", foreign ministry 15 Jan said nuclear tests would cease once U.S. concludes peace treaty with DPRK and halts U.S.-ROK joint military exercises. Technical experts estimate H-bomb claims inconsistent with results; with seismic readings showing blast smaller than typical H-bomb. U.S. and ROK condemned nuclear test as violation of UNSC resolutions and called for stronger response from China. ROK 7 Jan limited entry to Kaesong Industrial Complex and ceased cross-border cooperation, resumed anti-DPRK propaganda broadcasts in Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). U.S. House of Representatives 12 Jan passed legislation broadening sanctions against DPRK. ROK, Japan, and U.S. 6 Jan requested emergency meeting of UNSC, which announced it would begin work on new DPRK resolution. China and U.S. struggled to reach compromise on DPRK sanctions, but 27 Jan agreed on need for new UNSC resolution. U.S. late month reported intelligence suggesting increased activity at DPRK's Sohae satellite launch facility. ROK reported DPRK drone crossed into its territory 13 Jan, prompting warning shots.

- ["U.S., China agree on need for new U.N. measure on North Korea"](#), Reuters, 27 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Taiwan Strait** Taiwan expressed concern after Chinese state media 20 Jan broadcast footage of live fire military exercises and landing drills carried out by 31st Group Army, based opposite Taiwan; China's defence ministry later confirmed exercises took place in 2015, said "no need to over-interpret them". Followed victory of independence-leaning opposition leader Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in presidential and parliamentary elections 16 Jan; after her victory Tsai said she would establish "consistent, predictable and sustainable" relations with China.

- ["Taiwan opposition wins presidency. China warns against independence move"](#), Reuters, 16 Jan. 2016.

South Asia

► **Afghanistan** Afghan, Pakistani, U.S., Chinese delegates met in Islamabad 11 Jan and Kabul 18 Jan to discuss mechanisms for reviving talks with Taliban, following late Dec meeting between President Ghani and Pakistani army chief. CEO Abdullah's deputy spokesman said Pakistani officials had pledged to provide Kabul with list of Taliban leaders willing to negotiate, and that Islamabad had agreed to cut off financial support to Taliban. Nangarhar governor 12 Jan said twelve-member Taliban group joined govt-initiated peace process in his province. Independent Election Commission 18 Jan announced long-delayed parliamentary and district council elections to be held 15 Oct; CEO Abdullah's deputy spokesman called decision illegitimate. Rival Taliban factions reportedly agreed to end violent infighting 1 Jan. Insurgents continued to make gains in south and north, as heavy fighting continued in Helmand, Takhar and elsewhere. Unidentified gunmen 4 Jan attacked Indian consulate in Mazar-i-Sharif, Balkh province; three insurgents and one police killed. One U.S. soldier killed by Taliban in Marjah, Helmand 5 Jan; U.S. conducted airstrikes in area 6 Jan. Seven journalists killed in Taliban suicide car bomb attack in Kabul 20 Jan. Helmand police chief claimed around 120 Taliban insurgents killed 4-6 Jan in Marjah. Taliban and Islamic State (IS) clashed in Batikot and Chaparhar of Nangarhar province early Jan, dozens killed. Suicide attack on Pakistani consulate in Jalalabad 13 Jan killed seven police, IS claimed responsibility. U.S. 21 Jan said military authorised to target IS in Afghanistan. Security officials 2 Jan reported ten-day operation against IS in Nangarhar killed 150 fighters. Suicide bomber 17 Jan killed at least thirteen at home of tribal elder in Jalalabad.

- [“Pakistan, China, U.S. urge Taliban to rejoin Afghan peace talks”](#), Reuters, 19 Jan. 2016.

► **Bangladesh** On second anniversary of controversial 2014 elections 5 Jan, both ruling Awami League (AL) party and opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) staged large rallies, notably without violent clashes. BNP party leaders reportedly claimed party will concentrate on reorganisation. BNP contested local polls in 234 municipalities 30 Dec, securing 21 seats; AL won 179 seats amid allegations of widespread rigging. Around 50 candidates boycotted elections, another 36 pulled out on election day due to alleged rigging. Journalists covering polls clashed with ruling party activists, at least fifteen injured, numerous others threatened. AL hailed elections as “free and fair”, BNP criticised process but decided against staging protests. Court 25 Jan ordered BNP party leader Khaleda Zia to appear in court in March over sedition charges. Supreme Court 6 Jan upheld death sentence for Jamaat-e-Islami chief Motiur Rahman Nizmi, convicted for 1971 war crimes. Govt 12 Jan issued review petition to Supreme Court seeking death penalty for top Jamaat-e-Islami member Delwar Hossain Sayedee, also charged with 1971 war crimes. Court 18 Jan jailed five militants from banned Islamist group Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen (JMB) over 2005 bombings. Deterioration in relations with Pakistan which began following Pakistani criticisms of Nov 2015 executions of two opposition leaders sentenced by International Crimes Tribunal continued; Pakistani govt 5 Jan demanded withdrawal of Bangladeshi senior diplomat from high commission in Islamabad. Islamic State (IS) reportedly claimed responsibility for murder of Christian convert in Jhenaidah 7 Jan.

- [“Signs of rare tolerance brings relief”](#), *Daily Star*, 7 Jan. 2016.

➔ **India (non-Kashmir)** Violent clashes between Maoists and security forces saw several suspected Maoists killed. Maoists 22 Jan killed villager near Gulab Bigha village, Aurangabad district. Three students reportedly abducted by Maoists in Bijapur district 3 Jan. Seven police reported killed in Maoist ambush in Jharkhand's Palamu district 27 Jan.

- [“Maoists gun down Aurangabad villager”](#), *Times of India*, 23 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Kashmir** Less than a week after Indian PM Modi paid surprise visit to Pakistani PM Sharif, militants 2 Jan attacked Indian airbase in Pthankot in Punjab near Pakistan border, killing seven soldiers; five attackers reported killed. Indian authorities said evidence suggests Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad behind attack, although Kashmiri United Jihad Council claimed responsibility 4 Jan. Pakistani govt 13 Jan announced several Jaish-e-Mohammad members arrested in Punjab suspected of involvement in attack, including founder Maulana Azhar; Jaish-e-Mohammad denied Azhar had been arrested. Indian officials 18 Jan announced laser fences to be established across 40 “vulnerable” stretches along border. FM-level talks arranged for 15 Jan postponed to “near future” following 2 Jan attack. Pro-independence demonstrators and Indian security forces clashed in Srinagar 20 Jan; one civilian killed, prompting further demonstrations 22 Jan.

- [“Pakistan arrests Jaish-e-Mohammad members over India airbase attack”](#), *Guardian*, 13 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Nepal** Protests against new constitution by Madhesi groups continued into fifth month despite differences among agitating four-party United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF) on intensifying or scaling back blockade on essential supplies along southern Tarai belt in light of increasing humanitarian toll. Talks continued between mainstream parties and UDMF with latter expressing willingness to agree on three-month framework to resolve constitutional disputes. Rapprochement undermined 21 Jan after three Madhesi protestors killed and nine injured in police firing in Morang district following clashes between UDMF cadres and ruling party UML's youth wing; 57 total protest-related deaths since demonstrations began Aug 2015. Trust deficit widened after 23 Jan adoption of two constitutional amendments related to constituency delineation and proportional representation of historically marginalised groups; UDMF boycotted parliamentary deliberations, rejected amendments for not redrawing highly contested provincial boundaries in new federal state structure, criticised mainstream parties for unilaterally passing amendments while dialogue still unresolved; announced new phase of protests targeting capital to increase pressure on govt. Post-earthquake reconstruction still stalled despite National Reconstruction Authority 13 Jan unveiling three-month action plan. UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman visited Kathmandu 7-8 Jan, expressed concern over economy, humanitarian situation, reconstruction efforts.

- [“Too little, too late”](#), *Republica*, 25 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Pakistan** Deadly attack on Bacha Khan University in Khyber Pakhtunkwa (KPK)'s Charsadda district 20 Jan killed at least twenty including fourteen students, faculty member, librarian, two security guards, driver. Four attackers killed in clashes with security forces; Pakistani Taliban (TTP) denied involvement, however TTP faction commander Umar Mansoor, alleged by some to have masterminded Dec 2014 Peshawar

school attack, claimed credit, his group threatened further attacks on schools. Five arrested 23 Jan charged with aiding militants. Dozens killed in terrorist attacks during month, including eleven killed by suicide bomber at market near police checkpoint in Peshawar 19 Jan. Anti-terrorism court 11 Jan issued arrest warrants for Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) leader Hussain and twenty others for “criminal conspiracy against the state” over their criticisms of paramilitary Rangers’ activities in Karachi. Violence continued in Balochistan, several security personnel killed in attacks. Seventeen killed including twelve police in suicide attack outside polio vaccination centre in Quetta 13 Jan; TTP and Jundullah both claimed responsibility. Punjab law minister 3 Jan announced 42 arrested for alleged Islamic State (IS) links. Nearly 80 militants reportedly surrendered to govt forces in N Waziristan region 15 Jan. Reviewing implementation of National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism, interior minister 30 Dec said govt efforts had significantly improved security, conceded banned extremist groups re-emerging under new name; acknowledged limited progress on reforming status of FATA, finding solutions to Afghan refugee presence, strengthening criminal justice system.

- [“Taliban attack at Bacha Khan University in Pakistan renews fears”](#), *New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Sri Lanka** In interviews with BBC 21 Jan and Al Jazeera 29 Jan, President Sirisena rejected participation of foreign judges in special war crimes court due to be established under terms of 2015 UN Human Rights Council (HRC) resolution. Sirisena also appeared to rule out other forms of international involvement agreed to at HRC; 28 Jan parliamentary statement by PM Wickremesinghe maintained possible role for foreign lawyers and other experts. Govt 9 Jan presented resolution to parliament to inaugurate process of drafting new constitution, abolish executive presidency, introduce new electoral system, expand provincial powers. Opposition issued several procedural objections; session to resolve disagreements failed 12 Jan, further discussions postponed until Feb. Tamil National Alliance (TNA) leader Sumanthiran 26 Jan demanded devolution of power in new constitution. Sirisena 20 Jan reiterated Dec pledge of returning all people displaced by conflict in north and east by mid-2016. PM 15 Jan promised further 4,000 acres to be released for resettlement, efforts to release more Tamil prisoners held under Prevention of Terrorism Act, which he said would be repealed and replaced with new legislation. UK minister for Asia called on govt to finalise transitional justice mechanisms during 14-16 Jan visit. Sri Lanka-EU meetings in Colombo 18-21 Jan, discussed renewal of GSP+ trade preferences. Police 30 Jan arrested Yoshitha Rajapaksa, son of former president, and four others, on money laundering and fraud charges with respect to private TV station established under Rajapaksa govt. Gnanasara Thera, leader of Buddhist militant group Bodu Bala Sena, arrested 26 Jan on contempt of court and other charges following disruption of court proceedings 25 Jan; crowds led by monks protesting Gnanasara’s arrest dispersed by army and police.

- [“Sri Lanka government proposes new constitution to devolve power”](#), Reuters, 9 Jan. 2016.

South East Asia

➔ **Indonesia** Islamic State (IS) claimed responsibility for 14 Jan bomb and gun attack in Jakarta in which eight people killed (including four attackers) and dozens injured; first IS attack in Jakarta. Senior Malaysian police official reported possible link between

one suspected attacker and terrorism suspects in Malaysia. IS issued video warning of further attacks. President Widodo reported to be considering barring citizens who have joined radical groups to fight overseas from returning. Security forces late month evacuated several hundred members of Gafatar sect, Islamic sect banned by authorities, from West Kalimantan province after they were attacked in sectarian violence.

- [“Indonesia looks to stop militants overseas from returning home”](#), Reuters, 19 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Myanmar** Transitional period proceeding smoothly ahead of 1 Feb handover to new National League for Democracy (NLD)-dominated parliament and new govt taking over end-March. Suu Kyi held talks for second time with commander-in-chief 26 Jan. 102 prisoners released in presidential amnesty 22 Jan, including some 52 political prisoners; political prisoner support groups say 78 political prisoners remain behind bars, others on pre-trial detention. First session of Union Peace Conference convened 12-16 Jan in Naypyitaw, with some 700 participants, meeting deadline set by Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA); substantive discussions deferred until after new govt takes power end-March. Most armed groups that had not signed decided to stay away despite being invited to attend without decision-making rights; three groups fighting military in Kokang region not invited. President, commander-in-chief, Karen National Union leader Mutu Say Poe and Aung San Suu Kyi all addressed conference; latter indicated that she would make peace process a “top priority” of NLD administration. Shan State Army-South, an NCA signatory, accused govt forces of violating NCA by attacking their troops 31 Dec. Fighting also escalated between govt forces and Arakan Army troops in Rakhine state’s Kyauktaw township since late-Dec.

- [“Suu Kyi meets Myanmar army chief as power transition looms”](#), AFP, 25 Jan. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°147, [The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications](#), 9 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Philippines** Third Party Monitoring Team (TPMT) which tracks implementation of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) 3 Jan urged govt and MILF to promote passage of Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL), and manage public expectations in case congress does not pass it; also expressed concerns over whether BBL would be compliant with CAB. Senate President Franklin Drilon and House Speaker Feliciano Belmonte 28 Jan conceded BBL will not be passed before May 2016 elections. Tensions heightened 27 Jan with reopening of Senate probe into 25 Jan Mamasapano incident in which 44 police commandos and eighteen MILF were killed. MILF 27 Jan reported it has set up task force following reports of recruitment activities by Islamic State in south Mindanao, expressed concern over rising radicalism among region’s youth. Thousands of civilians reportedly fled areas in southern Philippines early month following attacks by Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF). Continued clashes between military and Abu Sayyaf Group.

- [“Bangsamoro law won’t pass under PNOy”](#), Minda News, 29 Jan. 2016.

➔ **South China Sea** China 6 Jan conducted test flights on Fiery Cross Reef using civilian aircraft; Vietnam accused China of threatening regional air safety, sent protest letters to Beijing and UN aviation body; Chinese foreign ministry defended tests as within China’s “indisputable sovereignty”. U.S. and Vietnam FMs discussing test flight by phone reportedly expressed concern over potential militarisation of outposts in Spratlys, decided to explore how to improve Vietnam’s security capabilities. Chinese

FM Wang Yi 27 Jan said China will honour commitment not to militarise SCS. U.S. Navy destroyer 30 Jan sailed within twelve nautical miles of Triton Island, claimed by China, Taiwan and Vietnam, in the Paracel Islands, in freedom of navigation operation; China accused U.S. of entering its territorial waters and being “intentionally provocative”. Foreign and defence ministers of U.S. and Philippines met 12 Jan; Philippines military announced it has offered U.S. use of eight military bases on Philippine territory as part of countries’ 2014 Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement. Deputy Mayor of Sansha City, administrative unit for all SCS islands claimed by China, 14 Jan announced upgrade to infrastructure on SCS islands. Philippine officials 18 Jan reported they received threatening radio warnings from alleged Chinese navy operators while 18 Jan flying Cessna from Civil Aviation Authority to Philippine-controlled Pagasa Island near Subi Reef 7 Jan. Philippine Civil Aviation Authority deputy director-general stated it would install \$1.05mn aviation surveillance system over region.

- Yanmei Xie, [“The Storm Beneath the Calm: China’s Regional Relations in 2016”](#), *China File*, 8 Jan. 2016.
- [“Japan eyes bigger South China Sea presence in 2016”](#), *Diplomat*, 12 Jan. 2016.

New Crisis Group Asia Report N°275, [Stirring up the South China Sea \(IV\): Oil in Troubled Waters](#), 26 Jan. 2016. The race for hydrocarbon reserves in the South China Sea is aggravating conflicting territorial claims. The regional players need cooperation, yet have increasingly open confrontations at sea. For peaceful joint energy development, all parties need to stop acting unilaterally and do more to understand the others’ goals and limitations.

➡ **Thailand** Anti-coup New Democracy Movement (NDM) student leader Sirawith Seritiwat seized 20 Jan by uniformed men; Sirawith alleged he was hooded and beaten before being delivered to police station. Sirawith and three other NDM activists later released after military court rejected police request to extend their detention. Military court 19 Jan ordered release of fourteen student activists detained since June 2015 for leading anti-coup rallies. Defence ministry 30 Dec released results of investigation into alleged corruption by senior army officers in construction of Rajabhakti Park, exonerating army. Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) 29 Jan issued constitution draft. CDC chairman Meechai Ruchapan said general election may be delayed from July 2017 to end of that year. Iyad Amin Madani, Sec Gen of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, visited Thailand 10-13 Jan, expressed support for military govt’s approach to Malay-Muslim insurgency in southernmost provinces; 10 Jan met in Kuala Lumpur with representatives of Majlis Syura (Mara) Patani, umbrella group of Patani independence organisations. Three NGOs 8 Jan released report alleging torture of insurgent suspects by security forces in deep south. PM Prayuth 21 Jan said authorities investigating report that three people with links to Islamic State (IS) had visited Sungai Kolok, Narathiwat late 2015 to donate money to mosques and encourage religious teachers to support IS. Violence in region continued, including explosion in Thepha district, Songkhla province 18 Jan, killing one.

- [“First charter draft comes under fire”](#), *Bangkok Post*, 29 Jan. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°274, [Thailand’s Lengthening Roadmap to Elections](#), 10 Dec. 2015.

Europe and Central Asia

Balkans

➔ **Kosovo** Opponents of Aug EU-brokered agreement with Serbia returned to streets of Pristina 9 Jan, with estimated 60,000 joining protests; some protesters clashed with police. Opposition announced further protests for 17 Feb, anniversary of declaration of independence. Latest round of Pristina-Belgrade dialogue in Brussels 27 Jan saw parties discuss implementation of former agreements. Prominent Kosovo Serb politician Oliver Ivanović, considered a moderate, sentenced to nine years' jail for war crimes by EULEX judges. European parliament 21 Jan ratified Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo. Dutch govt announced it would host new court to try Kosovo Liberation Army fighters for war crimes.

- ["Corruption, hate and violence: Kosovo in crisis"](#), Vice News, 22 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Macedonia** PM Gruevski offered resignation 15 Jan, 100 days before planned early elections 24 April, part of deal agreed with opposition to end political crisis. EU Enlargement Commissioner Hahn visited same day to participate in talks on implementation of deal, but sides unable to agree on whether to stick to agreed election date or postpone polls; opposition leader Zoran Zaev said preconditions for fair elections still not in place: electoral roll still needs to be checked for fake voters and media freedom assured. Head of electoral commission (DIK) said credible elections not possible by 24 April, more time needed to prepare; other DIK members voiced disagreement. MPs from ruling party in parliament voted to dissolve parliament 24 Feb, and elected new govt to pave way for 24 April elections, despite boycott by opposition MPs. Clean-up of electoral roll began late month; EU and U.S. ambassadors 29 Jan said urgent work remains to be done before parliament is dissolved 24 Feb.

- ["Macedonia crisis talks fail to agree election date"](#), Balkan Insight, 16 Jan. 2016.

Caucasus

➔ **Armenia** Trial of Russian soldier accused of murdering family of seven in Gyumri Jan 2015 began at Russian military base, under Armenian judge; defendant pleaded guilty.

- ["Protests erupt in Azerbaijan over jobs, economic woes"](#), RFE/RL, 13 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Azerbaijan** Following Dec currency depreciation caused by falling energy prices, protests broke out in several districts 13 Jan over mounting economic difficulties including unemployment, price increases; scores of people including opposition activists reportedly arrested, mostly in Siyazan, where military units were deployed. Security forces dispersed protest in Quba district in NE 15 Jan. Currency continued to depreciate; govt 14 Jan closed down private currency exchange businesses. Parliament 19 Jan approved measures aimed at curbing crisis; IMF and World Bank discussing possible assistance package.

- ["Baku's reserves rapidly evaporating amid fiscal storm"](#), Eurasianet, 13 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan)** Armenia and Azerbaijan continued to accuse each other of ceasefire violations; Nagorno-Karabakh de facto authorities reported Armenian soldier killed by Azeri troops along line of contact 9 Jan. Iran 27 Jan again offered to mediate between Yerevan and Baku to resolve dispute.

- [“U.S. diplomat: Violence in Nagorno-Karabakh unacceptable”](#), *Daily Sabah*, 18 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Georgia** International Criminal Court authorised investigation into alleged war crimes during 2008 Georgia-Russia war by Georgian, Russian and South Ossetian forces.

- [“ICC authorises Russia-Georgia war crimes investigation”](#), BBC, 27 Jan. 2016.

➔ **North Caucasus (Russia)** Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov made threatening statements toward Russian opposition during month: 12 Jan called opposition “enemies of the people and traitors” who should be tried for sabotage. Local politician in Siberia Konstantin Senchenko 14 Jan called Ramzan “disgrace to Russia”; apologised shortly after, allegedly after receiving threats. Chechen parliament speaker Magomed Daudov 16 Jan accused opposition figures and liberal media of being “traitors” controlled by West. Rights groups called on Moscow to condemn Kadyrov’s remarks. Deputy Chairman of presidential Human Rights Council Yevgeny Bobrov said Kadyrov’s and his subordinate’s statements will be scrutinised to determine if extremist and/or unconstitutional. Follows reports in Dec that Dagestan republic head Ramazan Abdulatipov tasked law enforcement agencies with listing media outlets, journalists and bloggers it believed to be “subversive” and “supporting extremism”. Thousands rallied in support of Kadyrov in Grozny 22 Jan, many reportedly forced to attend; Dagestani police 24 Jan intervened to prevent unauthorised pro-Kadyrov rally; Moscow authorities 25 Jan rejected application to hold anti-Kadyrov rally. Anti-terrorist operations continued: gang leader killed in Dagestan 11 Jan; authorities 15 Jan reported clash between law enforcement officers and alleged militants in Kabardino-Balkaria. Missing university lecturer who was reportedly detained by law enforcement officials 19 Dec found dead 1 Jan in Chechnya’s Urus Martan district. Govt Investigative Committee 21 Jan declared politician Boris Nemtsov’s murder case solved; Nemtsov’s family rejected conclusions. Moscow late Dec agreed to transfer assets of state-owned oil refinery infrastructure to Chechnya following request by Kadyrov.

- [“Putin’s dragon”](#), *New Yorker*, 8 Feb. 2016.

Eastern Europe

➔ *** Moldova** Capital Chisinau rocked by protests, outpouring of public anger over political corruption, demands for early elections. Amid ongoing efforts to form new govt after Oct 2015 ousting of previous govt over banking scandal, President Timofti 13 Jan rejected controversial businessman Vlad Plahotniuc as candidate for PM, nominated by pro-EU ruling coalition MPs. Thousands of protesters took to streets in Chisinau 13-14 Jan opposing Plahotniuc’s candidacy. Pro-Russian parties and pro-EU anti-corruption group staged further protests 16 Jan after Timofti named new PM nominee Pavel Filip, whose critics say is a proxy for Plahotniuc. Parliament 22 Jan voted in new pro-European govt headed by Filip; mostly pro-Russian protesters demanding early elections broke into parliament building, clashed with police. Protests continued over

following days calling for snap elections, constitutional referendum on direct presidential elections and end to parliamentary immunity. EU and U.S. called for restraint and dialogue. Ruling coalition 30 Jan said it will call for referendum on direct presidential elections.

- [“Moldova crisis: An elite power grab?”](#), BBC, 27 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Ukraine** Amid ongoing accusations of ceasefire violations between Ukrainian army and separatists, three Ukrainian soldiers and two rebels reported killed in separate incidents in east early Jan; fourth Ukrainian soldier reported killed 23 Jan. Kyiv and separatist negotiators meeting in Minsk 13 Jan agreed to abide by ceasefire. U.S. Asst Sec State Victoria Nuland and Putin aide Vladislav Surkov 15 Jan held “brainstorming” session in Russian enclave Kaliningrad; other U.S.-Russia consultations took place during month. OSCE monitors reported they came under fire SW of Donetsk 16 Jan. Poroshenko 14 Jan said Ukraine prepared to restore electricity supply to Crimea if it rejoins Ukraine; Ukraine cut off trade with Crimea 18 Jan. EU-Ukraine free trade agreement came into force 1 Jan. Russia same day banned import of Ukrainian food products; Ukraine reciprocated. Poroshenko failed to obtain support needed for vital Minsk-related constitutional amendments, postponed vote. PM Yatsenyuk 24 Jan called for referendum on new constitution; Poroshenko said no special status for east until lasting ceasefire in place. EU 18 Jan urged Kyiv to implement promised reforms. Central Bank 28 Jan issued revised growth forecast for 2016, 1.1%, down from 2.4% predicted Nov 2015. UN announced extension of humanitarian food aid to east.

- [“Security before politics in eastern Ukraine”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 27 Jan. 2016.

Western Europe/Mediterranean

➔ **Cyprus** Turkish Cypriot official 17 Jan said ongoing dispute with Turkish govt over water distribution could destabilise Turkish Cypriot ruling coalition and force early elections in Feb; destabilisation threatens positive progress in reunification talks. Turkish PM Davutoğlu 18 Jan called for summit on Cyprus with UK, Turkey, Greece, and Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot administrations.

- [“Water war could leave Turkish Cyprus high and dry”](#), *Al-Monitor*, 11 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Turkey** Govt declared progress in crackdown against PKK’s youth arm YDG-H in SE; PM Davutoğlu 19 Jan said Kurdish town Silopi in Şırnak province officially “free of PKK fighters”. Some 35 civilians, 33 security forces and twelve PKK militants killed in clashes between security forces and PKK, including PKK car bomb attack 14 Jan targeting police compound in Cinar, Diyarbakır province, six killed including five civilians. Officials 27 Jan widened curfew in Diyarbakır’s Sur district from six to eleven neighbourhoods. Two Kurdish lawyers 6 Jan petitioned European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) demanding temporary injunction to end curfews, claiming they violate basic human rights; court rejected petition. Petition followed late-Dec request to ECHR by pro-Kurdish People’s Democratic Party (HDP) co-chair Meral Daniş Beştaş to rule that govt crackdowns are causing mass rights abuses in SE. Kurdish rights situation worsened with Ankara Public Prosecutor’s Office launching series of investigations late-Dec into HDP leader Selahattin Demirtas, and into several politicians of Kurdish umbrella Democratic People’s Congress (DTK) following their

declaration supporting Kurdish self-rule. Country-wide debate intensified early-Jan over ruling Justice and Development Party's proposal for new constitution which would dramatically increase powers of presidency. Islamic State (IS) suicide attack 12 Jan killed eleven foreigners in Istanbul's tourist district Sultanahmet; some 31 IS suspects subsequently arrested and 112 detained, govt reportedly carried out several operations against IS positions in Syria and Iraq. Border tensions grew following 18 Jan rocket attack reportedly from IS-held territory in Syria on border town Kilis, one Turkish civilian killed. Govt accused Russia of violating its airspace again 29 Jan; Russia denied. Late-Nov refugee deal with EU remains stalled amid member states' resistance over \$3bn in aid; officials 15 Jan announced govt would begin issuing work permits for Syrian refugees without requiring residence permits, meeting longstanding demand of refugees and EU.

- ["Turkey wages lengthy battle for Kurdish stronghold"](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 10 Jan. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Europe Briefing N°77, [A Sisyphean Task? Resuming Turkey-PKK Peace Talks](#), 17 Dec. 2015.

Central Asia

➔ **Kazakhstan** Amid worsening economic crisis and following request from parliament 13 Jan, President Nazarbayev 20 Jan dissolved parliament, set early parliamentary elections for 20 March. Pro-govt Communist People's Party Vladislav Kosarev said fresh mandate needed to consolidate nation. Currency slipped to all-time low against dollar 18 Jan, having lost around half value since July 2015.

- ["Drift and dissent"](#), *Economist*, 30 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Kyrgyzstan** Govt detained eight members of ethnic-Uzbek Islamist militant faction Jannat Oshiklari, including six Kyrgyz citizens accused of murder and recruiting fighters for Islamic State (IS), accused of 22 Dec murder of follower of banned Akhmadia movement from Osh region; police said one suspect from Jalalabad province trained by IS in Syria. Following President Atambayev's annual end-of-year address on Russia's disengagement from hydropower investment, parliament 20 Jan revoked hydropower agreement with Russia.

- ["Kyrgyzstan cancels five hydropower plant deal with Russia"](#), HydroWorld, 21 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Tajikistan** Parliament 11 Jan proposed changes to constitution paving way for President Rahmon to retain presidency beyond 2020, also decreasing lower age limit for presidency; would allow president's son, Rustam Rahmon, currently head of customs service, to become president. President 27 Jan appointed daughter Ozoda chief of staff. Military sources 22 Jan reported border with Afghanistan to be reinforced with 1,000 extra troops. Interior minister 25 Jan told media 1,000 Tajik nationals have joined Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, 61 have returned, 148 killed in fighting.

- Deirdre Tynan, ["Tajikistan: An ever-more fragile state in a brittle region"](#), *New Eastern Europe*, 28 Jan. 2016.
- ["Tajikistan parliament paves way for president to rule for life"](#), AFP, 22 Jan. 2016.

New Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing N°78, *Tajikistan Early Warning: Internal Pressures, External Threats*, 11 Jan. 2016. Plagued by violence, corruption and economic hardship, and exposed to a long, insecure border with Afghanistan, Tajikistan is under dangerous stress. President Rahmon's autocratic undermining of the 1997 peace agreement is fostering Islamic radicalisation. As Tajikistan's growing fragility impacts a brittle region, the country must become a conflict-prevention priority.

➡ **Turkmenistan** Russia's Gazprom 4 Jan stopped buying gas from Turkmen gas, switching to Uzbekistan for gas supplies, in move analysts believe intended to pressure Turkmenistan into military cooperation with Russia. Media reported banks 12 Jan banned sale of dollars indefinitely. Twelve governors sacked by presidential decree 4 Jan, eleven for failing to meet harvest quota, twelfth on ill-health grounds; followed 31 Dec brawl between residents of Dashoguz province's Tagta district and police.

- ["Turkmen banks halt hard-currency sales"](#), RFE/RL, 12 Jan. 2016.

➡ **Uzbekistan** Police in restive Ferghana Valley complained over wage arrears early Jan; followed protests drawing hundreds mid-Dec over lack of gas, electricity and heating in Margilan and Ferghana. New law charging 7.5% tax on earnings above \$21 minimum monthly wage came into force 1 Jan. FM Kamilov 19 Jan met U.S. Asst Sec State Nisha Desai Biswal in Washington, reportedly discussed political development, regional stability/security, trade and development.

- ["Uzbek foreign minister. U.S. officials hold talks in Washington"](#), RFE/RL, 19 Jan. 2016.

Latin America and the Caribbean

➔ **Colombia** Peace talks between govt and FARC resumed 12 Jan; parties 22 Jan agreed on creation of “executive commission” to make decisions over final drafting of pending agreements in attempt to speed up last stage of negotiations. FARC 13 Jan publicly expressed doubt over possibility of meeting 23 March deadline for final agreement. Govt and FARC 19 Jan issued joint statement on creation of three-party mechanism for verification of disarmament and bilateral ceasefire; would include govt, FARC and UN political mission made up of observers from Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) member states. UNSC 26 Jan unanimously accepted govt and FARC formal request for creation of political mission; mission would be unarmed and have one-year mandate. ELN violence continued despite late-Dec statement by top ELN commander Nicolas Bautista, alias Gabino, that peace agenda with govt had been finalised: clashes with security forces reported 10 Jan in Catatumbo, two soldiers killed.

- [“Peace nears in Colombia as FARC, govt speed up talks”](#), teleSUR, 22 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Guatemala** President Morales inaugurated 14 Jan; in first speech expressed support for continued investigations against corruption by Public Ministry and International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG). Morales 14 Jan appointed former attorney general’s office General Secretary, Francisco Rivas, as minister of govt. Authorities 6 Jan arrested eighteen former high-level military officers: fourteen suspected of massive rights violations and four others for disappearance of a child during civil war in 1980s. Those arrested include Edgar Ovalle Maldonado, President Morales’ right-hand man during campaign and expected leader of party’s legislative group in Congress, and César Augusto Cabrera Mejía, initially considered for minister of govt position. Ombudsman late Dec called on govt to fulfil 1996 peace accords; said army’s continued presence in internal security issues contravenes civilian character of security apparatus.

- [“Guatemala arrests former military officers in connection with massacres”](#), NYT, 6 Jan. 2016.

New Crisis Group Latin America Report N°56, [Crutch to Catalyst? The International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala](#), 29 Jan. 2016. Dramatic changes upended Guatemalan politics in 2015. Forcing the pace were international prosecutors, bolstered in their fight against corruption and impunity by a great wave of support from ordinary citizens. If Guatemala’s national reforms continue when outside help leaves, it can become a true role model for the region.

⚡ **Haiti** Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) 22 Jan announced second postponement of presidential run-off election, originally planned 24 Jan, amid growing concern over escalating violence and continued disagreement over validity of Aug/Oct legislative and presidential elections, and series of violent protests by opposition supporters demanding postponement. International community, including UNSG Ban, EU observer missions and Organization of American States (OAS) 23 Jan expressed concern over worsening instability; urged govt and opposition to reach agreement to overcome electoral impasse. Opposition candidate Jude Célestin reiterated refusal to engage in dialogue unless Aug and Oct elections – both marred by violence and allegations of fraud – are declared invalid. Govt-backed candidate Jovenel Moïse continued to campaign, called for results to be respected. President Martelly 27 Jan announced replacement of all CEP members. OAS 27 Jan authorised special mission to assist with resolution of stalemate; opposition sup-

porters protested OAS involvement, claimed it may help Martelly remain in power beyond constitutionally mandated 7 Feb departure date. Parliament returned 11 Jan after year-long absence, marking official end to Martelly's one-man rule.

- ["International community calls for compromise in Haiti"](#), *Miami Herald*, 23 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Mexico** Marines 8 Jan arrested Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán in town of Los Mochis, Sinaloa state, following his July 2015 escape from maximum security prison. Officials 22 Jan said legal process underway to extradite Guzmán to U.S., where he faces drug and murder charges. Violence and kidnappings in Guerrero state persisted: gunmen 9 Jan attacked group in Arcelia, two killed and nineteen kidnapped; gunmen 11 Jan attacked school in Ajuchitlán, four teachers and director kidnapped. Authorities 15 Jan said 21 victims had been released, two died. Gunmen 2 Jan killed Temixco Mayor Gisala Mota Ocampo in Morelos state, hours after she took office; state officials blamed "Los Rojos" gang operating in neighbouring Guerrero, with whom she allegedly refused to make a deal. Police 31 Jan arrested 24 members of Sinaloa drug cartel in city of Sonoyta, Sonora state during joint border operation with U.S. Spanish police 15 Jan arrested former governor and ex-president of ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) Humberto Moreira, who faces charges of money laundering and embezzlement in U.S.

- Mary Speck, ["El Chapo Arrested. Again: Is Mexico Getting a Grip?"](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 15 Jan. 2016.
- ["How El Chapo was finally captured, again"](#), *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Venezuela** New opposition Democratic Unity (MUD) alliance-dominated National Assembly (AN) sworn in 5 Jan amid protests and tight security. Leader of Democratic Action Henry Ramos Allup elected to chair parliament for twelve months; Julio Borges of Justice First (PJ) named head of MUD's parliamentary fraction. Supreme Court (TSJ) 4 Jan ruled four MPs representing Amazonas state, including three MUD MPs, could not be sworn in due to legal challenge over alleged vote-buying, mounted late-Dec by ruling United Socialist Party (PSUV). MUD's lawyers said injunction unenforceable; swearing-in of the three MUD MPs went ahead 6 Jan. In response, TSJ declared all AN's decisions null and void until move reversed; former parliamentary chairman and PSUV VP Diosdado Cabello argued TSJ could assume legislative functions. Organization of American States (OAS) Sec Gen Luis Almagro 12 Jan published open letter criticising use of TSJ to curb parliament. In face of looming constitutional clash, Ramos and newly-appointed VP Aristóbulo Isturiz reached agreement 13 Jan with three MPs, who agreed to not take seats pending resolution of case. President Maduro 10 Jan presented "state of the union" address to parliament following 7 Jan cabinet reshuffle in which Isturiz replaced VP Jorge Arreaza, and two ministers with close ties to Cabello were removed, including his brother, industry minister José David Cabello. Maduro 15 Jan issued economic emergency decree, giving president broad powers to evade budget scrutiny, seize private sector assets and amend regulations; AN rejected decree 22 Jan. Economic crisis continued to worsen: Venezuelan crude oil reached lowest value in twelve years mid-Jan at US\$24 a barrel; central bank released economic figures for first time in two years, revealing 7.1% drop in GDP annual inflation rate by Sept of over 140%.

- Phil Gunson, ["Venezuela: The Light at the End of the Tunnel?"](#), *In Pursuit of Peace*, 8 Jan. 2016.
- ["Venezuela opposition congress tries to start legislating"](#), AP, 14 Jan. 2016.

Middle East & North Africa

Eastern Mediterranean

➔ **Israel-Palestine** Month saw continued Palestinian attacks on Israelis in Jerusalem, West Bank and Israel, increased use of live arms in attacks. Israeli PM Netanyahu 25 Jan ordered army to increase settlement security. Netanyahu 26 Jan accused UNSG Ban of giving “tailwind to terror” after Ban criticised Israeli settlement building. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas 6 Jan announced PA would not be dissolved but replaced by Palestinian state; called for international conference for peace; France 29 Jan proposed international peace summit to renew diplomatic process. PA General Intelligence chief widely criticised by Palestinians after stating 18 Jan that PA security forces prevented over 200 terrorist attacks against Israel since Oct 2015. Amid worsening conditions in Gaza, Hamas and PA continued dispute over opening and control of Rafah border crossing, which remains almost entirely closed. Ongoing talks over rapprochement between Israel and Turkey.

- [“Israel says will seize West Bank land; demolished EU structures”](#), Reuters, 21 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Lebanon** Leader Lebanese Forces party Samir Geagea 18 Jan backed rival General Michel Aoun, leader of Christian Free Patriotic Movement, for presidency, now vacant for over twenty months, in move to resolve political crisis. Parliament failed to elect new president again 7 Jan due to lack of quorum. Hizbollah 4 Jan detonated explosive device targeting Israeli army patrol in disputed Shebaa Farms area following alleged Israeli assassination of prominent militant Samir Kuntar late Dec; Israel retaliated with shelling. Authorities 14 Jan released on bail former Information Minister Michel Samaha, arrested Aug 2012 on terrorism charges. Former PM and Future Current leader Saad Hariri criticised release; protesters blocked roads in Beirut. Security forces 14 Jan reportedly arrested senior member of al-Qaeda-linked Abdullah Azzam Brigade in anti-terrorist operation in Beirut. Islamic State and al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra clashed in Aarsal late Jan.

- [“Advantage Iran in Lebanese political proxy battle with Saudi Arabia”](#), *Guardian*, 18 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Syria** UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva between Assad regime and opposition, scheduled for 25 Jan, delayed until 29 Jan amid dispute over composition of delegations. Main opposition negotiating body 22 Jan refused to attend talks unless Assad regime implements UNSC resolution calling for full humanitarian access to besieged areas and end to attacks targeting civilians; as of 31 Jan, opposition delegation present in Geneva, but insisting it would limit participation until humanitarian demands met. Prospects for credible negotiations decreased following escalation of tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran early Jan (see Iran). Assad regime and allied forces campaign gained momentum, making progress against anti-Islamic State (IS) rebels south of Aleppo and in Daraa; seized rebel-held towns of Salma 12 Jan, most significant rebel holding in coastal mountains, and Rabiya 24 Jan in Latakia province. Clashes between IS and govt forces over eastern city Deir al-Zour continued. IS bomb attack 26 Jan killed at least 24 in govt-controlled Homs; IS-claimed suicide attack in Damascus 31

Jan killed over 70. Having taken Tishreen dam 30 Dec with U.S. support, Kurdish YPG approaching Menbaj, major IS-held town east of Aleppo. Assad regime and Hizbollah 7 Jan agreed to allow small shipment of humanitarian aid to starving residents of besieged town Madaya near Lebanese border, part of deal that also sent aid to two Idlib towns besieged by rebels.

- Jean-Marie Guéhenno, [“Destroying ISIS: 10 dos and don’ts”](#), World Economic Forum, 17 Jan. 2016.
- [“Russian bombs take toll in Syria as Islamic State under pressure”](#), Reuters, 20 Jan. 2016.

Gulf

➔ **Bahrain** Police 6 Jan seized suspected Iranian-linked cell reportedly planning attacks in Bahrain. Several clashes between protestors and security forces after Saudi Arabia executed prominent Shia cleric early Jan, including west of Manama and in Sitra. Demonstrations erupted across country 13 Jan demanding release of Sheikh Salman, head of main opposition group al-Wefaq, detained Dec 2014 and charged with attempting to overthrow Al Khalifah regime.

- [“Bahrain says catches Iran-linked cell plotting attacks”](#), Reuters, 6 Jan. 2016.

📈 **Iran** IAEA 16 Jan confirmed Iran has honoured commitments under July 2015 nuclear deal, triggering rollback of all nuclear-related UN, EU and U.S. sanctions. U.S. 17 Jan announced new sanctions on eleven entities and individuals involved in Iran’s recent ballistic missile tests, hours after U.S. and Iran announced prisoner exchange, ending fourteen months of secret negotiations. Countries also resolved long-standing financial dispute. Saudi execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr 2 Jan, along with 46 others convicted of terrorism, provoked backlash in Iran, where govt condemned executions, Supreme Leader Khamenei warned Saudi Arabia will suffer “divine retribution”. Mobs hijacked protests in front of Saudi diplomatic missions in Tehran and NE city Mashhad; Riyadh 3 Jan severed diplomatic relations with Tehran and cut all economic ties; allies followed suit including Bahrain, Sudan and others; Kuwait and UAE downgraded relations. Govt uniformly condemned attacks on Saudi missions, reportedly arrested over fifty suspected of storming embassy and held security officials to account for failing to protect diplomatic properties. Revolutionary Guards 13 Jan released ten U.S. sailors detained previous day when U.S. Navy patrol boats drifted into Iran’s territorial waters.

- Ali Vaez, [“The Saudi Missions and the Mobs: Who Controls the Iranian Street?”](#), In Pursuit of Peace, 18 Jan. 2016.
- [“Sanctions against Iran lifted after compliance with nuclear deal”](#), *Guardian*, 16 Jan. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°166, [Iran After the Nuclear Deal](#), 15 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Iraq** Saudi Arabia’s 2 Jan execution of Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr further polarised region along sectarian lines, complicating Iraqi government efforts to rebuild multilateral relations with its neighbours, particularly Saudi Arabia. Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Shiite political forces 3 Jan denounced execution. Following spate of insurgent attacks 11 Jan in which dozens were killed, including IS attacks in Baghdad

and Diyala, Shia militiamen reportedly carried out retaliatory attacks against Sunnis in Diyala province. Retaliatory attacks fuelled growing concern over sectarian violence in Diyala, which was cleared of Islamic State (IS) Jan 2015. Despite PM Abadi's visit to Diyala 14 Jan in attempt to calm tensions, Sunni lawmakers walked out of parliament 19 Jan in protest at attacks and fact that Shia militiamen hold Diyala security file, not govt. Sistani 15 Jan urged unity. Five suicide bombers attacked military base north of Baghdad 3 Jan, fifteen security personnel killed. Coalition airstrikes destroyed IS cash distribution site in Mosul 12 Jan; U.S reported sixteen coalition airstrikes targeted IS 20 Jan, fourteen IS fighting positions in Sinjar destroyed. U.S. 5 Jan said IS-held territory in Iraq decreased by 40% in 2015. Three Americans and one Iraqi kidnapped in Baghdad 15 Jan, Iraqi officials said Shi'ite militia Asaeb Ahl al-Haq possibly responsible. UN report 19 Jan stated civilian suffering from violence "remains staggering", at least 18,800 killed Jan 2014-Oct 2015. Amnesty International 20 Jan reported Kurdistan Regional Govt forces possibly committed war crimes in areas captured from IS. Police 26 Jan reported mass grave discovered in Ramadi. Finance ministry 6 Jan announced govt likely unable to pay salaries in 2016 due to financial crisis provoked by sharp drop in oil prices, stoking fears of increasing domestic tensions, strengthening anti-establishment forces such as Shia militias and weakening govt credibility. UN 31 Jan requested additional \$861mn for humanitarian crisis.

- ["Sectarian violence besets key province in Iraq after an Islamic State attack"](#), *Washington Post*, 18 Jan. 2016.

↓ **Yemen** Fighting intensified as Saudi-backed coalition stepped up air campaign, mostly targeting Sanaa, in response to Huthi/Saleh bloc cross-border incursions and rocket attacks, after ending temporary truce 2 Jan (which in practice was never honoured by either side); UNSC 5 Jan urged warring parties to resume ceasefire. Rights groups accused Saudi-led coalition of dropping cluster munitions in Sanaa 6 Jan. Leaked UN panel of experts report 27 Jan accused Saudi airstrikes of targeting civilians in a "widespread and systematic" manner; Saudi-led coalition 31 Jan said it had launched investigation. Huthi/Saleh forces and Saudi-backed coalition redoubling efforts to gain new territory in disputed areas: Saudi-backed govt forces 6 Jan reportedly landed by sea at Red Sea port of Maydeh near border and on 24 Jan landed military vehicles and reinforcements to retake other border territories as well as Red Sea coast from Huthis; battle continued over western parts of Marib province and southern city Taiz, where Huthi/Saleh forces maintained blockade. Yemeni military officers supported by Saudi-led coalition 26 Jan announced preparations to "liberate" Huthi-controlled governorate Dammar, south of Sanaa. UN-sponsored talks scheduled for 14 Jan delayed as both sides made new demands for restarting negotiations: Huthis calling for ceasefire and Hadi govt insisting Huthis lift siege of Taiz, release additional political prisoners. Huthis 14 Jan released detained minister and four activists in move aimed at renewing ceasefire. Escalating regional tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran further complicated peace prospects (see Iran). Iran 7 Jan accused Saudi Arabia of airstrike on its embassy in Sanaa; Riyadh denied. Lawlessness and expansion of jihadi groups continued to plague south, particularly Aden; car bomb 17 Jan reportedly killed ten outside Aden security chief's home; another suicide car bombing 28 Jan killed at least eleven outside presidential palace.

- ["Yemen conflict: Saudi-led coalition targeting civilians, UN says"](#), BBC, 27 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Saudi Arabia** Regional tensions escalated following execution of 47 convicted of terrorism 2 Jan, including prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr, prompting violent demonstrations in Iran targeting Saudi missions (see Iran); protests also in Bahrain, Lebanon, Iraq. Al-Qaeda 11 Jan warned retaliation for execution of its members; leader 12 Jan issued message encouraging attacks against Saudi Arabia and Western allies. Mostly peaceful demonstrations against executions in Shia-majority Qatif district in east early Jan; man shot dead as security officers came under fire in Awamiya 4 Jan. Islamic State 5 Jan threatened destruction of prisons detaining jihadis. Two gunmen attacked Shia mosque in Mahasen 29 Jan, at least two killed. Saudi-led coalition continued military operations in Yemen (see Yemen).

- [“Mideast tensions soar as Saudi Arabia rallies countries to cut ties with Iran”](#), *Washington Post*, 4 Jan. 2016.

North Africa

➔ **Algeria** Cabinet Chief Ahmed Ouyahia 5 Jan unveiled long-awaited draft constitutional reforms: mostly technical revisions include reintroduction of presidential term limitations of two-five years in office, or one re-election; declaration of Tamazight as official language; exclusion of binationals from higher ranks of public office; increased press freedoms; decriminalisation of media offenses. Reforms to be submitted to parliament in several months for final approval. Opposition criticised revisions as insufficient, also restriction of constitutional consultations to small group of president’s supporters. Security forces 12 Jan arrested seven Libyan gunmen in Amenas, seized weapons and three vehicles; defence ministry reported soldiers killed four Islamist gunmen west of capital 29 Jan.

- [“What does an amended constitution really change about Algeria?”](#), *Washington Post*, 19 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Egypt** Parliament 10 Jan convened first session since June 2012, marking official completion of transitional roadmap announced July 2013. Independents form majority of seats reserved for individual candidates, with 318 of 448 seats; 67 seats for largest party Free Egyptians. 120 seats reserved for party-based lists all went to pro-regime “For the Love of Egypt” coalition. Some independent candidates initially refused to swear constitutional oath of loyalty because it praised Jan 2011 revolution, prompting controversy. Parliament set to review hundreds of laws issued by executive decree since July 2013; approved some controversial laws including counter-terrorism law, passed 17 Jan. Violence continued in N Sinai as phase two of counter-insurgency campaign launched early Jan: unidentified attackers fired at police 20 Jan killing five; militants and soldiers clashed 14 Jan, four soldiers and 30 militants reported killed; three police killed by IED 19 Jan; four children killed in fighting 28 Jan; roadside bomb killed two security officials 31 Jan. President Sisi expressed displeasure at non-implementation of development and economic assistance for Sinai early Jan; assured visiting CIA chief John Brennan that Egypt fully in control of peninsula. Attacks in tourist areas in Cairo and Hurghada by Red Sea, where two tourists wounded by gunmen 8 Jan, and three tourists stabbed 9 Jan. Bomb attack 21 Jan killed six including three police in Giza, Muslim Brotherhood blamed. One police, one soldier killed near Cairo 10 Jan; IS claimed responsibility. Heavy security deployed ahead of 25 Jan anni-

versary of 2011 uprising ending Mubarak's rule and protests severely curtailed amid crackdown on activists.

- [“Hundreds vanishing in Egypt as crackdown widens, activists say”](#), New York Times, 26 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Libya** Setback for implementation of 17 Dec Libya Political Agreement (LPA) and formation of Govt of National Accord (GNA) after some 104 members of Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) 25 Jan rejected cabinet line-up proposed by Presidency Council 18 Jan, asked PM-designate Serraj to resubmit proposal with fewer ministers. Two of nine Presidency Council members opposing new govt suspended their participation from body, then returned after HoR decision. Disagreements persist over HoR's insistence on removal of Article 8 of LPA regarding transfer of military power to Presidency Council if no agreement reached on Supreme Commander of Armed Forces within twenty days of ratification; Tripoli-based General National Congress 27 Jan said it opposed any change to LPA. Nomination for defence minister of Mahdi al-Barghathi, critic of commander of eastern-based Libyan National Army General Haftar, accelerated splits within army. Islamic State (IS) affiliates increased raids on oil infrastructure, including 4-6 Jan attack on Sidra terminal in Sirte basin, resulting in eleven guards and dozens of militants reported killed; and attacks on nearby Ras Lanuf oil port 7 and 21 Jan. Militants 8-9 Jan attacked power plant in Benghazi. At least 50 killed by truck bomb targeting police academy in Zliten 7 Jan; IS claimed responsibility. IS affiliates consolidated authority in Ben Jawwad town west of Sidra terminal. Deadly fighting reignited between Tebu and Tuareg armed groups in Obari 10 Jan despite local peace deal.

- [“Libya's rivals nominate unity cabinet under U.N. plan”](#), *Wall Street Journal*, 19 Jan. 2016.
- For latest report, see Crisis Group Middle East and North Africa Report N°165, [The Prize: Fighting for Libya's Energy Wealth](#), 3 Dec. 2015.

➔ **Morocco** Security forces 8 Jan arrested seven suspected militants linked to Islamic State (IS) near Casablanca. Interior ministry 18 Jan announced arrest of Belgian-Moroccan national reportedly linked to IS and Nov 2015 Paris attacks. Veteran independent journalist Ali al-Nouzla 25 Jan said he will face trial in Feb for “undermining territorial integrity” after he said Western Sahara one of three “red lines” in Morocco media (others being monarchy and Islam).

- [“Morocco arrests seven on suspicion of Islamic State ties”](#), Reuters, 8 Jan. 2016.

➔ **Tunisia** PM Habib Essid 2 Jan announced cabinet shuffle changing two-thirds of ministers including justice, interior and foreign affairs. Splits in President Essebsi's Nida Tounes (NT) continued over growing role of president's son Hamed Béji Caïd Essebsi's in party: over two dozen lawmakers resigned 8, 13 Jan. Hamed Béji Caïd Essebsi sought rapprochement with An-Nahda party, inviting party leader Rached Ghannouchi to NT congress mid-Jan. Following NT resignations, Islamist party An-Nahda became largest party in parliament 11 Jan with 69 seats, although Nida Tounes (now with only 64 seats) continues to lead governing coalition. Social unrest sparked off by protests against unemployment 19-20 Jan spread across country; clashes with police, arson attacks on four police stations, looting of banks and shops, roadblocks reported nights of 18-21 Jan. Nationwide night curfew 22 January helped calm situation.

- [“Tunisia imposes nationwide curfew following four days of unrest”](#), AFP, 22 Jan. 2016.